

Groton Daily Independent

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Groton Community Calendar

Tuesday, Dec. 13

NO SCHOOL

Senior Menu: Scalloped potato with ham, green peas, sunset salad, oatmeal raisin cookie, whole wheat bread.

Emmanuel Lutheran council, 7 p.m.

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

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

Conde UMC Advent Bible Study, 6 p.m.

Wednesday, Dec. 14

Senior Menu: Tuna noodle casserole, peas and carrots, Swedish apple pie square, whole wheat bread.

School Breakfast: Hash brown, pizza.

School Lunch: Turkey gravy over mashed potatoes, cranberries, fresh baked bun.

St. John's Bible Study, 2:45 p.m.; Confirmation, 3:45 p.m.; Advent Service, 7 p.m.

Emmanuel Lutheran Confirmation, 6 p.m.

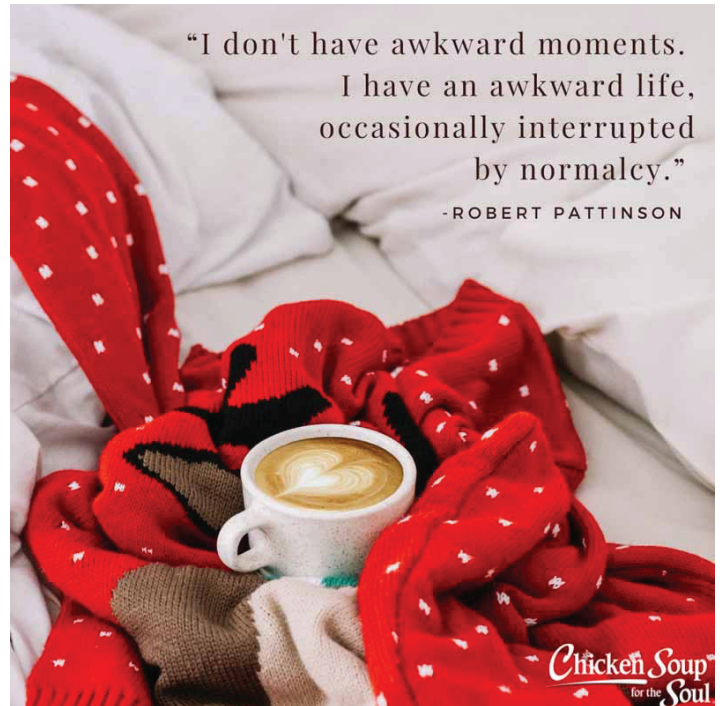
Community Coffee Hour at Groton UMC, 9:30 a.m.; Confirmation, 4 p.m.; Gingerbread Bash, 5 p.m.; Christmas Caroling Event, 6:30 p.m.

Thursday, Dec. 15

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PO Box 34, Groton SD 57445

Paul's Cell/Text: 605-397-7460



Senior Menu: Sloppy Joe on wheat bun, oven roasted potatoes, mixed vegetables, fruit sauce.

School Breakfast: Oatmeal with toppings.

School Lunch: Hamburgers, fries.

NEC Wrestling Tournament at Webster, 4 p.m.

JHGBB at Tiospa Zina (7th grade at 4 p.m. followed by 8th grade)

Boys Basketball hosts Sisseton, 6 p.m.

Friday, Dec. 16

Senior Menu: Hot turkey combo, mashed potatoes with gravy, 7 layer salad, fruit.

School Breakfast: Cereal

School Lunch: Pizza, cooked carrots.

Saturday, Dec. 17

Emmanuel Lutheran worship at Rosewood Court, 10 a.m.

Wrestling Tournament at Sioux Valley, 10 a.m.

Basketball at Jamestown College (Boys play Enderlin at 1:15 pm.; Girls play Kenmare at 2:40 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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Governor Noem Closes State Government Offices Statewide

PIERRE, S.D. – Today, Gov. Kristi Noem ordered all state government executive branch offices statewide to be closed Tuesday, Dec. 13, because of the winter storm expected in South Dakota.

The National Weather Service forecast calls for freezing rain, heavy snow, and high winds to occur throughout South Dakota. Travel will be impacted in those areas.

Officials continue to closely monitor the storm. A decision on state government office availability for Wednesday will be made Tuesday.

Citizens should be prepared to stay home Tuesday if possible. If they must travel, they should check sd511.org or the SD511 mobile app.

Interstate Closures Anticipated Across South Dakota Beginning Tuesday, Dec. 13, 2022

PIERRE, S.D. – Due to a strong winter storm system predicted to bring freezing rain, substantial snow totals, low visibility, drifting snow and high winds, closures on portions of Interstate 90 in western and central South Dakota are expected mid-morning on Tuesday, Dec. 13, 2022. Closures on portions of Interstate 29 north of Brookings are expected mid-day on Tuesday, Dec. 13, 2022. State officials will continue to assess the storm path and road conditions overnight.

Motorists should be aware that freezing rain, accumulating snow, and strong winds are anticipated to make sections of I-90 and I-29 impassable over an extended period of time as this storm system moves through the state over the next few days.

The SDDOT anticipates secondary highways will also become impassable. Numerous No Travel Advisories are also expected to be in place on state highways throughout the state.

SDDOT and South Dakota Department of Public Safety (DPS) are sharing anticipated Interstate closures to encourage travelers to adjust travel plans accordingly in advance of this storm system.

Safety on the roadways, for plow operators and the traveling public, is the number one priority for both DOT and DPS. Please use available resources for travel planning over the next few days.

For the latest on road and weather conditions, please visit <https://sd511.org> or dial 511.

For more information about SDDOT highway winter weather planning and services, access the Winter Highway Maintenance Plan at <https://dot.sd.gov/media/documents/External%20WHMP.pdf>.

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Bisbee is finalist at BIG Idea

Back row: (From left to right) Garrett Crawford, Aberdeen Roncalli; Chayse Shoemaker, Webster; Emily Tuschen, McCook Central; Alyx Hoffman, Leola; Kamryn Anderson, Kiah Koch and Kendyl Anderson, Warner (Wellness Winner)

Front row: (From left to right) Beau Price, Aberdeen Roncalli (Marketing Design Winner); Pack Forster, Howard (2nd Place Winner); Cole Bisbee, Groton (3rd Place and Ag Innovation Winner); Noah Felderman, Doland (1st Place Winner)

Not Pictured: Blaize Larson, Webster (Hometown Business Winner) (Troy McQuillen and Elizabeth Varin)

The 2022 BIG Idea Competition marked a milestone with new opportunities for high school students. A total of 277 entries were received involving over 357 students from 54 schools. For the first time in competition history, a separate virtual competition was held for finalists outside of South Dakota. These were judged by a separate judging panel and separate prizes awarded. The 2022 event wrapped up Wednesday, December 7, at Northern State University (NSU) with the in-state judging taking place followed by the Awards Ceremony where winners from both competitions were announced along with four special category awards. Nearly \$50,000 in cash and scholarships were awarded. The livestream link for the event can be found on the BIG Idea Facebook page (@BIGIdeaSD).

Noah Felderman of Doland High School took first place with Feldy's Ice Cream, a mobile ice cream shop in a converted school bus serving South Dakota State University (SDSU) ice cream and other fun summer treats! Feldy's Ice Cream has been operation for a couple years now. His prize includes \$1,000 cash prize, a \$2,500 scholarship to NSU, a \$2,000 scholarship to Presentation College and a \$2,500 scholarship to the South Dakota School of Mines & Technology.

Second place went to Free Bird RC, by Pack Forster from Howard. Free Bird RC utilizes 3D printing technology to provide printing and rapid prototyping services to remote control (RC) vehicle hobbyists and

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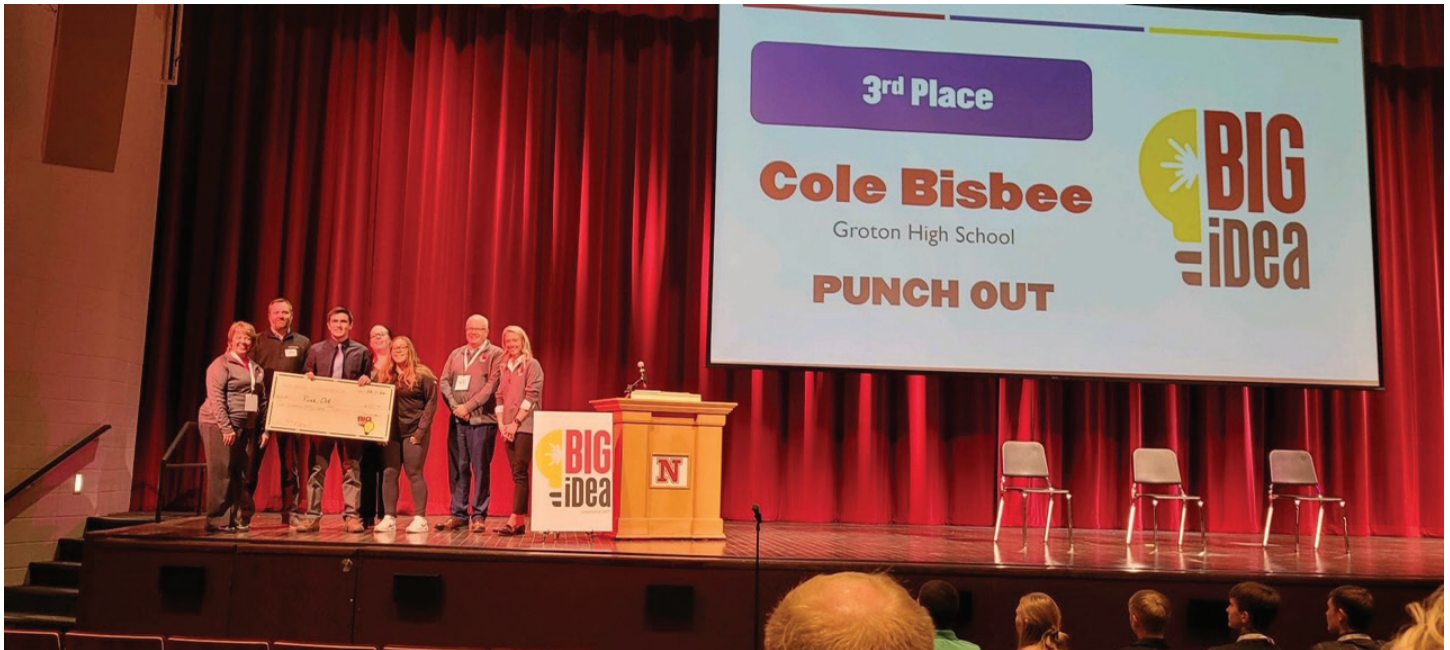


Photo Courtesy Amanda Bisbee

businesses alike. Second place prizes include \$500 cash, \$2,000 NSU scholarship, \$1,000 Presentation College scholarship, and \$1,000 South Dakota School of Mines & Technology.

Third place was awarded to Punch Out, by Cole Bisbee of Groton High School. Punch Out Tool Company, designed Punch Out, a spring-loaded, hand-held punch specifically designed for working on haybines. The Punch Out is best suited for punching out broken sickle teeth on haybines, where it is hard to fit a hammer. It can be used around the farm and at home too. Third place prizes include \$250 cash, \$1,500 NSU scholarship, \$1,000 Presentation College scholarship and \$1,000 South Dakota School of Mines & Technology. Punch Out also won the Agriculture Innovation Category award with a \$500 cash prize and \$500 scholarship from NSU. This year, 33 entries were judged in the Agriculture Innovation category, sponsored by the South Dakota Agriculture Foundation.

