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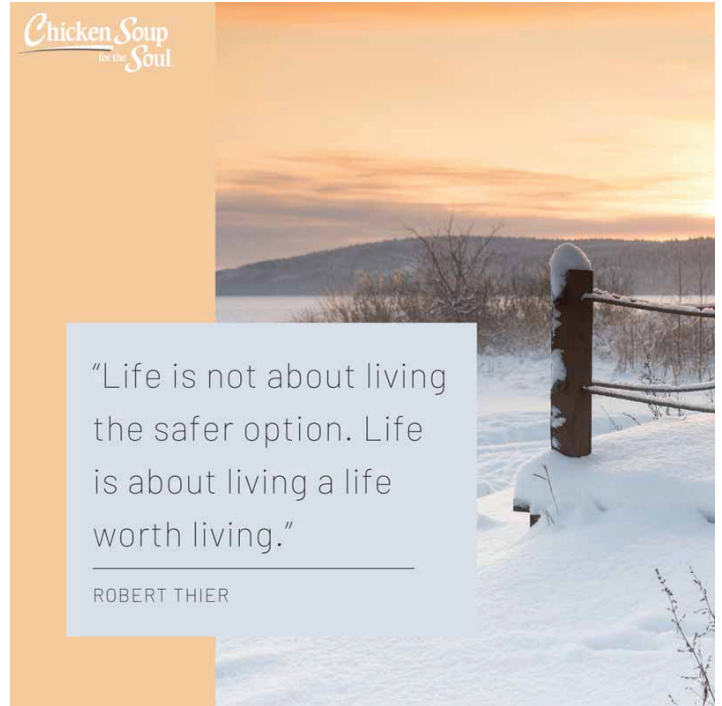
Groton Community Calendar

Wednesday, Dec. 7

Senior Menu: Spaghetti with meat sauce, mixed vegetables, garlic toast, pears, sherbert.
School Breakfast: Eggs and breakfast potatoes.
School Lunch: Sloppy joes, potato wedges.
St. John's Bible Study, 2:45 p.m.; Confirmation, 3:45 p.m.; Advent Service, 7 p.m.
Emmanuel Lutheran Sarah Circle, 5 p.m.; Confirmation, 6 p.m.; League, 6:30 p.m.
Groton Chamber board meets at noon at City Hall
Community Coffee Hour at Groton UMC, 9:30 a.m.
Confirmation UMYF Angel Tree Shopping, 6 p.m.

Thursday, Dec. 8

Senior Menu: Beef stew, biscuit, Waldorf salad, sherbert.
School Breakfast: Stuffed bagels.
School Lunch: Chicken sandwich, sweet potatoes.
MS/HS Christmas Concert, 7 p.m.



Friday, Dec. 9

Senior Menu: Chicken fried steak, mashed potatoes with gravy, corn, chocolate cake, fruit, whole wheat bread.

School Breakfast: Biscuits and gravy

School Lunch: Pizza crunchers, green beans.

BB at Hamlin (GBB 8th grade at 4 p.m. followed by 7th grade in multipurpose gym; Boys C game at 4 p.m. followed by JV and varsity girls at 6:30 p.m. with boys varsity at 8 p.m.)

Saturday, Dec. 10

Wrestling Invitational at LaMoure, 10 a.m.

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

Santa Day in Groton at Professional Management Services, 9 a.m.

City Holiday Lighting Contest, 7 p.m.

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

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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New Encoder for GDILIVE.COM

The first thing that probably comes to your mind is, "What is an encoder?"

The encoder is what makes livestreaming a possibility. If the encoder does not work properly, then livestreaming becomes a challenge. Or in some situations, a flop, for lack of a better term.

An encoder takes a signal from one end, say our camera with video and audio, and converts it into a digital format that is transmitted through the internet. Then your TV, phone or computer, has to decode that signal so you can watch it.

Since we started GDILIVE.COM in the fall of 2015, we have been using a red box through Livestream. A couple of years ago, Vimeo bought out Livestream. They had said they were going to "sunset" the Livestream format, basically, shutting

it down. So the search began for a replacement encoder to use. We bought one last year, but it and I did not get along very well. Many times, I had to revert back to the red box on the fly. I was still hoping that the red box would continue to work, despite their threat to shut it down. And it did.

Then this fall, I saw Brian Lundquist from Hub City Radio. He had to show me his new encoder that he was using. He said he had the entire season all pre-programmed and ready to go. When I saw it, I immediately fell in love with it. I wanted one.

I started to do some research on it and pricing. From the research I found on it, it looked like I was going to have to do a few things differently. Oh great, another learning curve! But I was up for the challenge and decided to bite the bullet and get one.

I was like a kid in a candy shop when I got it. I hooked up the camera and tried a trial run. There was no video. It was like not getting any candy in the candy shop. Are you serious! So it was back to the internet to find out why it was not working. Come to find out that my camera was not HDCP compliant.

Say what?

Apparently, there is this thing called HDCP (High-bandwidth Digital Content Protection). It happens on some cameras if they don't have this "license" to transmit data through an HDMI port. This port allows video and audio to transmit through it. It means High Definition Multimedia Interface.



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Any way, here I sat with a camera that would not work with the new encoder. Come to find out there is an adapter that I could get so that it would work. So the encoder went back in the box, I ordered the adapter, and waited for it to arrive.

Once again, I like a kid in the candy shop when it arrived. This time, I got candy! It worked. Yeah, another hurdle crossed.

Now that I got the hardware talking to each other, my next mission was to set up an experiment to see if I could actually get it to work. It appeared to work, so now it was time to take it out in the real world to try it out. I thought I would try a junior high girls game.

I got everything hooked up, and it appeared to be working. The operative word here is, "appeared." It said I was livestreaming, but I couldn't find it. Where was it? Frustration started to set in. I kept looking and looking to no avail.

THEN - I saw this little chat button at the bottom of the screen. I clicked on it and luckily, someone came on-line right away. I told them of my situation. They looked over my settings and discovered I had a button on that should have been off. Once he turned it off, it was working. Such a simple fix.

So now, everything seemed ready to go. The next step was doing a varsity game, The girls game at Sisseton was the first test. The first thing was getting wifi access.

Some schools have what they call a "Splash Screen." You also see this in motels. When you hook up to their wifi, a window opens in your browser and it asks for a password. This is where the previous encoders that I had were failures. They had no browser so there was no window or option to enter a password. Would this new encoder work with a splash screen? That was the next test.

I hooked up to their wifi and waited. Then, like magic, the splash screen popped up and asked for the password. I entered it. I was in! Yippee!!! That is going to be such a big help in some of the schools we go to.

In a matter of minutes, I had the livestream up and running and we were in business.

One thing that drew attention of several of our viewers was the little scoreboard I had at the bottom of the screen. I had several good comments about that new feature. Granted, it is something we have to do manually and we have to keep on top of it. Between Jeslyn and I, I think we did pretty good. We also have the ability to do PIP (picture in picture), meaning we could set up a second camera and have that on the scoreboard. I think I could get by with a cheap, smaller camera to do that. Good grief, you should see our set-up now - and now to add another camera and more cords! No wonder I started color coding my cables!

Something else we will be able to do is video ads. I have one from Dacotah Bank that I'm going to try at the Hamlin games.

So there is a little peek at what happens behind the scenes as you sit and watch the games from the comfort of your home. I know we get so many compliments of our service. I thank everyone for their support of GDILIVE.COM, for making this all possible.

GDILIVE.COM

MS/HS Christmas Program
Thursday, Dec. 8, 2022, 7 p.m.

We the People

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



By David Adler

Lynch v. Donnelly: Christmas Creche and the Constitution

The public role of religion in American life, long a challenging issue for the Supreme Court in its interpretation of the Establishment Clause of the Constitution, commanded nationwide attention in 1984 when a lawsuit was brought against Pawtucket, Rhode Island, for its erection of a nativity scene in the center of the city's downtown shopping district.

Prior to the arrival of Lynch v. Donnelly, the Supreme Court had rendered decisions that prohibited public schools from orchestrating prayer, posting the Ten Commandments and organizing a moment of silence even it did not specifically authorize prayer. Those practices, with major implications for the separation of church and state, violated the First Amendment's (and the 14th Amendment's, by virtue of Incorporation Doctrine) Establishment Clause, which provided "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion."

Nativity scenes, which swell the emotions and religious beliefs of Christians, were a commonplace throughout the nation. Did public display of a Christmas Creche, a sacred Christian symbol, violate the First Amendment?

In Lynch v. Donnelly, a bitterly divided Court, in a 5-4 opinion written by Chief Justice Warren Burger, significantly lowered the wall separating church and state and upheld the public display of the creche. The Chief Justice wrote that, despite the religious nature of the nativity scene, Pawtucket had a secular purpose in displaying it, as evidenced by the fact that it was a part of a Christmas exhibit that proclaimed, "Season's Greetings" and included Santa Claus, his reindeer, a Christmas tree, and figures of carolers, a clown, an elephant and a teddy bear. In short, the display represented a hybrid presentation of religious and secular elements.

Chief Justice Burger asserted that the First Amendment did not require complete separation, as demonstrated by our national motto—"In God we trust"—paid chaplains, presidential proclamations invoking God, the pledge of allegiance, and religious art in publicly supported museums. Burger said that the Constitution mandates "accommodation," and not merely tolerance, of all religion. Some Court watchers wondered at the time whether President Ronald Reagan's rhetoric about the national need for religion and "family values" had influenced the Chief Justice's opinion.

In a vigorous dissenting opinion, Justice William Brennan contended that the Burger Court had abandoned the rulings on the contours of the Establishment Clause, which it had inherited and developed. But Brennan interpreted Burger's ruling narrowly, maintaining that the question was still open on the constitutionality of a public display of a creche alone, or the display of another sacred symbol, such as a crucifixion scene, standing by itself. In 1989, the Court answered Justice Brennan's question with the requirement that, in order to avoid an Establishment Clause violation, public displays of religious symbols must be accompanied by secular symbols.

Chief Justice Burger's assertion that the creche had a secular purpose was, for the dissenters, and many clergy throughout the country, a point of contention. Justice Brennan rebuked the suggested secular character of the nativity scene. He wrote: "For Christians the essential message of the nativity is that God became incarnate in the person of Christ." A spokesperson for the National Council of Churches complained that the Court had placed Christ "on the same level as Santa Clause and Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer."

The Burger Court, it seemed, had succeeded in offending Christians and non-Christians alike. Some days, the Court can't win.

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

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Gophers and golf balls

Editor's note: Tony is taking the day off. Here's one we like from 2014.

He was a steely-eyed Russian and just a look was all he needed to keep you in line. But he had a twinkle in his eyes and a soft chuckle that we got to see more in his later years. Grandpa would take a pungent puff from his pipe, lean back and grin when something tickled him. Mischief and rascals, especially, pleased him.

I don't remember when he started smoking again. My earliest memory is of a grandfather who quit rolling his own cigarettes and then—because he needed some kind of a vice—kept lemon drops all over the house. A few times each year, I buy lemon drops because they remind me of Grandpa Spilloway the same way Sen-Sen and pickled herring—though not together—remind me of Grandma Bender.

In his later years, Grandpa decided that a pipe was not going to kill him any faster than old age, so he reconstituted the habit, but he still kept lemon drops around—to keep the grandkids from smoking, I suppose.

When I was younger, each summer after baseball season ended, I would spend two or three weeks at the farm. My duties were light. I would putt-putt out to the far west pasture in a three-wheeled tractor cobbled together from an old combine to get the cows, a duty that consisted of driving up and bellowing, "C'mon, Cows!" And they would come. If they dawdled or if I was bored, I would send Shep after them to nip their heels and hang from their tails, which explained why some cows on some days produced pure butter. Back at the barn, I threw hay down from the loft for the cows, loving the dusty sweetness and ignoring the inevitable growing collection of light bloody scratches on my arms.

My main forte' was gopher extermination, and it was here that I learned about economics. The rumor was that someone somewhere, maybe at the Logan County Courthouse in Napoleon, would pay a nickle for every gopher tail. Grandpa matched that nickle, but he had a few stipulations. He would provide the traps, but you had to stake them down well, or you could lose a gopher, a trap and a nickle in one fell swoop. And that was frowned upon.

The second rule involved a .22 single shot rifle. I could use it, but Grandpa charged me two cents a shell as a way of encouraging marksmanship and basic math skills. Not only did you have to hit a gopher on the first shot, you had to knock him away from the hole or he would roll underground and, even in death, deprive you of your nickle—a seven cent reversal. That was a pack of Black Jack gum and a two turns on the peanut machine down at the implement shop. (After you got the peanuts you would lick a finger to get all the rest of the good stuff out of there. That is why I no longer buy peanuts from those machines nor should you. I am not trying to crush the peanut vending machine industry, here, I'm just sayin'.)

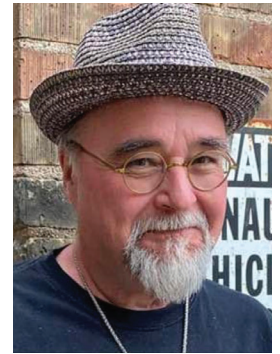
With my traps were set, I pursed my lips to make gopher whistles and snared them when they popped up to investigate. I systematically cleaned out three pastures each summer. I made a pretty good living as a gopher trapper until a friend of mine in Gackle told me you could get a quarter for a golf ball at the Gackle Country Club. Fifty-cents for the really good ones!

The thing was, we didn't know exactly who would buy the balls, but it was a good rumor, and we went to work, harvesting dozens of them, most of them on Hole 2 (I think) where a typical second shot would place you tantalizingly within reach of the green on the other side of a cattail-filled slough. But it would take a strong, perfect shot. Laying up is the smart thing to do, as I learned years later playing the course and after replacing all the balls I retrieved from there as a kid.

I came back to the farm, soggy, smelling like a swamp, and proudly showed Grandpa the day's catch and explained about the burgeoning used golf ball market. Grandpa decided then and there to buy them all. There weren't many 50-centers, but it was still a pretty good haul.

Those golf balls rolled around in a desk drawer for years, but it didn't dawn on me for a long time that Grandpa didn't golf. Maybe he considered it a good investment. Then again, maybe I missed the twinkle in his eye when he bought them. I may have missed it then, but I can see it now.

I can't believe we're out of lemon drops.



That's Life

by Tony Bender

Congratulations to the December 2022 Millie E. Olson Award Recipient, Rebecca Kiesz of Avantara Groton



Rebecca Kiesz has been with Avantara Groton since February of 2021, and in that span of time has made a big impact in her role as Charge Nurse.

Rebecca takes time to build relationships with the residents, truly holding their best interest at heart. Being a nurse is not just a job to her, and she demonstrates that through the energy, charisma and cheer she brings.

Rebecca leads the team positively even on the busiest most challenging days. She is always willing to pitch in and give a helping hand, no task is too big or too small for her. She is versatile wearing many hats including laundry, dietary, cna, and nurse. You name it, she's there. Whether it is day shift, night shift, or resident appointment, she is there.

A CNA coworker had this to share: "Rebecca is very easy to work with, and a good communicator. We always know what is needed when we work with her. She is excellent, always willing to help if needed. She is great with the residents. She is great about explaining things so that the CNA's understand."

Rebecca continues to go above and beyond day after day without hesitation. She is one of the most selfless, charismatic people you are likely to ever met, always wanting to do a good job and be a resident advocate.

Congratulations Rebecca! You are a very deserving recipient of the December 2022 Millie E. Olson Award!

The Millie E. Olson Award was created by the South Dakota Health Care Association (SDHCA) and named after its first recipient, Mildred E. Olson of Garretson, who was an exceptional caregiver. This award is open to staff of any SDHCA member center. Each month's recipient of the Millie E. Olson Award becomes Eligible for the Millie E. Olson Award of the Year, which is announced each September at an awards ceremony during SDHCA's Fall Convention.

Conde National League

Dec. 5, 2022 Team Standings: Tigers 27, Cubs 26, Braves 25, Pirates 23, Mets 22, Giants 21

Men's High Games: Russ Bethke 208, 192; Chad Furney 202; Ryan Bethke 189

Men's High Series: Russ Bethke 568, Chad Furney 517, Ryan Bethke 486

Women's High Games: Sam Bahr 167, 161; Vickie Kramp 165; Joyce Walter 143; Michelle Johnson 143

Women's High Series: Sam Bahr 443, Vickie Kramp 431, Joyce Walter 415

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Gov. Noem Delivers 2022 Budget Address

PIERRE, S.D. – Governor Kristi Noem delivered the 2022 Budget Address, unveiling her budget proposal for the remainder of Fiscal Year 2023 and Fiscal Year 2024.

You can find the full text of Governor Noem’s 2022 Budget Address below:

Good afternoon, Lieutenant Governor Rhoden, Mr. Speaker, members of the House and Senate, and my fellow South Dakotans:

Before I begin today, I want to thank my team at the Bureau of Finance & Management, the folks at the Department of Revenue for all of their hard work preparing all the data and information for today. They do their work with excellence, and I am so thankful for their help.

I also want to thank my family who is here today.

Today I will present my budget to you for consideration. This budget will cover the remainder of Fiscal Year 2023 and all of Fiscal Year 2024. Before I discuss our future, I want to remind you where we have been and how we stand financially today.

The last four years, we have made South Dakota the strongest state in America.

We lead the nation in almost every single economic metric. Our personal income growth is number one. And over the last year, both our new housing development and new business applications have been the best in America. Our kids lead the nation in educational outcomes, and we are breaking tourism records year after year.

This past year, our unemployment rate has been the lowest it’s ever been in history. Today, we have less than 700 people in the entire state on unemployment.

Our population is expanding at ten times the national average. I will continue to recruit Freedom-loving Americans to come join us here in South Dakota, particularly those who can fill high-demand positions. My budget today will help address these workforce challenges, as well.

South Dakota’s government is small but effective.

While we have grown, we have also been fiscally responsible. We have the best funded pension plan in the country. We continue to have a AAA credit rating, and we balance our budget.

I recognize that taxpayer dollars are not our own – they belong to the people of South Dakota. We all must remember throughout our budget discussions, that this money belongs to the hard-working people of South Dakota.

In South Dakota, our state motto declares “Under God, the people rule.” These aren’t just words we say...we believe them, and take action based on them. We MUST for the future security of our great state.

Frankly, the irresponsibility of the federal government demands it. No nation in history has ever survived the tax burden and spending spree that this White House is pursuing. They haven’t balanced the federal budget in decades, Congress continues to raise the debt limit with no plan for spending, and leaders in DC print money only to turn around and go into debt with foreign entities that are our enemies.

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Then they declare that they MUST reach into the pockets of everyday Americans to grab more of their earnings to keep us safe, enforce law and order, and subsidize programs designed to enslave families to government. We have seen the incredible power grab of these leaders the past few years. They have used unconstitutional actions and the enticement of more money to take unprecedented action to make people more dependent, weak, and apathetic. It is irresponsible and wrong.

That's not how we run our state. We make hard decisions and recognize that a limited government respects people AND their dollars and that it is the way to preserve the American dream for our children and our grandchildren. We don't make decisions to only benefit us today. We look far into the future and realize the ramifications of our decisions and make the hard choices, so that future South Dakotans have the chance to grow up in a place of opportunity and freedom.

The nation is watching how you in this body make decisions. That may not have been true 5 to 10 years ago. Whether you like it or not, people now know where South Dakota is. They see this state as a beacon of hope. A place of Liberty. How you decide to govern, budget, and communicate to our people will be watched, evaluated, and judged. Has your job gotten easier with more revenue? I would say No. It is much harder. We must be disciplined in order to protect our state from an expansion of government in our lives through new programs and subsidies. Let's not forget that government should be beholden to the people and not the other way around. Our founding fathers did not believe in a centralized government. They believed in the rights of individuals and their ability to govern themselves.

Our state is bringing in incredible revenue.

People are making more money, our businesses have expanded, we have recruited new industries and because of the way we have followed our states' motto "Under God the people rule" we have permanently grown the state's economy. We have lived through unprecedented challenges since I've been your Governor: bomb cyclones, a pandemic, the Derecho – make no mistake, this economic growth is an unprecedented event as well. We must be leaders who protect South Dakota's way of life as we look to the future.

On November 8th the people of this great state gave us a mandate. They turned out in record breaking numbers to make sure we in this building heard from them loud and clear. They demand low taxes, less regulation, and more freedom. They were also clear that they want us to take care of people and create opportunities to succeed. As Governor, I will continue to listen to our people. I will guide our discussion and decisions based on my constitutional authority.

We have \$423 million in reserves. Historically, our goal is to keep 10% in these funds. Since I've been Governor, we have almost doubled that number. We ended last year with a record-breaking budget surplus of \$115.5 million.

That historic surplus in Fiscal Year 2022 was largely thanks to sales & use tax receipts growing by more than 12% over the prior fiscal year. So far in Fiscal Year 2023, sales & use taxes have grown by another 14.1%. Early indications for November have us beating revenue projections by another \$58.8 million, putting us up \$135.3 million fiscal year to-date. Sales tax alone is running \$81.8 million ahead of the estimates that you adopted.

In South Dakota we know to prepare for the future. Let me be clear, we have done everything we can in our state to be successful. However, economists indicate there will be challenges ahead. Bad policies coming out of Washington, DC will unleash a recession on this country. We will be impacted. Earlier this year our country had two consecutive quarters of negative economic growth. The Federal Reserve's increase

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of interest rates is another indicator that a recession is on the horizon.

But South Dakota's growth in tax revenues continue, because our state's economy is in a far stronger position than the nation's as a whole. Economists expect that the upcoming recession will be primarily "investment-led." They expect that our unemployment rate will remain low. And they don't expect consumer spending to be heavily impacted. Those factors affect how we budget here in our state.

In my budget today, I am keeping our revenue projections for the future very conservative. The people of South Dakota deserve safe planning that protects them from future tax increases or drastic cuts to state services.

We expect \$310 million in ongoing revenue available for Fiscal Year 2024. And we are anticipating \$216 million in one-time revenue will be available in the upcoming Fiscal Year, as well. The budget that I am proposing to you today invests every single dollar of those revenues wisely.

Eliminating the sales tax on groceries is the biggest way that my budget helps South Dakotans tackle the challenge of Biden's inflation and protect hard earned money. Unfortunately, food costs have risen by far too much. And families are struggling to make ends meet, as a result.

You have heard me talk about the rapid increase of the costs of milk, ground beef, eggs and other groceries. Eggs alone have increased to over 140% of what they were a year ago. Even with South Dakota having the best personal income growth, family budgets are not keeping up. We can grow incomes even more by letting people keep more of their own hard-earned money in their pockets.

Gas prices continue to increase because of President Biden's energy policies. New regulations and taxes, a lack of utilization of American energy sources, and a dwindling reserve indicate this trend will continue.

Senior citizens, working parents, single moms – every South Dakotan is paying more for food, gas, and to heat and cool their homes. Their family finances are struggling under the strain. Over the last 10 years, Americans have saved 7 to 8 percent of their monthly income on average. During the pandemic, that jumped to 20 to 30 percent. Today, they are saving less than 4 percent because almost every dollar they make is needed to pay their monthly bills. They are no longer saving for college or to buy a new house or a new car. They are just barely getting by. We need to give them relief, and we can do so by giving them a \$100 million tax cut by eliminating the sales tax on groceries.

We have \$310 million in permanent revenue growth. And we still have \$208 million even after we deliver this tax cut to the people. We have been exceeding estimates by about \$25 million a month. The people of South Dakota overwhelmingly want this tax cut, and they know we can afford it.

Remember – our revenues are strong because we have grown our economy. It is the strongest in the nation. People have moved their families, their jobs, and their businesses to South Dakota. Our new housing developments are here to stay. New industries are thriving. The jobs of the future are right here in South Dakota. And once again, we have the fastest growing incomes in America. This growth is sustainable. And there won't be a better opportunity in the future.

My team and I are fully confident that this is the right tax cut at the right time. Let's get it done.

Medicaid expansion passed on the ballot, and therefore it will be implemented.

In every other state where Medicaid Expansion was passed, the costs exceeded their expectations.

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That's why this past year, we did our homework, researched those states, and consulted with experts to put together this budget plan to ensure the law is followed.

The federal government incentivizes states to implement Medicaid by subsidizing costs the first few years. After that, the burden falls on the state. The first year, the cost for Medicaid Expansion will be \$66 Million, but the state's responsibility will be \$13 million. In the second year, the program will cost just under \$70 million, and the state will cover \$16 million. We expect the cost of Medicaid Expansion to be \$66 million in year one, just under \$70 million in year two, rising to more than \$80 million by year five.

Make no mistake, the expansion of Medicaid – as passed on the November ballot by the people of this state – is an expansion of a government program that will give free healthcare to a population of the state that the majority are able-bodied, single males. Our goal in policy should be to give people the opportunity to have more freedom in healthcare options, not government-run programs. Let's keep that in mind in the coming days and give people the dignity of responsive and responsible healthcare that they control – not the government.

There are on-going budget increases we address every year in the legislature. State statute requires we address state aid to education, and we also take care of state employees and providers. This year, I am recommending a 5% increase for all three, which is almost double what is required by state statute.

A few years back, the legislature created a process to establish a rate-setting methodology for health and human service providers – this would affect services delivered by community-based providers. This methodology reflects the reasonable amount that we should pay for services that are provided.

Unfortunately, as the cost of living has increased, reimbursement rates for many of these services have struggled to keep pace. Today, I am recommending that we invest \$22 million in targeted increases to reimburse at least 90% of the reasonable rate for all providers of these services.

Some have fallen too far behind. To get to 90%, we will need a 21% increase to nursing homes; a 17% increase to community support providers for South Dakotans with developmental disabilities; and a 26% increase for psychiatric residential treatment facilities. These providers are critical to our state and ensure we can continue to take care of some of the most vulnerable among us.

We must address the fact that we are having a very difficult time recruiting state employees. Today they are falling behind industry, and we often train people for their positions only to have them leave for jobs elsewhere. My budget has \$11 million in targeted pay increases for specific job areas and \$11 million in added benefits to ensure state government has the workforce it needs to carry out critical services that are necessary for us to fulfill our responsibilities.

I want to remind everyone of one thing that the media seems to forget every year – the governor and the legislature do not decide where all of these dollars go. We cannot dictate to schools and healthcare providers how these dollars are spent. But I would encourage all of them to put as much of it into pay increases as they can. South Dakota has the fastest growing incomes in the country, but if you don't continue to invest in your workers, providers, and teachers, they will find good paying jobs elsewhere.

Because of President Biden's inflation, building projects that have already received legislative approval are coming in far over budget. I am recommending \$25.6 million in one-time funding to finish these critical projects that we've already started.

This request includes \$13 million to the State Public Health Lab; \$7 million to Board of Regents projects;

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and \$6 million to the DEX – or Dakota Events Complex – at the State Fair. All of these projects have received prior legislative approval, and they need to be completed.

Margaret Thatcher, famously said, "There is no such thing as society. There are individual men and women, and there are families."

Amen sister.

When I became Governor, I implemented Paid Family Leave for state employees. We told state employees that if they were bringing a new child into their home – whether by birth or adoption – that the state would cover 60% of their pay via paid family leave.

Today, I am announcing that we will be extending that benefit to cover 100% of pay for state employees. This will cost \$3 million in ongoing dollars.

One of the biggest challenges facing our state overall is workforce. Too often, new parents have to leave the workforce when a new child joins the family. Those early days are so crucial to give moms and dads the opportunity to bond with the new child. By extending paid family leave opportunities, we can help workers and families.

To do this, we will be including \$20 million in one-time incentives – spread out over four years – to incentivize private businesses to buy in to a new paid family leave opportunity.

We will also be supporting mothers and families through funding for adoption – and pregnancy and postpartum care for Medicaid patients. And we will be funding scholarships for foster children. You will hear more details about each of these proposals in my state of the state address in January.

But it isn't just birth and adoption where families need our help. We can strengthen families by continuing to help them through some tougher circumstances, too. Over the last couple years, you have helped invest in regional behavioral health centers.

Too often, when someone is experiencing a mental health crisis, they just end up in jail or in the emergency room. That isn't how we get them the help that they need. And that isn't a responsible use of taxpayer dollars. These facilities will help these individuals get better care as soon as possible. And it will be closer to home.

We've built these facilities in communities across the state. Two years ago, you provided funding for facilities in Pennington County and Watertown. Last year, you provided an additional \$15 million to expand these regional facilities statewide.

You built the buildings – now we need to fund the operations. My budget proposes \$5.6 million in ongoing funding to these regional facilities to get these individuals the help that they need sooner. It will not only be better care, it will also be more efficient and cost-effective than what we are doing today.