The 5 remaining finalists will be receiving \$100 cash and \$1,000 scholarships to Presentation College, Northern State University, and the South Dakota School of Mines & Technology. The other finalists included VaCay Check-In by Emily Tuschen from McCook Central High School, Native Cleaners by Chayse Shoemaker from Webster High School, Sleek Steel Buildings LLC by Garrett Crawford from Aberdeen Roncalli High School, Countryside Living by Kamryn Anderson, Kendyl Anderson, and Kiah Koch from Warner High School, and 2 Doors by Alyx Hoffman from Leola High School.

Freeze Dried Fun, by Beau Price of Aberdeen Roncalli High School, won the Marketing Design portion of the competition. The Marketing Design competition is an option for students to create an ad for their business idea. The award is sponsored by McQuillen Creative Group which donates \$500 cash and Northern State University donates a \$500 scholarship as well. This year, 176 entries were judged in this category.

Countryside Living, by finalists Kamryn Anderson, Kendyl Anderson and Kiah Koch from Warner, also won the Wellness Category award with a \$500 cash prize and \$500 scholarship from NSU. This year's Wellness Category, sponsored by Sanford Health, had a total of 50 qualifying entries.

Staging and Designing Success by Blaize Larson from Webster High School won our newest special category, Hometown Business. The award is sponsored by the South Dakota Retailers Association which donates \$500 cash and Northern State University donates a \$500 scholarship as well. This year, 120 entries were judged in this category.

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Photo Courtesy Amanda Bisbee

As mentioned, this was the first time we've held a separate virtual competition for finalists outside of South Dakota. Taking first place in this competition was Stefan Neuber from Windsor High School in California with his idea MatheX. In second we had Samuel Fan and Steven Xu from Valley Christian High School in California with their idea KindKibble. CulturalMunch by Arush Sharma and Tanush Garg from Ashland High School in Massachusetts took 3rd place.

During the Awards Ceremony, students also heard from three business owners in the area: Dave Vilhauer, SD SportScene; Brianna Kulser, Kusler Clinics; and Cam Schock, Climate Control.

The Partners in Business Award is sponsored by Angelhaus to reward the networking and mentorship experiences teachers have incorporated into their classroom. This year's recipients of the Partners in Business award are Donna Herrick at Aberdeen Roncalli High School, Kaylan Pool at Webster High School and Brandt Munsen at Aberdeen Central High School.

About BIG Idea: The BIG Idea Competition aims to promote entrepreneurship, spur creative thinking and encourage students to start a business. The competition is coordinated by the Small Business Development Center. Sponsors for 2022 include Sanford Health, East River Electric, REED Fund, Dacotah Bank, First Bank and Trust, SD Retailers Association, Northern State University, Presentation College, South Dakota School of Mines & Technology, Aberdeen Development Corporation, GROW South Dakota, McQuillen Creative Group, Independent Health Solutions, Northwestern Energy, Angelhaus, South Dakota Agriculture Foundation, Midcontinent Communications, 3M, Agtegra, Missouri River Energy Services, and the Tom and Danielle Aman Foundation. The Competition is a result of the input and collaboration of many organizations including: Aberdeen Area Chamber of Commerce, Aberdeen Downtown Association, Aberdeen Catholic School System, and Aberdeen School District. For more information about the competition, see [HYPERLINK "http://www.BIGIdeaSD.com"](http://www.BIGIdeaSD.com) www.BIGIdeaSD.com.



Daktronics reports \$13 million loss in second quarter

Brookings company blames liquidity problems on pandemic, supply chain

BY: MAKENZIE HUBER - DECEMBER 12, 2022 5:04 PM

Brookings-based manufacturer Daktronics lost \$13 million in the second quarter of its fiscal year, the company revealed Monday in a delayed earnings report.

The company blamed supply chain problems and higher costs for materials, labor and freight. The company said it aggressively secured inventory to address supply chain volatility, and that approach consumed cash.

"These times have stressed our liquidity beyond levels that we have ever seen, and our financial resources have not been sufficiently flexible," President and CEO Reece Kurtenbach said in a news release. "Our immediate priority is to restore our balance sheet to historical levels of liquidity. We are pursuing avenues to strengthen our financing flexibility by adding liquidity and diversifying our funding sources."

The earnings report included net sales of \$187 million during the quarter. The report was delayed last week due to "substantial doubt" about the company's ability to continue, and the discovery of a "material weakness relating to the lack of adequate and appropriate financial reporting." That information sent Daktronics stocks plummeting by 39% last week to as low as \$1.46 per share.

As of Monday, the company's stock rose as high as \$2.48, which was still about a dollar lower than before the company delayed its earnings report.

Daktronics is one of South Dakota's best-known success stories and is an anchor business for the community of Brookings. Since its founding 54 years ago in a garage by two engineering professors at South Dakota State University, the company has become a leading manufacturer of scoreboards, LED screens and other displays across the country, including professional sports teams. Daktronics became a publicly traded company in 1994.

Daktronics' footprint includes about 2,500 employees worldwide, with more than half of those in South Dakota.

During a conference call with investors on Monday, Kurtenbach said the company "understands the concern" caused by last week's postponement of the earnings report.

Leadership explained to investors Monday that the company has a historic high of \$463 million worth of "necessary backlog buildup" due to the pandemic and supply chain problems.

In response to that situation, the company amended its credit terms. The company subsequently concluded during the preparation of its quarterly financials that, according to accounting principles, the new credit arrangement raised substantial doubts about the company's ability to continue. That accounted for last week's postponement of the earnings report.

"The company continues to evaluate its disclosure controls and procedures and internal controls over financial reporting," Daktronics said Monday in a news release.

Kurtenbach elaborated on supply chain problems in the Monday conference call, adding that the economic downturn due to the pandemic and "sudden rebound" in activity stressed liquidity without flexible financial resources to deal with the demand.

Kurtenbach said the company didn't increase the sales prices for customers at the time and took on additional costs to fulfill projects by their deadlines.

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"We achieved sales increases even though our capacity was constrained due to significant and unusual part shortages, a challenging labor environment, operating disruptions from COVID-19 related absences, and the first quarter COVID-19 mandated shutdown of our Shanghai production facilities," Kurtenbach said.

Daktronics leadership said they increased prices for customers in late 2021 and throughout this year to address the increased cost of sales, and they expect to see those increased prices affect the financial performance throughout the next year.

To improve cash flow and enhance its liquidity, the company's plan of action includes normalizing inventory levels as supply chain disruptions ease. Daktronics expects inventory levels to peak in the third quarter and return to normal as the order backlog is filled and purchases are reduced.

The company also plans to implement supply chain resiliency measures, improve its operating margin through price increases, and invest in factory capacity expansion and equipment. Only "critical production and service personnel" will be hired in that timeframe to increase output.

"As supply chains continue to ease, we are further conserving cash by reducing inventory purchases and lowering inventory levels," Kurtenbach said. "We are prudently managing operating costs. We will continue to actively monitor market and supply conditions, adjusting pricing and operations accordingly."



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.

Consultant: \$100 million Expo building replacement would secure fairgrounds future

Sioux Empire Fair losing ground to more modern facilities

BY: JOHN HULT - DECEMBER 12, 2022 1:52 PM

A \$100 million investment in the W.H. Lyon Fairgrounds Expo building would translate into another 100 days of use each year and another half-million dollars in economic impact for the Sioux Falls area.

Those figures represented just a few of the conclusions from a consultant who presented to a Monday meeting of the Minnehaha County Commission and its fairgrounds task force. The county-owned W.H. Lyon Fairgrounds plays host to the most well-attended fair in South Dakota each summer and a wide range of events throughout the year.

The county is the owner, responsible for upkeep and management, but does not see a share of the sales tax revenues generated by the events. State law directs sales tax revenues to the state and cities, while counties rely on property tax revenues.

That's one reason the commission convened the task force and hired consultants Charles D. Smith Architecture and Planning, and CSL International, to assess the fairgrounds' future. Another push for a consultant review came in the form of a \$65 million offer from Knife River Corp. to buy the land for an expanded quarry in July.

The deed for the fairgrounds specifies that it be used for the fair, so some commissioners dispatched the idea of a sale right away. But state law does allow such land grant covenants to be broken if meeting the expectations becomes economically untenable. The cost of upgrades, the potential of a sale and rapidly expanding slate of event center options in the area and around the state each factored into the decision to hire a consultant.

The county has always been in a difficult place with regard to the fairgrounds funding, Commissioner Dean Karsky said. Nothing in the report changes that.

"The county owns the property and is expected to maintain it, but the county's not the winner with these events," Karsky said. "The city and the sales taxes get the benefit."

Location a plus for Sioux Falls fairgrounds

On Monday, CSL's Joel Feldman told commissioners and members of the 15-person study group that the fairgrounds have a great location and are well-utilized – for now.

Beyond the fair, the fairgrounds hosts a weekly food giveaway, monthly flea markets, livestock shows, an annual dog show, a renaissance festival and a model train show. Most non-fair events are housed in the Expo building.

It all adds up to 54 events, 139 event days and half a million visitors each year. Taken together, they contribute \$1.1 million in state sales taxes annually, as well as \$496,000 in city sales taxes and \$311,000 in tourism and business investment district taxes.

Event organizers like the location just off Interstate 29, as well as the wealth of entertainment and recreational opportunities afforded by South Dakota's largest metropolitan area.

The fairgrounds' reputation could suffer without investment, though, Feldman told the group.

"We're not up to industry standards in many respects at the fairgrounds," he said.

Surveys with event-holders revealed some concerns about the 80-year-old fairgrounds. Facilities comparable to the Expo building around the country that have invested in modernization are now better positioned to host a wider range of events, he said.

E-sports tournaments, augmented reality/virtual reality events or drone racing competitions count as just a few of the new opportunities on the table if the county were to invest in an upgrade.

Feldman's report recommended a new Expo building with 50,000 square feet for events, 100,000 square feet for exhibits and 7,500 square feet of meeting rooms. Cost estimates ranged from \$84 million to \$105 million, though Feldman cautioned that price volatility could push actual costs far higher.

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The fair has already lost business to state-level competition, according to Sioux Empire Fair Manager Scott Wick. A new building at the South Dakota State Fair has drawn interest from multiple organizers that formerly rented the Expo building.

"We've had events book at the DEX in Huron, even though it's not even built yet," Wick said.

Return on investment questioned

Study group members peppered Feldman with questions about the cost of current operations, survey results and the wisdom of an investment that would force the county to charge higher rent to event organizers to recoup costs.

"There may be some of those events where the attractiveness now is the low rate," said Bob Thimjon, a Sioux Falls hotelier and member of the study group.

But higher rents or dynamic pricing based on event type might not scare off the kinds of events the county could target with newer facilities, said group member Jeff Eckhoff, director of planning and development services for the city of Sioux Falls.

"With a higher-end facility, you'd get the kinds of events that can pay more," Eckhoff said.

Commissioner Jean Bender, meanwhile, was among those who pointed out that the event-related economic impact to the state and local economy doesn't necessarily translate into county revenue. The county budget is built from property taxes; sales taxes go elsewhere.

Operating expenses for a new facility would put the fair in the red during construction and in the first three years thereafter, but would rebound to manageable levels, Feldman told the group. Four years out from a new building's opening, once operational expenses stabilize, the area would see an additional \$29 million of economic activity a year.

Those projected figures are only appealing under an assumption that the county finds the cash to pay for the upgrade, though. Were the burden to fall on the back of the county alone, "we can't afford it," said Commission Chair Cindy Heiberger.

The consultant report did lay out a number of pathways to funding beyond county coffers. Grants and donations, sales tax contributions from the city, naming rights sales or higher registration fees could help fill in funding gaps.

Amy Pokela, a community representative on the study group, said she's excited to learn about the area's reaction to the proposal. That reaction will help the county decide if the legwork and negotiation will be worth the effort.

"If the community supports this, all those other things will work themselves out," Pokela said.



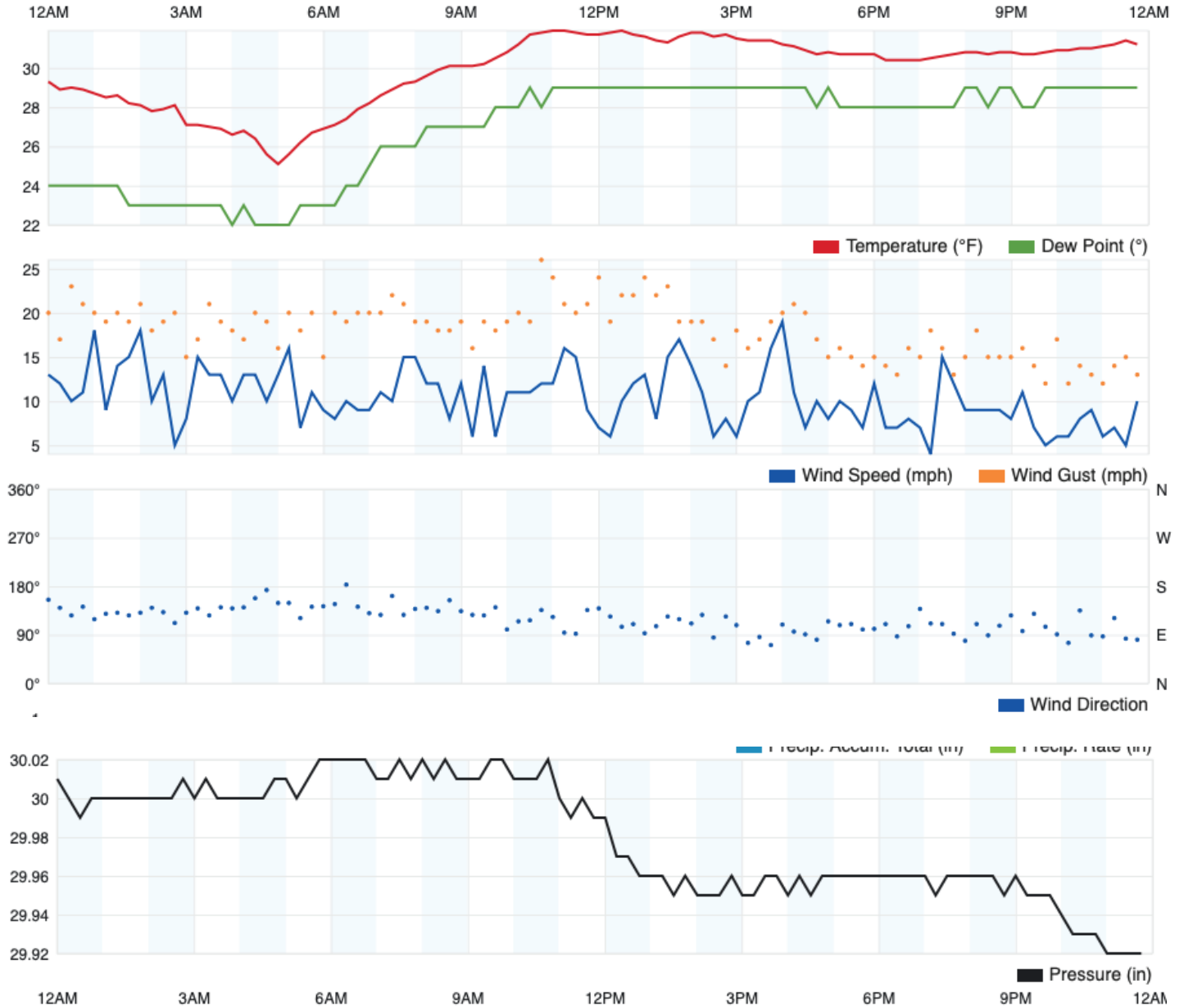
JOHN HULT  

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

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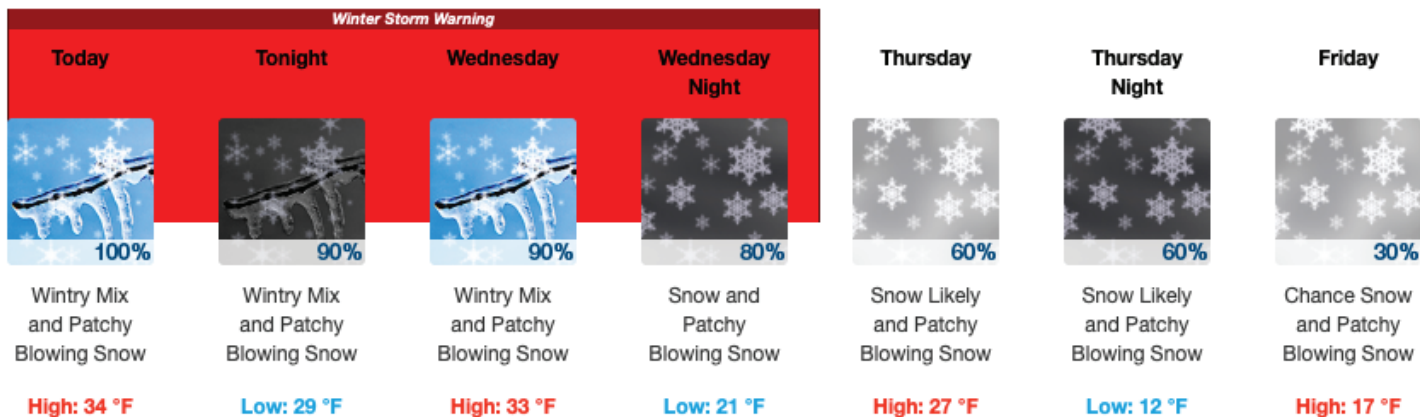
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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Winter Storm Today Through Thursday

December 13, 2022
4:40 AM

Key Messages

- Travel will likely be impacted.
- Significant ice and snow accumulations
- Precipitation transitioning to all snow today. Potential for heaviest (6"+) snow over central South Dakota.
- Wet heavy snow will limit blowing snow, but periods of reduced visibility remain possible with falling snow. Western South Dakota has a higher potential for blizzard conditions.

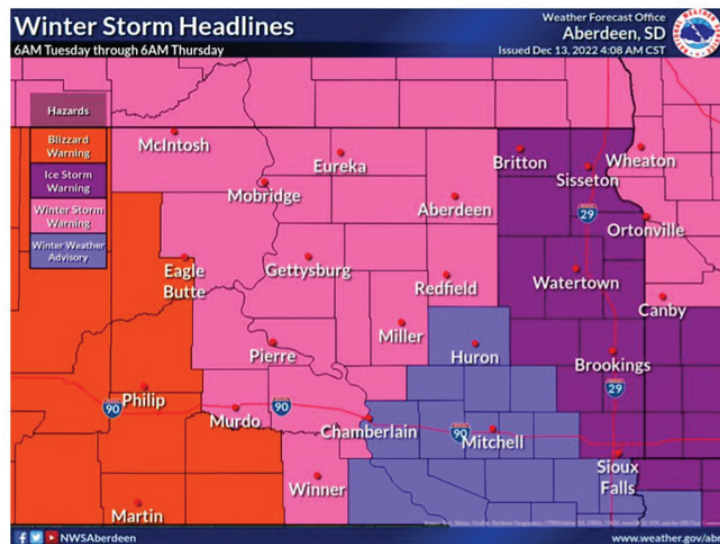
NEW

Important Updates

- Headlines remain unchanged.

Next Scheduled Briefing

- Tuesday afternoon



Valid as of 3 PM Dec 12, 2022



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

National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD

Please be careful if you have to be out on the roads today as they will probably be slick. Check road conditions (if available) at www.sd511.org. This morning, eastern counties could get some more ice accumulation, but should become all snow by late morning to early afternoon.

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Expected Snowfall Accumulations

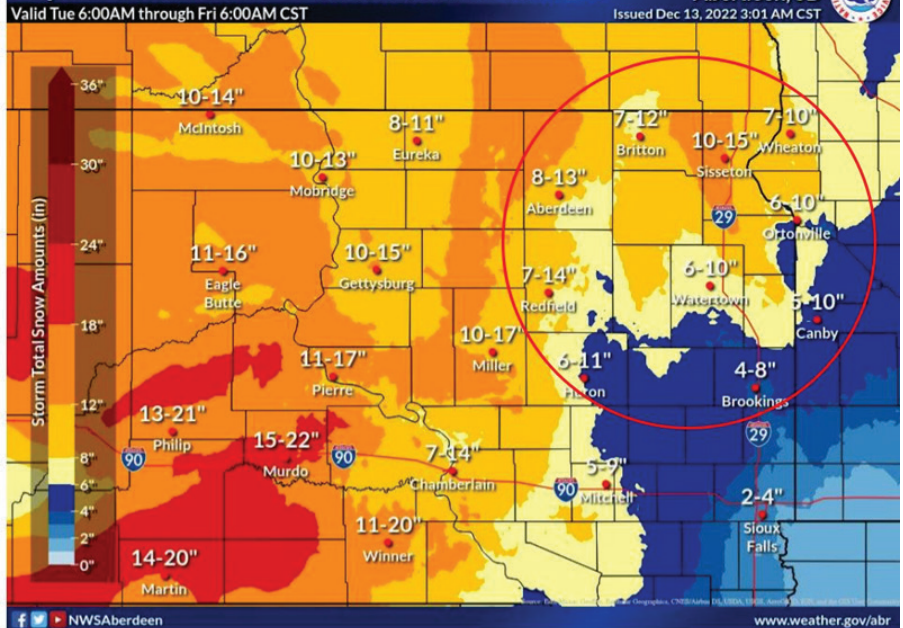
December 13, 2022
4:41 AM

Through 6 PM Thursday

- Graphic: Snow accumulation potential through 6 AM Friday
- Additional light amounts possible Friday
- **Highlighted area** represents **greatest uncertainty** for snowfall amounts due to mixed precipitation & near freezing temperatures

Expected Snowfall - Official NWS Forecast

Weather Forecast Office
Aberdeen, SD
Issued Dec 13, 2022 3:01 AM CST



National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD

Most of the precipitation today is expected to be snow. However, transition timing will affect snowfall totals. There may be a lull in the heaviest precipitation this morning and periods of snow and blowing snow are expected to continue through Thursday.

Winter Storm Warning

...WINTER STORM WARNING REMAINS IN EFFECT UNTIL 6 AM CST THURSDAY...

- * WHAT...Heavy mixed precipitation. Total snow accumulations of 6 to 13 inches and ice accumulations of around one tenth of an inch. Highest snowfall amounts will be across the northwestern part of the county. Winds gusting as high as 40 mph.
- * WHERE...Brown County.
- * WHEN...Until 6 AM CST Thursday.
- * IMPACTS...Travel could be very difficult to impossible. Patchy blowing snow could significantly reduce visibility. The hazardous conditions could impact the morning or evening commute.

PRECAUTIONARY/PREPAREDNESS ACTIONS...

If you must travel, keep an extra flashlight, food, and water in your vehicle in case of an emergency.