The final way that this budget will continue to build on South Dakota's strength is by investing in public safety and infrastructure. These are core functions of state government.

Over the last four years, we have made tremendous infrastructure improvements. We have repaired dams, roads and bridges, and built railroads to help support South Dakota's incredible growth.

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My budget continues to guarantee our state's public safety, as well. South Dakota has set itself apart as a place that respects law enforcement and our military. We realize that our people cannot enjoy our state's tremendous Freedom if they are not safe in their homes or on our streets.

Last year, we started the hard work of addressing the challenges within the Department of Corrections and prison system. We put \$86 million into a new Incarceration Construction Fund and funded \$3.8 million for land and design costs for a new women's minimum-security prison in Rapid City. The new Incarceration Task Force agreed with these recommendations.

The engineering and design process came back with dollar figure estimates. Updated population projections indicate that we will need 300 beds at the women's facility. The cost estimate for construction is \$200,000 per bed, or \$60 million. We can cover this cost with the money that you set aside in the Incarceration Construction Fund, and my budget reflects that.

We also need to address the state penitentiary. We know it is outdated, not compliant with ADA requirements, and overcrowded. It has been an issue for many years, long before I was your Governor.

I am recommending that we take the same multi-year approach that you have taken with the women's prison in Rapid City. My budget includes \$52 million in funding to purchase land and conduct engineering and design for this new facility. \$27 million of that will come from the remaining dollars in the Incarceration Construction Fund, and \$25 million will come from one-time general funds.

I am recommending we transfer excess funds that are above and beyond the traditional 10 percent we always hold in reserves, to address this situation. We remain committed and will continue to maintain 10% in reserves as we always have in the state of South Dakota.

We also have a responsibility to secure people's personal information. We can't do that with our current operational system. Our state's accounting and software system is 35 years old. It is vulnerable to hackers and in danger of crashing in the future. Imagine using the same computer you used 35 years ago. Many of you wouldn't dream of it, yet our state does. Also, we have no backup for this outdated system, which is a major security concern that comes with incredible liabilities.

Think about our agencies and all the personal information they are responsible to keep secure for the people of South Dakota. For instance, the Department of Health and the healthcare information they hold for individuals, or Social Services and their case work and child protective programs, to name a few. We need technology systems that will ensure privacy for all our citizens. Every hour, our state servers encounter thousands of hacking attempts. We need a system that will ensure privacy for all our citizens.

It will take 4 years and \$70 million dollars in one-time funding to replace this accounting system – but we must get it done. We don't want to look back and wish that we'd taken this threat seriously.

My budget also provides one-time funding to upgrade the State's Emergency Alert System and upgrade remaining state radio infrastructure to support our law enforcement. They are our heroes, and they must have the tools and equipment they need to continue to serve our state.

Our National Guard serve us every day, and we can do more to support them. Currently, the state covers 50% of tuition if a Guard member attends a Board of Regents institution. We cover more than 80% of tuition at our state's tech colleges. I want to take both of those numbers to 100%. We should fully support the men and women in our National Guard as they pursue their education and serve our state and country.

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We are also going to address the needs of finishing the Sioux Falls Readiness Center. We will also be providing \$8 million in additional federal fund authority to help them complete that project.

And I am also supporting \$29 million in federal fund authority for a Field Maintenance Shop for the National Guard in Watertown. This will help us get more of our readiness capabilities in the same location.

I love South Dakota. It is a beacon to the rest of the nation for what is possible when we follow conservative principles and fiscal responsibility. We have become a success story because we keep government limited and live within our means.

Our blessings don't just happen to us. Oh yes, God is good. All the time. But we have choices to make that will come with consequences for generations to come. If we are wise, we will preserve for our children the last best hope on earth. If we fail, well – Ronald Reagan defined that type of failure as "sentencing our children to take the last step into a thousand years of darkness."

I have faith we will be up to the task at hand.

That we will remember the sacrifices of our founding fathers, the blood shed by the greatest generation so we can be here in this chamber today, and the commitment of our deployed military who stand – right now – in harm's way so we can be free.

We have no idea what "hard" is. What they did – what they do – that's hard. We are lucky. Honored. Blessed.

Let's never forget that – and let's get to work. Merry Christmas!

SDDP Statement on Governor Noem's 2022 Budget Address

South Dakota Democratic Senate Minority Leader Reynold Nesiba issued the following statement in response to Governor Noem's 2022 budget address:

"In a world of 8% inflation the Governor's proposed 5% cost of living adjustment means that teachers, state employees, and providers are having a 3% real wage cut imposed on them. Last year they had a 2% real wage cut imposed. We need 10% across the board increase to simply allow essential workers to be protected from inflation whose existence the Governor mentioned multiple times in her speech.

"We continue to have a childcare crisis in SD. Affordable, high quality childcare, that pays its workers a living wage will require SD to do what every other successful state does. We need to subsidize it. I'm disappointed that the Governor is failing to lead on this critical workforce development issue.

"Democrats are pleased that the Governor is claiming three of our priorities as her own—cutting the sales tax on food, paid parental leave, and 100% tuition benefits for our guard members. We look forward to working with our Republican colleagues to bring these into reality."

Social Security Site has a new design

Starting Tuesday, visitors to SSA.gov will experience a fresh homepage and a new design to help them find what they need more easily.

"SSA.gov is visited by over 180 million people per year and it is one of our most important tools for providing efficient and equitable access to service," said Kilolo Kijakazi, Acting Commissioner of the Social Security Administration. "Whether providing service in person or online, our goal is to help people understand what they may qualify for and seamlessly transition them to an application process." Improved self-service capability allows people to skip calling or visiting an office, which helps Social Security staff focus on those visitors who need in-person assistance.

Part of ongoing efforts to improve how the public can do business with the agency, the redesign is intended to provide a clear path to the tasks customers need to accomplish. Many of the most visited sections of SSA.gov are now live with a more user-friendly and task-based approach. New pages and improvements based on public feedback will continue to be unveiled in the coming months.

Visitors to SSA.gov can use interactive tools to:

Check eligibility for benefits

The new benefit eligibility screener is a convenient and simple way for people to learn if they might be eligible for benefits.

Save time on Social Security Number (SSN) and card online services

If a person loses their SSN card, they may not need a replacement. In most cases, simply knowing their SSN is enough. If a person does need a replacement card, they may be able to request it online by visiting www.ssa.gov/ssnumber. Individuals can also start an application for an updated card or request an SSN for the first time. People may never need to visit an office and, if they do need to visit an office to complete the application, they will save a lot of time by starting online.

Start an application for Supplemental Security Income (SSI)

People can start the application process online and request an appointment to apply for SSI benefits by answering a few questions at www.ssa.gov/benefits/ssi/.

Apply for Social Security benefits and other online services

For most benefits, people can apply online or start an application online. In many cases, there are no forms to sign. The agency will review the application and reach out with questions or for more information. Visit www.ssa.gov/onlineservices to apply for retirement, disability, or Medicare.

Many Social Security services do not require the public to take time to visit an office. Using a my Social Security account, a personalized online service, people can start or change direct deposit, or request a replacement SSA-1099. For individuals already receiving Social Security benefits, they can print or download a current Benefit Verification Letter if they need proof of their benefits.

People not yet receiving benefits can use their online account to get a personalized Social Security Statement, which provides their earnings information as well as estimates of their future benefits. The portal also includes a retirement calculator and links to information about other online services. The agency encourages people without a my Social Security account to create one today at www.ssa.gov/myaccount/.

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- Heated hand grips
- OVH crank chute control w/ high-arc steel chute
- Heavy-duty cast aluminum gear box backed by 5-year limited warranty**

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- 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**

MSRP
\$2,099*



2X 30" MAX

Take on winter with the commercial-grade durability of the 357cc Cub Cadet 2X 30" MAX snow blower

- Heavy-duty 14-gauge steel side plates and auger housing
- 14" augers and impeller
- Sealed ball bearings on auger and wheel shafts
- LED light bar on auger housing
- 23" intake height
- Heated hand grips
- 16"x6.5" X-Trac tires
- High-arc steel chute
- Heavy-duty cast aluminum auger gear box w/ 5-year limited warranty

MSRP
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Steen reappointed to Planning and Zoning Commission

The Groton City Council gave the approval to reappoint Jeff Steen for a five-year term on the Planning and Zoning Commission. The council met in regular session Tuesday night at City Hall and was broadcast live on GDILIVE.COM.

Karyn Babcock talked with a couple of members of the Carnival of Silver Skates and Mayor Hanlon about the tarp for the skating pond. Babcock said she would like to see it in the budget for next year. Babcock suggested putting down two types of tarp - a more permanent tarp for the main area and a more temporary tarp on the north end where the scenery is. She suggested putting the displays on a birm. Other options will also be explored.

A part request for Dahme Construction was approved for \$203,083.19 for the water main extension on the south end of town.

The Veteran's Circle at the Groton Union Cemetery was replatted to allow for more burial plats. The Planning and Zoning Commission had approved the plat and the city council also approved it.

The council approved the joint cooperative agreement with the Northeast Council of Governments for the 2023 year. The fee is \$1,720.07. The agency assists the city with grant applications.

The first reading of the 2022 supplemental appropriation ordinance was approved to help balance funds that were in the negative. The total amount was \$58,574.00.

There was no update on the park bathroom.



From left to right in front: Kamryn Flihs (Tenor Saxophone), Gretchen Dinger (Flute), Carter Barse (Alto Saxophone), and Jackson Dinger (French Horn)

From left to right in back: Mrs. Desiree Yeigh (Director), Cadance Tullis (Percussion), Ellie Weismantel (Percussion), and Jacob Lewandowski (Percussion) (Courtesy Photo)

Groton Area Band Students selected to 31st North Area Honor Band Festival

On Saturday December 3rd, seven band students represented Groton Area at the North Area Honor Band Festival. The students presented a concert at the Johnson Fine Arts Center at NSU in Aberdeen. The students are chosen by HS All State Band Scores, 2022 MS All State Honor Band Scores, and nominations and recommendations from the student's band director.

Dr. Haley Armstrong, director of Bands and Coordinator of Musical Activities at South Dakota School of Mines and Technology, was the director for this year's event.

The South Dakota North Area Honor Band was created when area band directors began expressing an interest in providing a regional opportunity for their experienced instrumental musicians. Upon nomination by their band director, students who auditioned for the 2022 South Dakota All-State Band are seated first in the ensemble, and additional students of high caliber complete the sections. It remains the goal of the directors to increase the interest in instrumental performance and to provide a top-level learning experience for the more advanced high school band students of this area.

Representing twenty-three schools, approximately one hundred students were selected to participate in the Honor Band. Participating schools and their directors are Aberdeen Central – Jeremy Schutter & John Patzlaff; Aberdeen Christian – Kimberly Steger; Aberdeen Roncalli – Kimberly Carda & Molly Royals; Bowdle – Sarah Rathert; Clark – Amy Nelson; Eureka – Dale Batie; Gettysburg – Walker Rose; Great Plains Lutheran – Eric Martens; Groton Area – Desiree Yeigh; Herried – Julie Borr; Hoven – Elizabeth Bengs; Howard – Jean Morrison; Huron – James Stueckrath; Ipswich – Becky Nierman; Langford – Kelly Wieser; Leola – Nancy Kindelspire; Milbank – Susan Karels; Northwestern – Wendy Thorson; Selby Area – Noelle Allerdings; Sully Buttes – Erica Paxton; Summit – Daniel Jimenez; and Wilmot – Ellie Helgeson.

Congratulations students on a wonderful concert and thank you for your commitment to the Groton Area Band Department.



SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

Noem pairs big cut with big spending in budget plan

Proposals include grocery-tax repeal, millions for prisons, free tuition for National Guard

BY: MAKENZIE HUBER - DECEMBER 6, 2022 5:28 PM

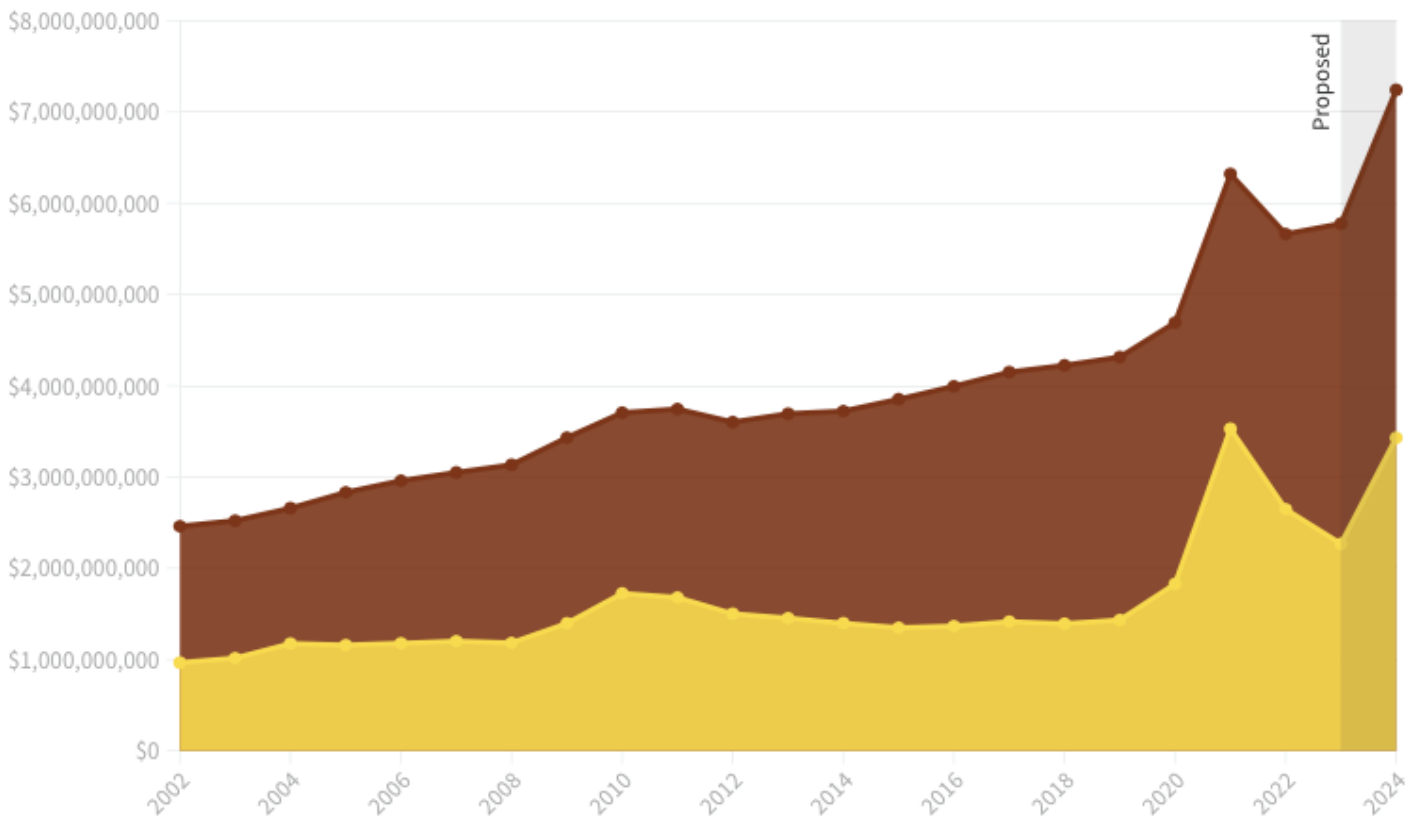
PIERRE – Gov. Kristi Noem proposed South Dakota’s largest-ever state budget and biggest-ever tax cut Tuesday in her 2022 budget address, along with improved pay and benefits for state employees, money for new and improved prisons, free college tuition for National Guard soldiers, and numerous other proposals.

Noem said the tax cut – a proposed elimination of the state sales tax on groceries – and the increased spending are justified by a booming economy, large reserves, surging tax revenue and millions in available one-time funds.

“The people of South Dakota deserve safe planning that protects them from future tax increases or

State budgets by year

The total amounts of South Dakota's annual state budgets, including the portion arising from federal funding.



Source: [SD Bureau of Finance and Management](#) • Seth Tupper/South Dakota Searchlight

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drastic cuts to state services," Noem said in the address, delivered to legislators in the Capitol's House chamber.

Noem's proposed fiscal year 2024 budget would be the largest in South Dakota history, at over \$7.2 billion. Compared to the adopted 2023 budget, that would be a 25% increase. Lawmakers will consider Noem's proposals when they convene next month for the annual legislative session in Pierre.

Noem boasted that the state has \$423 million in reserves, ending last year with a record-breaking budget surplus of \$115.5 million.

This year, the state is on track to beat revenue projections again by \$58.8 million, setting the state up with a \$135.3 million surplus so far this fiscal year. Sales tax alone is running \$81.8 million ahead of the estimate the Legislature adopted, Noem added.

Noem's office expects \$310 million in new ongoing revenue available for fiscal year 2024 with \$216 million in one-time revenue as well.

Tony Venhuizen, an incoming Republican state representative from Sioux Falls who will be vice chair of House Appropriations, said the revenue growth is "practically unprecedented."

"That's an opportunity but also a challenge," Venhuizen said. "It's going to be difficult to judge how long that will continue."

Eliminating state sales tax on groceries

That revenue growth gives South Dakota the opportunity to cut taxes, Noem said. Eliminating the sales tax on groceries would cut about \$100 million in revenue, dropping the anticipated new ongoing revenue from \$310 million to \$208 million. Noem has called the proposal the biggest tax cut in state history.

"The people of South Dakota overwhelmingly want this tax cut, and they know we can afford it," Noem said. "... My team and I are fully confident that this is the right tax cut at the right time. Let's get it done."

However, some legislators are skeptical that the tax cut is fiscally responsible. Senate President Pro Tempore Lee Schoenbeck, R-Watertown, said the tax cut is "obviously problematic."

The state received unprecedented levels of federal funding from pandemic stimulus programs in recent years. To cut the sales tax when such federal spending isn't continuous, Schoenbeck said, would affect the state's stability and budget going forward.

"You can't do that unless you think the feds are going to keep spending millions of dollars in our state," Schoenbeck said. "The extreme increase is caused by federal spending in our state. Fiscal conservatives are saying that we're not going to go down a path that'll set us up for an income tax."

Sen. Reynold Nesiba, D-Sioux Falls and minority leader, applauded Noem's proposed tax cut, saying Tuesday that Democrats have been working to eliminate the food sales tax for years.

While Nesiba hopes to see legislators eliminate the grocery tax completely, he said he would support a compromise of 2 percentage points cut from the state sales tax on groceries, eliminating about \$50 million in revenue by dropping the tax from 4.5 percent to 2.5 percent on groceries.

House Republicans have yet to identify their priorities for the session, Venhuizen said.

"It's too early to say we'll support one plan or the other," Venhuizen said, "but we certainly see the merit in what the governor is proposing and we'll keep talking."

Prisons, National Guard tuition & more

Nesiba also said he is supportive of Noem's recommended 100% tuition coverage for National Guard



Gov. Kristi Noem presents her fiscal year 2024 budget proposal to legislators on Dec. 6, 2022, at the Capitol in Pierre.

(Makenzie Huber/South Dakota Searchlight)

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soldiers at state universities and technical colleges (an increase from the current 50% at state universities and 80% at technical colleges), and her plan for a 5% pay increase for state employees.

However, the pay raise for state employees doesn't keep pace with the nation's current 8% inflation, leaving workers with a wage cut, Nesiba added. Failing to keep pace with inflation puts the state at a disadvantage when competing for workers in a tight labor market.

"It didn't go nearly far enough," Nesiba said. "Our revenues are robust enough and there is enough in reserves where we can simultaneously cut taxes, increase spending and balance the budget. The big debate will be how much to cut taxes and increase spending to balance the budget."

Noem said her budget does include \$11 million for targeted pay increases for state workers and another \$11 million in added benefits. In addition to the 5 percent pay increase for state workers, Noem is also proposing a 5 percent increase in state aid to public schools.

In the realm of public safety, Noem proposed spending about \$400 million to renovate and construct new prisons.

\$60 million of that money is intended for a proposed 300-bed women's minimum-security prison in Rapid City. Another \$341.6 million would go toward purchasing land, conducting engineering and design, and eventually building a replacement for the state penitentiary in Sioux Falls.

Noem said she wants to use excess reserve funds to help pay for the prison projects.

Schoenbeck said he supports addressing the prison needs.

"Those are unattractive things to deal with and are extremely expensive," Schoenbeck said. "It takes some gravitas to do that. I'm told that'll be \$800 million by the time we're done with those two prisons."

Other spending Noem proposed to the Legislature includes:

- \$22 million in targeted increased reimbursement rates for care facilities across the state, including a 21% increase in funding for nursing homes, 17% increase to community support providers for South Dakotans with developmental disabilities, and a 26% increase for psychiatric residential treatment facilities.
- \$25.6 million in one-time funding to finish projects in progress, including the State Public Health Lab, Board of Regents projects and the Dakota Events Complex at the State Fair.
- Covering 100% of state employees' pay while on family leave, which is currently paid at 60%.
- The next step for legislators is to meet beginning in January and discuss each of the topics covered in Noem's address and how best to move forward.

"We don't want to be in a position where we find ourselves in a hole in a couple of years," Venhuizen said. "In the meantime, we have a lot of opportunities."



MAKENZIE HUBER

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

Noem recommends \$70 million to update 'outdated' accounting software

BY: JOSHUA HAIAR - DECEMBER 6, 2022 4:56 PM

PIERRE — Gov. Kristi Noem says state government's accounting and software system is so out of date that it needs millions of dollars and multiple years to fix.

That revelation came during Noem's annual budget address Tuesday at the Capitol in Pierre.

Noem's recommended budget for fiscal year 2024 includes \$70 million in one-time funding to implement a new system used by every state government agency for financial operations. She is concerned about the integrity of the state's 35-year-old system.

"It is vulnerable to hackers and in danger of crashing in the future," Noem said. "Imagine using the same computer you used 35 years ago. Many of you wouldn't dream of it, yet our state does."

The governor said it will take four years to implement a new system.

The current software system is run by the Bureau of Finance and Management (BFM). The BFM has a wide scope of responsibilities. It helps the governor prepare a recommended budget, prepares financial reports, provides administrative support, and manages the state's financial systems. In addition, the BFM handles the setting of internal service rates, accounting, and budgeting for the state.

Colin Keeler, BFM's director of financial systems since 1997, said the proposed funding comes on the heels of the completion of a feasibility study.

The feasibility study, finished in January, projected a cost of \$64.35 million over three years. It is estimated 93,960 hours of work will need to be devoted to the project.

"It's going to be a blend of existing staff and new staff," Keeler said. "We just don't have those exact details yet."

An evaluation team will review proposals and make a recommendation for the procurement of a new, cloud-based system.

New staff will be required during the multi-year project implementation, according to the Governor's Office.

But the move will require approval from lawmakers on the Legislature's Appropriations Committee, which considers Noem's proposed budget and prepares an actual budget for lawmakers to vote on.

State Sen. Jean Hunhoff, R-Yankton, co-chairs the committee. She said concerns about the state's outdated system have been brought to the Legislature since she can remember.

"I've been on Appropriations 15 years. This is not a new topic," Hunhoff said. "We are at a point where we need to do something and we need to do it now."

Noem said state servers encounter thousands of hacking attempts every hour.

"Think about our agencies and all the personal information they are responsible to keep secure for the people of South Dakota," Noem said. "For instance, the Department of Health and the health care information they hold for individuals, or Social Services and their casework and child protective programs, to name a few."

However, those agencies are not part of this specific software update, according to Colin Keeler with the BFM.

The governor's mention of thousands of hacking attempts was referring to all state systems. Keeler is not aware of any successful hacking of BFM's 35-year-old system. He said the system does not connect to the internet.

Keeler said retention of staff who are knowledgeable of the outdated software is becoming harder to find, making operation and maintenance difficult.

"We're on a 1988 system right now. We need to move to a 2025 system and use that system to stay current so we're not so far behind," Keeler said.



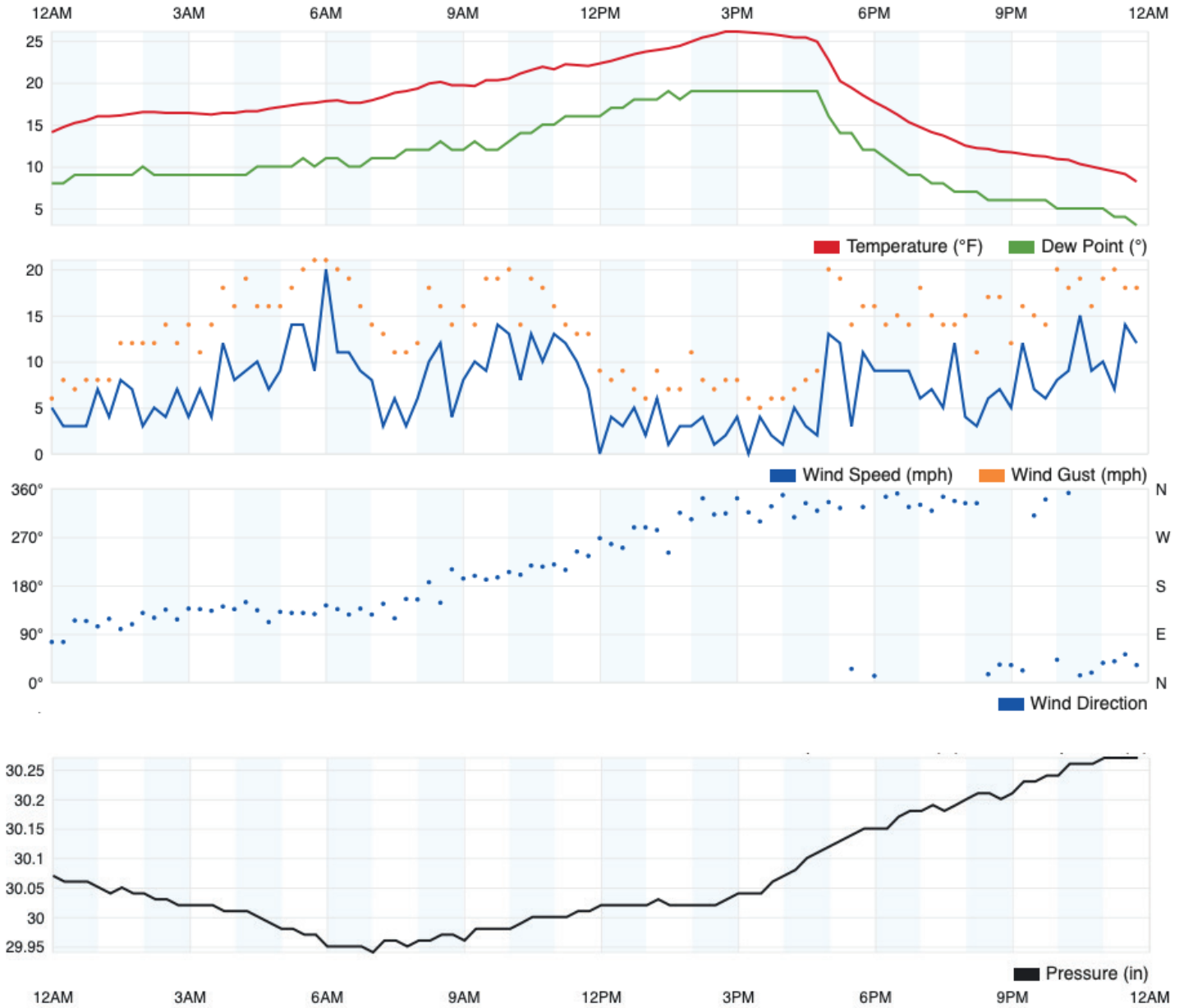
JOSHUA HAIAR  

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.

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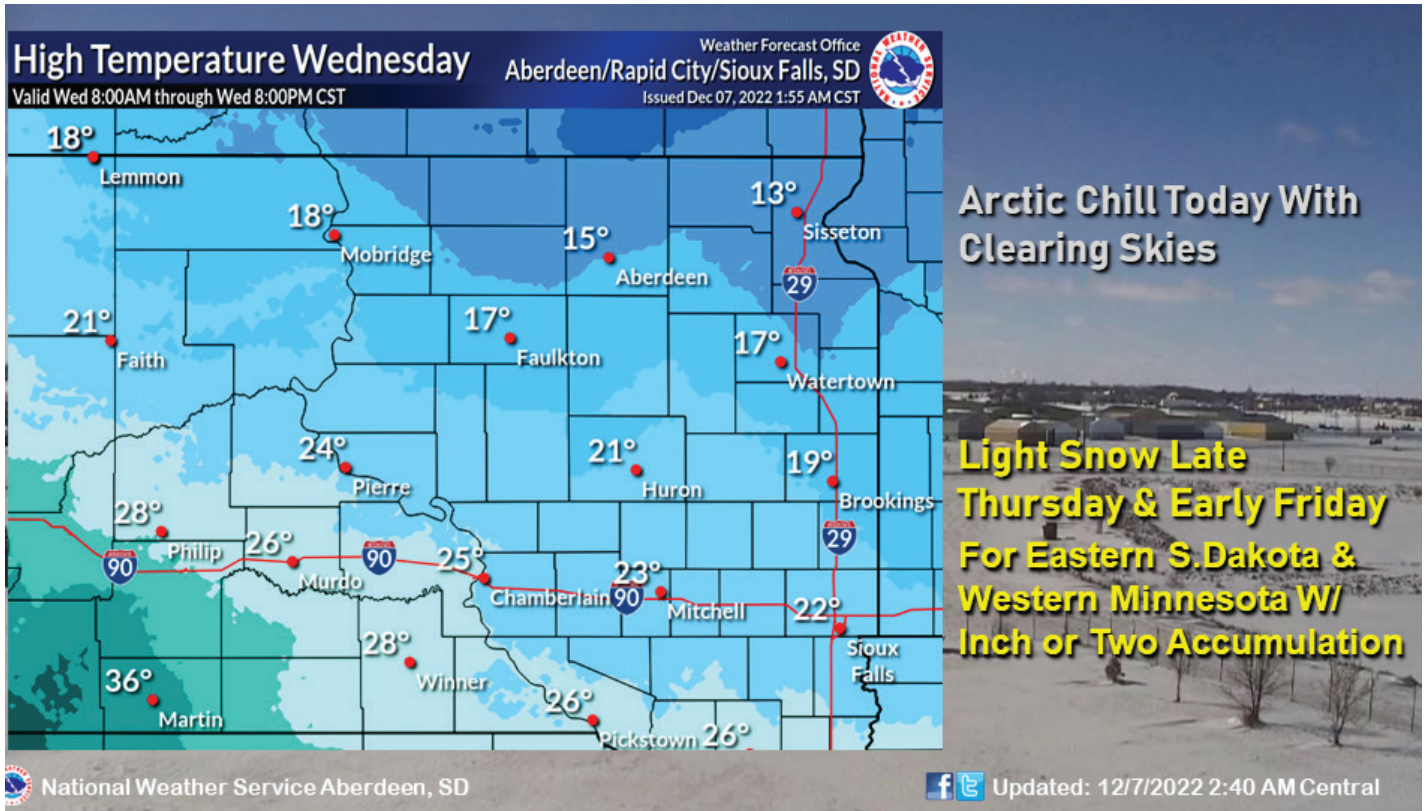
Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Wednesday	Wednesday Night	Thursday	Thursday Night	Friday	Friday Night	Saturday
						
Slight Chance Snow then Sunny	Mostly Clear	Mostly Sunny	Chance Snow then Mostly Cloudy	Mostly Cloudy	Mostly Cloudy	Partly Sunny
High: 14 °F	Low: 6 °F↑	High: 29 °F	Low: 16 °F	High: 32 °F	Low: 22 °F	High: 34 °F



Snow will continue through the morning mainly across the eastern Dakotas into western Minnesota. Arctic high pressure moves in with temperatures 10 to 20 degrees below normal and wind chills into the teens below zero. The next round of light snow is expected later Thursday into early Friday with inch or two type accumulations for eastern South Dakota and western Minnesota.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 26 °F at 2:46 PM

Low Temp: 8 °F at 11:54 PM

Wind: 21 mph at 5:40 AM

Precip: : 0.00

Day length: 8 hours, 54 minutes

Today's Info

Record High: 60 in 1918

Record Low: -27 in 2013

Average High: 32°F

Average Low: 11°F

Average Precip in Dec.: 0.14

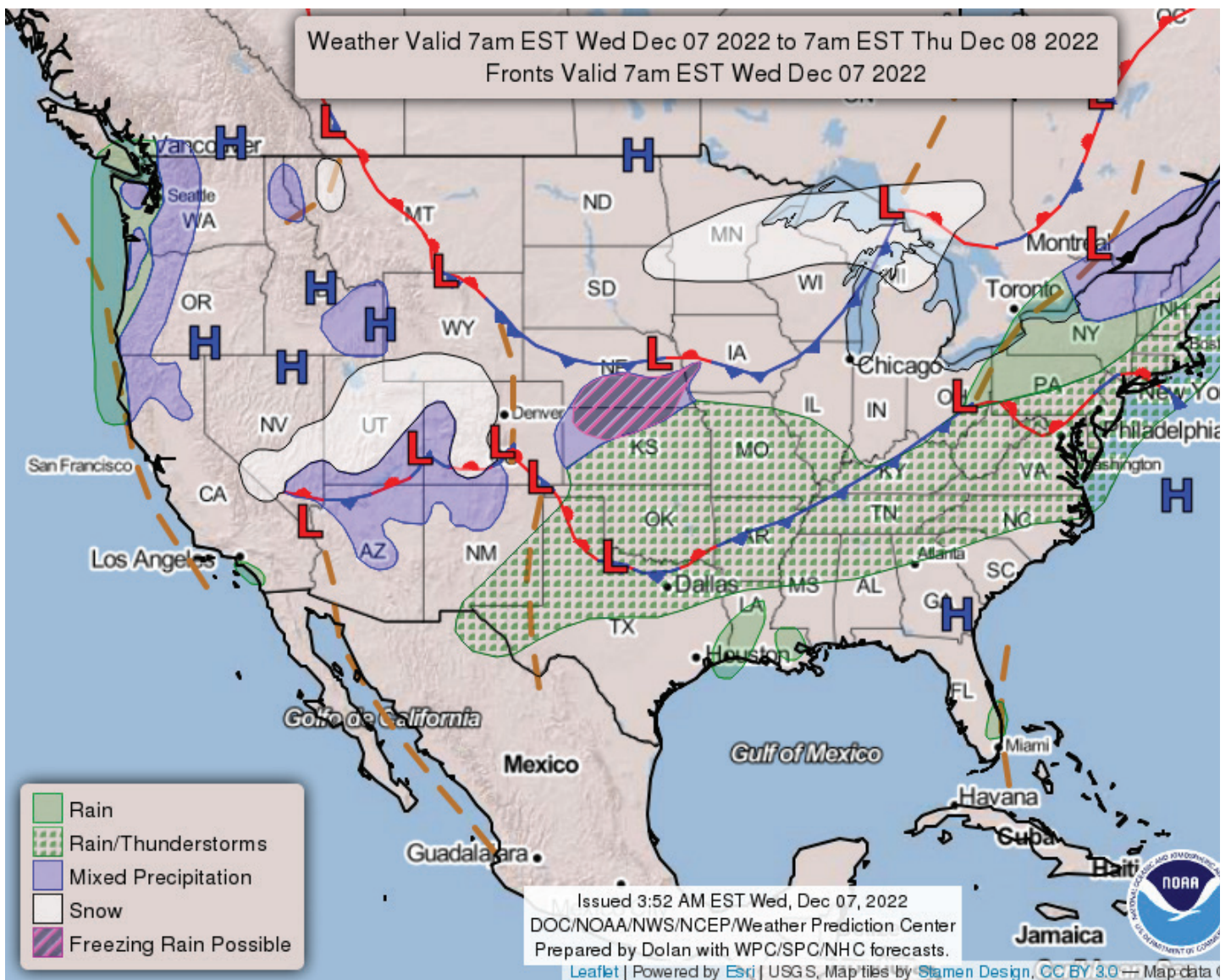
Precip to date in Dec.: 0.00

Average Precip to date: 21.35

Precip Year to Date: 16.50

Sunset Tonight: 4:51:03 PM

Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:57:49 AM



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Today in Weather History

December 7, 1963: Winds of 50 to 60 mph resulted in blowing snow all day on the 7th, which reduced visibilities to near zero and produced snow drifts several feet deep in many areas. Snowfall in eastern South Dakota was generally from 3 to 7 inches with 1 to 2 inches in the western part of the state. Storm total snowfall included 8 inches at Sisseton, 5 inches at Watertown and Wheaton, 4 inches at Aberdeen, and 2 inches at Mobridge.

December 7, 1971: Heavy snow of 7 to 12 inches fell in north-central South Dakota on the 7th. Timber Lake and Eagle Butte each reported 12 inches of snow. Strong winds accompanied the snow and caused extensive drifting. Drifts up to 15 feet were reported in sheltered areas near Lemmon. Seven inches fell at Mobridge, and 11 inches fell at Selby. McIntosh received 4 inches.

December 7, 1740: By all accounts, the Merrimack River in New Hampshire flooded on this day. The flood is likely the first recorded in New Hampshire. "The snow melted, and a freshet occurred in the Merrimack River, nothing like it having been experienced there for seventy years. At Haverhill, the stream rose fifteen feet, and many houses were floated off." (Perley, Sidney, 1891, *Historic storms of New England* p. 49-51).

December 7, 2006: A rare tornado tore through Kensal Rise in London. This T4 on the TORRO scale, equivalent to an F2 on the Fujita scale, injured six people and damaged 150 homes. According to the BBC, the last tornado which caused significant damage in London was in December 1954, in West London.

1886 - A great snowstorm hit the southern Appalachian Mountains. The three day storm produced 25 inches at Rome GA, 33 inches at Asheville NC, and 42 inches in the mountains. Montgomery AL received a record eleven inches of snow. Columbia SC received one to two inches of sleet. (4th-6th) (David Ludlum) (The Weather Channel)

1970 - A windstorm toppled the National Christmas Tree at the White House. (Sandra and TI Richard Sanders - 1987)

1987 - Another in a series of storms brought high winds and heavy rain to the northwestern U.S., with heavy snow in some of the higher elevations. In northern California, Crescent City was drenched with 2.58 inches of rain, and winds gusted to 90 mph. Up to fourteen inches of snow blanketed the mountains of northern California, and snow and high winds created blizzard conditions around Lake Tahoe NV. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - The morning low at Bismarck, ND, was eleven degrees warmer than the record low of 25 degrees at Meridian MS, and during the afternoon half a dozen cities in the north central and northwestern U.S. reported record high temperatures for the date, including Alpena MI with a reading of 57 degrees. (Storm Data) (The National Weather Summary)

1989 - Heavy snow blanketed the Central Rocky Mountain Region. Totals in the southern foothills of Colorado ranged up to 17 inches at Rye. Arctic air invaded the north central U.S. Lincoln NE, which reported a record high of 69 degrees the previous afternoon, was 35 degrees colder. International Falls MN was the cold spot in the nation with a morning low of 9 degrees below zero, and temperatures in northern Minnesota hovered near zero through the daylight hours. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

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Daily Devotionals

Seeds of Hope

A GIFT FOR ETERNITY

Timothy did well in his first semester at college. A sense of excitement was building in the family as the day approached when he would be home for Christmas. His mother wanted to make it a special event, one he would remember for years to come.

"Let's give Timothy a wristwatch for Christmas," she said. "He's done so well and I want him to know how much we appreciate all of his hard work."

"But," protested his father, "what happened to that crushproof, waterproof, shockproof, scratchproof watch we gave him when he left for college?"

"He can't find it," said his mother.

In giving us the gift of His Son, God gave us Someone Who will be with us forever. A Gift that will be with us until the end of our lives and throughout eternity. An indestructible, unchanging, all-powerful, and ever-present Presence.

Jesus promised: "be sure of this – I am with you always and everywhere, even to the end of the age."

Some would ask, "What does it mean that He will be with us? Did he not leave His disciples when He ascended into heaven?" No, He didn't.

When He left them physically, He sent the Holy Spirit to be His presence with them personally. We know He was called "Immanuel – God with us" when He was born. We know He is with us now through the Holy Spirit.

Prayer: It's easy, Father, to lose sight of You and Your messages at this time of the year. But help us to pause, pray frequently and sense Your presence within us. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: Matthew 28:20 Teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.



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 Tuesday:

Mega Millions

15-16-19-28-47, Mega Ball: 13, Megaplier: 3

(fifteen, sixteen, nineteen, twenty-eight, forty-seven; Mega Ball: thirteen; Megaplier: three)

Estimated jackpot: \$379,000,000

Powerball

Estimated jackpot: 100,000,000

Whitney scores 23 as Montana downs South Dakota State 81-56

MISSOULA, Mont. (AP) — Brandon Whitney's 23 points helped Montana defeat South Dakota State 81-56 on Tuesday night.

Whitney was 10 of 12 shooting and 3 of 3 from the free throw line for the Grizzlies (4-5). Aanen Moody was 6-of-10 shooting, including 2 for 5 from distance, and went 6 for 8 from the line to add 20 points. Dischon Thomas recorded 17 points and shot 7 for 13, including 3 for 8 from beyond the arc.

Matthew Mors led the Jackrabbits (3-7) in scoring, finishing with 15 points. Matt Dentlinger added 12 points for South Dakota State. Zeke Mayo also recorded 11 points.

Tuesday's Scores

The Associated Press

GIRLS PREP BASKETBALL=

Centerville 58, Canistota 26

Chamberlain 56, Stanley County 33

Florence/Henry 60, Deuel 28

Garretson 47, Tri-Valley 31

Gregory 56, Avon 46

Howard 63, Arlington 45

Huron 50, Yankton 39

Irene-Wakonda 46, Bon Homme 44

Jones County 44, Kimball/White Lake 32

Lennox 50, Dakota Valley 45

Leola/Frederick 50, Sunshine Bible Academy 13

Mt. Vernon/Plankinton 41, McCook Central/Montrose 30

Oldham-Ramona/Rutland 50, Great Plains Lutheran 39

Platte-Geddes 49, Freeman 39

Scotland 38, Bridgewater-Emery 14

Sioux Falls Christian 56, Western Christian, Iowa 39

Sully Buttes 56, Ipswich 19

Timber Lake 71, Tiospaye Topa 35

West Central 49, Baltic 32

Wolsey-Wessington 58, Wessington Springs 50

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

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Air Force wins 79-58 against South Dakota

COLORADO SPRINGS, Colo. (AP) — Jake Heidbreder had 27 points in Air Force's 79-58 victory over South Dakota on Tuesday night.

Heidbreder was 8-of-12 shooting, including 5 for 8 from distance, and went 6 for 6 from the line for the Falcons (6-4). Camden Vander Zwaag scored 14 points while shooting 3 for 5 from beyond the arc and 5 of 6 from the free-throw line. Rytis Petraitis was 2 of 4 shooting and 3 of 3 from the free-throw line to finish with eight points.

A.J. Plitzuweit led the way for the Coyotes (5-5) with 15 points. Max Burchill added 11 points for South Dakota. Paul Bruns had eight points.

Air Force entered halftime up 39-21.

South Dakota Legislature tackles Christian marks in Capitol

By STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — South Dakota lawmakers can adorn their office with a crucifix, but they can't pound the nail into the state Capitol's wall, a legislative oversight board clarified on Tuesday as part of a policy regulating how religious symbols can mark the state's seat of government.

The Legislature's Executive Board took up the issue after two Republican lawmakers stained five chairs in a Capitol meeting room with oil as they marked chairs with crosses ahead of a meeting last month to elect caucus leaders. It took the Capitol's groundskeepers about three hours to clean, but five chairs were left slightly discolored.

The executive board appeared content with the lawmakers, who were not named, covering the \$79.80 in wages for the time spent cleaning the chairs. At least one offender expressed regret at the decision to mark the chairs, said Republican state Sen. Lee Schoenbeck, who chairs the executive board.

But the episode — which came alongside a rift in the Republican caucus between moderates and a right-wing — also raised questions about who had access to the Statehouse rooms where laws are formed and to what degree lawmakers, often compelled by their Christian convictions, can leave a mark in the Capitol.

Republican state Rep. Sue Peterson told The Dakota Scout that she marked chairs with oil crosses as an act of prayer before last month's Republican caucus meeting. She said many lawmakers often pray as they craft state laws.

Peterson did not immediately respond to a request for comment on the new policy.

Schoenbeck proposed a policy that instructs lawmakers they "may not mark on or damage in any fashion the real or personal property of the Citizens' Capitol." And if they want to "modify" their workspaces, they have to make a request to the state agency that maintains the building.

"There's a crucifix in my office, and I'm not the one who pounds the nail in the Capitol to hang it," Schoenbeck said, giving an example of how lawmakers should walk the line between allowing religious expression while respecting the century-old building.

Lawmakers have long been comfortable with an atmosphere imbued with Christianity. They bow their heads in prayer before starting each session, dozens show up to the Capitol with their foreheads marked by crosses on Ash Wednesday and the Bible is sometimes invoked during bill debates.

But Schoenbeck also said it was important to clarify how First Amendment rights are respected on government property. He said if one religious group is given space for expression, any other group needs to be granted access as well.

The board's policy establishes a process by which legislators and citizens can request to use one of the Capitol's meeting rooms if it complies with the Legislature's work and policies. Citizens would need to make a \$500 deposit.

Schoenbeck said he hopes people will pause to think about the history of the building: "People don't step back and think about, we're just passing through this place."

South Dakota's Noem tries to convince lawmakers on tax cut

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By STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — South Dakota Gov. Kristi Noem tried Tuesday to win over the Republican-controlled Legislature with details of her plan to enact a historic repeal of the state's tax on groceries. But to deliver on the campaign promise, the Republican governor must convince lawmakers in the coming months that the state can also afford to tackle inflation and a long list of items pressing on the state's budget.

Noem, a Republican, was critical of a proposal to repeal the state grocery tax during the final days of the legislative session in March, but this fall, she changed course and made it a centerpiece of her reelection campaign.

"Eliminating the sales tax on groceries is the biggest way that in my budget that we can help South Dakotans tackle the challenge of Joe Biden's inflation and protect their hard-earned money," she told the Legislature in her annual budget address. "Unfortunately, food costs have risen by far too much. Families are struggling to make ends meet as a result."

Noem, who has set her political ambitions beyond South Dakota, repeatedly took aim at Biden's economic policies in the speech and credited the state's rosy financial outlook to her conservative policy-making.

However, the state's economic growth has lagged behind much of the country this year. South Dakota's gross domestic product growth — the broadest measure of economic output — ranked 33rd among states from April through June, according to the most recent report from the U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis.

Some Republicans and Democrats say they first want give raises to keep pace with inflation to people who draw their income from state funds. They also need to find funding for the Medicaid expansion approved by voters this year, upgrades to the state's prison system and shortages in elder care facilities.

"We're going into a year where there's a real interest in cutting taxes but there are also a lot of new demands because of high inflation," said Republican Rep. Tony Venhuizen ahead of Noem's speech.

The governor has estimated that repealing the state tax on groceries would cost about \$100 million and argued that state revenue growth can cover it. Noem expects the state to have \$310 million in ongoing revenue growth in the upcoming fiscal year, as well as \$216 million in one-time funds available.

During her victory speech on Election Day, Noem was so confident that the state was ready to cut the grocery tax that she also hinted at other projects she would like to fund — incentivizing paid family leave and creating a way for childcare workers to get benefits. On Tuesday, she said she wanted to send \$23 million to pay for paid family leave for both state employees and private sector workers, but made no mention of addressing what many in the state see as a crisis-level shortage in childcare.

Budget-setting during most of Noem's first term was filled with state revenues swollen by consumer spending and federal pandemic relief. Noem has credited her hands-off approach to governmental COVID-19 protection measures for keeping the state's economy humming.

But lawmakers are also cautioning that those years of plenty — when millions of dollars went to upgrading university campuses and other projects — could soon be over. Noem said some of those projects, like a new event center at the state fairgrounds, a new public health lab and university upgrades, are running over budget due to inflation and would require \$26 million in additional funding.

A potential recession could take a toll on state budget revenues in the coming year and inflation has already left budget holes to fill, said Sen. Lee Schoenbeck, a Republican who presides over the Senate. He expressed skepticism at the idea of cutting taxes that provide ongoing revenue for the state.

Sen. Casey Crabtree, the Republican caucus leader, issued a statement praising Noem's budget approach but stayed silent on the proposed repeal of the grocery tax.

"The GOP-led Senate is dedicated to making sure our residents are taxed fairly and that South Dakota remains fiscally sustainable in the long term," he said.

Democrats, meanwhile, have pushed for years to repeal the state's tax on groceries. But even Rep. Linda Duba, who will be just one of two Democrats on the Joint Appropriations Committee, predicted that the state could afford only an incremental cut to the tax if it also keeps up with inflation in funding for teachers, state employees and community support providers.

"We are going to see a fight between those who want to do all these tax relief programs — but you've

got to care for all the people in our state," she said.

Toshiba Donates \$42,000 to South Dakota Nonprofit

MITCHELL, S.D. & LAKE FOREST, Calif.--(BUSINESS WIRE)--Dec 6, 2022--

Toshiba America Business Solutions presents \$42,000 to Mitchell, S.D. nonprofit, the Sam Tronnes Memorial Foundation, LLC. Since 2017, with support from its business partners and dealers, Toshiba has donated more than \$250,000 to support education, youth sports and veterans in the Mitchell community.

The Sam Tronnes Memorial Foundation, LLC provides scholarships to Mitchell High School graduating seniors while also financing the purchase of sports equipment for youth in need via the South Dakota Amateur Hockey Association. The Foundation additionally presented a portion of the donation to the Mitchell Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 2750.

"Education and community involvement are two key focus areas for Toshiba," states Toshiba America Business Solutions President and Chief Executive Officer Larry White. "Collaborating with the Sam Tronnes Memorial Foundation, LLC enables us to fulfill these very important objectives on an annual basis."

"The year-in-and-year-out support Toshiba, its resellers, and business partners deliver to our foundation uplifts the entire Mitchell community as well as other communities across South Dakota," says Sam Tronnes Memorial Foundation, LLC President Dave Tronnes. "Their donations provide more children the opportunity to attend college and play organized sports while additionally providing our area veterans the support they require and deserve."

Toshiba is a 36-year manufacturer within Mitchell, S.D. employing nearly 100 people in the immediate area. The company's 25-acre Mitchell facility produces more than 1,200 metric tons of toner annually and is the primary global supplier of color toner for Toshiba's industry-recognized e-STUDIO™ copiers.

Germany: 25 arrested on suspicion of planning armed coup

By FRANK JORDANS Associated Press

BERLIN (AP) — Thousands of police officers carried out raids across much of Germany on Wednesday against suspected far-right extremists who allegedly sought to overthrow the government in an armed coup. Officials said 25 people were detained.

Federal prosecutors said some 3,000 officers conducted searches at 130 sites in 11 of Germany's 16 states against adherents of the so-called Reich Citizens movement. Some movement members reject Germany's postwar constitution and have called for bringing down the government.

Justice Minister Marco Buschmann described the raids as an "anti-terrorism operation," adding that the suspects may have planned an armed attack on institutions of the state.

Germany's top security official said the group was "driven by violent coup fantasies and conspiracy ideologies."

Prosecutors said 22 German citizens were detained on suspicion of "membership in a terrorist organization." Three other people, including a Russian citizen, were held on suspicion of supporting the organization, they said. Another 27 people were under investigation.

German media outlet Der Spiegel reported the searched locations included the barracks of Germany's special forces unit KSK in the southwestern town of Calw. The unit received scrutiny in the past over alleged far-right involvement by some soldiers.

Federal prosecutors declined to confirm or deny that the barracks was searched.

Along with detentions in Germany, prosecutors said one person was detained in the Austrian town of Kitzbuehel and another in the Italian city of Perugia.

Prosecutors said those detained are alleged to last year have formed a "terrorist organization with the goal of overturning the existing state order in Germany and replace it with their own form of state, which was already in the course of being founded."

The suspects were aware their aim could only be achieved by military means and with force, prosecutors said.

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Some of the group's members had made "concrete preparations" to storm Germany's federal parliament with a small armed group, according to prosecutors. "The details (of this plan) still need to be investigated" to determine whether any of the suspects can be charged with treason, they said.

The group is alleged to have believed in a "conglomerate of conspiracy theories consisting of narratives from the so-called Reich Citizens as well as QAnon ideology," according to the statement. Prosecutors added that members of the group also believe Germany is ruled by a so-called "deep state;" similar baseless claims about the United States were made by former President Donald Trump.

Prosecutors identified the suspected ringleaders as Heinrich XIII P. R. and Ruediger v. P., in line with German privacy rules. Der Spiegel reported that the former was a well-known 71-year-old member of a minor German noble family, while the latter was a 69-year-old former paratrooper.

Federal prosecutors said Heinrich XIII P. R., whom the group planned to install as Germany's new leader, had contacted Russian officials with the aim of negotiating a new order in the country once the German government was overthrown. He was allegedly assisted in this by a Russian woman, Vitalia B.

"According to current investigations there is no indication however that the persons contacted responded positively to his request," prosecutors said.

Prosecutors identified another individual detained by police Wednesday as Birgit M.-W. Der Spiegel reported she is a judge and former lawmaker with the far-right Alternative for Germany party.

The party, known by its German acronym AfD, has increasingly come under scrutiny by German security services due to its ties with extremists.

AfD's co-leaders Tino Chrupalla and Alice Weidel condemned the reported plans, which they said they had only learned of through the media.

"We have full confidence in the authorities involved and demand a swift and comprehensive investigation," they said in a statement.

Prosecutors said that apart from a council of leaders, or Rat, the group had tasked several members with the formation of an armed wing. Led by Ruediger v. P., they planned to obtain weapons and conduct firearms training.

The raids showed that "we know how to defend ourselves with full force against the enemies of democracy," Interior Minister Nancy Faeser said.

"The investigation offers an insight into the depths of the terrorist threat within the Reich Citizens milieu," Faeser said. "Only the further investigation will provide a clear picture of how far the coup plans had come."

Sara Nanni, a Green party lawmaker, suggested the group may not have been very capable.

"More details keep coming to light that raise doubts about whether these people were even clever enough to plan and carry out such a coup," Nanni said in a post on the social network Mastodon. "The fact is: no matter how crude their ideas are and how hopeless their plans, even the attempt is dangerous!"

Officials have repeatedly warned that far-right extremists pose the biggest threat to Germany's domestic security. This threat was highlighted by the killing of a regional politician and the deadly attack on a synagogue in 2019.

Faeser announced earlier this year that the government planned to disarm about 1,500 suspected extremists and to tighten background checks for those wanting to acquire guns as part of a broader crackdown on the far right.

Germany's chief federal prosecutor planned to make a statement on the case later Wednesday.

Hawaii remembrance to draw handful of Pearl Harbor survivors

By AUDREY McAVOY Associated Press

PEARL HARBOR, Hawaii (AP) — A handful of centenarian survivors of the attack on Pearl Harbor are expected to gather at the scene of the Japanese bombing on Wednesday to commemorate those who perished 81 years ago.

That's fewer than in recent years, when a dozen or more traveled to Hawaii from across the country to pay their respects at the annual remembrance ceremony.

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Part of the decline reflects the dwindling number of survivors as they age. The youngest active-duty military personnel on Dec. 7, 1941, would have been about 17, making them 98 today. Many of those still alive are at least 100.

About 2,400 servicemen were killed in the bombing, which launched the U.S. into World War II. The USS Arizona alone lost 1,177 sailors and Marines, nearly half the death toll.

Robert John Lee recalls being a 20-year-old civilian living at his parent's home on the naval base where his father ran the water pumping station. The home was just about 1 mile (1.6 kilometers) across the harbor from where the USS Arizona was moored on battleship row.

The first explosions before 8 a.m. woke him up, making him think a door was slamming in the wind. He got up to yell for someone to shut the door only to look out the window at Japanese planes dropping torpedo bombs from the sky.

He saw the hull of the USS Arizona turn a deep orange-red after an aerial bomb hit it.

"Within a few seconds, that explosion then came out with huge tongues of flame right straight up over the ship itself — but hundreds of feet up," Lee said in an interview Monday after a boat tour of the harbor.

He still remembers the hissing sound of the fire.

Sailors jumped into the water to escape their burning ships and swam to the landing near Lee's house. Many were covered in the thick, heavy oil that coated the harbor. Lee and his mother used Fels-Naptha soap to help wash them. Sailors who were able to board small boats that shuttled them back to their vessels.

"Very heroic, I thought," Lee said of them.