The latest road conditions can be obtained by calling 5 1 1.

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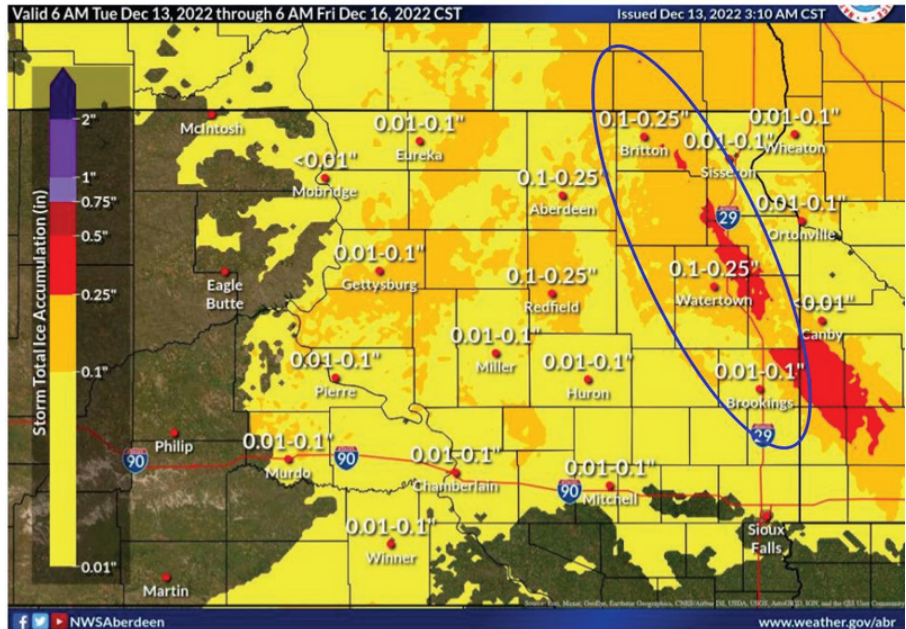
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Additional Ice Accumulations

December 13, 2022
4:41 AM

- Additional ice accumulations through Wednesday evening
- Main forecast challenge concerns temperatures while precipitation is falling with readings right around freezing.
 - ◆ Slight changes in the temperature will impact ice accumulations up (slightly cooler temperatures) or down (slightly warmer temperatures)
- **Impacts:** Icy roads are expected. **Power outages possible in the blue highlighted areas**



National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD

Freezing rain is expected this morning but should transition to snow by late morning to early afternoon. The greatest additional accumulations are expected over the higher terrain of the Sisseton Hills region.

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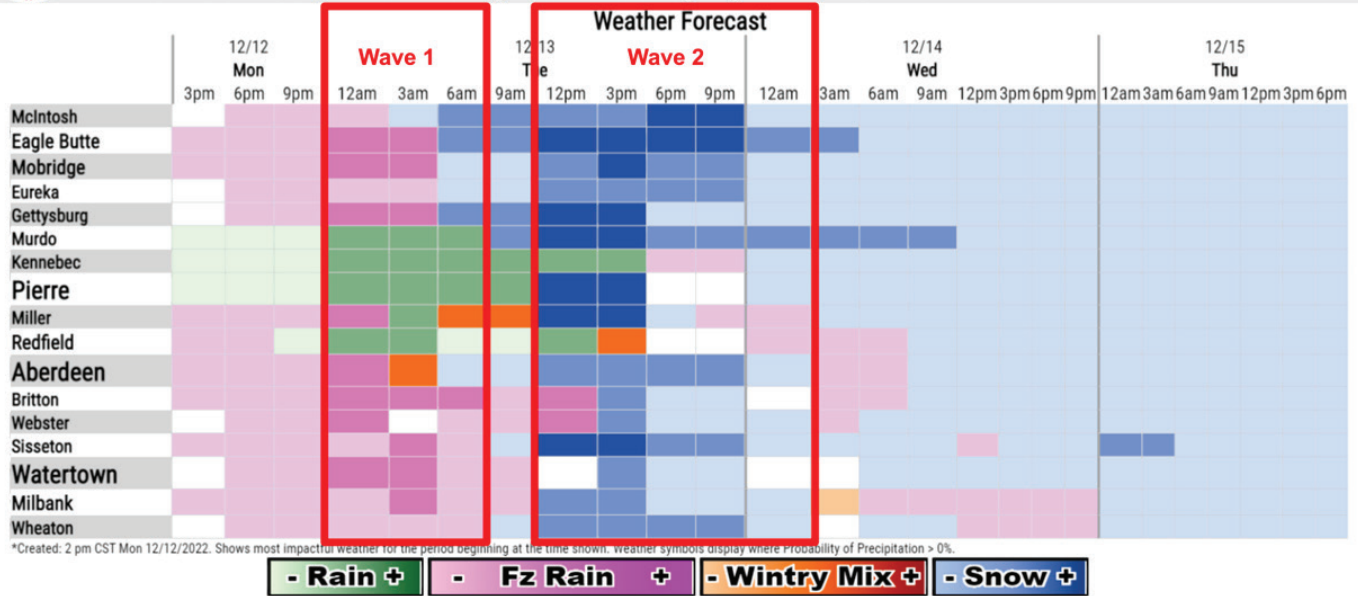
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Precipitation Types

December 12, 2022
3:31 PM

Heaviest Precipitation During the Times Highlighted in Red



National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD

A wintry mix of precipitation is expected for the start of the storm, with freezing drizzle and rain tonight transitioning to snow during the day on Tuesday. The heaviest precipitation will fall in two waves, with the first tonight into Tuesday morning and then the second on Tuesday afternoon and evening. Light snow will continue to fall on Wednesday and Thursday.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 32 °F at 11:10 AM

Low Temp: 25 °F at 4:55 AM

Wind: 26 mph at 10:45 AM

Precip: : 0.00 Ice and Snow

Day length: 8 hours, 48 minutes

Today's Info

Record High: 57 in 1921

Record Low: --34 in 1917

Average High: 29°F

Average Low: 9°F

Average Precip in Dec.: 0.25

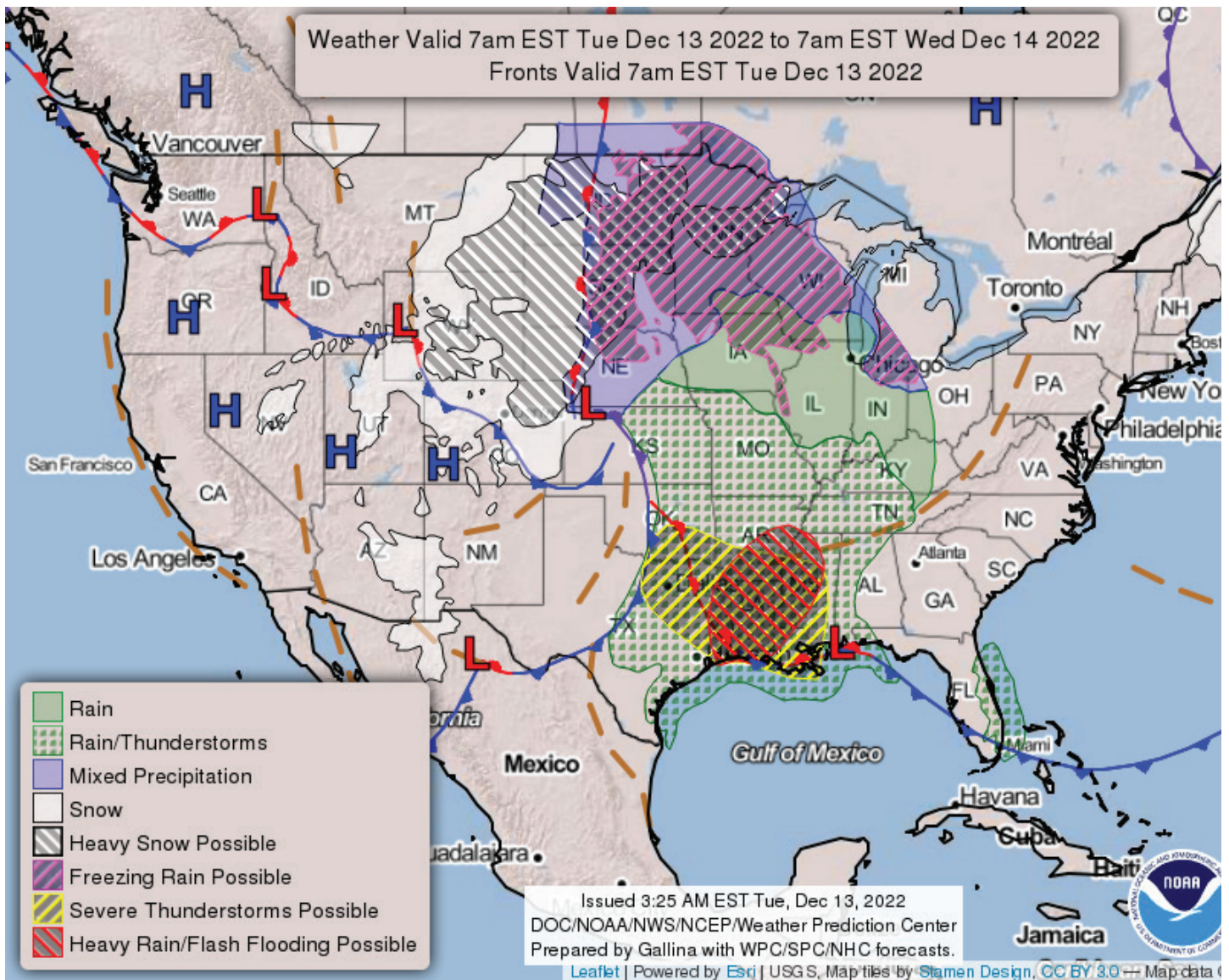
Precip to date in Dec.: 0.00

Average Precip to date: 21.46

Precip Year to Date: 16.50

Sunset Tonight: 4:51:06 PM

Sunrise Tomorrow: 8:03:02 AM



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Today in Weather History

December 13, 2008: An intense low-pressure area moved out of the Rockies and across the Central Plains bringing widespread snow, blizzard conditions, and extreme winds chills to central and northeast South Dakota as well as west central Minnesota into the early morning hours of the 15th. Snowfall amounts of 1 to as much as 12 inches along with winds gusting to 50 mph caused widespread near zero visibilities and dangerous travel conditions. Winds chills fell into the 35 below to 45 below zero range. Many vehicles became stuck or stranded along several highways and along Interstates 29 and 90. Interstate 90 was closed from the Wyoming line to Murdo from late on the 13th until the morning of the 14th. Interstate 29 was also closed for much of the 14th. The Onida, Agar, and Gettysburg Volunteer Fire Department found it difficult to respond to a structure fire south of Gettysburg. Due to whiteout conditions, the structure was lost to the fire by the time the fire departments arrived. Most area schools were closed on Monday due to the road conditions along with the bitter cold wind chills. Some of the heaviest snowfall amounts included: 6 inches at Watertown, Browns Valley, Sisseton, Waubay, and Castlewood; 7 inches at Ortonville, Webster, Clear Lake, Faulkton, and Aberdeen; 8 inches at Milbank, 9 inches at Britton and Wheaton; 10 inches at Clear Lake, and 12 inches at Roscoe. Mobridge received 2 inches and Pierre received 4 inches of snowfall with this storm

December 13, 1997: A freak cold snap and snowstorm struck parts of northern Mexico left 12 people dead, and the area paralyzed. It snowed in the city of Guadalajara for the first time since 1881, leaving amazed residents to gawk at the white stuff and make snowmen. The temperature plunged to 5 degrees in Chihuahua.