Lee joined the Hawaii Territorial Guard the next day, and later the U.S. Navy. He worked for Pan American World Airways for 30 years after the war.

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs doesn't have statistics for how many Pearl Harbor survivors are still living. But department data show that of the 16 million who served in World War II, only about 240,000 were alive as of August and some 230 die each day.

There were about 87,000 military personnel on Oahu at the time of the attack, according to a rough estimate compiled by military historian J. Michael Wenger.

The ceremony sponsored by the Navy and the National Park Service will feature a moment of silence at 7:55 a.m., the minute the attack began, and a missing-man-formation flyover.

Navy and park service officials are due to deliver remarks.

Making 'indie' video games gets trickier as industry evolves

By MATT O'BRIEN AP Technology Writer

Video game developer Ben Esposito's first big break was a quirky game called Donut County starring a raccoon who dropped small objects and then entire neighborhoods into an ever-growing hole in the ground.

His latest, Neon White, is a campy twist on the first-person shooter genre that involves careening across heaven at breakneck speeds to stop a demon invasion. Drawn in an anime style and with a romantic subplot, it's nominated for "Best Indie" and "Best Action" game at Thursday's Game Awards, an Oscars-like event for the video game industry.

Every year, some tiny and independent video game developer studios like Esposito's Angel Matrix hold their own with the big leagues by making hit games that achieve commercial success or at least critical acclaim. Even one of the world's most popular games, Minecraft, was started by an independent game developer in Sweden who later sold his studio to Microsoft for \$2.5 billion.

"I have really odd taste," said Esposito, 33. "When I'm picking stuff, it's about trying to come up with that rare intersection of something that is offbeat and interesting to me, but if presented the right way, it could be financially successful."

How long these "indie" studios can flourish is up for debate as the gaming industry undergoes increasing consolidation — symbolized by Xbox-maker Microsoft's pending \$69 billion takeover of giant game publisher Activision Blizzard that awaits approval from U.S. and European regulators.

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Esposito, the game's co-creator and director, and his wife, co-creator Geneva Hodgson, worked out of their home near Los Angeles to lead development of Neon White over the past three years. At the height of production, about five people worked full time on the game. Add friends, contractors and freelancers and it was still fewer than 20 people who touched the product, Esposito said.

And while there's no one formula for transforming an offbeat idea into a blockbuster hit found on computers, phones or a family's PlayStation, Xbox or Nintendo Switch, there are plenty of indie studios that have managed to build an audience for their games.

Thursday's Game Awards event in Los Angeles is showcasing several. Those include the French-made summer hit *Stray*, about a cute cat navigating the alleyways of a post-apocalyptic city; another game about a cult led by a possessed lamb; and the retro-looking *Vampire Survivors* that pits its hero against a constant stream of monsters.

But as the industry keeps consolidating, some developers including Esposito worry that a golden age for high-quality indie games could be threatened as a smaller group of distributors makes choices about what gets funded.

"When it comes to bigger budgets, it's a challenge because the industry feels like it's contracting a bit," he said. "Studios get bought up. Talent gets concentrated into certain areas and then budgets change."

Games that Esposito describes as having middle-tier budgets in the \$2 million range — neither cheap to make, nor as expensive as the major studio franchises — could get sidelined.

"I think we're seeing that kind of mid-budget game start to disappear," he said. "I think that's really sad because that's the kind of budget that I think can produce really interesting, odd, risky but well-realized projects and I think *Neon White's* one of those."

Both *Stray* and *Neon White* benefited from the support of arthouse publisher Annapurna Interactive, the games division of the film studio behind movies like *"Her"* and *"American Hustle."* In the case of *Neon White*, that allowed Esposito's team to enhance the game by hiring professional voice actors.

"It's always a very risky endeavor to make an independent video game," said *Stray* producer Swann Martin-Raget. The tools to make games are becoming more accessible, and so many studios are making them that it can be "really hard to get people's attention," he said.

Stray captured plenty of people's attention this summer with its cinematic visuals of a realistic-looking tabby cat scampering around a city menaced by robots and other hazards. Its maker was BlueTwelve Studio, a small team of developers in the southern French city of Montpellier, some of whom previously worked at the nearby office of big game-maker Ubisoft.

As a sign of its upstart success, *Stray* is competing against big-budget blockbusters like Bandai Namco's *Elden Ring* and Sony's *God of War Ragnarök* for Thursday's prestigious "Game of the Year" award.

Games analyst Steve Bailey at London-based market research firm Omdia said it's hard to define what classifies a game as indie.

It used to mean "you have a small team, they do everything themselves and they release it without a publisher and they do not care about success. That was part of the original kind of indie spirit." Now it sometimes describes anything that doesn't come out of big studios making the highest-profile games.

"So it could even be somebody who has a publisher, some quite large studios actually, and budgets that might run into tens of millions of dollars that still get classed as indie," Bailey said.

Bailey said there's no question that players today have a rich and diverse collection of games to choose from on consoles, and from popular web-based game platforms such as Steam or Epic.

"There's this interesting balancing act that's taking place that the opportunities now are greater than they've ever been" for independent developers, Bailey said. "But the competition itself is absolutely massive."

In the short term, the consolidation could be good for independent developers as companies like Microsoft strive to offer the widest possible array of games to get people hooked on buying a monthly subscription-based service such as Xbox Game Pass.

In the longer term, there's more uncertainty if the game market starts to look more like streaming movie services like Netflix that can apportion budgets and contracts based on past viewership, Bailey said.

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"In the future, when Xbox is focusing on profitability instead of expansion and acquisition, there might be a change of power," he said. "It might be harder for indies to get traction on subscription platforms. It's great for the people who are on there who get to be part of that wave, but the ones who are off, things might get harder."

Democratic Sen. Warnock wins Georgia runoff against Walker

By BILL BARROW and JEFF AMY Associated Press

ATLANTA (AP) — Democratic Sen. Raphael Warnock defeated Republican challenger Herschel Walker in a Georgia runoff election Tuesday, ensuring Democrats an outright majority in the Senate for the rest of President Joe Biden's current term and capping an underwhelming midterm cycle for the GOP in the last major vote of the year.

With Warnock's second runoff victory in as many years, Democrats will have a 51-49 Senate majority, gaining a seat from the current 50-50 split with John Fetterman's victory in Pennsylvania. There will be divided government, however, with Republicans having narrowly flipped House control.

"After a hard-fought campaign — or, should I say, campaigns — it is my honor to utter the four most powerful words ever spoken in a democracy: The people have spoken," Warnock, 53, told jubilant supporters who packed a downtown Atlanta hotel ballroom.

"I often say that a vote is a kind of prayer for the world we desire for ourselves and for our children," declared Warnock, a Baptist pastor and his state's first Black senator. "Georgia, you have been praying with your lips and your legs, your hands and your feet, your heads and your hearts. You have put in the hard work, and here we are standing together."

In last month's election, Warnock led Walker by 37,000 votes out of almost 4 million cast, but fell short of the 50% threshold needed to avoid a runoff. The senator appeared to be headed for a wider final margin in Tuesday's runoff, with Walker, a football legend at the University of Georgia and in the NFL, unable to overcome a bevy of damaging allegations, including claims that he paid for two former girlfriends' abortions despite supporting a national ban on the procedure.

"The numbers look like they're not going to add up," Walker, an ally and friend of former President Donald Trump, told supporters late Tuesday at the College Football Hall of Fame in downtown Atlanta. "There's no excuses in life, and I'm not going to make any excuses now because we put up one heck of a fight."

Democrats' Georgia victory solidifies the state's place as a Deep South battleground two years after Warnock and fellow Georgia Democrat Jon Ossoff won 2021 runoffs that gave the party Senate control just months after Biden became the first Democratic presidential candidate in 30 years to win Georgia. Voters returned Warnock to the Senate in the same cycle they reelected Republican Gov. Brian Kemp by a comfortable margin and chose an all-GOP slate of statewide constitutional officers.

Walker's defeat bookends the GOP's struggles this year to win with flawed candidates cast from Trump's mold, a blow to the former president as he builds his third White House bid ahead of 2024.

Democrats' new outright majority in the Senate means the party will no longer have to negotiate a power-sharing deal with Republicans and won't have to rely on Vice President Kamala Harris to break as many tie votes.

National Democrats celebrated Tuesday, with Biden tweeting a photo of his congratulatory phone call to the senator. "Georgia voters stood up for our democracy, rejected Ultra MAGAism, and ... sent a good man back to the Senate," Biden tweeted, referencing Trump's "Make America Great Again" slogan.

About 1.9 million runoff votes were cast in Georgia by mail and during early voting. A robust Election Day turnout added about 1.4 million more, slightly more than the Election Day totals in November and in 2020.

Total turnout still trailed the 2021 runoff turnout of about 4.5 million. Voting rights groups pointed to changes made by state lawmakers after the 2020 election that shortened the period for runoffs, from nine weeks to four, as a reason for the decline in early and mail voting.

Warnock emphasized his willingness to work across the aisle and his personal values, buoyed by his status as senior pastor of Atlanta's Ebenezer Baptist Church, where civil rights icon Martin Luther King Jr.

once preached.

Walker benefited during the campaign from nearly unmatched name recognition from his football career, yet was dogged by questions about his fitness for office.

A multimillionaire businessman, Walker faced questions about his past, including his exaggerations of his business achievements, academic credentials and philanthropic activities.

In his personal life, Walker faced new attention on his ex-wife's previous accounts of domestic violence, including details that he once held a gun to her head and threatened to kill her. He has never denied those specifics and wrote of his violent tendencies in a 2008 memoir that attributed the behavior to mental illness.

As a candidate, he sometimes mangled policy discussions, attributing the climate crisis to China's "bad air" overtaking "good air" from the United States and arguing that diabetics could manage their health by "eating right," a practice that isn't enough for insulin-dependent diabetic patients.

On Tuesday, Atlanta voter Tom Callaway praised the Republican Party's strength in Georgia and said he'd supported Kemp in the opening round of voting. But he said he cast his ballot for Warnock because he didn't think "Herschel Walker has the credentials to be a senator."

"I didn't believe he had a statement of what he really believed in or had a campaign that made sense," Callaway said.

Walker, meanwhile, sought to portray Warnock as a yes-man for Biden. He sometimes made the attack in especially personal terms, accusing Warnock of "being on his knees, begging" at the White House — a searing charge for a Black challenger to level against a Black senator about his relationship with a white president.

Warnock promoted his Senate accomplishments, touting a provision he sponsored to cap insulin costs for Medicare patients. He hailed deals on infrastructure and maternal health care forged with Republican senators, mentioning those GOP colleagues more than he did Biden or other Washington Democrats.

Warnock distanced himself from Biden, whose approval ratings have lagged as inflation remains high. After the general election, Biden promised to help Warnock in any way he could, even if it meant staying away from Georgia. Bypassing the president, Warnock decided instead to campaign with former President Barack Obama in the days before the runoff election.

Walker, meanwhile, avoided campaigning with Trump until the campaign's final day, when the pair conducted a conference call Monday with supporters.

Walker joins failed Senate nominees Dr. Mehmet Oz of Pennsylvania, Blake Masters of Arizona, Adam Laxalt of Nevada and Don Bolduc of New Hampshire as Trump loyalists who ultimately lost races that Republicans once thought they would — or at least could — win.

Dissident artist Weiwei says China unrest won't alter regime

By BARRY HATTON Associated Press

MONTEMOR-O-NOVO, Portugal (AP) — Dissident Chinese artist and activist Ai Weiwei is taking heart from recent public protests in China over the authorities' strict COVID-19 policy, but he doesn't see them bringing about any significant political change.

"I don't think that's possible," he told The Associated Press in an interview at his home in Portugal.

The recent unrest in several Chinese cities that has questioned Beijing's authority — going so far as to demand President Xi Jinping's resignation in what have been the boldest protests in decades — is "a big deal," Ai acknowledges. But it is unlikely to go further, he says.

Challenges to Chinese Communist Party rule are routinely snuffed out with whatever degree of brutality is required. Ai points, for example, to how Beijing cracked down on Hong Kong's pro-democracy movement two years ago.

In his view, some "realistic thinking" is required.

"Everything is about control ... to guarantee the whole nation will follow (Xi's) direction," the 65-year-old said in the interview Tuesday at his country house about 100 kilometers (60 miles) east of Lisbon, the

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Portuguese capital.

His 2020 documentary "Coronation," about the lockdown in Wuhan, China, during the COVID-19 outbreak, illustrated the country's ruthlessly efficient and brutal official response to the pandemic.

The Chinese government's "zero-COVID" policy included harsh measures that, according to Ai, kept some people confined to their apartments for 100 straight days.

Three grueling years of lockdowns and other severe restrictions, along with Xi's scrapping of civil liberties, built up "tremendous pressure" in Chinese society, Ai says.

The balloon popped on Nov. 25, after at least 10 people died in a fire in an apartment building in China's northwest. Though officials denied suggestions that firefighters or victims were blocked by locked doors or other anti-virus controls, the disaster became a focus for public frustration.

Ai sees an inevitability in the public's exasperation, and is cheered by the questions it has raised. "Of course, they start questioning the leadership and the social structure, the political structure," he said.

Beijing has in recent weeks relaxed some measures, and on Wednesday announced a series of steps rolling back some of its harshest pandemic restrictions in an apparent nod to public frustration.

Ai warns, however, that the relatively small protests, some of which have involved just individuals or neighborhoods, shouldn't be overstated in a country with a population of 1.4 billion people. And he recalls that the Chinese Communist Party has some 100 million members, all loyal to the regime.

Though "not at all" hopeful of meaningful change in China in the foreseeable future, Ai sees encouraging signs in the protests. They may be, he says, baby steps toward a more distant goal.

"What (is) clear is the new generation of young people from China — students or young workers — they start to be more clear about what kind of government China is and maybe also (demand) political change," he said. "But that would take a long time."

He is also gloomy about the muted international response to the clamor for change by some Chinese, seeing foreign governments as more interested in economic relations with Beijing than human rights issues.

Long an outspoken critic of the Chinese government, Ai was detained by the authorities for almost three months in 2011. He has lived in exile since 2015, most recently in the countryside of southern Portugal where he says he has now settled.

He is building a 3,000-square-meter (32,000-square-foot) studio on his land, with a view of the crumbling 13th-century castle of Montemor-o-Novo.

On Saturday, in a show of support for the Chinese protesters, Ai will appear at Speakers' Corner in London's Hyde Park. He will give out blank sheets of paper, which have been a symbol of opposition to Beijing's censorship, signed with invisible ink.

China eases anti-COVID measures following protests

By JOE McDONALD Associated Press

BEIJING (AP) — China rolled back rules on isolating people with COVID-19 and dropped virus test requirements for some public places Wednesday in a dramatic change to a strategy that confined millions of people to their homes and sparked protests and demands for President Xi Jinping to resign.

China has enforced some of the world's strictest curbs, disrupting global manufacturing and trade and the lives of ordinary Chinese, while many nations switched to trying to live with the virus.

The latest announcement from the National Health Commission is the second easing of rules following a Nov. 11 change that fueled hopes the Communist Party would scrap its "zero COVID" strategy. Experts warn, however, that because millions of elderly people still need to be vaccinated, it will be mid-2023 or later before restrictions can be lifted completely.

China's low infection rates also mean few people have developed natural immunity, a factor that might set back reopening plans if cases surge and authorities feel compelled to reimpose restrictions.

The easing is in line with promises to reduce the human cost of "zero COVID," including changes announced before the protests that included shorter quarantines for travelers from abroad. The latest moves have been highly publicized — a possible effort to quell public anger — but it was unclear whether they

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were a response to the protests.

Under the new rules, people with mild cases will be allowed for the first time to isolate at home instead of going to sometimes overcrowded or unsanitary quarantine centers. That addresses a major irritation that drove the outpouring of anger.

Public facilities except for "special places," such as schools, hospitals and nursing homes, will no longer require visitors to produce a "health code" on a smartphone app that tracks their virus tests and whether they have been to areas deemed at high risk of infection, the government said.

Local officials must "take strict and detailed measures to protect people's life, safety and health" but at the same time "minimize the impact of the epidemic on economic and social development," the statement said.

The latest changes are "small steps" in a gradual process aimed at ending restrictions, said Liang Wanjian, a member of an experts group advising the National Health Commission, at a news conference.

"We will look at it, study and judge, and analyze again," said Liang, one of China's most prominent anti-epidemic experts.

The government's goal is "to return to the state before the epidemic, but the realization of the goal must have conditions," Liang said.

China's restrictions have helped to keep case numbers low, but public frustration is rising as millions of people are repeatedly confined at home for uncertain periods, schools close abruptly and economic growth falls.

The changes have been rolled out despite a renewed spike in infections started in October. On Wednesday, the government reported 25,231 new cases, including 20,912 without symptoms.

Xi's government has held up "zero COVID" as proof of the superiority of China's system compared with the United States and Western countries. China's official death toll is 5,235 since the start of the pandemic versus a U.S. count of 1.1 million.

There was no indication Beijing was dropping its goal of trying to stamp out transmission of the virus, which has killed at least 6.6 million people worldwide.

China is the last major country still trying to do that while the United States and other governments have eased travel and other curbs.

A deputy premier, Sun Chunlan, said last week that the latest variants were less likely to cause illness. That suggested the government might be preparing to declare COVID-19 a less serious disease, which might lead to a less drastic response, but there has been no confirmation of that.

The government announced a campaign last week to vaccinate the elderly that health experts say must be done before China can end restrictions on visitors coming from abroad. They say the ruling party also needs to build up China's hospital system to cope with a possible rise in cases.

Rules were left in place that warn apartment and office buildings might be sealed if infections are found. Complaints that families are confined for weeks at a time with uncertain access to food and medicine were a key driver of the protests.

The ruling party switched early this year to suspending access to neighborhoods or districts where infections were discovered instead of isolating whole cities.

On Wednesday, the government said the scope of closures will be narrowed still further to single apartment floors or buildings instead of neighborhoods.

It said schools in communities with no outbreaks must return to in-person teaching.

That appeared to be a response to complaints that local leaders, threatened with the loss of their jobs in the event of outbreaks, impose closures that are destructive, might be unnecessary and exceed what the central government allows.

The demonstrations in at least eight major cities and on dozens of university campuses were the most widespread display of public dissent in decades. In Shanghai, some protesters shouted the politically explosive demand for Xi, China's most influential figure in decades, to resign.

The next World Cup will jump to 48 teams. Is bigger better?

By GERALD IMRAY AP Sports Writer

DOHA, Qatar (AP) — The next World Cup will be the biggest ever after world soccer body FIFA took the leap from a 32-team field to 48 teams in 2026.

It means more of soccer's so-called "little teams" that didn't make it to Qatar will be given a chance of a lifetime when the tournament is hosted by the United States, Canada and Mexico.

That could be great news for everyone who was entertained by Saudi Arabia's stirring upset of Lionel Messi's Argentina at this World Cup, Japan's two wins over former champions Germany and Spain or Morocco's humbling of star-studded Belgium and Spain on its way to an unexpected quarterfinal run. More surprises surely await in four years.

Still, it's not clear to everyone that bigger is better.

While 48 teams might increase the chances of fairytale moments such as Saudi Arabia's 2-1 win over Argentina in the group stage, there's also a good chance of the opposite: more one-sided games that may take some of the shine off a tournament that is meant to be the best vs. the best.

Spain 7, Costa Rica 0 also happened at this World Cup. As did England's 6-2 rout of Iran, France's 4-1 dismantling of Australia and Qatar becoming the first host country to lose its three group stage matches. FIFA will need to dig even deeper into the lower levels of international soccer to get from 32 to 48.

"It means that we will have to find 16 more good teams," said Arsene Wenger, FIFA's Chief of Global Football Development and a central figure in making a 48-team World Cup workable.

FIFA is still promoting the expansion as an upgrade and good for the global game. All continents will have more slots and FIFA says opening soccer's marquee event to more of its 211 member countries or territories should have an impact beyond the teams, with the prospect of even more eyes on TV screens and more kids inspired to kick balls across the globe.

"I am convinced that if the teams, the countries have more opportunities to go to the world stage, it will do more for (soccer) development inside that country," Wenger said.

Qatar's World Cup is the first in the Middle East and the furthest FIFA has ventured from the game's heartlands in Europe and South America. That decision has provoked its own harsh criticism but the on-field action might have been a timely advert for the 48-team plan, which FIFA announced in 2017 and has had to defend ever since over doubts about what the exact format will be.

FIFA initially indicated it would be 16 groups of three teams, but that idea was widely criticized. Another option could be 12 groups of four teams. Wenger said FIFA's decision-making council has not decided yet.

In Qatar, Japan was one of three Asian teams to qualify for the last 16, which had never happened before. African teams collected more points in the group stage than ever. Morocco topped a group containing 2018 World Cup runner-up Croatia and semifinalist Belgium, and advanced to the quarterfinals by beating Spain on penalties on Tuesday. Cameroon signed off by beating Brazil, the first time an African team has conquered the five-time champion and soccer's most celebrated team at a World Cup.

"Just look at how the World Cup is unfolding," said Senegal coach Aliou Cisse. "It's not like 30 years ago when the big fish were completely eating the little fish alive."

Amid Japan's run in Qatar, winger Takefusa Kubo said "they can't underestimate Asia." Ghana coach Otto Addo said Africa deserves its extra places and its teams now have a better chance of going further.

However, the expansion may not have much of an impact on the final outcome of the World Cup.

European and South American teams — the big fish Cisse referred to — have gobbled up every one of the 21 World Cup titles so far, with 12 for Europe and nine for South America. No teams from another continent have made a final in nearly 100 years of World Cup history. Eighty-two out of 84 semifinalists have been European or South American. The United States in 1930 and South Korea in 2002 are the exceptions.

In Qatar, while teams from outside Europe and South America did well in the group stage, only Morocco advanced to the quarterfinals, where it will face Portugal on Saturday. South Korea, Japan, Senegal, the United States and Australia were all eliminated in the round of 16.

Cisse's Senegal are the African champions but were outclassed 3-0 by England. South Korea, ranked

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No. 3 in Asia, was knocked out 4-1 by Brazil. South Korea forward Son Heung-min, his country's one star, said almost in envy: "Look at their players."

A bigger World Cup does offer clear advancement opportunities for FIFA, though.

Just over 3.5 billion people, more than half the world's population, watched the 2018 World Cup in Russia, according to FIFA, and the soccer body earned record revenues of \$7.5 billion from commercial deals tied to the Qatar World Cup.

With those numbers in the bank from a 32-team tournament, 48 offers the obvious chance to sell World Cup aspirations to more people in more places.

China's Xi visiting Saudi Arabia amid bid to boost economy

BEIJING (AP) — Chinese leader Xi Jinping is attending a pair of regional summits in Saudi Arabia this week amid efforts to kick-start economic growth weighed down by strict anti-COVID-19 measures.

The Foreign Ministry said Wednesday that Xi will attend the inaugural China-Arab States Summit and a meeting with leaders of the six nations that make up the Gulf Cooperation Council in the Saudi capital of Riyadh. His state visit to Saudi Arabia will end on Saturday.

Xi's attendance at the China-Arab States Summit marks the "largest and highest-level diplomatic event between China and the Arab world since the founding of the People's Republic of China and will become an epoch-making milestone in the history of China-Arab relations," Foreign Ministry spokesperson Mao Ning told reporters at a daily briefing on Wednesday.

Mao said China hopes the summit will set a future agenda for relations between the sides and "help build more strategic common understandings on major regional and international issues ... and defend multilateralism."

The last was an apparent reference to China's efforts to challenge the U.S.-dominated international order that has seen Beijing find common cause with Russia, Iran and other states hostile to Washington.

Xi's visit underscores China's role as the world's second-largest economy and a major source of outward investment, lately under the rubric of Xi's signature "Belt and Road Initiative" and the more recent "Global Development Initiative." Those programs aim to have Chinese companies build and finance roads, power stations, ports and other infrastructure across Asia and beyond, vastly increasing Beijing's influence in the developing world.

So far, they've met with only limited success, amid accusations that many of the projects are impracticable, overpriced and unaffordable to the mostly poor nations taking them on.

To fuel China's massive demand, the country imports half of its oil. Fully half of those imports come from Saudi Arabia, amounting to tens of billions of dollars annually.

China's economic growth had been on a steady decline for years and was dealt a major blow by rolling lockdowns imposed across the country as a response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Chinese economic growth rebounded to 3.9% over a year earlier in the three months ending in September, up from the first half of the year's 2.2%, but still well short of the government target.

On Wednesday, China announced a series of measures rolling back some of its most draconian anti-COVID-19 restrictions, including limiting harsh lockdowns and ordering schools without known infections to resume regular classes.

China's ruling Communist Party shares many of the authoritarian tendencies of Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states, shielding Beijing from criticism over its harsh policies toward Uyghurs and other Muslim minorities. More than a million have been sent to detention centers where they report being forced to denounce Islam and swear fealty to Xi and the party.

Beijing denies the charges, saying they have been providing job training and ridding Muslims of extremist, separatist and terroristic tendencies.

With no major differences between them on human rights, the tone of Xi's visit is "likely to be much more positive" than the visit earlier this year to the kingdom by U.S. President Joe Biden, the political risk consultancy Eurasia Group said in a report.

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"Nevertheless, the relationship still has a long way to go if it is to become as deep and nuanced as Saudi-US ties," the report said.

Despite Biden's earlier pledges to hold Saudi Arabian leader Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman responsible for the killing of a U.S.-based journalist, his administration last month said the prince's high office should shield him from a lawsuit over his role. A U.S. federal judge on Tuesday dismissed the lawsuit.

The U.S. military has long safeguarded Saudi Arabia from external enemies, in exchange for Saudi Arabia keeping global oil markets afloat.

The trip to Saudi Arabia marks a further move by Xi to restore his global profile after spending most of the pandemic inside China. The visit is just Xi's third overseas trip since early 2020.

It also comes amid questions about the Chinese public's support for Xi, who has cracked down relentlessly on free speech and purged political rivals. Xi was granted a third five-year term as leader in October, but street protests against "zero-COVID" policies last month saw the most significant public challenge to his rule and may have prompted a relaxation of some measures.

Chinese companies have become major players in Saudi Arabia's move to upgrade its infrastructure, among them construction firms and the telecoms giant Huawei. More deals are expected to be signed during Xi's visit, including in the defense sector, where Saudi Arabia has shown signs of moving away from its traditional dependence on the U.S.

"The Saudi visit will allow Xi to be the center of attention and regional leaders will be receptive to the Chinese perspective," Eurasia Group said in its report. "That these exchanges are coming amid a backdrop of challenging ties between Mideast capitals and Washington will not be lost on Beijing."

Extinctions, shrinking habitat spur 'rewilding' in cities

By JOHN FLESHER AP Environmental Writer

DETROIT (AP) — In a bustling metro area of 4.3 million people, Yale University wildlife biologist Nyeema Harris ventures into isolated thickets to study Detroit's most elusive residents — coyotes, foxes, raccoons and skunks among them.

Harris and colleagues have placed trail cameras in woodsy sections of 25 city parks for the past five years. They've recorded thousands of images of animals that emerge mostly at night to roam and forage, revealing a wild side many locals might not know exists.

"We're getting more and more exposure to wildlife in urban environments," Harris said recently while checking several of the devices fastened to trees with steel cables near the ground. "As we're changing their habitats, as we're expanding the footprint of urbanization, ... we'll increasingly come in contact with them."

Animal and plant species are dying off at an alarming rate, with up to 1 million threatened with extinction, according to a 2019 United Nations report. Their plight is stirring calls for "rewilding" places where they thrived until driven out by development, pollution and climate change.

Rewilding generally means reviving natural systems in degraded locations — sometimes with a helping hand. That might mean removing dams, building tunnels to reconnect migration pathways severed by roads, or reintroducing predators such as wolves to help balance ecosystems. But after initial assists, there's little human involvement.

The idea might seem best suited to remote areas where nature is freer to heal without interference. But rewilding also happens in some of the world's biggest urban centers, as people find mutually beneficial ways to coexist with nature.

The U.S. Forest Service estimates 6,000 acres (2,428 hectares) of open space are lost daily as cities and suburbs expand. More than two-thirds of the global population will live in urban areas by 2050, the U.N. says.

"Climate change is coming, and we are facing an equally important biodiversity crisis," said Nathalie Pettorelli, senior scientist with the Zoological Society of London. "There's no better place to engage people on these matters than in cities."

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In a September report, the society noted rewilding in metropolises such as Singapore, where a 1.7-mile (2.7-kilometer) stretch of the Kallang River has been converted from a concrete-lined channel into a twisting waterway lined with plants, rocks and other natural materials and flanked by green parkland.