1915 - A heavy snowstorm kicked off the snowiest winter in modern records for western New England. (The Weather Channel)

1962 - A severe Florida freeze occurred. Morning lows reached 35 degrees at Miami, 18 degrees at Tampa, and 12 degrees at Jacksonville. It was the coldest December weather of the 20th century and caused millions of dollars damage to crops and foliage. In Georgia, the morning low of 9 degrees below zero at Blairsville established a state record for the month of December. (David Ludlum) (The Weather Channel)

1987 - A major winter storm produced high winds and heavy snow in the Southern Rockies and the Southern High Plains. Snowfall totals in New Mexico ranged up to 25 inches at Cedar Crest, with up to three feet of snow reported in the higher elevations. Winds of 75 mph, with gusts to 124 mph, were reported northeast of Albuquerque NM. El Paso TX was buried under 22.4 inches of snow, including a single storm record of 16.8 inches in 24 hours. The snowfall total surpassed their previous record for an entire winter season of 18.4 inches. Record cold was experienced the next three nights as readings dipped into the single numbers. High winds ushering unseasonably cold air into the southwestern U.S. gusted to 100 mph at Grapevine CA. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - Low pressure off the Atlantic coast produced up to a foot of snow in eastern Nassau County and western Suffolk County of southeastern New York State. Mild weather prevailed across the western half of the country. Nine cities reported record high temperatures for the date, including Goodland KS with a reading of 74 degrees. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 - Strong northwesterly winds, ushering bitterly cold arctic air into the central U.S., produced squalls with heavy snow in the Great Lakes Region. Snowfall totals in Upper Michigan ranged up to 24 inches at Manistique. Nine cities in Arkansas and Texas reported record low temperatures for the date, including Calico Rock AR with a reading of 4 degrees above zero. (Storm Data) (The National Weather Summary)

2002 - A powerful Pacific storm system plowed into the western United States during the 13th-16th, producing high winds, heavy rains, significant mountain snowfall and causing 9 deaths (Associated Press). Rainfall amounts exceeding 10 inches occurred in parts of California, and wind gusts over 45 mph produced up to 1.9 million power outages during the period (Pacific Gas & Electric).

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Daily Devotionals

Seeds of Hope

THE REAL THING!

It has always been difficult for missionary families to be together at special times for important occasions. Often hearts ache for the joy and happiness that bonds hearts and unites loved ones for special reasons and seasons.

The headmaster of a school for the children of missionaries knew that feeling very well. His parents were missionaries, and he spent many birthdays alone as well as many holidays apart from family members. He knew that one of his students, in particular, was having a difficult time one Christmas and decided to visit him in his room.

After talking for a few minutes he asked, "John, what would you like for Christmas this year?"

Looking at a picture of his father on the wall, he said, "I would like my father to step out of that frame."

That's what Jesus did. He "stepped out" of the Old Testament "frames" that prophesied His coming. He became the "real thing" when he walked among the people, laid His hands on the sick, and restored them to health, fed the hungry with bread that would last throughout eternity, and gave the water of life to those dying of thirst.

The Son of God willingly and voluntarily made Himself "nothing" when He assumed a human body and a human nature and became the "real thing." Jesus is God seeing us through human eyes, hearing us with human ears, touching lives with human hands, and loving us with a human heart. In Jesus, we see God with us – Immanuel!

Prayer: Thank You, Father, for sending us the "Real Thing." Through Your Son we know how much You love us, understand us, and know our every need. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: Philippians 2:5-11 Who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men.



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)
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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 Monday:

Lotto America

03-23-31-33-51, Star Ball: 7, ASB: 3

(three, twenty-three, thirty-one, thirty-three, fifty-one; Star Ball: seven; ASB: three)

Estimated jackpot: \$30,940,000

Mega Millions

Estimated jackpot: 400,000,000

Powerball

16-31-50-55-61, Powerball: 9, Power Play: 4

(sixteen, thirty-one, fifty, fifty-five, sixty-one; Powerball: nine; Power Play: four)

Estimated jackpot: \$134,000,000

From blizzards to tornadoes, US braces for wild weather week

By STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — Much of the central United States from the Rocky Mountains to the Midwest was braced Tuesday for blizzard-like conditions, while states farther to the south were warned of the risk of flash flooding and tornadoes from a massive storm blowing across the country.

An area stretching from Montana into western Nebraska and Colorado was under blizzard warnings, and the National Weather Service said that as much as 2 feet (61 centimeters) of snow was possible in some areas of western South Dakota and northwestern Nebraska. Meanwhile, ice and sleet were expected in the eastern Great Plains.

The National Weather Service warned that up to about half an inch (2.5 centimeters) of ice could form and winds could gust up to 45 miles per hour (72 kilometers per hour) in parts of Iowa, Minnesota and South Dakota. Power outages, tree damage, falling branches and hazardous travel conditions all threatened the region.

"This is a 'we are not kidding' kind of storm," the South Dakota Department of Public Safety said Monday in a tweet urging people to stock up on essentials, then stay home once the storm hits.

Portions of Interstate 90 and Interstate 29 through South Dakota were expected to be closed by mid-morning Tuesday due to "freezing rain, substantial snow totals, low visibility, drifting snow and high winds," the state's Department of Transportation said. Secondary highways will likely become "impassable," it said.

Those farther south in Texas and Louisiana could get heavy rains with flash flooding, hail and tornadoes by Tuesday, the National Weather Service said. The storm was forecast to continue southeast into Florida later in the week.

"It will be a busy week while this system moves across the country," said Marc Chenard, a meteorologist at the National Weather Service's headquarters in College Park, Maryland.

The weather is part of the same system that dumped heavy snow in the Sierra Nevada over the weekend before moving east.

In northern Utah, a tour bus crashed Monday morning as snow and frigid temperatures blanketed the region. The bus flipped onto its side in Tremonton after the driver lost control while switching lanes, the state's Highway Patrol said in a statement. The Highway Patrol said 23 passengers were injured, including some seriously.

Thousands of students from Native American communities across Wyoming, Nebraska and the Dakotas were traveling to Rapid City, South Dakota, for this week's Lakota Nation Invitational, a high school athletic event. Brian Brewer, one of the organizers, said he had urged schools and participants to travel early.

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"We told them with this storm coming — if you leave tomorrow, there's a good chance you might not make it," he said Monday.

In Northern California, most mountain highways had reopened Monday. Remaining warnings in the Southern California mountains were expected to expire late Monday night, the National Weather Service said.

With winter still more than a week away, it was the latest fall storm to bring significant precipitation to California, which is dealing with the impacts of years of drought that have spurred calls for water conservation.

The UC Berkeley Central Sierra Snow Lab northwest of Lake Tahoe reported that the storm dropped 54.5 inches (138.5 centimeters) of snow.

The Sierra snowpack, which on average is at its peak on April 1, is normally a significant source of water when it melts in the spring. Throughout the drought experts have cautioned about optimism over early season storms as climate change makes what were once average conditions rare.

Last year, a powerful atmospheric river dumped huge amounts of rain on California in October and a wet stretch in December left parts of the Sierra Nevada buried in snow. Then the state experienced its driest January through April on record.

Lien leads South Dakota State past Mount Marty 85-56

BROOKINGS, S.D. (AP) — Broden Lien scored 20 points as South Dakota State beat Mount Marty 85-56 on Monday night.

Lien had seven rebounds for the Jackrabbits (5-7). Zeke Mayo scored 18 points and added eight rebounds and seven assists. Tanner Te Slaa had 14 points.

Josh Arlt led the Lancers with 14 points. Tash Lunday added 12 points and eight rebounds.

Monday's Scores

The Associated Press

BOYS PREP BASKETBALL=

Platte-Geddes 67, Scotland 33

GIRLS PREP BASKETBALL=

POSTPONEMENTS AND CANCELLATIONS=

DeSmet vs. Wolsey-Wessington, ppd.

Redfield vs. Faulkton, ppd.

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

US blizzard expected to impact millions in Rockies, Midwest

By STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — A massive winter storm blew toward the center of the U.S. on Monday, threatening millions of people with heavy snow, freezing rain and flooding.

The National Weather Service warned that there would be "numerous, widespread, and impactful weather hazards in the heart of the country this week." Across the Rockies and into the northern Plains and parts of the Midwest, people were warned to prepare for blizzard-like conditions. Those farther south in Texas and Louisiana could get heavy rains with flash flooding, hail and tornadoes by Tuesday. The storm will continue southeast into Florida later in the week, forecasters said.

"It will be a busy week while this system moves across the country," said Marc Chenard, a meteorologist at the National Weather Service's headquarters in College Park, Maryland.

Officials in western South Dakota told residents to brace for 6 inches (15 centimeters) or more of snow: "Get your shovels handy, get your groceries, and check other needed supplies. The roads will be hard to

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travel.”

A swath of country stretching from Montana into western Nebraska and Colorado was under blizzard warnings Monday, and the National Weather Service said that as much as 2 feet (61 centimeters) of snow was possible in some areas of western South Dakota and northwestern Nebraska. Meanwhile, ice and sleet were expected in the eastern Great Plains.

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Latest Iowa bird flu cases push December total near 700,000

By JOSH FUNK AP Business Writer

OMAHA, Neb. (AP) — Four new cases of bird flu at Iowa turkey farms in the past few days will push the number of birds slaughtered nationwide this month to limit the spread of the virus up to nearly 700,000.

The latest cases announced by the Iowa Department of Agriculture only add to the toll of this year’s ongoing outbreak that has prompted officials to kill more than 53 million birds in 47 states. Anytime the virus is found, the entire flock is killed to help control the disease.

Iowa officials said the latest cases found since Friday involved 240,000 birds on turkey farms in Sac, Buena Vista, Cherokee and Ida counties all in the northwest corner of the state. Iowa leads all states with nearly 16 million chickens and turkeys slaughtered this year — more than double the next closest state of Nebraska — largely because it is the nation’s largest egg producer and egg farms can include millions of chickens.

Several other bird flu cases have been confirmed this month at other turkey farms in Iowa, South Dakota, Minnesota and Missouri. An upland gamebird producer in Colorado also had to slaughter 18,000 birds to

limit the spread of the virus.

Experts believe the virus that causes bird flu is spread primarily by wild birds as they migrate across the country. The virus spreads easily through droppings or the nasal discharge of an infected bird, which can contaminate dust and soil and be carried onto farms on boots and clothing or on truck tires. Even though wild birds can often carry avian influenza without developing symptoms, the virus has killed a large number of eagles, vultures, ducks and other wild birds.

Farmers take measures like requiring workers to change clothes before entering barns and sanitizing trucks as they enter the farm, but the disease is difficult to control.

This year's outbreak is different than most past ones because the virus found a way to linger throughout the summer when warmer temperatures usually largely kill off the virus. The U.S. Department of Agriculture resumed reporting large numbers of birds infected in September when more than 6 million birds had to be killed. That was followed by another 2 million in October and nearly 4 million more in November.

Bird flu doesn't represent a significant threat to human health because human cases are extremely rare and none of the infected birds are allowed into the nation's food supply. And properly cooking poultry to 165 degrees Fahrenheit will kill any viruses.

But the bird flu outbreak — combined with the soaring cost of fuel and feed — has driven up the prices of eggs, chicken and turkey.

SEC charges former FTX CEO with defrauding crypto investors

By KEN SWEET AP Business Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — The U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission has charged the former CEO of failed cryptocurrency firm FTX with orchestrating a scheme to defraud investors.

An SEC complaint filed Tuesday alleges that Sam Bankman-Fried raised more than \$1.8 billion from equity investors since May 2019 by promoting FTX as a safe, responsible platform for trading crypto assets.

The civil complaint says Bankman-Fried diverted customer funds to Alameda Research LLC, his privately-held crypto fund, without telling them. The complaint also says Bankman-Fried commingled FTX customers' funds at Alameda to make undisclosed venture investments, lavish real estate purchases, and large political donations.

"Bankman-Fried placed billions of dollars of FTX customer funds into Alameda. He then used Alameda as his personal piggy bank to buy luxury condominiums, support political campaigns, and make private investments, among other uses," the complaint reads. "None of this was disclosed to FTX equity investors or to the platform's trading customers."

Alameda did not segregate FTX investor funds and Alameda investments, the SEC said, using that money to "indiscriminately fund its trading operations," as well as other ventures of Bankman-Fried.

"We allege that Sam Bankman-Fried built a house of cards on a foundation of deception while telling investors that it was one of the safest buildings in crypto," said SEC Chair Gary Gensler. "The alleged fraud committed by Mr. Bankman-Fried is a clarion call to crypto platforms that they need to come into compliance with our laws."

Bankman-Fried was arrested Monday in the Bahamas at the request of the U.S. government, U.S. and Bahamian authorities said.

The arrest was made after the U.S. filed criminal charges that are expected to be unsealed Tuesday, according to U.S. Attorney Damian Williams. Bankman-Fried had been under criminal investigation by U.S. and Bahamian authorities following the collapse last month of FTX, which filed for bankruptcy on Nov. 11, when it ran out of money after the cryptocurrency equivalent of a bank run.

The SEC charges are separate from the criminal charges expected to be unsealed later Tuesday.

A spokesman for Bankman-Fried had no comment Monday evening. Bankman-Fried has a right to contest his extradition, which could delay but not likely stop his transfer to the U.S.

Bankman-Fried's arrest comes just a day before he was due to testify in front of the House Financial Services Committee. Rep. Maxine Waters, D-Calif., chairwoman of the committee, said she was "disappointed"

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that the American public, and FTX's customers, would not get to see Bankman-Fried testify under oath.

That hearing, however, will be held Tuesday despite the arrest of Bankman-Fried.

Bankman-Fried was one of the world's wealthiest people on paper, with an estimated net worth of \$32 billion. He was a prominent personality in Washington, donating millions of dollars toward mostly left-leaning political causes and Democratic political campaigns. FTX grew to become the second-largest cryptocurrency exchange in the world.

That all unraveled quickly last month, when reports called into question the strength of FTX's balance sheet. Customers moved to withdraw billions of dollars, but FTX could not meet all the requests because it apparently used its customers deposits to cover bad bets at Bankman-Fried's investment arm, Alameda Research.

Bankman-Fried said recently that he did not "knowingly" misuse customers' funds, and said he believes his millions of angry customers will eventually be made whole.

The SEC challenged that assertion Tuesday in its complaint.

"FTX operated behind a veneer of legitimacy Mr. Bankman-Fried created by, among other things, touting its best-in-class controls, including a proprietary 'risk engine,' and FTX's adherence to specific investor protection principles and detailed terms of service. But as we allege in our complaint, that veneer wasn't just thin, it was fraudulent," said Gurbir Grewal, director of the SEC's Division of Enforcement. "FTX's collapse highlights the very real risks that unregistered crypto asset trading platforms can pose for investors and customers alike."

EU reels as scandal tarnishes parliament's credibility

By LORNE COOK Associated Press

BRUSSELS (AP) — The European Union's parliament was reeling Tuesday, its credibility under threat, as a corruption and bribery scandal damaged lawmakers' careers and as fingers pointed at Qatari officials accused of seeking to play down labor rights concerns ahead of the soccer World Cup.

The scandal, which started unfolding publicly last week, has scarred the reputation of the EU's only institution comprised of officials elected directly in the 27 member countries. It has undermined the assembly's claim to the moral high ground in its own investigations, such as into allegations of corruption in member country Hungary.

"It is so profound because it jars so fundamentally with what parliament pretends to stand for," Ghent University Professor Hendrik Vos, an EU expert, told The Associated Press. "The parliament pretends to stand for transparency, unable to be bribed, to defend fundamental values. And then then you get something like this."

Referring to her barely suppressed "fury, my anger, my sorrow," Parliament President Roberta Metsola told EU lawmakers on Monday that "European democracy is under attack." While they convened in in Strasbourg, France, Belgian police picked up a haul of computer data from the assembly's other seat in Brussels.

The parliament, however, has always been a ripe target for people seeking funds or favors or to influence policy, from tobacco lobbyists and auto industry representatives to officials from national governments. The difference this time is that Belgian prosecutors found out.

Police have now conducted more than 20 raids, mostly in Belgium but also in Italy, as part of a probe into bribery for political favors. Prosecutors suspect that people "in political and/or strategic positions within the European Parliament were paid large sums of money or offered substantial gifts to influence Parliament's decisions."

The scandal has rocked the Socialists and Democrats (S&D) group in the Parliament. The group brings together center-left parties from across Europe. It remains the second-largest group in the 705-seat assembly but lost more than 30 seats in the last election as public support waned.

Prosecutors have charged four people, who have not been identified, with corruption, participation in a criminal group and money laundering. Parliament Vice President Eva Kaili of Greece was among them.

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Lawmakers voted overwhelmingly Tuesday to terminate her term in office.

Kaili, a 44-year-old Greek former TV presenter, is from the S&D. Belgian EU lawmaker Marc Tarabella suspended himself as a group member on Monday, suggesting he might be among those charged. Three other S&D lawmakers temporarily stood down from senior duties within the group, apparently because their parliamentary assistants were implicated.

Belgian authorities have not identified the Gulf country suspected of offering cash or gifts to officials at the parliament, but several members of the assembly and some Belgian media have linked the investigation to Qatar.

"Qatar has bought the votes of this assembly in order to cover up the exploitation and death of migrant workers on the World Cup infrastructures," Manon Aubry, co-chair of the Left group, said Monday. "I really want to send a very clear message to Qatar. You cannot buy MEPs like you can buy football clubs."

Qatar's Ministry of Foreign Affairs has said that the allegations are "baseless and gravely misinformed."

Arguably, Qatar has received some favorable reviews in Europe this year, but allegations that European officials were paid off to provide them typically would be hard to establish. But investigators have seized hundreds of thousands of euros at the homes of officials, according to Belgian prosecutors.

Senior members of the EU's executive branch, the European Commission, have praised the labor reforms Qatar made ahead of the World Cup. In April, the commission also began a drive to provide visa-free travel for Qataris holding biometric passports who want to come to Europe for short stays, although the parliament has shelved its role in that process in light of the investigation.

But as Russia's war in Ukraine hits energy supplies in Europe, member countries are also desperate to find more reliable suppliers to help slash high energy prices for consumers. Qatar is seen as one of those. Two weeks ago, Germany signed a massive contract for Qatari liquefied natural gas.

For Olivier Hoedeman, a coordinator for lobbying watchdog Corporate Europe Observatory, the scandal is more about long-known shortcomings at the parliament.

"This horrific unfolding bribery scandal is a product of years of negligence which have come back to haunt EU institutions," he said. "Earlier this year a ban was imposed on dodgy Russian lobbyists way too late. Today, Qatar is in focus. These are both wake-up calls. It's not good enough to take reactive measures after yet another scandal."

A decade after Sandy Hook, grief remains but hope grows

By DAVE COLLINS Associated Press

NEWTOWN, Conn. (AP) — They would have been 16 or 17 this year. High school juniors.

The children killed at the Sandy Hook Elementary School on Dec. 14, 2012 should have spent this year thinking about college, taking their SATs and getting their driver's licenses. Maybe attending their first prom.

Instead, the families of the 20 students and six educators slain in the mass shooting will mark a decade without them Wednesday.

December is a difficult month for many in Newtown, the Connecticut suburb where holiday season joy is tempered by heartbreak around the anniversary of the nation's worst grade school shooting.

For former Sandy Hook students who survived the massacre, guilt and anxiety can intensify. For the parents, it can mean renewed grief, even as they continue to fight on their lost children's behalf.

In February, Sandy Hook families reached a \$73 million settlement with the gunmaker Remington, which made the shooter's rifle. Juries in Connecticut and Texas ordered the conspiracy theorist Alex Jones to pay \$1.4 billion for promoting lies that the massacre was a hoax.

In mid-November, a memorial to the 26 victims opened near the new elementary school built to replace the one torn down after the shooting.

Ten years on, some victims' relatives and survivors aren't without hope for a brighter future.

ACTIVISM IN TRAGEDY'S AFTERMATH

After the massacre, Nicole Hockley and Mark Barden were among many victims' relatives who turned to activism. They helped form Sandy Hook Promise, a nonprofit group that works to prevent suicides and

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mass shootings.

Hockley, who lost her 6-year-old son, Dylan, and Barden, who lost his 7-year-old son, Daniel, both find it difficult to believe their children have been gone for a decade.

"For me, Dylan is still this 6-year-old boy, forever frozen in time," Hockley said. "This journey that we've been on the last 10 years, it doesn't feel like a decade and it doesn't feel like 10 years since I last held my son, either."

A decade hasn't diminished the disbelief Barden and his wife feel over Daniel's death.

"Jackie and I still have moments where we just kind of look at each other, still wrapping our heads around the fact that our little 7-year-old boy was shot to death in his first grade classroom," he said.

"I can't help but wonder what he'd be like now at 17," he said, repeating the number 17. "I just think he would be still a more mature version of the beautiful, sweet, compassionate, thoughtful, intelligent little boy that he was at 7. And it breaks my heart to think of the wonderful impact he would have had in these last 10 years and what he would have still yet to come, and it's all been taken away from him."

Sandy Hook Promise's programs have been taught in more than 23,000 schools to over 18 million children and adults. Key components include education about the warning signs of potential school violence or self-harm and an anonymous tip system to report a classmate at risk for hurting others or themselves.

Hockley and Barden say they believe the educational programs and reporting system have prevented many suicides and stopped some school shootings.

"It's a tremendous satisfaction and it's a serious responsibility," Barden said of the group's work. "And it's a gift in a way that we have built something that allows us this mechanism with which to honor our children by saving other children and by protecting other families from having to endure this pain."

GROWING UP A SURVIVOR

Ashley Hubner was in her second grade classroom at Sandy Hook Elementary when the shooting happened. She and her classmates ran to the cubby area to hide. The school intercom system clicked on. Everyone could hear gunshots, screaming and crying.

When police arrived, she and her classmates didn't want to open the door. They thought bad guys could be impersonating officers. They screamed "No!" The officers had to convince them they were actually police.

Ashley, now a 17-year-old senior at Newtown High School, developed post-traumatic stress disorder and has struggled with anxiety and depression, like other students who were there that day. Ashley said she always gets more emotional and irritable around the shooting anniversary.

"Even though it's been 10 years, like this is still a problem that a lot of us still have to handle in our everyday lives and it still affects us greatly," she said.

Adding to the grief is the fact that mass shootings keep happening, she said.

"We've had 10 years to change things and we've changed so little, and that's just disgusting to me," she said.

Ashley said there wasn't much talk among her classmates yet about the anniversary.

"I feel like everyone just tries to pretend like everything is normal and then when it gets to that day, I'm sure people will reach out and I'll reach out to people."