Treating urban rivers like natural waters instead of drainage ditches can boost fish passage and let adjacent lands absorb floodwaters as global warming brings more extreme weather, the report says.

The German cities of Hannover, Frankfurt and Dessau-Rosslau designated vacant lots, parks, lawns and urban waterways where nature could take its course. As native wildflowers have sprung up, they've attracted birds, butterflies, bees, even hedgehogs.

London Mayor Sadiq Khan, describing the United Kingdom as "one of the most nature-depleted countries in the world," announced a plan last year to fund 45 urban rewilding projects to improve habitat for stag beetles, water voles and birds such as swifts and sparrows.

In the north London borough of Enfield, two beavers were released in March — 400 years after the species was hunted to extinction in Great Britain — in the hope their dams would prevent flash flooding. One died but was to be replaced.

Chicago's Shedd Aquarium and the nonprofit Urban Rivers are installing "floating wetlands" on part of the Chicago River to provide fish breeding areas, bird and pollinator habitat and root systems that cleanse polluted water.

Urban rewilding can't return landscapes to pre-settlement times and doesn't try, said Marie Law Adams, a Northeastern University associate professor of architecture.

Instead, the aim is to encourage natural processes that serve people and wildlife by increasing tree cover to ease summer heat, storing carbon and hosting more animals. Or installing surface channels called bioswales that filter rainwater runoff from parking lots instead of letting it contaminate creeks.

"We need to learn from the mistakes of the mid-20th century — paving over everything, engineering everything with gray infrastructure" such as dams and pipes, Adams said.

Detroit's sprawling metro area illustrates how human actions can boost rewilding, intentionally or not.

Hundreds of thousands of houses and other structures were abandoned as the struggling city's population fell more than 60% since peaking at 1.8 million in the 1950s. Many were razed, leaving vacant tracts that plants and animals have occupied. Nonprofit groups have planted trees, community gardens and pollinator-friendly shrubs.

Conservation projects reintroduced ospreys and peregrine falcons. Bald eagles found their way back as bans on DDT and other pesticides helped expand their range nationwide. Anti-pollution laws and government-funded cleanups made nearby rivers more hospitable to sturgeon, whitefish, beavers and native plants, such as wild celery.

"Detroit is a stellar example of urban rewilding," said John Hartig, a lake scientist at the nearby University of Windsor and former head of the Detroit River International Wildlife Refuge. "It's been more organic than strategic. We created the conditions, things got better environmentally, and the native species came back."

The refuge, a half-hour's drive from downtown, consists of 30 parcels totaling 6,200 acres (2,509 hectares), including islands, wetlands and former industrial sites. It's home to 300 bird species and a busy stopover for ducks, raptors and others during migration, said Manager Dan Kennedy.

To Harris, the Yale biologist formerly with the University of Michigan, Detroit offers a unique backdrop for studying wildlife in urban settings.

Unlike most big cities, its human population is declining, even as its streets, buildings and other infrastructure remain largely intact. And there's diverse habitat. It ranges from large lakes and rivers to neighborhoods — some occupied, others largely deserted — and parklands so quiet "you don't even know you're in the city," Harris said while changing camera batteries and jotting notes in a woodsy section of O'Hair Park.

Her team's photographic observations have yielded published studies on how mammals react to each other, and to people, in urban landscapes.

The project connects them with local residents, some intrigued by coyotes and raccoons in the neighborhood, others fearful of diseases or harm to pets.

It's an educational opportunity, Harris said — about proper trash disposal, resisting the temptation to feed wild animals and the value of healthy, diverse ecosystems.

"It used to be that you had to go to some remote location to get exposure to nature," said Harris, a Philadelphia native who was excited as a child to glimpse an occasional squirrel or deer. "Now that's not the case. Like it or not, rewilding will occur. The question is, how can we prepare communities and environments and societies to anticipate the presence of more and more wildlife?"

Rewilding can be a tough sell for urbanites who prefer well-manicured lawns and think ecologically rich systems look weedy and unkempt or should be used for housing.

But advocates say it isn't just about animals and plants. Studies show time in natural spaces improves people's physical and mental health.

"A lot of city people have lost their tolerance to live with wildlife," said Pettorelli of Zoological Society of London. "There's a lot of reteaching ourselves to be done. To really make a difference in tackling the biodiversity crisis, you're going to have to have people on board."

FBI: Polygamous leader had 20 wives, many of them minors

By FELICIA FONSECA Associated Press

FLAGSTAFF, Ariz. (AP) — The leader of small polygamous group near the Arizona-Utah border had taken at least 20 wives, most of them minors, and punished followers who did not treat him as a prophet, newly filed federal court documents show.

Samuel Bateman was a former member of the Fundamentalist Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, or FLDS, until he left to start his own small offshoot group. He was supported financially by male followers who also gave up their own wives and children to be Bateman's wives, according to an FBI affidavit.

The document filed Friday provides new insight about what investigators have found in a case that first became public in August. It accompanied charges of kidnapping and impeding a foreseeable prosecution against three of Bateman's wives — Naomi Bistline, Donnae Barlow and Moretta Rose Johnson.

Bistline and Barlow are scheduled to appear in federal magistrate court in Flagstaff on Wednesday. Johnson is awaiting extradition from Washington state.

The women are accused of fleeing with eight of Bateman's children, who were placed in Arizona state custody earlier this year. The children were found last week hundreds of miles (kilometers) away in Spokane, Washington.

Bateman was arrested in August when someone spotted small fingers in the gap of a trailer he was hauling through Flagstaff. He posted bond but was arrested again and charged with obstructing justice in a federal investigation into whether children were being transported across state lines for sexual activity.

Court records allege that Bateman, 46, engaged in child sex trafficking and polygamy, but none of his current charges relate to those allegations. Polygamy is illegal in Arizona but was decriminalized in Utah in 2020.

Arizona Department of Child Services spokesman Darren DaRonco and FBI spokesman Kevin Smith declined to comment on the case Tuesday. Bistline's attorney didn't respond to a request for comment, and Barlow's attorney declined to comment. Johnson didn't have a publicly listed attorney.

The FBI affidavit filed in the women's case largely centers on Bateman, who proclaimed himself a prophet in 2019. Bateman says he was told by former FLDS leader Warren Jeffs to invoke the "Spirit of God on these people." The affidavit details explicit sexual acts that Bateman and his followers engaged in to fulfill "Godly duties."

Jeffs is serving a life sentence in a Texas prison for child sex abuse related to underage marriages.

Criminal defense attorney Michael Piccarreta, who represented Jeffs on Arizona charges that were dismissed, said the state has a history of trying to take a stand against polygamy by charging relatively minor offenses to build bigger cases.

"Whether this is the same tactic that has been used in the past or whether there's more to the story, only time will tell," he said.

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The office of Bateman's attorney in the federal case, Adam Zickerman, declined to comment Tuesday. Bateman lived in Colorado City among a patchwork of devout members of the polygamous FLDS, ex-church members and those who don't practice the beliefs. Polygamy is a legacy of the early teachings of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, but the mainstream church abandoned the practice in 1890 and now strictly prohibits it.

Bateman often traveled to Nebraska where some of his other followers lived and internationally to Canada and Mexico for conferences.

When Bateman was arrested earlier this year, he instructed his followers to obtain passports and to delete messages sent through an encrypted system, authorities said.

He demanded that his followers confess publicly for any indiscretions, and shared those confessions widely, according to the FBI affidavit. He claimed the punishments, which ranged from a time out to public shaming and sexual activity, came from the Lord, the affidavit states.

The children identified by their initials in court documents have said little to authorities. The three children found in the trailer Bateman was hauling through Flagstaff — which had a makeshift toilet, a couch, camping chairs and no ventilation — told authorities they didn't have any health or medical needs, a police report stated.

None of the girls placed in state custody in Arizona disclosed sexual abuse by Bateman during forensic interviews, though one said she was present during sexual activity, according to the FBI affidavit. But the girls often wrote in journals that were seized by the FBI. In them, several of the girls referenced intimate interactions with Bateman. Authorities believe the older girls influenced the younger ones not to talk about Bateman, the FBI said.

Moroccans celebrate historic World Cup win against Spain

TARIK EL-BARAKAH Associated Press

RABAT, Morocco (AP) — Exuberant Moroccans poured into the streets of their capital and in cities across Europe on Tuesday, waving flags and honking horns to celebrate their national soccer team's historic victory over Spain at the World Cup.

Morocco defeated Spain in a penalty shootout, making the Atlas Lions the only team from outside Europe or South America to make it to the quarterfinals in Qatar — and the first Arab team in World Cup history to make it to the last eight.

"We are so proud of our Lions, who fought hard to get us into the quarterfinals," said Niama Meddoun, a Rabat resident. "We are delighted to be Moroccans today, since we are the first Arab country that has reached the quarterfinals."

The King of Morocco, Mohammed VI, praised the national team and sent his "heartfelt congratulations" to the players, the technical team and administrative personnel, "who gave their all and blazed a trail throughout this great sporting event," according to a statement from the royal palace.

The king said the players represented "hopes and dreams of Moroccans in Morocco, Qatar, and all over the world."

Morocco is the only Arab — and African — nation left in the tournament, the first World Cup held in the Middle East. Its World Cup success has reverberated across the Arab world and among Moroccan and some other immigrant communities in Europe.

In Barcelona, Spain's second largest city, a crowd of youths waving Moroccan, Egyptian, Algerian and Palestinian flags gathered in the center, where fans of FC Barcelona traditionally celebrate big victories. People cheered to the sound of drums. Some were lighting flares.

In a Barcelona restaurant where viewers had congregated, people jumped on tables and lifted chairs in the air. Outside, cars honked horns and people lit firecrackers and red and green smoke bombs.

Youssef Lotfi, a 39-year-old construction worker who was born in Casablanca but moved to Spain as a child and said he feels love for both countries, was brimming with pride.

"Today is a day of joy for Moroccans and all the Arab world," Lotfi said. "It was a heart-attack finish that

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could have gone either way.”

He called the victory “once in a lifetime” experience. “Morocco is representing all the Arab world, all the African continent, that is beyond description, it is the most glorious part,” he said.

In Ceuta, a Spanish exclave which borders with Morocco on the north African coast, the win was also celebrated with cars honking horns. Ceuta’s population is a mix of Spaniards and Moroccan residents and workers.

“What pride! What happiness! Now to celebrate with friends. I have lost my voice!” said 20-year-old Ismael Mustafa. “We were able to pull it off. For Spain? You will win next time, so no worries.”

Celebrations across Spain, which has some 800,000 Moroccan residents, were mostly peaceful, though Spanish media reported a brief scuffle between Morocco and Spain fans in a bar in the southern city of Huelva. No injuries or arrests were reported.

In Qatar, Moroccan fans clashed briefly with police outside the stadium before the game started.

Ten days ago riots broke out in Belgium and the Netherlands as Morocco fans celebrated beating Belgium in the group stage in Qatar.

In central Paris, cars started honking almost immediately after Morocco’s surprise win Tuesday, and crowds of people streamed toward the Champs-Élysées to celebrate. Men and women, in business suits or track suits, from teenage to middle-aged, cheered or raised their hands in victory. Cries of “Allez, allez!” in French rang out, and one woman asked strangers “Who has a Moroccan flag I can borrow?”

Spain fans were crushed by the loss.

“They have been very unlucky in the penalties, but it seems to me that they have also made a mistake in the players who take the penalties,” said 64-year-old Dionisio Sánchez, who was among a group of fans who trickled out of bar in Madrid.

“They shot with very little enthusiasm ... little desire to score, but the penalties, it’s luck, it’s a lottery,” he said.

US Jews fear collision with expected Israeli government

By JOSEF FEDERMAN Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — Israel’s ties to the Jewish American community, one of its closest and most important allies, are about to be put to the test, with Israel’s emerging far-right government on a collision course with Jews in the United States.

Major Jewish American organizations, traditionally a bedrock of support for Israel, have expressed alarm over the far-right character of the presumptive government led by conservative Israeli leader Benjamin Netanyahu. Given American Jews’ predominantly liberal political views and affinity for the Democratic Party, these misgivings could have a ripple effect in Washington and further widen what has become a partisan divide over support for Israel.

“This is a very significant crossroads,” said Jeremy Ben-Ami, president of J Street, a liberal, pro-Israel group in Washington. “The potential for specific actions that could be taken by this government, these are the moments when the relationship between the bulk of American Jews and the state of Israel begins to really fray. So I’m very afraid.”

Jewish-American leaders appear especially worried about the prominent role expected to be played by a trio of hard-line, religious lawmakers. The three have made racist anti-Arab statements, denigrated the LGBTQ community, attacked Israel’s legal system and demonized the liberal, non-Orthodox streams of Judaism popular in the U.S. All vehemently oppose Palestinian independence.

“These are among the most extreme voices in Israeli politics,” said Rabbi Rick Jacobs, president of the Union for Reform Judaism, the largest Jewish movement in the U.S. “What will be the trajectory of a new Israeli government with such voices in such key leadership roles is of deep, deep concern.”

More centrist organizations, such as the Anti-Defamation League, which fights antisemitism and other forms of hatred, and the Jewish Federations of North America, an umbrella group that supports hundreds of Jewish communities, have also spoken out.

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Though these groups, like J Street and the Reform movement, support a two-state solution with the Palestinians, their recent statements have focused on Israel's democratic ideals. The Anti-Defamation League said that including the three far-right lawmakers in a government "runs counter to Israel's founding principles." The Federations called for "inclusive and pluralistic" policies.

For decades, American Jews have played a key role in promoting close ties between the U.S. and Israel. They have raised millions of dollars for Israeli causes, spoken out in Israel's defense and strengthened strong bipartisan support for Israel in Washington.

But this longstanding relationship has come under strain in recent years — especially during Netanyahu's 2009-2021 rule.

Netanyahu's hard-line policies toward the Palestinians, his public spats with Barack Obama over peace-making and the Iranian nuclear issue and his close ties with Donald Trump put him at odds with many in the American Jewish community.

Opinion polls show that roughly three-quarters of American Jews lean toward the Democratic Party. They tend to be more critical of the Israeli government and more sympathetic to the Palestinians than their Republican counterparts, with these divisions even wider among younger Jews in their 20s.

These trends appear set to go into hyper-drive as Netanyahu prepares to return to power after a year and a half as opposition leader, this time flanked by some of the country's most extremist politicians.

After winning elections last month, Netanyahu and his allies are still forming their coalition. But he already has reached a number of deals that are setting off alarm bells overseas.

Itamar Ben-Gvir, a lawmaker known for his anti-Arab vitriol and provocative stunts, has been offered the job of national security minister, a powerful position that will put him in charge of Israel's national police force. This includes the paramilitary border police, a unit on the front lines of much of the fighting with Palestinians in east Jerusalem and the occupied West Bank.

Ben-Gvir has labeled Arab lawmakers "terrorists" and called for deporting them. He wants to impose the death penalty on Palestinian attackers and grant soldiers immunity from prosecution.

Netanyahu also has agreed to appoint the lawmaker Avi Maoz as a deputy minister overseeing a new authority in charge of "Jewish identity" and giving him responsibilities over Israel's educational system.

Maoz is known for his outspoken anti-LGBTQ positions and disparaging remarks about the Reform movement and other non-Orthodox Jews.

He wants a ban on Pride parades, has compared gays to pedophiles and wants to allow some forms of conversion therapy, a discredited practice that tries to change the sexual orientation or gender identity of LGBTQ children.

Maoz hopes to change Israel's "Law of Return," which allows anyone with a single Jewish grandparent to immigrate to Israel, and replace it with a much stricter definition of who is a Jew. He also opposes non-Orthodox conversions to Judaism. This is an affront to liberal Jewish groups, which have less rigid views on Jewish identity.

Bezalel Smotrich, a settler leader with a history of anti-gay and anti-Palestinian comments, has been granted widespread authority over settlement construction and Palestinian civilian life in the occupied West Bank.

Netanyahu has been generous toward his allies because they support major legal reforms that could freeze or dismiss his corruption trial. Critics say such moves will imperil Israel's democratic foundations.

Speaking on NBC's "Meet the Press," Netanyahu tried to play down such concerns as he vowed to safeguard democracy and LGBTQ rights. "I ultimately decide policy," he said.

Hailey Soifer, chief executive of the Jewish Democratic Council of America, said it is premature to judge a government that hasn't yet taken office. But she acknowledged the concerns about issues like LGBTQ rights, Palestinian rights and respect for democracy — particularly with memories of the Trump administration still fresh.

"Many of those concerns are based on our own experience with an administration that didn't share our values," said Soifer.

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Whether U.S. policy will be affected is unclear. The Biden administration has said it will wait to see policies, not personalities, of the new government.

But Eric Alterman, author of "We Are Not One," a new book about relations between Israel and American Jews, says the sides are moving in opposite directions.

Progressive Democrats already have pushed for a tougher approach to Israel because of its treatment of the Palestinians.

"It may come suddenly. It may come in pieces. But there's simply a break coming between American Jews and Israeli Jews," Alterman said.

China trade shrinks amid virus pressure, interest rate hikes

By JOE McDONALD AP Business Writer

BEIJING (AP) — China's imports and exports shrank in November under pressure from weakening global demand and anti-virus controls at home.

Exports sank 9% from a year ago to \$296.1 billion, worsening from October's 0.9% decline, customs data showed Wednesday. Imports fell 10.9% to \$226.2 billion, down from the previous month's 0.7% retreat in a sign of a deepening Chinese economic slowdown.

The country's global trade surplus narrowed by 2.5% from a year earlier to \$69.9 billion.

Trade had been forecast to weaken as global demand cooled following interest rate hikes by the Federal Reserve and central banks in Europe and Asia to rein in surging inflation.

Chinese consumer demand has been hurt by a "zero-COVID" strategy that shuts down large sections of cities to contain virus outbreaks. That has disrupted business and confined millions of people to their homes for weeks at a time.

Consumer spending contracted in October and factory activity weakened as anti-virus controls following a rise in infections weighed on the economy.

Retail sales sank 0.5% compared with a year earlier, down from September's 2.5% expansion, as millions of people were confined to their homes, government data showed Tuesday. Growth in factory output decelerated to 5% from the previous month's 6.3%.

The performance was even weaker than expected by forecasters who said activity would cool as Chinese anti-virus controls and interest rate hikes by the U.S. Federal Reserve and other central banks weighed on global activity.

"November is shaping up to be even worse," said Zichun Huang of Capital Economics in a report.

Chinese economic growth rebounded to 3.9% over a year earlier in the three months ending in September from the first half's 2.2%, but economists say activity already was cooling. They have cut forecasts of annual growth to as low as 3%, which would be among the weakest in decades.

Exports to the United States fell 25.4% from a year earlier to \$40.8 billion while imports of American goods sank 7.3% to \$16.5 billion. The politically sensitive surplus with the United States narrowed by 34.1% to \$24.3 billion.

Imports from Russia, mostly oil and gas, rose 28% from a year earlier to \$10.5 billion. Exports to Russia gained 18.5% to \$7.7 billion.

Washington, Europe and Japan are cutting purchases of Russian oil and gas to punish President Vladimir Putin's government for its attack on Ukraine, but their sanctions don't prevent China, India or other countries from buying its exports.

Beijing is buying more to take advantage of Russian discounts. That irks Washington and its allies by topping up the Kremlin's cash flow. President Joe Biden has warned Xi against helping Putin evade sanctions.

Xi said in a letter to a business conference this month that China, one of the biggest buyers of Russian oil and gas, is ready to "forge closer partnership" with Moscow in energy, according to the official Xinhua News Agency. It gave no details.

Speedier drug approvals hit slowdown as FDA faces scrutiny

By MATTHEW PERRONE AP Health Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — Expedited drug approvals slowed this year as the Food and Drug Administration's controversial accelerated pathway came under new scrutiny from Congress, government watchdogs and some of the agency's own leaders.

With less than a month remaining in the year, the FDA's drug center has granted 10 accelerated approvals — fewer than the tally in each of the last five years, when use of the program reached all-time highs.

The program allows drugs to launch in the U.S. based on promising early results, before they are proven to benefit patients.

Academics have long complained that the practice has resulted in a glut of expensive, unproven medications, particularly for cancer. But last year's accelerated approval of a much-debated Alzheimer's drug touched off a new round of criticism, including investigations of FDA's decision making by federal inspectors and Congress.

A recent FDA hearing aimed at revoking approval from an unproven preterm birth drug further underscored the program's shortcomings. FDA has been trying to get the drug, Makena, off the market for more than two years, because a follow-up study showed it didn't benefit infants or mothers. The manufacturer has refused to cooperate.

Amid the latest controversy, FDA leaders have taken unprecedented steps suggesting a tougher stance on accelerated approval: nudging drugmakers to remove a growing list of unproven uses for drugs and asking Congress for new powers to expedite removals when companies balk.

Dr. Reshma Ramachandran, a Yale University researcher who supports congressional reforms, believes the recent scrutiny of the accelerated approval process "definitely led to them pausing and taking a different path." Still, Ramachandran and other critics say it's too early to tell if FDA's recent actions reflect a longer-term policy shift.

An FDA spokeswoman said the agency's posture on accelerated approval "has remained consistent and the agency is committed to ensuring the integrity of the program." She added that FDA is using "every authority at our disposal" to make sure drugmakers quickly conduct confirmatory studies after approval.

Launched in 1992, the accelerated approval program is credited with speeding the availability of early breakthroughs for HIV and cancer. About 300 drug approvals have been made that way, nearly half of them in the last five years.

But researchers and government watchdogs have chronicled problems with FDA's oversight, including delays in quickly removing drugs with failed or missing confirmatory studies. Federal inspectors recently found that 40% of accelerated approvals had incomplete confirmation studies.

The picture is beginning to change. In less than two years, the FDA has successfully called on drugmakers to remove more than 20 approvals from accelerated drugs — mainly cancer therapies — that failed to show a benefit. That's more than half the withdrawals in the program's history.

FDA's cancer chief, Dr. Rick Pazdur, has referred to this effort of clawing back approvals as his "jihad."

Several drugmakers recently declined FDA requests to voluntarily pull their drugs. That's raised the specter of more long, onerous public hearings to force removal, a process Pazdur called "a nightmare."

The ability to require drugmakers to have their studies underway before approval is one part of legislation that congressional lawmakers hope to attach to a massive, end-of-the-year spending bill. If passed, it would be the biggest overhaul in accelerated approval's 30-year history.

"We need more teeth in terms of getting the confirmatory trials started before accelerated approval," FDA Commissioner Robert Califf said at a recent cancer conference. "Once approval occurs it's very difficult to hold back the marketeers."

FDA regulators are already testing out the approach. Increasingly, the agency is telling drugmakers they must have their confirmation studies underway before approval.

"We know the FDA has raised the bar for accelerated approval, and so that's why we're seeking additional clarity on their position," Mike Sherman, CEO of startup Chimerix, told investors on a recent call discussing the company's plans for an upcoming cancer drug.

A higher bar could spell trouble for smaller drugmakers, who often rely on accelerated approval to gain a market foothold before raising additional funds.

To be sure, FDA approval trends are impacted by a variety of forces. The agency's overall tally of novel drugs is down markedly this year at about 30, compared with 50 last year. And even the recent peak in use of the accelerated pathway — 45 approvals in 2020 — reflected several trends.

Drugmakers have been aggressively pursuing a new class of "immunotherapies" that help the body recognize and attack cancer. The FDA has granted more than 80 uses for those drugs since 2015, pushing up annual accelerated approval tallies.

Additionally, COVID-19 pandemic disruptions forced some drugmakers to cut short their research plans, asking FDA for accelerated approval based on partially completed studies, instead of a full results.

"There was a lot of reinterpretation of the FDA rules to make sure those companies could proceed, otherwise they would have lost billions of dollars," said Sam Kay, a consultant with Clarivate, which advises pharmaceutical companies.

It's a reminder of how much flexibility the FDA has.

Many of the reforms pending in Congress "are things the FDA could do now," notes Ramachandran.

"I think having Congress do it gives them the cover and blessing to carry forward with what they want to do," she said.

Tagovailoa, Zaporizhzhia make list of most mangled words

By MARK PRATT Associated Press

BOSTON (AP) — "Miami Dolphins quarterback Tua Tagovailoa explained the significance of the Chicxulub impact crater to actor Domhnall Gleeson over a drink of negroni sbagliato in the Ukrainian city of Zaporizhzhia," is the kind of sentence that just might tie your tongue up in knots.

It contains five examples from this year's list of the most mispronounced words released Wednesday by The Captioning Group, which since 1991 has captioned and subtitled real-time events on television in the U.S. and Canada.

The Captioning Group has compiled the list since 2016 by surveying the words and names most often mangled on live television by newsreaders, politicians, public figures and others. It is commissioned by Babel, the online language learning company based in New York and Berlin.

Yes, the list is a little humorous, but it's also educational and highlights how some of the biggest international news events of the year have entered the North American consciousness, said Esteban Touma, a senior content producer and language teacher at Babel.

"It really shows the ways we interact with other languages and really gives a good grasp of what's going on in the world and how we connect with people abroad," he said.

Don't be intimidated by tough-to-pronounce words, he said. It is an opportunity to learn. After all, even professionals sometimes have problems.

"People want to get the right pronunciation but it's hard to do so," he said.

Just ask Joe Biden.

New British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak was infamously referred to as "Rasheed Sanook" by the U.S. president, but he wasn't the only one to stumble over the name, which should be pronounced REE-shee SOO-nahk.

Then there's Grammy-winning singer Adele, who informed the world in October that her fans have for years been mispronouncing her name. It's not "ah-DELL" but "uh-DALE."

The other words on the list, with phonetic pronunciations provided by Babel, were:

— Chicxulub (CHICK-choo-loob) — The crater in the Gulf of Mexico caused by the asteroid that scientists say likely caused the extinction of the dinosaurs was in the news recently.

— Domhnall Gleeson (DOH-null GLEE-sun) — The Irish actor called out talk show host Stephen Colbert for mispronouncing his first name.

— Edinburgh (ed-in-BRUH) — American news anchors faced criticism for mispronouncing the Scottish

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capital during coverage of Queen Elizabeth II's memorial in September.

— Negroni sbagliato (ne-GRO-nee spah-lee-AH-toh) — The alcoholic beverage was introduced to the world by actor Emma D'Arcy, whose social media mention of the drink received more than 14 million views.

— Novak Djokovic (NO-vak JO-kuh-vich) — The Serbian tennis star was in the news in January when he was barred from competing in the Australian Open and deported for failing to comply with the nation's COVID-19 vaccination rules.

— Ohtani rule (oh-TAHN-ee) — Major League Baseball's rule named after 2021 AL MVP Shohei Ohtani allows a starting pitcher to remain in a game as the designated hitter even after leaving the mound.

— Tuanigamanuolepola (Tua) Tagovailoa (TOO-uh-ning-uh-mah-noo-oh-LEH-po-luh TUNG-o-vai-LOH-uh) — The Miami Dolphins quarterback became the center of discussion about NFL concussion protocols after suffering injuries in consecutive games.

— Zaporizhzhia (zah-POH-reezha) — The Ukrainian city is the location of Europe's largest nuclear power plant, which was shut down in September as the nation's war with Russia raged in the area.

State judge places hold on Oregon's gun law, state to appeal

By GILLIAN FLACCUS Associated Press

PORTLAND, Ore. (AP) — A ruling by a state court judge placed Oregon's tough new voter-approved gun law on hold late Tuesday, just hours after a federal court judge allowed the ban on the sale and transfer of high-capacity magazines to take effect this week.

The ruling by Harney County Judge Robert Raschio threw the implementation of Measure 114 — set for Thursday — into limbo and Oregon Attorney General Ellen Rosenblum said on Twitter that her office will urgently appeal to the Oregon Supreme Court. That filing is likely to come Wednesday morning.

"It's been a busy day for Measure 114, Oregon's new gun safety law, which is supposed to go into effect Thursday. A federal and a state judge both issued rulings today," the Twitter thread said. "As of now, the law cannot go into effect on Thursday."

The lawsuit in Harney County, filed by Gun Owners of America Inc., the Gun Owners Foundation and several individual gun owners, sought to have the entire law placed on hold while its constitutionality is decided. The state lawsuit specifically makes the claims under the Oregon Constitution, not the U.S. Constitution — and that means for now, Raschio's ruling is binding in the entire state.

Earlier Tuesday, a federal judge in Portland had delivered an initial victory to proponents of the sweeping gun-control measure narrowly approved by Oregon voters last month.

U.S. District Judge Karin Immergut allowed the ban on the sale and transfer of new high-capacity magazines to take effect Thursday. She also granted a 30-day delay before the law's permit-to-purchase mandate takes effect, but did not quash it entirely as gun rights advocates had wanted.

Measure 114 requires a permit, criminal background check, fingerprinting and hands-on training course for new firearms buyers. It also bans the sale, transfer or import of gun magazines over 10 rounds unless they are owned by law enforcement or a military member or were owned before the measure's passage. Those who already own high-capacity magazines can only possess them in their homes or use them at a firing range, in shooting competitions or for hunting as allowed by state law after the measure takes effect.

Gun sales and requests for background checks soared in the weeks since the measure was approved because of fears the new law would prevent or significantly delay the purchase of new firearms under the permitting system.

Multiple gun rights groups, local sheriffs and gun store owners have sued, saying the law violates Americans' constitutional right to bear arms. All of those lawsuits were filed in federal courts except for the one in Harney County, a gun rights group said late Tuesday.

"We are, of course, deeply troubled by the ruling that came out of the Federal Court today. We are also grateful for the opposing ruling from the Harney County Judge this afternoon," the Oregon Firearms Federation wrote. "But no matter what, there is a long way to go."

The interfaith coalition that placed Measure 114 on the ballot said earlier Tuesday it appreciated the

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federal judge's ruling and understood the need for a delay in the permit-to-purchase provision to sort out the process.

"We'd like to see the permitting in place this week because that would save lives, but at the same time we understand that it will take longer to do it well," said Mark Knutson, chairman of the Lift Every Voice Oregon campaign and pastor at Portland's Augustana Lutheran Church. "For us, it's all about saving lives and safety."

Knutson did not return a call late Tuesday about the state ruling.

Amid the uncertainty, gun sales spiked in Oregon in the past month.

The Oregon State Police reported more than 35,000 pending background check transactions for gun purchases as of last week and was averaging 3,000 requests a day compared to less than 900 a day the week before Measure 114 passed, according to agency data. On Black Friday, the agency received 6,000 background check requests alone, OSP Capt. Kyle Kennedy said in an email.

Gun store owners also reported a run on guns, with sales in some stores increasing four- or five-fold in recent weeks.

Measure 114's fate is being carefully watched by both gun rights advocates and those who want stricter limits on gun ownership because it is one of the first to take effect after a U.S. Supreme Court ruling in June that struck down a New York law that placed limits on carrying guns outside the home.

The June ruling signaled a shift in the way the nation's high court will evaluate Second Amendment infringement claims, with the Supreme Court's conservative majority finding judges should no longer consider whether the law serves public interests like enhancing public safety.

Instead, judges should only weigh whether the law is "consistent with the Second Amendment's text and historical understanding."

Gun-rights supporters have called the June ruling a "wrecking ball" for firearms restrictions. Since then, federal judges in Texas have struck down a law against adults under 21 carrying handguns and a ban on people under indictment buying firearms. Judges have also blocked measures in West Virginia, Delaware and Colorado.

Other gun regulations have survived challenges since the ruling, however, including one involving ghost guns in California and one on non-violent felons owning guns in Pennsylvania.

Still, the Supreme Court also sent back to a lower court for review a California ban on high-capacity magazines that's similar to Oregon's new law.

Trump Organization convicted in executive tax dodge scheme

By MICHAEL R. SISAK Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Donald Trump's company was convicted of tax fraud Tuesday for helping executives dodge taxes on extravagant perks such as Manhattan apartments and luxury cars, a repudiation of financial practices at the former president's business as he mounts another run for the White House.

A jury found two corporate entities at the Trump Organization guilty on all 17 counts, including charges of conspiracy and falsifying business records. Trump himself was not on trial. The verdict in state court in New York came after about 10 hours of deliberations over two days.

The conviction was validation for New York authorities who say their three-year investigation into Trump and his businesses is continuing. The probe, which began as an inquiry into hush-money payments made on Trump's behalf, later morphed into an examination of the company's asset valuation and pay practices.

The company faces a fine of up to \$1.6 million. Sentencing is scheduled for Jan. 13. The defense said it will appeal.

"A former president's companies now stand convicted of crimes. That is consequential," Manhattan District Attorney Alvin Bragg said outside the courtroom. "It underscores that in Manhattan we have one standard of justice for all."

Trump, a Republican who launched his 2024 campaign last month during the trial, blasted the verdict as a part of a Democrat-led "MANHATTAN WITCH HUNT!"

"This case is unprecedented and involved no monetary gain to these two Corporations," Trump said in

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a statement, adding: "New York City is a hard place to be 'Trump.'"

The verdict adds to mounting legal woes for Trump, who faces a criminal investigation in Washington over the retention of top-secret documents at his Mar-a-Lago estate, as well as efforts to undo the results of the 2020 presidential election.

Those inquiries are being led by a newly named Justice Department special counsel. The district attorney in Atlanta is also leading an investigation into attempts by Trump and his allies to overturn his loss in that state.

The verdict also comes amid a series of self-inflicted crises for Trump in recent weeks, including anger over his dinner with a Holocaust-denying white nationalist and the antisemitic rapper formerly known as Kanye West, and the former president's for the "termination of all rules, regulations, and articles, even those found in the Constitution" to address his baseless claims of mass election fraud.

The Trump Organization — and Trump's management of it — was at the center of "The Apprentice," the reality show that solidified his global celebrity. That fame in turn helped fuel his unlikely political rise, allowing him to sell himself to voters as a successful businessman who could take lessons from that sphere and apply them to Washington.

The Manhattan case against the Trump Organization was built largely around testimony from the company's former finance chief, Allen Weisselberg, who previously pleaded guilty to charges that he manipulated the company's books to illegally reduce his taxes on \$1.7 million in fringe benefits. He testified in exchange for a promised five-month jail sentence.

To convict the Trump Organization, prosecutors had to convince jurors that Weisselberg or an underling he worked with on the scheme was a "high managerial" agent acting on the company's behalf and that the company also benefited.

Trump Organization lawyers repeated the mantra "Weisselberg did it for Weisselberg" throughout the monthlong trial, contending that he had gone rogue and betrayed the company's trust. Weisselberg attempted to take responsibility on the witness stand, saying nobody in the Trump family knew what he was doing.

"It was my own personal greed that led to this," an emotional Weisselberg testified.

But prosecutor Joshua Steinglass alleged in his closing that Trump "knew exactly what was going on" and was "explicitly sanctioning tax fraud."

Bragg slipped into the courtroom as the verdict was being read. Afterward he refused to answer questions from reporters, ducking behind a glass door as he was asked if he regretted Trump wasn't charged personally.

New York Attorney General Letitia James, whose office assisted in the investigation, called the verdict a "clear message that no one, and no organization, is above our laws."

In some ways it's a limited victory for prosecutors, however.

No one, save for Weisselberg, is going to prison. No one is putting a padlock on Trump Tower or forcing the company out of business. And a potential \$1.6 million fine is a rounding error on the budget of an enterprise that boasts billions of dollars in assets.

Still, the Trump Organization may now run into some trouble getting loans and making deals, and New York City could have more leverage to try to end the company's contract managing a city-owned golf course in the Bronx.

But even as the trial was unfolding, the company struck a deal with Saudi developer Dar Al Arakan to license the Trump name for a golf, hotel and residential development in Oman. Next year, three of Trump's golf courses will host tournaments for Saudi-backed LIV Golf.

The bigger threat to the company could be the civil lawsuit James filed in September alleging that it misled banks and others about the value of its many assets, a practice she dubbed the "art of the steal."

James, a Democrat, is asking a court to ban Trump and his three eldest children from running a New York-based company and is seeking to fine them at least \$250 million. As a preliminary measure, a judge has appointed an independent monitor to oversee the company's operations while the case is pending.

Bragg inherited the Trump investigation when he took office in January. His predecessor, Cyrus Vance

Jr., had authorized his deputies to seek a grand jury indictment for Trump, but Bragg soon shut that down and they quit.

Officially, he says, the investigation is "active and ongoing."

On Monday he sent his strongest signal yet that he's interested in pursuing more charges, hiring former acting U.S. Assistant Attorney General Matthew Colangelo to lead the probe. Bragg and Colangelo worked together on Trump-related matters at the state attorney general's office.

'Next mass killer': Dropped case foretold Colorado bloodbath

By JIM MUSTIAN, COLLEEN SLEVIN and BERNARD CONDON Associated Press

COLORADO SPRINGS, Colo. (AP) — Anderson Lee Aldrich loaded bullets into a Glock pistol and chugged vodka, ominously warning frightened grandparents not to stand in the way of an elaborate plan to stockpile guns, ammo, body armor and a homemade bomb to become "the next mass killer."

"You guys die today and I'm taking you with me," they quoted Aldrich as saying. "I'm loaded and ready."

So began a day of terror Aldrich unleashed in June 2021 that, according to sealed law enforcement documents verified by The Associated Press, brought SWAT teams and the bomb squad to a normally quiet Colorado Springs neighborhood, forced the grandparents to flee for their lives and prompted the evacuation of 10 nearby homes to escape a possible bomb blast. It culminated in a standoff that the then-21-year-old livestreamed on Facebook, showing Aldrich in tactical gear inside the mother's home and threatening officers outside — "If they breach, I'm a f---ing blow it to holy hell!" — before finally surrendering.

But charges against Aldrich for the actions that day were dropped for reasons the district attorney has refused to explain due to the case being sealed and there was no record showing guns were seized under Colorado's "red flag" law with similarly no explanation from the sheriff. All of it could be one of the most glaring missed warnings in America's sad litany of mass violence because, just a year and a half later, Aldrich was free to carry out the plan to become "the next mass killer."

Clad in body armor and carrying an AR-15-style rifle, Aldrich entered the Club Q gay nightclub just before midnight on Nov. 19 and opened fire, authorities say, killing five people and wounding 17 others before an Army veteran wrestled the attacker to the ground.

"It makes no sense," said Jerecho Loveall, a former Club Q dancer who is recovering from a wound to the leg from one of the high-powered rounds. "If they would have taken this more seriously and done their job, the lives we lost, the injuries we sustained and the trauma this community has faced would not have happened."

"It was absolutely preventable," said Wyatt Kent, who held the hand of a woman as she bled to death on top of him, and who also lost his partner that night. "Even if charges aren't filed for a bomb threat, maybe you're not mentally sound enough to own a firearm."

Why apparently nothing was done to stop Aldrich since coming onto law enforcement's radar last year is a question that has haunted this picturesque Rockies city of 480,000 since the shooting, even as loved ones have begun burying the victims and the shuttered Club Q has become a shrine surrounded by hundreds of bouquets, wreaths and rainbow flags.

Criminal defense lawyers with whom AP shared the law enforcement documents say they questioned why charges were not pursued in the 2021 incident given the grandparents' detailed statements, a tense standoff at the mother's home and a subsequent house search that found bomb-making materials that Aldrich claimed had enough firepower to blow up an entire police department and a federal building.

The documents were obtained by Colorado Springs TV station KKTU and verified as authentic to AP by a law enforcement official who was not authorized to discuss the sealed case and kept anonymous. Documents also included a judge's order to jail Aldrich on \$1 million bond and a listing by District Attorney Michael Allen of seven offenses "committed, or triable," including three felony counts of kidnapping and two of menacing.

For his part, Allen has repeatedly declined to comment on why those charges didn't go forward, citing a Colorado law that automatically seals records in cases when charges are dropped and requires him to not

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even acknowledge the records exist. The law was passed three years ago as part of a nationwide movement to help prevent people from having their lives ruined if cases are dismissed and never prosecuted.

And even though Allen said during a news conference soon after the nightclub shooting that he “hoped at some point in the near future” to share more about the 2021 incident, he has yet to do so. AP and other news organizations have gone to court seeking to unseal the entire case file, a request scheduled to be heard later this week.

In the absence of that file, there are only scattered clues about what happened after Aldrich’s 2021 arrest, including Aldrich telling The Gazette of Colorado Springs in August about spending two months in jail as a result of the incident and asking the publication to remove or update its web coverage about it, asserting the case had been dismissed. “There is absolutely nothing there, the case was dropped,” Aldrich said in a phone message, adding, “It is damaging to my reputation.”

When a Gazette reporter followed up with a call and asked why the case was dropped, Aldrich declined to say anything more because the case had been sealed.

Such a troubling case — dropped or not — could still have been used to trigger Colorado’s “red flag” law, which allows family members or law enforcement to ask a judge to order a removal of guns for a year from people dangerous to themselves or others, with possible extensions based on subsequent hearings.

But an AP review shows no record that Aldrich’s grandparents or mother went to a judge to get such an order. And there’s no record the agency that arrested Aldrich, the El Paso County Sheriff’s Office, did either.

El Paso County is especially hostile to the state’s red flag law, among 2,000 counties nationwide declaring themselves a “Second Amendment Sanctuary” that opposes any infringement on the right to bear arms. It passed a resolution in 2019 specifically denying funds or staff to enforce the law.

Sheriff Bill Elder, who declined to comment on Aldrich’s 2021 case, has previously said he would only remove guns on orders from family members, refusing to go to court himself to get permission except under “exigent circumstances.”

“We’re not going to be taking personal property away from people without due process,” Elder said as the law neared passage in 2019.

Allen, the district attorney, also criticized the red flag law while running for the office in 2020, tweeting that it is “a poor excuse to take people’s guns and is not designed in any way to address real concrete mental health concerns.” He has noted since the shooting that DAs don’t have the authority to initiate such seizures.

Colorado Gov. Jared Polis, the first openly gay man ever elected to lead a state, said in the wake of the nightclub shooting that the failure to take away guns from the alleged shooter needs to be investigated. Authorities have refused to say how the weapons used in the attack were obtained.

“There were many warning signs,” Polis spokesman Conor Cahill told the AP. “It appears obvious that an Extreme Risk Protection Order law could have and should have been utilized, which would have removed the suspect’s firearms and could very well have prevented this tragedy.”

Aldrich, now 22, remains jailed without bond on murder and hate crime charges in the nightclub shooting that carry a potential sentence of life behind bars. Defense attorneys have said Aldrich is non-binary, not strictly identifying with any gender. Aldrich’s attorneys did not respond to a request for comment.

In both a mugshot and first court appearance, the 6-foot-4, 260-pound Aldrich appeared slumped with deep bruises and cuts on a fleshy face. It was a stark contrast to the many smiling photos as a youngster on the mother’s Facebook page that belied a turbulent life marked by domestic violence, bullying and family run-ins with the law.

Aldrich’s parents split up soon after their child was born. The father, Aaron Brink, pursued a career as a mixed martial arts fighter and porn actor when he wasn’t doing time for drug convictions or contesting other charges, including battery against Aldrich’s mother.

In an interview after the shooting, Brink told San Diego television station KFMB that he had lost track of Aldrich a decade ago and thought the child had died by suicide, until Aldrich reached out to him by phone last year. Brink said that when he first heard about the shooting, he was troubled the alleged shooter had

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gone to a gay bar, citing the family's Mormon religion.

"We don't do gay," Brink said, adding that he now regrets having praised his child for violent behavior when younger. "Life is so fragile and it's valuable. Those people's lives were valuable."

The alleged shooter, born Nicholas Franklin Brink, was so embarrassed by the father, according to 2016 Texas court documents, that weeks before turning 16, the teen filed for a formal name change to Anderson Lee Aldrich.

The filing came months after Aldrich was apparently targeted by online bullying. A website posting from June 2015 attacked a teen named Nick Brink. It included photos similar to ones of the shooting suspect and ridiculed the youngster for being overweight, not having much money and an interest in Chinese cartoons.

Laura Voepel, the mother, has her own history of outbursts and trouble with the law, including an arson count in Texas reduced to a lesser charge. She reportedly was recorded in a July 2022 video in an airport hurling racial epithets at a Hispanic woman who she felt had been taking too long to get her luggage off a plane.

And according to a court record, Voepel was arrested just hours after the Nov. 19 nightclub shooting on resisting arrest and disorderly conduct charges. She had refused to leave the apartment where she lived with Aldrich, according to FBI records obtained by AP. She can be heard crying out for help as she is pulled by officers away from her home on video she asked neighbors to record.

Aldrich's behavior on June 18, 2021, began, according to the sealed law enforcement documents, after the grandparents called a family meeting in their living room about their plans to sell their home and move to Florida. The grandchild responded with rage, telling them this couldn't happen because it would interfere with Aldrich's plans to store materials in the grandparents' basement to "conduct a mass shooting and bombing." The grandparents told authorities Aldrich threatened to kill them if they didn't promise to cancel the move.

The grandparents begged for their lives as Aldrich told them of the plans to "go out in a blaze." When Aldrich went to the basement, they ran out the door and called 911.

A short time later, doorbell video obtained by AP shows Aldrich arriving at the mother's home lugging a big black bag, telling her the police were nearby and adding, "This is where I stand. Today I die."

Another shot shows the mother later running from the house. "He let me go," the law enforcement documents quote her as saying. Neither Voepel nor Aldrich's grandparents, who now live in Florida, returned messages seeking more details.

In the end, Aldrich holed up in the mother's home, threatening to blow up the place as police swarmed and deployed bomb-sniffing dogs. "Come on in boys, let's f---ing see it!" Aldrich yelled on the Facebook livestream before later surrendering with hands up and tactical gear swapped for a short-sleeved shirt, shorts and bare feet.

Aldrich's next arrest would come 17 months later and a few miles away inside the Club Q.

Gunshot victim Loveall says his days since have been spent dealing with grief over those who died and bouts of crying he can't control. He also fears going to sleep because of the swarm of images in his head: Bullets flying, people diving for cover, shattering glass and blood all over.

"It happened so fast they didn't have time to scream," Loveall said as he smoked a cigarette outside his mobile home.

"There is no reason why he should have had access to an assault rifle ... especially for someone who has been quoted saying 'I'm going to be the next mass shooter.'"

Greek Orthodox church at World Trade Center reopens at last

By KAREN MATTHEWS Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — More than two decades after a tiny Greek Orthodox church in lower Manhattan was destroyed by the falling south tower of the World Trade Center, that church's far grander replacement opened to the public this week in an elevated park overlooking the rebuilt trade center's memorial plaza.

The new St. Nicholas Greek Orthodox Church and National Shrine hosted its first liturgy service on

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Tuesday to mark the Feast of St. Nicholas and is preparing to welcome visitors of all faiths who want to remember the victims of the Sept. 11, 2001 terrorist attacks.

"Today is a joyous day for America and for New York," said Michael Psaros, chair of Friends of St. Nicholas, the group tasked with raising funds for the church. "We invite all of America to please come visit, to come to the cenotaph that was created and built in memory of 3,000 people who were martyred and murdered on Sept. 11."

Completion of the project, one of the last pieces of the newly built World Trade Center complex, once seemed in doubt.

The Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America and the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey, which owns the World Trade Center, battled in court over where the new church would be built before agreeing to Liberty Park just south of the main trade center site.

A ceremonial groundbreaking was held in 2014, but construction came to a halt in 2017 when the archdiocese fell behind on payments.

Work resumed in 2020 with the goal of opening St. Nicholas in time for the 20th anniversary of the terrorist attacks on Sept. 11, 2021. That goal was not quite met, though the church was ceremonially lighted to mark the anniversary last year.

But on Tuesday, icons depicting heroes of Sept. 11 as well as Christ and the saints watched over a service conducted largely in New Testament Greek.

"This is the resurrection of St. Nicholas Church," said Olga Pavlakos, the vice president of the parish council and a third-generation member of the St. Nicholas community.

Another worshipper from a family that attended the old St. Nicholas, Maria Yatrakis, said she had tears in her eyes when she went inside the new church. "To see it back up like this, to see it so close to the Statue of Liberty, which represents all the immigrants who helped make this church, is very moving to all of us," Yatrakis said.

The church where Greek immigrants gathered a century ago was a converted tavern that was eventually dwarfed by the office buildings that grew around it. The new church was designed by Spanish-born architect Santiago Calatrava in the style of historic Byzantine structures including the Hagia Sophia in Istanbul, with a central dome flanked by towers.

The church is covered in marble from the same Pentelic vein in Greece where the Parthenon's stones were quarried, and at night its dome, through the translucent marble panels, shines like a beacon.

The iconography inside was painted by a monk from Xenophontos Monastery in Mount Athos, Greece, known as Father Loukas. The Rev. Alexander Karloutsos, the former vicar general of the archdiocese and a key player in the rebuilding of the church from the beginning, said Father Loukas was asked not just to create traditional icons but "to show the reality of Sept. 11."

In one panel depicting the day of the attacks, boats sail to rescue people fleeing the destruction as the twin towers burn. In another, Christ greets first responders including police officers and firefighters at the Resurrection.

"This is the first icon you will ever see in the Orthodox tradition that includes contemporary scenes for the Resurrection," Karloutsos said. "We've never done that before in any Orthodox church in the world."

St. Nicholas' price tag after years of cost overruns is about \$95 million, Karloutsos said.

Calatrava, who also designed the train hub known as the Oculus at the trade center, said he has visited St. Nicholas often as it neared completion, though he was not at Tuesday's ceremony.

"I regret I couldn't be there," Calatrava said from his office in Zurich. "I think it became a very beautiful piece. I'm very proud."

Calatrava said that when he has visited St. Nicholas with friends, "they tell me it's a jewel. And I think it is a little bit like that. It is something small but very significant in this particular place of New York overlooking the memorial as a part of all the reconstruction of lower Manhattan."

Brother finds body Baltimore firefighters missed in building

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By LEA SKENE Associated Press

BALTIMORE (AP) — Several hours after firefighters extinguished a warehouse fire in southwest Baltimore early Sunday, the scene was eerily quiet as Donte Craig stepped through the charred rubble, trying to remain hopeful.

He was looking for his older brother James Craig Jr., who leased the warehouse for his demolition and hauling business. After hearing about the fire, which was reported around 11:30 p.m. Saturday, family members grew increasingly concerned throughout the night because James Craig Jr. wasn't answering calls or texts.

Finally, his brother drove to the scene late Sunday morning.

Inside the building, he found the body of his 45-year-old brother on the second floor. Baltimore Police have launched a homicide investigation.

As the investigation unfolds, family members are demanding answers. They want to know how firefighters initially failed to realize the building was occupied.

Their questions add to growing controversy surrounding the Baltimore Fire Department and its policies, which came under scrutiny after three firefighters died responding to a call early this year. The chief resigned last week in response to an investigative report that found numerous deficiencies.

In response to questions about the warehouse fire, officials said they had no reason to believe anyone was inside the two-story commercial building. They also said the building was ultimately deemed structurally unsafe for firefighters to enter.

But the Craig family said there were signs of occupancy, including about a half-dozen dogs spending the night in an adjacent enclosure. First responders had the dogs taken to an animal shelter, according to family members.

James Craig Jr. used the first floor of the warehouse as a workshop, but he also had a bedroom upstairs where he sometimes stayed after working late. He collapsed near the top of the stairs, according to his brother.

"He was trying to get out," Donte Craig said in an interview at the scene Tuesday afternoon.

He pointed to the staircase leading to the second floor. While parts of the building were severely damaged from the flames — including sections of the walls and floorboards that were reduced to charcoal and ash — the metal staircase remained intact.

Donte Craig said he easily walked up the stairs Sunday morning and spotted his brother's body before reaching the top. He questioned why firefighters didn't make a similar effort.

"They've got a lot to answer for," said father James Craig Sr. "Why couldn't they walk up one flight of steps? Maybe my son could still be alive."

The criticism comes amid existing turmoil for the Baltimore Fire Department. Chief Niles Ford, who had led the department since 2014, resigned last week after an investigative report found numerous deficiencies. The report examined the department's response to a southwest Baltimore rowhouse fire that left three firefighters dead.

Among the investigative findings: There was no program to notify firefighters about vacant and unsafe homes or standard procedures for battling fires and coordinating EMS responses at vacant buildings. The report also cited a culture of competition among firefighters that may have led to increased risk-taking.

In that case, there were signs of a previous fire and structural instability, but firefighters entered the building anyway, officials have said.

Baltimore's high concentration of vacant buildings present a unique danger to firefighters. A Baltimore Sun investigation showed vacant homes in Baltimore burn at twice the national rate, but gaps in record-keeping have limited what firefighters know before proceeding inside.

At the scene of the recent warehouse fire, firefighters initially entered the building and "performed interior operations to battle the fire," department spokesperson Blair Adams said. But then the incident commander and safety officer discovered "some visual signs of structural instability" and ordered immediate evacuation. At that point, firefighters battled the fire from outside.

The fire was placed under control around 1 a.m. Sunday, officials said.

"There was no reason to believe anyone was inside," Adams said in a text message Tuesday.

She said firefighters responded to the scene again on Sunday after the body was discovered. Baltimore Police homicide and arson units also responded. Officials said the cause is still under investigation.

James Craig Sr. said he's not satisfied with the city's response.

"I'm getting assumptions; I'm not getting any facts," he said Tuesday afternoon during a phone conversation with a homicide detective assigned to the case. "You have to remember, the reality of this is that I lost my son. That's the reality of the whole thing."

Argentina's VP Fernández guilty in \$1B fraud, gets 6 years

By ALMUDENA CALATRAVA Associated Press

BUENOS AIRES, Argentina (AP) — Argentine Vice President Cristina Fernández was convicted and sentenced Tuesday to six years in prison and a lifetime ban from holding public office for a fraud scheme that embezzled \$1 billion through public works projects during her presidency.

A three-judge panel found the Peronist leader guilty of fraud, but rejected a charge of running a criminal organization, for which the sentence could have been 12 years in prison. It was the first time an Argentine vice president has been convicted of a crime while in office.

Fernández lashed out at the verdict, describing herself as the victim of a "judicial mafia." But she also later announced that she would not run next year for the presidency, a post she previously held in 2007-2015.

The sentence isn't firm until appeals are decided, a process that could take years. She will remain immune from arrest meanwhile.

Fernández's supporters vowed to paralyze the country with a nationwide strike. They clogged downtown Buenos Aires and marched on the federal court building, beating drums and shouting as they pressed against police barriers.

Fernández roundly denied all the accusations. Argentina's dominant leader this century, she was accused of improperly granting public works contracts to a construction magnate closely tied to her family.

The verdict is certain to deepen fissures in the South American nation, where politics can be a blood sport and the 69-year-old populist leader is either loved or hated.

President Alberto Fernández, who is not related to his vice president, said on Twitter that she was innocent and that her conviction is "the result of a trial in which the minimum forms of due process were not taken care of."

Prosecutors said Fernández fraudulently directed 51 public works projects to Lázaro Báez, a construction magnate and early ally of her and her husband Nestor Kirchner, who served as president in 2003-2007 and died suddenly in 2010.

Báez and members of Fernández's 2007-2015 presidential administration were among a dozen others accused in the conspiracy. The panel also sentenced Báez and her public works secretary, José López, to six years. Most of the others got lesser sentences.

Prosecutors Diego Luciani and Sergio Mola said the Báez company was created to embezzle revenues through improperly bid projects that suffered from cost overruns and in many cases were never completed. The company disappeared after the Kirchners' 12 years in power, they said.

In Argentina, judges in such cases customarily pronounce verdicts and sentences first and explain how they reached their decision later. The panel's full decision is expected in February. After that, the verdict can be appealed up to the Supreme Court, a process that could take years.

Fernández went on her YouTube channel to say she will not seek further office after her vice presidential term expires on Dec. 10, 2023. "I'm not going to be a candidate for anything, not president, not for senator. My name is not going to be on any ballot. I finish on December 10 and go home," she said.

Politicians and analysts had noted that until her appeal is settled, Fernández would be free to run for any elected office — from a seat in Congress to the presidency — and obtain immunity arrest by being elected.

"Cristina always surprises," pollster Roberto Bacman, director of Argentina's Center for Public Opinion

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Studies, said of her announcement. But "she will continue fighting," he added. "She places herself in the center of the fight and says that she is not going to hide."

He said it remains to be seen if the Peronist sector seeks to push Fernández to reconsider her decision.

Patricio Giusto, director of the consulting firm Diagnóstico Político, predicted Fernández will deepen her "strategy of victimization and equating herself" with Luiz Inácio Lula Da Silva, the leftist politician who has just been elected president of Brazil after a court overturned his prison sentence for corruption.

During the judicial process, the vice president called herself a victim of "lawfare" and characterized the Judiciary as a pawn of the opposition media and conservative politician Mauricio Macri, who succeeded her as president in 2015-2019.

Fernández remains the singular leader of the leftist faction of the Peronist movement. Bacman said his surveys show 62% of Argentines want her removed and 38% support her no matter what.