Ashley wasn't sure how she might mark the day. All town schools will be closed for staff development. She said she may make her first trip to the new memorial.

She said she has been happy with her senior year at Newtown High, calling it one of the best school years she's had. She is looking forward to going to college.

"I'm really, really excited to leave," she said. "Just like to get new experiences, grow up and move on with this chapter of my life, you know?"

LIGHT CONQUERING DARKNESS

St. Rose of Lima Church has been a gathering point for the Newtown community since the day of the shooting, when hundreds of people packed the Roman Catholic church and stood outside for a vigil. It has held a special Mass every Dec. 14 since.

Monsignor Robert Weiss still struggles with his own trauma. The church led the funerals for eight slain

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children. He hasn't slept well ever since and becomes emotional easily. During Mass, he always keeps watch on the entrances, worried about a violent intruder.

"It's a very difficult time for me having buried eight of those children," he said of the anniversary. "It just brings back so many memories of true sadness."

The anniversary Masses are hopeful, Weiss said, with a theme that light conquers darkness.

"The darkness of evil is not going to conquer good and we as a community have to work together to be sure that happens," Weiss said. "We want to celebrate and remember the children and the families, and how it's turned this tragedy into so many positive things to assist other people."

2022 'TIPPING POINT' IN GUN SAFETY

After Sandy Hook, there was frustration among many gun violence prevention advocates that nothing was being done to stop such massacres. The failure of a gun control bill in the months after Sandy Hook was another hard loss.

But U.S. Sen. Chris Murphy, a Connecticut Democrat, said the shooting gave new energy to the movement, with numerous groups forming to demand action.

"In the 10 years leading up to Sandy Hook, the gun lobby controlled Washington. Anything they wanted they got," said Murphy.

"After Sandy Hook happened, we started building what I would describe as the modern anti-gun violence movement," he said. "During the next 10 years, there was essentially gridlock. The gun lobby no longer got what they wanted, but unfortunately in Washington we weren't getting what we wanted either."

After mass shootings last spring killed 21 people at an elementary school in Uvalde, Texas, and 10 people at a supermarket in Buffalo, New York, Congress passed the Bipartisan Safer Communities Act, the first major federal gun control law in decades. The law expands background checks for younger gun buyers, boosts school mental health programs and promotes "red flag" laws to temporarily confiscate guns from people deemed dangerous.

"I think this summer marked the tipping point, where finally the gun safety movement has more power than the gun lobby," Murphy said.

"It's going to be a hard December for those families, but I hope they know what a difference that they have made in the memory of their children in these 10 years."

Colorado River water users convening amid crisis concerns

By KEN RITTER Associated Press

LAS VEGAS (AP) — Living with less water in the U.S. Southwest is the focus this week for state and federal water administrators, tribal officials, farmers, academics and business representatives meeting about the drought-stricken and overpromised Colorado River.

The Colorado River Water Users Association conference, normally a largely academic three-day affair, comes at a time of growing concern about the river's future after more than two decades of record drought attributed to climate change.

"The Colorado River system is in a very dire condition," Dan Bunk, a U.S. Bureau of Reclamation water manager, declared during internet presentations streamed Nov. 29 and Dec. 2 that invited public comment about possible actions.

"Flows during the past 23-year period ... are the lowest in the past 120 years and (among) the lowest in more than 1,200 years," Bunk told the webinar audience. The deadline for public submissions is Dec. 20 for a process expected to yield a final report by summer.

Bunk said the two largest reservoirs on the river — Lake Mead behind Hoover Dam on the Nevada-Arizona state line and Lake Powell formed by the Glen Canyon Dam on the Arizona-Utah line — are at unprecedented low levels. Lake Mead was at 100% capacity in mid-1999. Today it is 28% full. Lake Powell, last full in June 1980, is at 25%.

Scientists attribute extended drought to warmer and drier weather in the West to long-term, human-caused climate change. The effect has been dramatic on a vast river basin where the math never added

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up: The amount of water it receives doesn't meet the amount that is promised.

Lake Powell's drop last March to historically low water levels raised worries about losing the ability — perhaps within the next few months — to produce hydropower that today serves about 5 million customers in seven states. If power production ceases at Glen Canyon Dam, rural electric cooperatives, cities and tribal utilities would be forced to seek more expensive options.

Reclamation water managers responded with plans to hold back more water in Lake Powell but warned that Lake Mead water levels would drop.

Meanwhile, bodies have surfaced as Lake Mead's shoreline recedes, including the corpse of a man who authorities say was shot, maybe in the 1970s, and stuffed in a barrel. He remains unidentified. The gruesome discoveries renewed interest in the lore of organized crime and the early days of the Las Vegas Strip, just a 30-minute drive from the lake.

The U.S. Bureau of Reclamation in June told the seven states that are part of the Colorado River Basin — Arizona, California, Colorado, Nevada, New Mexico, Utah and Wyoming — to determine how to use at least 15% less water next year, or have restrictions imposed on them. Despite deadlines, discussions have not resulted in agreements.

Bureau officials use the image of pouring tea from one cup to another to describe how water from Rocky Mountain snowmelt is captured in Lake Powell, then released downriver through the Grand Canyon to Lake Mead. About 70% is allocated for irrigation, sustaining a \$15 billion-a-year agricultural industry that supplies 90% of U.S. winter vegetables.

The two lakes, combined, were at 92% capacity in 1999, Bunk noted. Today, they are at 26%.

"Due to critically low current reservoir conditions, and the potential for worsening drought which threatens critical infrastructure and public health and safety ... operational strategies must be revisited," Bunk said.

This year's meeting of water recipients begins Wednesday at Caesars Palace on the Las Vegas Strip. The event theme, "A New Century for the Colorado River Compact," marks 100 years since a 1922 interstate agreement divvied water shares among interests in the seven states now home to 40 million people and millions of farmed acres.

Agricultural interests got the biggest share. Native American tribes weren't included and were referenced in one sentence: "Nothing in this compact shall be construed as affecting the obligations of the United States of America to Indian tribes."

It wasn't until 1944 that a separate agreement promised a share of water to Mexico.

Today, tribes are at the table and a Mexico delegation is due to attend the conference. U.S. cities that receive river water include Denver, Salt Lake City, Albuquerque, Las Vegas, Phoenix, Los Angeles and San Diego.

Many call conservation crucial. Among conference topic titles are "Messaging in a More Water-Challenged world" and "The Next 100 Years Begins Now."

"The ongoing drought is a stark reminder that water conservation is not just smart planning but an absolute necessity to save the life of the Colorado River," Amelia Flores, chairwoman of Colorado River Indian Tribes, said ahead of the event. The tribal reservation in western Arizona includes more than 110 miles (177 kilometers) of Colorado River shoreline.

"Whether it's fallowing fields, upgrading irrigation canals, or modernizing farming methods," Flores said, "decisions made now will have lasting consequences."

Throughout the river basin, warnings have increased and measures have tightened markedly in 2022.

In April, water administrators in Southern California imposed a one-day-a-week outdoor watering limit on more than 6 million people.

Last month, 30 agencies that supply water to homes and businesses throughout the region joined the Las Vegas area in restricting the planting of decorative lawns that no one walks on.

Adel Hagekhalil, Metropolitan Water District of Southern California general manager, warned this month in a statement that another dry winter could force officials to make voluntary measures mandatory.

The four states at the headwaters of the river — Colorado, New Mexico, Utah and Wyoming — also

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recently announced they plan to ask Congress to let them use federal money through 2026 for a program dubbed "strategic conservation." It would resurrect a 2015 to 2018 pilot program that paid farmers to fallow land to cut water use.

Camille Touton, bureau commissioner, tempered a warning during the water webinars about federal intervention — she called it "moving forward on the initiation of administrative actions" — with a vow to "find a collective solution to the challenges that we face today."

Touton and two top Interior Department officials are scheduled to address the conference on Friday.

Cornered in Ukraine, Putin ditches annual news conference

By The Associated Press undefined

Russian President Vladimir Putin will not be holding his annual year-end marathon news conference this month amid the war in Ukraine, a break in the long-held tradition that observers have attributed to the Kremlin's uneasiness about a string of battlefield setbacks.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov confirmed Monday that Putin wouldn't hold the annual news conference for the first time in 10 years. He didn't comment on the reason behind it, but many commentators attributed it to the Russian leader's reluctance to face unpleasant questions about what he calls Russia's "special military operation" in Ukraine.

The annual news conference has been used by the Kremlin to polish Putin's image. The tightly stage-managed show televised live lasted for up to 4 1/2 hours and featured Putin talking about a wide range of domestic and foreign policy issues.

Political analyst Abbas Gallyamov said in a video commentary that Putin cancelled the annual news conference because "he has nothing to say from the point of view of strategy."

"The press conference has become a significant fixture in Putin's calendar of public engagement and has frequently been used as an opportunity to demonstrate the supposed integrity of Putin," the U.K. Defense Ministry said in a commentary on Twitter.

"Although questions are almost certainly usually vetted in advance, the cancellation is likely due to increasing concerns about the prevalence of anti-war feeling in Russia," it said. "Kremlin officials are almost certainly extremely sensitive about the possibility that any event attended by Putin could be hijacked by unsanctioned discussion about the 'special military operation.'"

Putin ordered the invasion of Ukraine on Feb. 24, saying that it's aimed to "demilitarize" and "denazify" the country, citing NATO's refusal to offer Russia guarantees that Ukraine wouldn't be invited to join the alliance. Ukraine and much of the world denounced the Russian attack on its neighbor as an unprovoked act of aggression.

Putin and his officials hoped to rout the Ukrainian military in a few days, but a fierce Ukrainian resistance quickly derailed those plans. After a botched attempt to quickly capture the Ukrainian capital, the Russian troops pulled back from areas around Kyiv in March.

In September, Ukraine won back large swaths of land in the northeastern Kharkiv region, and last month it reclaimed control of the strategic southern port city of Kherson.

A mobilization of 300,000 reservists that Putin ordered in September so far has failed to reverse battlefield fortunes for Russia. The mobilization order has prompted hundreds of thousands of Russians to flee abroad to avoid recruitment, and those who have been called up reported glaring shortages of key equipment and supplies.

In a rare acknowledgement last week that the campaign in Ukraine is taking longer than he anticipated, Putin admitted that wrapping up his "special military operation" could be a "lengthy process." At the same time, he continued to claim that the campaign was going according to plan and will achieve its goals.

The Kremlin has muzzled any criticism of its action in Ukraine from the liberal anti-war camp, shutting critical media outlets and criminalizing the spread of any information that differs from the official view. But it has faced an increasingly vocal criticism from Russian hardliners who have denounced the president as weak and indecisive and called for ramping up strikes on Ukraine.

Amid a string of military setbacks in Ukraine, Putin spiked another annual fixture, a televised call-in show in which he takes questions from the public to nurture his father-of-the-nation image.

Putin also so far has failed to deliver the televised state-of-the-nation address to parliament, a speech he's obliged by the country's constitution to deliver each year.

The Kremlin hasn't set a date for Putin's address.

Biden to sign gay marriage bill at White House ceremony

By CHRIS MEGERIAN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden is inviting thousands to celebrate at the White House on Tuesday as he signs into law gay marriage legislation before a bipartisan crowd that reflects growing acceptance of same-sex unions.

Lawmakers from both parties will be there, as will first lady Jill Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris and her husband, Doug Emhoff. The White House promised musical performances but was trying to maintain suspense about the headliners.

The triumphant mood will play out against the backdrop of a right-wing backlash over gender issues, which has alarmed gay and transgender people and their advocates.