Meanwhile, other cases remain pending against her, including a charge of money-laundering that also involves her son and daughter.

North Carolina power cut by shooting could come back earlier

By HANNAH SCHOENBAUM Associated Press/Report for America

RALEIGH, N.C. (AP) — Duke Energy said it expects to restore power ahead of schedule to thousands of homes in a central North Carolina county that have been without electricity for several days after an attack on the electric grid.

Duke Energy spokesman Jeff Brooks said the company expects to have power back Wednesday just before midnight in Moore County. The company had previously estimated it would be restored Thursday morning.

About 35,000 Duke energy customers were still without power Tuesday, down from more than 45,000 at the height of the outage Saturday.

The outages began shortly after 7 p.m. Saturday night after one or more people drove up to two substations, breached the gates and opened fire on them, authorities have said. Police have not released a motive or said what kind of firearm was used.

Sam Stephenson, a power delivery specialist for Duke Energy, said the company has been able to implement "rolling power-ups" in the northern part of the county, giving some customers power in 2- to 3-hour waves.

North Carolina Gov. Roy Cooper called for a thorough assessment of the state's critical infrastructure Tuesday morning at the monthly Council of State meeting — a collective body of elected officials comprising the executive branch. He said this will likely include discussions with federal regulators, lawmakers and utility companies about how to bolster security and prevent future attacks.

In the short-term, the state has sent generators to Moore County and is helping feed residents. Law enforcement in surrounding counties has been more vigilant about monitoring nearby substations since the attack, he said.

"This seemed to be too easy," Cooper told reporters after the meeting. "People knew what they were doing to disable the substation, and for that much damage to be caused — causing so much problem, economic loss, safety challenges to so many people for so long — I think we have to look at what we might need to do to harden that infrastructure."

Mike Causey, the North Carolina insurance commissioner and state fire marshal, called the attack "a wakeup call to provide better security at our power substations."

Many businesses around the county that is about 60 miles (95 kilometers) southwest of the state capital of Raleigh are closed at a normally busy time of year for tourism and holiday shopping. Schools are also closed through Thursday, and traffic lights are out around the area. A curfew remains in place from 9 p.m. to 5 a.m.

County officials said 54 people spent Monday night at an emergency shelter at the county sports complex in Carthage, up from 19 people the night before, as temperatures dropped below freezing after sundown.

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Many more residents have stopped by the shelter for food, warmth, showers or to charge their devices. Republican state Sen. Tom McInnis, who represents Moore County, said the General Assembly is awaiting updates on how the perpetrators of this attack might be charged and may consider new legislation related to the punishment when the legislature returns in January.

"I'm reasonably confident there will be new legislation that will be brought forward in the long session to address the potential that, again, that the crime and the penalty need to be leveled and evened out," McInnis said at a news conference Tuesday.

Brian Harrell, former assistant secretary for infrastructure protection at the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, said a determined adversary with insider knowledge of how to cripple key components of critical infrastructure is difficult to stop and requires an industry-wide collective defense.

DHS and energy companies have been monitoring what Harrell, who now leads security for an energy company servicing multiple states, identified as a significant uptick in nefarious online discussions about sabotaging distribution and transmission substations.

Investigators have said whoever shot up the substations knew what they were doing. But they have not released further information about how much inside knowledge they may have had.

"What impacts you can impact me, so threat information-sharing is absolutely essential," Harrell told The Associated Press. "Over 85% of all critical infrastructure is owned by the private sector, so we need to have more regular conversations amongst security partners to identify, disrupt and mitigate" threats to infrastructure.

Ronaldo dropped, Ramos scores 3 for Portugal at World Cup

By STEVE DOUGLAS AP Sports Writer

LUSAIL, Qatar (AP) — A chant of "RONALDO! RONALDO!" swept around the biggest stadium at the World Cup, followed by loud jeers when the fans realized their idol wasn't coming onto the field.

Cristiano Ronaldo was, in fact, sitting in the Portugal dugout, looking glum and still wearing a substitute's bib. And the guy who started instead of him on Tuesday was about to complete a hat trick.

After Ronaldo was dropped from the starting lineup in a bold call by Portugal coach Fernando Santos, Goncalo Ramos — the superstar striker's unlikely replacement — made himself an instant star by leading the team to a 6-1 win over Switzerland and into the World Cup quarterfinals.

Ramos, a 21-year-old forward who only made his Portugal debut last month, demonstrated the kind of clinical finishing for which Ronaldo was once known in scoring the first goal in the 17th minute and adding others in the 51st and 67th.

No player had scored a hat trick in his first World Cup start since Germany striker Miroslav Klose in 2002.

"Not even in my wildest dreams did I think about being part of the starting team for the knockout stage," said Ramos, an unheralded striker who plays for Benfica and counts Ronaldo as his soccer idol along with Robert Lewandowski and Zlatan Ibrahimovic.

It was around the hour mark that fans throughout the 89,000-seat Lusail Stadium started to implore Santos to bring on the 37-year-old Ronaldo, and they got their wish in the 72nd minute. Portugal had the game wrapped up by then, with defenders Pepe and Raphael Guerreiro also having scored. Rafael Leao added another goal in stoppage time.

Ronaldo didn't score — he still hasn't in the knockout stage in any of his five World Cups — and after briefly celebrating with his teammates following the final whistle, he walked off the field on his own, perhaps wondering where his career goes from here.

He is currently without a club after leaving Manchester United midway through the World Cup, and he might no longer be the starter for his country.

The rest of the Portugal team hung around to applaud its fans at one end of the stadium. A quarterfinal match awaits against Morocco on Saturday and Santos now has to decide whether to stick with Ramos or restore Ronaldo, the top scorer in men's international soccer and one of the game's greatest ever players.

Santos said it was a strategic decision to drop Ronaldo and not a disciplinary one, having expressed

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unhappiness during his eve-of-match news conference Monday at the striker's attitude after he was substituted against South Korea in the team's final group game.

"What we have to do is think about this team collectively," Santos said, before talking about Ronaldo. "I will always consider he is a very important player to have in the team."

That might now be a substitute and an experienced head in the locker room rather than a starter.

Ramos was a surprise replacement — he had previously only made three substitute appearances for Portugal — and took his chance.

Ramos, who was only 2 years old when Ronaldo made his Portugal debut in 2003, scored the first hat trick at this year's World Cup.

He drove a rising shot with his left foot inside Switzerland goalkeeper Yann Sommer's near post for the first goal, flicked deftly through Sommer's legs from close range for the second, and then ran through to chip the goalkeeper for his third.

Ronaldo was seen smiling while he was warming up on the side of the field after Ramos' second goal.

"Cristiano, as our captain, did what he always does," Ramos said. "He helped us and encouraged us, not only myself but my colleagues."

Ramos even had an assist, playing the ball through for Guerreiro to score the fourth goal.

Ronaldo was lively when he came on and even thought he had scored when he ran through and drove a low left-footed shot past Sommer. The goal was disallowed for offside, much to the irritation of the fans — Portuguese or from other countries — who had come to see him play.

Switzerland's only goal came in the 57th minute when Manuel Akanji tapped in at the far post after a corner kick.

LONG WAIT

Switzerland lost in the round of 16 for the third straight World Cup. The country hasn't reached the quarterfinals since hosting the event in 1954.

OLDEST SCORER

Pepe took the captaincy from Ronaldo and became the oldest player to score in the knockout stage at the World Cup, at 39 years, 283 days.

Ukraine leader defiant as drone strikes hit Russia again

By JAMEY KEATEN Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Drones struck inside Russia's border with Ukraine on Tuesday in the second day of attacks exposing the vulnerability of some of Moscow's most important military sites, experts said.

Ukrainian officials did not formally confirm carrying out drone strikes inside Russia, and they have maintained ambiguity over previous high-profile attacks.

But Britain's Defense Ministry said Russia was likely to consider the attacks on Russian bases more than 500 kilometers (300 miles) from the border with Ukraine as "some of the most strategically significant failures of force protection since its invasion of Ukraine."

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said Russian authorities will "take the necessary measures" to enhance protection of key facilities. Russian bloggers who generally maintain contacts with officials in their country's military criticized the lack of defensive measures.

A fire broke out at an airport in Russia's southern Kursk region that borders Ukraine after a drone hit the facility, the region's governor said Tuesday. In a second incident, an industrial plant 80 kilometers (50 miles) from the Ukrainian border was also targeted by drones, which missed a fuel depot at the site, Russian independent media reported.

"They will have less aviation equipment after being damaged due to these mysterious explosions," said Yurii Ihnat, spokesman for the Air Force Command of the Armed Forces of Ukraine. "This is undoubtedly excellent news because if one or two aircraft fail, then in the future, some more aircraft may fail in some way. This reduces their capabilities."

Moscow blamed Kyiv for unprecedented attacks on two air bases deep inside Russia a day earlier. The

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attacks on the Engels base in the Saratov region on the Volga River and the Dyagilevo base in the Ryazan region in western Russia were some of the most audacious inside Russia during the war.

In the aftermath, Russian troops carried out another wave of missile strikes on Ukrainian territory that struck homes and buildings and killed civilians, compounding damage done to power and other infrastructure over weeks of missile attacks.

Approximately half of households in the Kyiv region remain without electricity, the regional governor said Tuesday, while authorities in southern Odesa — which was hard hit Monday — say they have managed to restore power to hospitals and some vital services.

In a new display of defiance, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy traveled near the front line in the eastern Donetsk region. Marking Ukraine's Armed Forces Day, he vowed to push Russian forces out of all of Ukraine's territory.

"Everyone sees your strength and your skill. ... I'm grateful to your parents. They raised real heroes," Zelenskyy said in a video address to Ukrainian forces from the city of Sloviansk, a key Ukrainian stronghold in the east.

U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken, speaking at a news conference in Washington, said the United States has "neither encouraged nor enabled the Ukrainians to strike inside of Russia." But he said the U.S. is determined — along with many other countries that back Kyiv — to make sure that the Ukrainians have "the equipment that they need to defend themselves, to defend their territory, to defend their freedom."

Russia's Defense Ministry's charged that the attack was launched with Soviet-made drones. After the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, which split Russia and Ukraine into separate countries, Ukraine inherited some Soviet-designed Tu-141 Strizh drones, which entered service in the 1970s and have a range of 1,000 kilometers (over 600 miles.)

They were designed for reconnaissance duties, but can be fitted with a warhead that effectively turns them into a cruise missile. Unlike modern drones, the Strizh, or Swift, drones can stay in the air only for a limited amount of time and fly straight to a designated target. Their outdated technology makes the drones easily detectable by modern air defense systems — and easy to shoot down.

A Russian pro-war blogger posting on the Telegram channel "Milinfoive" on Monday hit out at Russian military leadership, alleging that incompetence and lack of proper fortifications at the airbases made Ukrainian drone strikes possible.

Russia's Defense Ministry said three Russian servicemen were killed and four others wounded by debris, and that two aircraft were slightly damaged in the strikes Monday.

After Ukrainian forces took control in November of the major Russian-occupied city of Kherson, neither side has made significant advances.

But Ukrainian officials have indicated that the country plans to pursue counteroffensives during the winter when frozen ground is conducive to moving heavy equipment. Kherson city is still being hit by Russian rocket attacks but if Ukrainian forces establish firm control there it could be a bridgehead for advancing toward Crimea.

Pro-Kremlin political analyst Sergei Markov said the latest strikes by Ukraine "have raised questions about security of Russian military air bases."

The Engels base hosts Tu-95 and Tu-160 nuclear-capable strategic bombers that have been involved in strikes on Ukraine. Dyagilevo houses tanker aircraft used for mid-air refueling.

In a daily intelligence update on the war in Ukraine, Britain's Defense Ministry said the bombers would likely be dispersed to other airfields.

Speaking in a conference call with reporters Tuesday, Peskov said that "the Ukrainian regime's course for continuation of such terror attacks poses a threat."

Peskov reaffirmed that Russia sees no prospects for peace talks now, adding that "the Russian Federation must achieve its stated goals."

Ukrainian rocket attacks killed six people in the separatist-held city of Donetsk, about 100 kilometers (60 miles) south of where Zelenskyy spoke, said Denis Pushilin, head of the Russia-backed Donetsk People's

Republic. He said one of those killed was a 29-year-old member of the DPR parliament.

Russia, meanwhile, maintained intense attacks on Ukrainian territory, shelling towns overnight near the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant that left more than 9,000 homes without running water, local Ukrainian officials said.

The towns lie across the Dnieper River from the nuclear plant, which was seized by Russian forces in the early stages of the war. Russia and Ukraine have for months accused each other of shelling at and around the plant.

The head of Ukraine's northern Sumy region, which borders Russia, said that Moscow launched over 80 missile and heavy artillery attacks on its territory. Governor Dmytro Zhyvytsky said the strikes damaged a monastery near the border town of Shalyhyne.

Ihnat, the Ukrainian air force spokesman, said the country's ability to shoot down incoming missiles is improving, noting there had been no recent reports of Iranian-made attack drones being used on Ukrainian territory.

DOJ subpoenas election officials in states Trump disputed

By SCOTT BAUER and JILL COLVIN Associated Press

MADISON, Wis. (AP) — Special counsel Jack Smith has subpoenaed local election officials in Wisconsin, Michigan, Arizona and Pennsylvania, asking for communications with or involving former President Donald Trump, his 2020 campaign aides and a list of allies involved in his efforts to try to overturn the results of the election.

The requests, issued to Milwaukee and Dane counties in Wisconsin; Wayne County, Michigan; Maricopa County, Arizona; and Allegheny County, Pennsylvania, are the first known subpoenas by Smith, who was named special counsel last month by Attorney General Merrick Garland.

Smith is overseeing the Justice Department's investigation into the presence of classified documents at Trump's Florida estate as well as key aspects of a separate probe involving the violent storming of the Capitol on Jan. 6, 2021, and Trump's frantic efforts to remain in power.

The subpoenas, some of which were first reported by The Washington Post, are the clearest indication yet that Smith's work will include an examination of the fake electors that were part of Trump's efforts to subvert the election count and certification. All of the states where requests were sent are states that Trump and his allies targeted as they tried to overturn the democratic vote.

In Pennsylvania, for instance, Trump's campaign sued unsuccessfully in court to try to overturn President Joe Biden's victory, while his allies organized a Trump slate of electors to send to Congress. Trump and his supporters also repeatedly contacted top Republican lawmakers, at times asking about using the GOP-controlled legislature to give lawmakers the power to overturn the election. They refused.

The subpoenas, two of which were obtained by The Associated Press, request "any and all communications in any form" between June 1, 2020, and Jan. 20, 2021, "to, from, or involving" Trump, his campaign, lawyers and aides, including former campaign officials like Bill Stepien and Justin Clark and lawyers John Eastman, Boris Epshteyn, L. Lin Wood, Sidney Powell and former New York Mayor Rudy Giuliani.

In Wisconsin, Milwaukee County Clerk George Christenson said he received a subpoena on Monday and is working with the county's attorney to comply with the request as soon as possible.

"I don't see any issues with it," he said. "Many of those names aren't familiar to me, so I don't know how many of those individuals did reach out to us. For example, I don't recall receiving anything from Rudy Giuliani. I think I would have remembered that. But who knows."

Christenson said he hoped the documents would help with the investigation, but he didn't expect to turn over anything that hasn't already been made public.

"I don't expect to find any smoking gun," Christenson said.

Dane County Clerk Scott McDonell said he received a similar subpoena on Dec. 1, asking for communications he had with "the gang of people you would sort of expect."

McDonell said the only person on the list that his office had interaction with was Jim Troupis, Trump's

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Wisconsin-based attorney. Trump paid for a recount of ballots cast in Milwaukee and Dane counties, the two largest Democratic counties in Wisconsin, following the 2020 election. Troupis spearheaded the legal effort not to count tens of thousands of ballots cast absentee in that election, including his own.

McDonnell said he didn't expect his response to the subpoena to reveal anything that "hasn't been covered in the past."

"I don't have any stories of Trump calling me at dinner like the other guys," McDonnell said.

In Michigan, Secretary of State Jocelyn Benson confirmed that Wayne County had received a subpoena from Smith but did not provide additional information on what it was seeking.

"We welcome and support the work of any law enforcement agency working to ensure full accountability for efforts to illegally overturn the fair and accurate results of Michigan's 2020 election," Benson said in a statement sent to The Associated Press.

Trump's efforts to overturn the 2020 election in Michigan centered on Detroit's convention hall, which is located in Wayne County. Trump falsely claimed poll workers there "were duplicating ballots," and an unsuccessful lawsuit by his campaign on Election Day forced election workers to temporarily halt the tallying of votes in the state's largest city.

Another lawsuit was filed by several attorneys, including Trump allies Powell and Wood, on behalf of six Republican voters who wanted a federal judge to decertify Michigan's results and impound voting machines. The judge declined, calling the request "stunning in its scope and breathtaking in its reach."

Angela Benander, a spokesperson for the Michigan Department of State, said the department wasn't aware of any other counties being issued subpoenas from Smith.

In Arizona, Maricopa County also received a subpoena and will comply, said county spokesperson Fields Moseley.

The county, which includes the Phoenix area and more than 60% of Arizona voters, had been a centerpiece of Trump's efforts to overturn the election and cast doubt on the results.

Trump allies tried to pressure Republicans on the county board of supervisors not to certify his loss in 2020, and when they did so, continued trying to reach them as Congress prepared to tally the electoral votes on Jan. 6. Clint Hickman, then the chairman of the board, dodged calls from the White House operator, who left voicemails saying the president was trying to reach him.

In Pennsylvania, Allegheny County, the state's second-most populous and home to Pittsburgh, received a subpoena as well, a spokesperson confirmed. The Pennsylvania Department of State, along with several jurisdictions targeted by Trump's campaign in 2020 — Philadelphia and Bucks and Montgomery counties — declined comment on whether they'd received subpoenas, too.

A Justice Department spokesperson declined to comment Tuesday.

In addition to the DOJ, Fulton County District Attorney Fani Willis has also been investigating whether Trump and his allies illegally tried to interfere in the 2020 election in Georgia. ____

Colvin reported from New York. Associated Press writers Joey Cappelletti in Lansing, Michigan, Jonathan J. Cooper in Phoenix, Marc Levy in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, and Eric Tucker in Washington contributed to this report.

Jan. 6 committee to issue criminal referrals, chairman says

By FARNOUSH AMIRI Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The House committee investigating the Jan. 6 attack on the U.S. Capitol will make criminal referrals to the Justice Department as it wraps up its probe and looks to publish a final report by the end of the year, the panel's chairman said Tuesday.

Rep. Bennie Thompson, D-Miss., told reporters that the committee has decided to issue the referrals recommending criminal prosecution, but did not disclose who the targets will be or if former President Donald Trump will be among them.

"At this point, there'll be a separate document coming from me to DOJ," Thompson told reporters at the Capitol.

Thompson said the committee is meeting later Tuesday to discuss the details.

"The Committee has determined that referrals to outside entities should be considered as a final part of its work," a spokesperson for the select committee told The Associated Press. "The committee will make decisions about specifics in the days ahead."

The decision to issue referrals is not unexpected. Rep. Liz Cheney, R-Wyo., the vice chair of the committee, has for months been hinting at sending the Justice Department criminal referrals based on the extensive evidence the nine-member panel has gathered since it was formed in July 2021.

While Congress can send criminal referrals to the Justice Department — marking a symbolic act — it is ultimately up to federal prosecutors whether to pursue charges. The potential charges the committee has been hinting against Trump include conspiracy to defraud the United States and obstruction of an official proceeding of Congress.

Over the course of its investigation, the committee has referred several members of Trump's inner circle to the agency for refusing to comply with congressional subpoenas. So far only one contempt of Congress charge, against Steven Bannon, has turned into an indictment.

The panel — comprised of seven Democrats and two Republicans — has sought to create the most comprehensive record of what the lawmakers have called Trump's "staggering betrayal" of his oath of office and his supporters' unprecedented attempt to stop Congress from certifying Democrat Joe Biden's victory.

The committee built its case against the former president over a series of public hearings that began in early June and included live and video testimony from members of Trump's family, his White House aides and other allies. At the end of the last hearing, the committee voted unanimously to subpoena Trump for his testimony under oath as well as documents. In response, Trump filed a lawsuit against the panel.

With the select committee set to dissolve at the end of the year, lawmakers do not appear to be putting up a fight to secure Trump's testimony. But his criminal referral, as Cheney and others have suggested, could prove to be a much more powerful closing argument. The panel is expected to hold at least one final meeting in December to vote on releasing the report to the public, which will include transcripts of some of the 1,000 witnesses and the millions of pages of documents the panel has amassed. The final presentation will likely include any referrals to the Justice Department.

But across the country, the lack of criminal referral thus far has not precluded federal, state and local prosecutors from pursuing legal challenges against the former president in connection with Jan. 6.

Trump is personally facing more serious legal challenges off Capitol Hill, including the Mar-a-Lago investigation focused on the potential mishandling of top-secret documents. And he is no longer shielded from prosecution the way he was as president, with some legal experts telling AP that they regard the records investigation as centered on more straightforward factual and legal questions than the prior probes he has faced.

Hockey's history shows handful of non-white pioneers

By STEPHEN WHYNO AP Hockey Writer

Taffy Abel carried the American flag at the 1924 Olympics, where his team won silver in hockey. Henry Elmer "Buddy" Maracle played 11 games in the early-1930s NHL. Paul Jacobs may have played in the league's second season in 1918-19.

But in the commonly known history of hockey, a predominantly white sport in North America and Europe, these three men and others have been late to receive credit as Indigenous pioneers. Now, as part of a worldwide reckoning with prejudice, hockey historians are delving deeper into the role of some of the first nonwhite professional hockey players.

Historians agree that there were Indigenous players on the ice well before Willie O'Ree became the first Black player to skate in an NHL game in January 1958. O'Ree, who endured years of racism, was inducted into the Hockey Hall of Fame in 2018 and had his No. 22 retired this year.

There are no detailed demographical records from the NHL's earliest years, the league and historians say. Because of that — and because some players hid or downplayed their own Indigenous or Asian heritage to avoid racist treatment — defining the sport's trailblazers and who broke the so-called color barrier in

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the NHL is difficult at best and likely impossible to prove.

"It's really hard to identify who was the first because if you go back into everyone's certain ancestry, a lot of people will have Indigenous or other minority groups in them, so it's hard to pinpoint," hockey historian and author Ty Di Lello said. "There might be the first publicly known, but it's probably near impossible just because so many people that had Indigenous or other minority backgrounds maybe didn't look like it."

Larry Kwong became the first player of Asian descent to appear in an NHL game — in 1948, a decade before O'Ree. And Di Lello and others wonder if there were Asian Americans or fellow Asian Canadians before Kwong, the son of two Chinese parents who was born in British Columbia.

"Willie O'Ree couldn't hide it," historian Eric Zweig said. "There's no stories of any Black players passing as white before Willie O'Ree."

Fred Sasakamoose, who played 11 games in the mid-1950s, has long been recognized as the NHL's first Native Canadian player and became well known in the First Nations community. But historians and the Hall of Fame would give that distinction to Mohawk player Paul Jacobs — if he played in a game during the 1918-19 season, as may be the case.

Historical records are unclear and experts disagree on whether Paul Jacobs ever actually touched the ice. He was on the Toronto Arenas roster and, as the Hall of Fame notes, could have played in up to five games, which would make him the first nonwhite player in the NHL, which was formed in November 1917.

George Jones does not believe Jacobs played in a game and is adamant that Abel, his late uncle, deserves credit for breaking the league's color barrier in 1926. Jones has ramped up his effort to bring attention to Abel, a big defenseman who "passed" as white during his career before revealing his Native American heritage upon the death of his mother in 1939, five years after retiring.

"The reason he had to pass was not one of choice — it was one of survival," Jones said. "I'm proud of him, what he did — very proud. I know what he had to go through and the internal torment that he had to go through as part of this 'passing' thing. He had depression, he had drinking problems, but he survived."

The NHL in a recent tweet heralded Abel as "a two-time Stanley Cup champion, ice hockey silver medalist at the 1924 Winter Olympics and one of the first known Native American players."

Jones, who has taken his argument to Commissioner Gary Bettman and other league officials, said that's not enough. He wants acknowledgment from the NHL that Abel broke the league's color barrier as its first nonwhite player, saying in an email: "Native American Taffy Abel was the first professional hockey player to break the NHL Color Barrier in 1926."

League executives and researchers say they have looked into cases like Abel's and Maracle's and are not comfortable declaring a "first" among Native or Indigenous players because there's no way of proving it. Most NHL publications refer to O'Ree as the first Black player and Sasakamoose as the first Indigenous or First Nations player with treaty status.

It was more than a decade before Mike Marson became the NHL's second Black player. More than 95% of current NHL players and nearly 84% of employees are white.

"The National Hockey League is determined to identify and celebrate the trailblazers on and off the ice who diversified our game — whether by being 'first' or by doing exemplary work," a league spokesperson said in an email to The Associated Press. "Understandably, record-keeping from the earliest days of the league — particularly as it pertained to the race and ethnicity of our players — was not what it is today. This complicates efforts to definitively identify individuals as the first of any particular group, but it does not diminish the contributions of these pioneers."

The NHL has been reckoning with matters of race in recent years and it has become increasingly clear how much people of color shaped the history of hockey.

That includes Native American and First Nations players. Beyond Jacobs, Abel, Maracle and Sasakamoose, there are almost certainly many more whose tales are still unknown. Dan Ninham started the North American Indigenous Athletics Hall of Fame in the hopes of finding more.

"There are so many Indigenous athletes and hockey players out there," Ninham said. "They're out there, and this is one of the ways we want to get their names and who they are out there and to continue their

legacies.”

Those legacies are complicated. Sam McKegney of Queen’s University in Kingston, Ontario, and one of the creators of the Indigenous Hockey Research Network, argues national policies specifically in Canada discouraged members of the Indigenous peoples from embracing their heritage and used hockey in boarding schools as a way of pushing children from the First Nations to assimilate to white culture.

Avoiding boarding school and making it to the NHL, Jones said, is why Abel and his family kept being Native American a secret. He’s almost certainly not alone.

More than 150,000 Native children in Canada were forced to attend state-funded Christian schools from the 19th century until the 1970s in an effort to isolate them from their homes and culture. The aim was to Christianize and assimilate them into mainstream society, which previous Canadian governments considered superior.

“We’re at a moment of Indigenous resurgence,” McKegney said. “Reclamation of history is going to illuminate people whose stories haven’t yet been told or haven’t been understood in the public light. I do think that we’re going to hear more of these stories.”

Dig at UK housing site yields major 7th century treasures

By JILL LAWLESS Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — A 1,300-year-old gold and gemstone necklace found on the site of a new housing development marks the grave of a powerful woman who may have been an early Christian religious leader in Britain, archaeologists said Tuesday.

Experts say the necklace, uncovered with other items near Northampton in central England, is part of the most significant early medieval burial of a woman ever found in the U.K.

The woman is long gone – some tooth enamel is all that remains. But scientists say her long-buried trove will shed new light on life in 7th century England, a time when Christianity was battling with paganism for people’s allegiance.

The items are “a definite statement of wealth as well as Christian faith,” said Lyn Blackmore, a senior finds specialist at Museum of London Archaeology, which made the discovery.

“She was extremely devout, but was she a princess? Was she a nun? Was she more than a nun – an abbess? ... We don’t know,” Blackmore said.

The Harpole Treasure – named for the village where it was found, about 60 miles (96 kilometers) north-west of London – was unearthed in April by archaeologists working with property developer Vistry Group on a neighborhood of new houses.

On one of the last days of the 10-week dig, site supervisor Levente-Bence Balázs noticed something glinting in the dirt. It turned out to be a rectangular gold pendant with a cross motif, inlaid with garnets — the centerpiece of a necklace that also contained pendants fashioned from gold Roman coins and ovals of semiprecious stones.

“These artifacts haven’t seen daylight in more than 1,300 years,” Balázs said. “To be the first person to actually see it – it’s just indescribable.”

Researchers say the burial took place between 630 and 670 A.D., the same period as several other graves of high-ranking women that have been found around Britain. Earlier high-status burials were mostly men, and experts say the change could reflect women gaining power and status in England’s new Christian faith.

The Kingdom of Mercia, where the Harpole Treasure was found, converted to Christianity in the 7th century, and the woman buried there was a believer, maybe a faith leader. A large and ornate silver cross was placed on her body in the grave. It is adorned with tiny, astonishingly well-preserved likenesses of human heads with blue glass eyes, who may represent Christ’s apostles. Clay pots from France or Belgium, containing residue of an unknown liquid, were also found.

Within a few decades, as Christianity took hold more widely in England, the practice of burying people with their luxury goods died out.

“Burying people with lots and lots of bling is a pagan notion, but this is obviously heavily vested in

Christian iconography, so it's that period of quite rapid change," said Simon Mortimer of archaeological consultants RPS, who worked on the project.

The Harpole discoveries will help fill in gaps in knowledge about the era between the departure of Britain's Roman occupiers in the 5th century and the arrival of Viking raiders almost 400 years later. Experts say it's one of the most significant Saxon finds since the 7th-century ship burial found in the 1930s at Sutton Hoo, about 100 miles (160 kilometers) to the east.

Once archaeologists have finished their work, the plan is for the items to be displayed in a local museum. Property developers in Britain routinely have to consult archaeologists as part of their planning process, and Mortimer said the practice has yielded some important finds.

"We are now looking at places we would never typically have looked at," he said, and as a result "we are finding genuinely unexpected things."

"The scale of the wealth is going to change our view of the early medieval period in that area," he added. "The course of history has been nudged, ever so slightly, by this find."

Doctors say Pelé's health improving, remains in hospital

SAO PAULO (AP) — Brazilian soccer great Pelé is improving, doctors said Tuesday.

The 82-year-old Pelé has been hospitalized for a week to treat a respiratory infection aggravated by COVID-19. He is expected to leave the hospital when he fully recovers from the infection.

"(He has) stable vital signs, is conscious, and with no new complications," the Albert Einstein hospital said in a statement.

Pelé, a three-time World Cup winner, is also fighting cancer and is undergoing chemotherapy.

In Qatar, the image of a young Pelé celebrating goals and lifting trophies with Brazil's national team appeared on the shirts, flags and banners of Brazilian fans gathering Monday before a World Cup match against South Korea.

Pelé had said he would be watching the match from the hospital. Brazil won 4-1 to reach the quarterfinals.

Biden's efforts to protect abortion access hit roadblocks

By AMANDA SEITZ and COLLEEN LONG Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Biden administration is still actively searching for ways to safeguard abortion access for millions of women, even as it bumps up against a complex web of strict new state laws enacted in the months after the Supreme Court stripped the constitutional right.

Looking to seize on momentum following a midterm election where voters widely rebuked tougher abortion restrictions, there's a renewed push at the White House to find ways to help women in states that have virtually outlawed or limited the treatment, and to keep the issue top of mind for voters.

In reality, though, the administration is shackled by a ban on federal funding for most abortions, a conservative-leaning Supreme Court inclined to rule against abortion rights and a split Congress unwilling to pass legislation on the matter.

Meanwhile, frustration on the ground in the most abortion-restricted states is mounting.

"This is not going away anytime soon," said Jen Klein of the Biden administration's Gender Policy Council. "Tens of millions of Americans are living under bans of various sorts, many of them quite extreme, and even in states where abortion is legal, we're all seeing the impact on providers and on systems being loaded by people who are coming across state lines."

Since the U.S. Supreme Court decision in June, roughly half the states have some type of abortion restrictions in place, with at least 11 states essentially banning the procedure.

Administration officials are meeting Tuesday and Wednesday with state lawmakers ahead of their 2023 sessions, including in states with more extreme bans on the table, and will discuss safeguarding rights and helping women access care as top issues. The meetings follow sit-downs with roughly nine governors, attorneys general and Democratic state legislators from more than 30 states.

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The administration, meanwhile, is implementing Biden's executive orders signed in July and August that directed federal agencies to push back on abortion restrictions and protect women traveling out of their state to seek one, though some women's rights advocates say it doesn't go far enough.

And there are still other avenues left for the administration to explore, said Kathleen Sebelius, a former U.S. health and human services secretary.

HHS might look to wield its power around federal protections for health care providers, life-saving abortions, abortion pills and travel for women in abortion-restricted states, she said. During her tenure, for example, the agency did some policy maneuvering to expand rights for same-sex couples, including a requirement that any hospitals receiving federal funds allow their patients to select a same-sex partner as a visitor, years before gay marriage was legalized.

"It's amazing how broad a lot of the agency's authorities are and how much creative thinking can go on," Sebelius said.

Already, the Justice Department has sued Idaho over its restrictive abortion policy and indicted at least 20 people who have been accused of obstructing access to abortion clinics. Attorney General Merrick Garland has said he would protect the right for women to travel between states for medical care.

Veterans and their beneficiaries are able to access abortion, even in states that have outlawed it, through the Department of Veteran Affairs in cases where the woman's life or health is at risk or in cases of rape or incest. The Defense Department will cover leave and travel costs for troops seeking abortions if they are not available in their state.

The Federal Trade Commission has sued at least one data broker for selling information that tracks people at reproductive health care clinics, while the Federal Communication Commission reminded 15 mobile carriers of privacy laws in a recent letter.

Perhaps most consequentially, the Department of Health and Human Services told hospitals they "must" provide abortions if a mother's life is at risk. The agency cited federal law, called the Emergency Medical Treatment and Labor Act, or EMTALA, that requires medical facilities to provide treatment if a person may be in labor or faces an emergency health situation.

But "no executive action can replace a precedent of nearly 50 years," Klein said. "The most important thing is to fight for national legislation."

None is upcoming in the lame-duck session before Republicans take control of the House. And Biden is limited in what else he can do.

Indeed, the administration's moves so far have made little difference in Ohio, said Kellie Copeland, the executive director at Pro-Choice Ohio. A law that would essentially ban abortion once fetal cardiac activity is detected is awaiting a court ruling. Currently, abortion is banned at 22 weeks, state Medicaid funds can't be used for abortion and parental consent is required for a minor to receive care.

"I can say as an advocate in Ohio, no one is saying, 'Oh wow, this has made a difference,'" Copeland said. "The impact has not been felt."

Copeland's organization is one of about 50 local advocacy groups and abortion clinics entrenched in states and cities that asked the president in an August letter to offer federal travel and childcare vouchers for people living in states where abortion is banned, introduce federal protections for mailing abortion pills, and gather hospital attorneys to reiterate that doctors must give abortions in life-saving situations.

Chaos has ensued at hospitals located in the country's most restrictive states, where doctors treating critically ill pregnant patients must weigh their medical recommendations against potential punishments like prison time. Reports of sick pregnant women turned away by doctors or facing unsafe delays in medical care are pouring in.

"It's made it incredibly dangerous for patients, it's put physicians in a terrible position," American Medical Association President Jack Resneck, Jr. said during a meeting with reporters Tuesday. "And yet, when we go and talk about it, we're seeing purveyors of disinformation say, 'oh those stories are exaggerated or that's not true.'"

Resneck said for physicians it feels as though "state's attorneys general or governors or law enforcement officers" are standing over their shoulders in the exam room. He worries it could drive an already

problematic health care worker shortage to worsen in those states.

"I'm worried about ... whether we're going to have the workforce in those states in the future to take care of pregnant patients," he said.

HHS is investigating at least one hospital in Missouri after officials there refused to let doctors perform an abortion on a woman during a medical emergency, but won't say how many complaints it has received against providers or hospital system for failing to provide life-saving care.

In August, HHS also invited states to apply for Medicaid waivers that would unlock federal funds to pay for travel costs for women who live in states where abortion procedures have been severely restricted.

Not a single state has applied, although the agency said it is in talks with officials in some states about applications.

In Louisiana, where abortion is banned except in certain cases where a mother's life is at stake, federal policies around travel are likely to have the most impact, said Michelle Erenberg of the New Orleans-based abortion rights advocacy group Lift Louisiana.

She's not hopeful that other federal proposals will ease how women access abortion directly in the state. "It's a little frustrating," Erenberg said. "Also, we understand there's only so much the administration is going to be able to do when a state like Louisiana has decided to enact a near total ban on abortion care."

Kirstie Alley, Emmy-winning 'Cheers' star, dies at 71

By ANDREW DALTON and ALICIA RANCILIO Associated Press

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Kirstie Alley, a two-time Emmy winner whose roles on the TV megahit "Cheers" and in the "Look Who's Talking" films made her one of the biggest stars in American comedy in the late 1980s and early 1990s, died Monday. She was 71.

Alley died of cancer that was only recently discovered, her children True and Lillie Parker said in a post on Twitter. Alley's manager Donovan Daughtry confirmed the death in an email to The Associated Press.

"As iconic as she was on screen, she was an even more amazing mother and grandmother," her children's statement said.

She starred opposite Ted Danson as Rebecca Howe on "Cheers," the beloved NBC sitcom about a Boston bar, from 1987 to 1993. She joined the show at the height of its popularity after the departure of original star Shelley Long.

Alley would win an Emmy for best lead actress in a comedy series for the role in 1991.

"I only thank God I didn't have to wait as long as Ted," Alley said in her acceptance, gently ribbing Danson, who had finally won an Emmy for his "Cheers" role as Sam Malone in his eighth nomination the previous year.

She would take a second Emmy for best lead actress in a miniseries or television movie in 1993 for playing the title role in the CBS TV movie "David's Mother."

She had her own sitcom on the network, "Veronica's Closet," from 1997 to 2000.

In the 1989 comedy "Look Who's Talking," which gave her a major career boost, she played the mother of a baby whose inner thoughts were voiced by Bruce Willis. She would also appear in a 1990 sequel "Look Who's Talking Too," and another in 1993, "Look Who's Talking Now."

John Travolta, her co-star in the trilogy, paid her tribute in an Instagram post.

"Kirstie was one of the most special relationships I've ever had," Travolta said, along with a photo of Alley. "I love you Kirstie. I know we will see each other again."

She would play a fictionalized version of herself in the 2005 Showtime series "Fat Actress," a show that drew comedy from her public and media treatment over her weight gain and loss.

She dealt with the same subject matter in the 2010 A&E reality series "Kirstie Alley's Big Life," which chronicled her attempt to lose weight and launch a weight-loss program while working as a single mother in an unconventional household that included pet lemurs.

Alley said she agreed to do the show in part because of the misinformation about her that had become a tabloid staple.

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"Anything bad you can say about me, they say," Alley told the AP at the time. "I've never collapsed, fainted, passed out. Basically, anything they've said, I never. The only true thing is I got fat."

In recent years she appeared on several other reality shows, including a second-place finish on "Dancing With the Stars" in 2011. She appeared on the competition series "The Masked Singer" wearing a baby mammoth costume earlier this year.

She appeared in the Ryan Murphy black comedy series "Scream Queens" on Fox in 2015 and 2016.

One of her co-stars on the show, Jamie Lee Curtis, said on Instagram Monday that Alley was "a great comic foil" on the show and "a beautiful mama bear in her very real life."

Alley's "Cheers" co-star Kelsey Grammer said in a statement that "I always believed grief for a public figure is a private matter, but I will say I loved her."

Another "Cheers" co-star, Rhea Perlman, recounted how she and Alley became friends almost instantly after she joined the show. She said Alley organized large Easter and Halloween parties and invited everyone. "She wanted everyone to feel included. She loved her children deeply. I've never met anyone remotely like her. I feel so thankful to have known her."

A native of Wichita, Kansas, Alley attended Kansas State University before dropping out and moving to Los Angeles.

Like Travolta, she would become a longtime member of the Church of Scientology.

Her first television appearances were as a game show contestant, on "The Match Game" in 1979 and "Password" in 1980.

She made her film debut in 1982's "Star Trek: The Wrath of Khan."

Other film roles included 1987's "Summer School," 1995's "Village of the Damned" and 1999's "Drop Dead Gorgeous."

Alley was married to her high school sweetheart from 1970 to 1977, and to actor Parker Stevenson from 1983 until 1997.

She told the AP in 2010 if she married again, "I'd leave the guy within 24 hours because I'm sure he'd tell me not to do something."

Man arrested after egg allegedly thrown at King Charles III

LONDON (AP) — A man was arrested Tuesday on suspicion of assault after an egg was allegedly hurled towards King Charles III during a visit to a town center, police said.

Bedfordshire Police said a man in his 20s was being questioned over an alleged common assault.

Charles was meeting members of the public outside the town hall in Luton, 30 miles (46 kilometers) north of London, when the projectile was apparently thrown. He was moved to a different area by his security guards and resumed shaking hands with members of the public.

The king has traveled widely across Britain since becoming monarch on the death of his mother, Queen Elizabeth II, in September. He was due to visit several sites in Luton on Tuesday, including a transit station and a Sikh house of worship, a gurdwara.

Last month a 23-year-old man was arrested after eggs were hurled at Charles and his wife Camilla, the queen consort, during a visit to York, northern England. The man was later released on bail.

Will Smith's 'Emancipation' role taught him lesson post-slap

By JONATHAN LANDRUM Jr. AP Entertainment Writer

LOS ANGELES (AP) — While filming "Emancipation," Will Smith routinely drew inspiration from the words "sacred motivation" that were written on the front page of a script. But the Oscar winner heavily leaned on the phrase even more in recent months, as he tried to overcome the backlash to his Oscars slap and banishment from the ceremony.

"It's like when you can locate and center yourself in your divine purpose, you can withstand anything and everything," Smith said of the phrase that greeted him when he took on the lead role in Antoine Fuqua's "Emancipation," which is currently in theaters and will be available to stream Friday on Apple TV+. "Sacred

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motivation" became like a theme for him and his castmates, Smith said.

The film, completed months before Smith strode onto the Oscars stage and slapped presenter Chris Rock for a joke about Smith's wife, Jada Pinkett-Smith, was a grueling shoot. Inspired by an iconic 1863 photo of the scarred back of "Whipped Peter," Smith portrays the character Peter — a man who attempts to escape slavery while he uses his wits to dodge slave hunters and brave alligator-infested Louisiana swamps in his quest for freedom.

The photos of "Whipped Peter" were taken during a Union Army medical examination that first appeared in Harper's Weekly. An image known as "The Scourged Back" showed countless mutilated whip marks on Peter's bare back that were delivered by his enslavers. The photo contributed to the growing opposition to slavery.

Smith said his character taught him a lesson in overcoming adversity after he faced condemnation, memes and a 10-year Oscars attendance ban. The "slap" seemingly overshadowed his own biggest career milestone, which came later in the night: winning his first-ever Academy Award, best actor for "King Richard."

The backlash rocked Smith, but Peter ultimately helped steer him back on track too.

"Peter has absolutely helped me through these last few months, just reestablishing within myself in what my purpose is in this world," Smith said in a recent interview, one of his first since the Oscars. He has repeatedly apologized for his behavior after accepting his ban.

Normally, "Emancipation" might earn Smith some serious Oscars buzz. He's still eligible for nominations and awards, but can't personally accept them. Given backlash to "The Slap," Smith mainly hopes that audiences will still watch Fuqua's film.

"This movie was so grueling. Literally across the board, everybody had to devote a hefty amount of suffering to what you see on that screen," Smith said. "So my greatest wish, and I guess I can talk about my greatest fear, is that my team would be penalized for my actions. I'm out with this film that I love and strictly want my people to get their flowers."

Fuqua knows Smith made a mistake, but he hopes audiences can move past it. The director believes the story about Peter's search for freedom, fighting to get back to his family and being a catalyst in highlighting the horrific side of slavery in "Emancipation" is much bigger than "The Slap."

"Peter's story is so inspiring, especially as a Black man. We go through a lot of things daily, just being Black," said Fuqua, known for directing "Training Day," "Equalizer" films and "The Magnificent Seven." He said his new film tackles how certain elements of racism in America that still occur today.

"For me, it's a mistake," Fuqua said of Smith striking Rock on live television. "Hopefully everybody can get back on track and God bless everyone. But we're talking about 400 years of brutality."

Bingwa, who plays Peter's wife Dodiene, credits Smith's ability to endure the adversity while pushing forward through it.

"It's in line with the film. I imagine it's been a tough period," said Bingwa, who hopes audiences can learn more about Peter's determination to return home after making a promise. "I don't want to speak on Will's behalf, but he's been an inspiration to so many for so long. I love seeing him with his head held high. Everyone can learn from his experience. I just love the way you took it on the chin, you're wearing it and walking forward. We're all human."

While promoting the film, Smith held private screenings for several influential figures including Rihanna, Tyler Perry, Dave Chappelle, LeBron James and his Los Angeles Lakers teammates along with students at Morehouse College. He garnered a great amount of support from those individuals, giving him somewhat a sigh of relief.

Each time Smith harkened back to Peter's story, the more he became empowered to share his character's journey.

"I feel very comfortable in this current situation with this project, with these people," he said. "I feel cleansed. I feel purified and transformed in many ways. And as one of the lessons from Peter is, 'Suffering leads to salvation.' So I am comfortable taking my medicine."

5 plants that say 'holiday season,' and how to care for them

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By JEFF LOWENFELS Associated Press

Holiday horticulture tends to revolve around the same handful of plants. So if you don't already have any or all of these five holiday plants, now is the time to get them:

PAPERWHITES

The bulbs of these daffodil family members are pre-chilled so they can be planted now and produce flowers in a month to six weeks. If you find them for sale, by all means buy as many as you can. The only caveat is that some family members may object to the unbelievably sweet smell of their blooms.

While you can grow these bulbs by siting their bases in just a bit of water, it is best to plant them in a shallow container of soil. They don't need much water and will perform well if given the best light you have. If yours sprouts, you are guaranteed flowers, at least the first year. People usually toss them when they are finished, as they're unlikely to flower again.

POINSETTIAS

Poinsettias, of course, are for sale in all manner of venues this time of year. Many of us buy them, keep them for the next few weeks and then toss them. The trick is to keep them alive for the holiday season.

This requires first bringing the plant home with a minimum exposure to cold air. If you live in a cold climate, consider warming the car before transporting them. Once home, the plants should not be exposed to drafts from doorways or windows. Place them where daytime temperatures are between 65 and 75 Fahrenheit, and with 60 as an ideal night temp.

Soak the entire pot whenever the surface turns dry. Let them drain, and keep checking the soil surface for the next dunking.

Poinsettias should never sit in water, so if you want to keep the decorative foil that accompanies many of them, poke a hole in it to let water out.

CHRISTMAS TREES

These, too, are their own gardening activity. Make sure your tree is kept in plenty of water and pay the strictest attention to safety rules if you use lights. After Christmas, look for a place that will chip up and recycle your tree, or place it in a back corner of your yard as cover for birds.

AMARYLLIS

These are the easiest and showiest bulbs you can buy, and they produce the largest flowers you are ever likely to grow. They are usually sold together with pot and soil, and all you need to do is ensure yours is planted so that 1/3 of the top of the bulb is above the soil line.

Keep the plant growing right through summer. Then put yours into a cool, dark location so it goes dormant, to be brought out again next holiday season for flowering.

CHRISTMAS CACTUS

Christmas cactuses, Schlumbergeras, are another great plant that blooms during the mid-winter holidays. They will live for dozens of holiday seasons (some are passed on from one generation to the next) and bloom each year if exposed to shortening days. Rooting cuttings is easy using just a leaf, so it is not uncommon for a clone of the same plant to be in more than one family member's home.

Christmas cactuses do best in bright light. When it is in bloom, a Christmas cactus should only be watered when the soil is dry. Too much water and the flowers will drop off, so this is one of those times when too dry is better than too wet.

The rest of the year, water by soaking the pot when the surface soil dries out. Next fall, give yours natural light and keep cool, up against a window, and they will bloom again.

Many kids are struggling. Is special education the answer?

By HEATHER HOLLINGSWORTH Associated Press

The COVID-19 pandemic sent Heidi Whitney's daughter into a tailspin.

Suddenly the San Diego middle schooler was sleeping all day and awake all night. When in-person classes resumed, she was so anxious at times that she begged to come home early, telling the nurse her stomach hurt.

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Whitney tried to keep her daughter in class. But the teen's desperate bids to get out of school escalated. Ultimately, she was hospitalized in a psychiatric ward, failed "pretty much everything" at school and was diagnosed with depression and ADHD.

As she started high school this fall, she was deemed eligible for special education services, because her disorders interfered with her ability to learn, but school officials said it was a close call. It was hard to know how much her symptoms were chronic or the result of mental health issues brought on by the pandemic, they said.

"They put my kid in a gray area," said Whitney, a paralegal.

Schools contending with soaring student mental health needs and other challenges have been struggling to determine just how much the pandemic is to blame. Are the challenges the sign of a disability that will impair a student's learning long term, or something more temporary?

It all adds to the desperation of parents trying to figure out how best to help their children. If a child doesn't qualify for special education, where should parents go for help?

"I feel like because she went through the pandemic and she didn't experience the normal junior high, the normal middle school experience, she developed the anxiety, the deep depression and she didn't learn. She didn't learn how to become a social kid," Whitney said. "Everything got turned on its head."

Schools are required to spell out how they will meet the needs of students with disabilities in Individualized Education Programs, and the demand for screening is high. Some schools have struggled to catch up with assessments that were delayed in the early days of the pandemic. For many, the task is also complicated by shortages of psychologists.

To qualify for special education services, a child's school performance must be suffering because of a disability in one of 13 categories, according to federal law. They include autism, attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder, learning disabilities like dyslexia, developmental delays and "emotional disturbances."

It's important not to send children who might have had a tough time during the pandemic into the special education system, said John Eisenberg, the executive director of the National Association of State Directors of Special Education.

"That's not what it was designed for," he said. "It's really designed for kids who need specially designed instruction. It's a lifelong learning problem, not a dumping ground for kids that might have not got the greatest instruction during the pandemic or have major other issues."

In the 2020-2021 school year, about 15% of all public school students received special education services under federal law, according to the National Center for Education Statistics.

Among kids ages 6 and older, special education enrollment rose by 2.4% compared with the previous school year, according to federal data. The figures also showed a large drop in enrollment for younger, preschool-age students, many of whom were slow to return to formal schooling. The numbers varied widely from state to state. No data is available yet for last year.

While some special education directors worry the system is taking on too many students, advocates are hearing the opposite is happening, with schools moving too quickly to dismiss parent concerns.

Even now, some children are still having evaluations pushed off because of staffing shortages, said Marcie Lipsitt, a special education advocate in Michigan. In one district, evaluations came to a complete halt in May because there was no school psychologist to do them, she said.

When Heather Wright approached her son's school last fall seeking help with the 9-year-old's outbursts and other behavioral issues, staff suggested private testing. The stay-at-home mom from Sand Creek, Michigan, called eight places. The soonest she could get an appointment was in December of this year — a full 14 months later.

She also suspects her 16-year-old has a learning disability and is waiting for answers from the school about both children.

"I hear a lot of: 'Well, everyone's worse. It's not just yours,'" she said. "Yeah, but, like, this is my child and he needs help."

It can be challenging to tease out the differences between problems that stem directly from the pandemic and a true disability, said Brandi Tanner, an Atlanta-based psychologist who has been deluged with

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parents seeking evaluations for potential learning disabilities, ADHD and autism.

"I'm asking a lot more background questions about pre-COVID versus post-COVID, like, 'Is this a change in functioning or was it something that was present before and has just lingered or gotten worse?'" she said.

Sherry Bell, a leader in the Department of Exceptional Children at Charleston County School District in South Carolina, said she is running into the issue as well.

"In my 28 years in special education, you know, having to rule out all of those factors is much more of a consideration than ever before, just because of the pandemic and the fact that kids spent all of that time at home," said Bell.

The key is to have good systems in place to distinguish between a student with a lasting obstacle to learning and one that missed a lot of school because of the pandemic, said Kevin Rubenstein, president-elect of the Council of Administrators of Special Education.

"Good school leaders and great teachers are going to be able to do that," he said.

The federal government, he noted, has provided vast amounts of COVID relief money for schools to offer tutoring, counseling and other support to help students recover from the pandemic.

But advocates worry about consequences down the line for students who do not receive the help they might need. Kids who slip through the cracks could end up having more disciplinary problems and diminished prospects for life after school, said Dan Stewart, the managing attorney for education and employment for the National Disability Rights Network.

Whitney, for her part, said she is relieved her daughter is getting help, including a case manager, as part of her IEP. She also will be able to leave class as needed if she feels anxious.

"I realize that a lot of kids were going through this," she said. "We just went through COVID. Give them a break."

Today in History: December 7, Japan attacks Pearl Harbor

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Wednesday, Dec. 7, the 341st day of 2022. There are 24 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On Dec. 7, 1941, the Empire of Japan launched an air raid on the U.S. Navy base at Pearl Harbor in Hawaii as well as targets in Malaya, Hong Kong, Guam, the Philippines and Wake Island; the United States declared war against Japan the next day.

On this date:

In 1787, Delaware became the first state to ratify the U.S. Constitution.

In 1796, electors chose John Adams to be the second president of the United States.

In 1917, during World War I, the United States declared war on Austria-Hungary.

In 1963, during the Army-Navy game, videotaped instant replay was used for the first time in a live sports telecast.

In 1972, America's last moon mission to date was launched as Apollo 17 blasted off from Cape Canaveral.

In 1982, convicted murderer Charlie Brooks Jr. became the first U.S. prisoner to be executed by injection, at a prison in Huntsville, Texas.

In 1988, a major earthquake in the Soviet Union devastated northern Armenia; official estimates put the death toll at 25-thousand.

In 2001, Taliban forces abandoned their last bastion in Afghanistan, fleeing the southern city of Kandahar.

In 2004, Hamid Karzai (HAH'-mihd KAHR'-zeYE) was sworn in as Afghanistan's first popularly elected president.

In 2017, Democratic Sen. Al Franken said he would resign after a series of sexual harassment allegations; he took a parting shot at President Donald Trump, describing him as "a man who has bragged on tape about his history of sexual assault." Republican Rep. Trent Franks of Arizona said he would resign, after revealing that he discussed surrogacy with two female staffers.

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In 2018, the man who drove his car into counterprotesters at a 2017 white nationalist rally in Virginia was convicted of first-degree murder; a state jury rejected defense arguments that James Alex Fields Jr. acted in self-defense.

In 2020, retired Air Force Brig. Gen. Charles "Chuck" Yeager, the World War II fighter pilot ace and quintessential test pilot who in 1947 became the first person to fly faster than sound, died at 97.

Ten years ago: President Barack Obama asked Congress for \$60.4 billion in federal aid for New York, New Jersey and other states hit by Superstorm Sandy (lawmakers ended up passing a \$50.5 billion emergency relief measure in addition to a \$9.7 billion bill to replenish the National Flood Insurance Program).

Five years ago: A white former South Carolina police officer, Michael Slager, was sentenced to 20 years in prison for the fatal shooting of an unarmed black motorist, Walter Scott, in North Charleston in 2015. Demonstrators in the Gaza Strip burned U.S. flags and pictures of President Trump, and Palestinian protesters clashed with Israeli forces in east Jerusalem and the West Bank, after Trump's decision to recognize Jerusalem as Israel's capital.

One year ago: During a video call lasting more than two hours, President Joe Biden warned Russia's Vladimir Putin that a Russian invasion of Ukraine would bring sanctions and enormous harm to the Russian economy. A major outage in Amazon's cloud computing network severely disrupted services at a wide range of U.S. companies for more than five hours, impacting everything from airline reservations and auto dealerships to payment apps and video streaming services.

Today's Birthdays: Linguist and political philosopher Noam Chomsky is 94. Bluegrass singer Bobby Osborne is 91. Actor Ellen Burstyn is 90. Broadcast journalist Carole Simpson is 82. Baseball Hall of Famer Johnny Bench is 75. Actor-director-producer James Keach is 75. Country singer Gary Morris is 74. Singer-songwriter Tom Waits is 73. Sen. Susan M. Collins, R-Maine, is 70. Basketball Hall of Famer Larry Bird is 66. Actor Priscilla Barnes is 65. Former "Tonight Show" announcer Edd (cq) Hall is 64. Rock musician Tim Butler (The Psychedelic Furs) is 64. Actor Patrick Fabian is 58. Actor Jeffrey Wright is 57. Actor C. Thomas Howell is 56. Actor Kimberly Hébert Gregory (TV: "Kevin (Probably) Saves the World") is 50. Producer-director Jason Winer is 50. Former NFL player Terrell Owens is 49. Rapper-producer Kon Artis is 48. Pop singer Nicole Appleton (All Saints) is 47. Latin singer Frankie J is 46. Country singer Sunny Sweeney is 46. Actor Chris Chalk is 45. Actor Shiri Appleby is 44. Pop-rock singer/celebrity judge Sara Bareilles (bah-REHL-es) is 43. Actor Jennifer Carpenter is 43. Actor Jack Huston is 40. MLB first baseman Pete Alonso is 28.