Among the attendees will be the owner of Club Q, a gay nightclub in Colorado where five people were killed in a shooting last month, and two survivors of the attack. The suspect has been charged with hate crimes.

Plaintiffs from lawsuits that originally helped secure the nationwide right to gay marriage are also expected to be there, according to the White House.

The new law is intended to safeguard gay marriages if the U.S. Supreme Court ever reverses *Obergefell v. Hodges*, its 2015 decision legalizing same-sex unions nationwide. The new law also protects interracial marriages. In 1967, the Supreme Court in *Loving v. Virginia* struck down laws in 16 states barring interracial marriage.

"Congress has restored a measure of security to millions of marriages and families," Biden said in a statement when the legislation passed last week. "They have also provided hope and dignity to millions of young people across this country who can grow up knowing that their government will recognize and respect the families they build."

The signing will mark the culmination of a monthslong bipartisan effort sparked by the Supreme Court's decision in June to overturn *Roe v. Wade*, the 1973 ruling that made abortion available across the country.

In a concurring opinion in the case that overturned *Roe*, Justice Clarence Thomas suggested revisiting other decisions, including the legalization of gay marriage, generating fear that more civil rights could be imperiled by the court's conservative majority.

Lawmakers crafted a compromise that was intended to assuage conservative concerns about religious liberty, such as ensuring churches could still refuse to perform gay marriages.

In addition, states will not be required to issue marriage licenses to same-sex couples. But they will be required to recognize marriages conducted elsewhere in the country.

A majority of Republicans in Congress still voted against the legislation. However, enough supported it to sidestep a filibuster in the Senate and ensure its passage.

"Together, we showed that it's possible for Democrats and Republicans to come together to safeguard our most fundamental rights," Biden said.

Tuesday's ceremony will mark another chapter in Biden's legacy on gay rights.

He memorably — and unexpectedly — endorsed same-sex unions in a television interview in 2012, when he was vice president. Days later, President Barack Obama announced that he also supported gay marriage.

Attendees will be given a card commemorating Biden's comments from his 2012 interview.

"What this is all about is a simple proposition: Who do you love?" Biden said on NBC's "Meet the Press" a decade ago. "Who do you love and will you be loyal to the person you love? And that is what people are finding out is what all marriages at their root are about."

Since becoming president, Biden has reversed President Donald Trump's efforts to strip transgender people of anti-discrimination protections. His administration includes the first openly gay Cabinet member, Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg, and the first transgender person to receive Senate confirmation, Assistant Secretary for Health Rachel Levine.

Donors meet in Paris to get Ukraine through winter, bombing

By SYLVIE CORBET and INNA VARENYTSIA Associated Press

PARIS (AP) — Dozens of countries and international organizations threw their weight and hundreds of millions of euros (dollars) behind a fresh and urgent push Tuesday to keep Ukraine powered, fed, warm and moving this winter, responding defiantly to sustained Russian aerial bombardments that have plunged millions into the cold and dark by targeting critical infrastructure.

An international donor conference in Paris quickly racked up pledges of financial and in-kind support to help Ukraine's beleaguered civilian population survive winter's freezing temperatures and long nights.

Donor promises of immediate help to repair Ukraine's bomb-battered power grid and other infrastructure were also accompanied by international pledges of long-term support for the country and strong condemnation of the Kremlin's savaging of civilian targets.

French President Emmanuel Macron, in a speech opening the conference, described Moscow's bombardments of civilian targets as a war crime. He said the Kremlin is attacking civilian infrastructure because its troops have suffered setbacks on the battlefields.

Moscow's intention is to "plunge the Ukrainian people into despair," Macron said.

The European Union's chief executive, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, said the missile and drone bombardments are aimed at breaking Ukrainian morale but added: "Russia will fail."

Ukraine President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, who spoke by video link, said 12 million Ukrainians are suffering power outages. In presenting a long list of immediate needs, Zelenskyy said his country requires electricity generators as urgently as it also needs armored vehicles and armored vests for its troops.

Donor pledges quickly surged past the 400-million euro mark, the equivalent of more than US\$420 million, Macron's office announced. The total included 125 million euros (\$131 million) worth of aid from host France.

As temperatures plunge and snow falls, Ukraine's needs are huge and pressing. Successive waves of cruise missiles and exploding drones since October have destroyed about half of Ukraine's energy infrastructure, the Kyiv government says. It says Russia is trying to create a fresh wave of refugees to Europe. Russia says that by striking civilian infrastructure, its aim is to weaken Ukraine's ability to defend itself.

In Ukraine, life for many is becoming a battle for survival.

"Globally we need everything," said Yevhen Kaplin, who heads a Ukrainian humanitarian group, Proliska, providing cooking stoves, blankets and other aid to front-line regions and away from the battlefields.

With "the shelling, the missiles strikes and strikes on the infrastructure, we can't say whether there will be gas tomorrow, we can't predict whether to buy gas stoves or not," he said. "Every day the picture changes."

The Paris meeting — attended by 46 countries and 24 international organizations — also was putting in place a system to coordinate international aid this winter, so donors of equipment and other aid don't double-up. A web-based platform will enable Ukraine to list its civilian aid needs, and allow donors to show what they'll supply in response.

Sweden was among the first nations attending the meeting to pledge more aid. Its foreign trade minister, Johan Forssell, announced a contribution of 55 million euros (US\$58 million) for humanitarian aid and the rebuilding of schools, hospitals and energy infrastructure.

As winter bites, "we need to do whatever we can to help improve conditions in Ukraine and also help them to fight off the Russian invaders," he said. "We're here for them as long as it takes."

BTS member Jin begins military duty at front-line boot camp

By HYUNG-JIN KIM and JUWON PARK Associated Press

YEONCHEON, South Korea (AP) — Jin, the oldest member of K-pop supergroup BTS, began his 18 months of mandatory military service at a front-line South Korean boot camp Tuesday as fans gathered near the base to say goodbye to their star.

Six other younger BTS members are to join the military in coming years one after another, meaning that the world's biggest boy band must take a hiatus, likely for a few years. Their enlistments have prompted a fierce domestic debate over whether it's time to revise the country's conscription system to expand exemptions to include prominent entertainers like BTS, or not to provide such benefits to anyone.

With lawmakers squabbling at Parliament and surveys showing sharply split public opinions over offering exemptions to BTS members, their management agency said in October that all BTS members would perform their compulsory military duties. Big Hit Music said that both the company and the members of BTS "are looking forward to reconvening as a group again around 2025 following their service commitment."

Jin, who turned 30 earlier this month, entered the boot camp at Yeoncheon, a town near the tense border with North Korea, for five weeks of basic military training together with other new conscript soldiers, the Defense Ministry said. After the training involving rifle shooting, grenade throwing and marching practices, he and other conscripts would be assigned to army units across the country.

About 20-30 fans — some holding Jin's photos — and dozens of journalists gathered near the camp. But Jin didn't meet them as a vehicle carrying him moved into the boot camp without getting him out.

"I want to wait (for) Jin and see him go into the military and wish him all the best," Mandy Lee from Hong Kong said before Jin's entrance to the camp.

"Actually it's complicated. I wanna be sad. I wanna be happy for him," said Angelina from Indonesia. "Mixed feelings. He has to serve (for) his country." Angelina, like many Indonesians, uses only one name.

A couple dozen fans could be seen as a small turnout given Jin's huge popularity. But Jin and his management agency had earlier asked fans not to visit the site and notified them there wouldn't be any special event involving the singer, in order to prevent any issue caused by crowding.

Authorities still mobilized 300 police officers, soldiers, emergency workers and others to maintain order and guard against any accidents, according to the army. Strict safety steps were expected as South Korea is still reeling from the devastating Halloween crush in October in Seoul that killed 158 people.

Hours before entering the camp, Jin — whose real name is Kim Seok-jin — wrote on the on the online fan platform Weverse that "It's time for a curtain call." He posted a photo of himself Sunday with a military buzzcut and a message saying, "Ha ha ha. It's cuter than I had expected."

By law, all able-bodied South Korean men must serve in the military for 18-21 months under a conscription system established to deal with threats from North Korea. But the law gives special exemptions to athletes, classical and traditional musicians, and ballet and other dancers if they have won top prizes in certain competitions and enhance national prestige. K-pop stars and other entertainers aren't given such benefits even if they gain worldwide fame and win big international awards.

"Though BTS members have opted to go to the military, there are still some sort of regrets," said Jung Duk-hyun, a pop culture commentator. "Those in the pop culture sector experience little bit of disadvantages and unfairness, compared with those in the pure art sector or athletes. This will likely continue to be an issue of controversy so I wonder if it must be discussed continuously."

Exemptions or dodging of duties are a highly sensitive issue in South Korea, where the draft forces young men to suspend their studies or professional careers. Defense Minister Lee Jong-sup and Lee Ki Sik, head of South Korea's enlistment office, previously said it would be "desirable" for BTS members to fulfill their military duties to ensure fairness in the country's military service.

Chun In-bum, a retired lieutenant general who commanded South Korea's special forces, said the government must move to repeal any exemptions as the military's shrinking recruitment pool is "a very serious" problem amid the country's declining fertility rate. He called a debate over BTS's military service "unnecessary" as it wasn't raised by BTS members, who have shown willingness in carrying out their duties.

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BTS was created in 2013 and has a legion of global supporters who call themselves the "Army." Its other members are RM, Suga, J-Hope, Jimin, V and Jungkook, who is the youngest at 25. The group expanded its popularity in the West with its 2020 megahit "Dynamite," the band's first all-English song that made BTS the first K-pop act to top Billboard's Hot 100. The band has performed in sold-out arenas around the world and was even invited to speak at United Nations meetings.

Hybe Corp., the parent company of Big Hit, said in October that each member of the band for the time being would focus on individual activities scheduled around their military service plans. In October, Jin released "The Astronaut," a single co-written by Coldplay.

Jung, the commentator, said sold projects could give BTS members much-needed time to develop themselves after working together as a group for many years. But Cha Woo-jin, a K-pop commentator, said it's unclear if BTS would enjoy the same popularity as a group when they get together again after finishing their military duties in a few years.

In August, Lee, the defense minister, said BTS members who are serving would likely be allowed to continue practicing and to join other non-serving BTS members in overseas group tours.

Cha said K-pop's global influence wouldn't be hurt much because of BTS members' enlistments as they "appear to represent K-pop but aren't everything of K-pop." Chung agreed, saying that other K-pop groups like BLACKPINK, Stray Kids and aespa could rise further.

China students return home amid COVID travel spread fears

BEIJING (AP) — Some Chinese universities say they will allow students to finish the semester from home in hopes of reducing the potential of a bigger COVID-19 outbreak during the January Lunar New Year travel rush.

It wasn't clear how many schools were taking part, but universities in Shanghai and nearby cities said students would be given the option of either returning home early or staying on campus and undergoing testing every 48 hours. The Lunar New Year, which falls on Jan. 22 this year, is traditionally China's busiest travel season.

Universities have been the scene of frequent lockdowns over the past three years, occasionally leading to clashes between the authorities and students confined to campus or even their dorm rooms.

Tuesday's announcements came as China begins relaxing its strict "zero-COVID" policy, allowing people with mild symptoms to stay home rather than be sent to a quarantine center, among other changes that followed widespread protests.

Starting from Tuesday, China has stopped tracking some travel, potentially reducing the likelihood people will be forced into quarantine for visiting COVID-19 hot spots. Despite that, China's international borders remain largely shut and there has been no word on when restrictions on inbound travelers and Chinese wishing to go overseas will be eased.

The move follows the government's dramatic announcement last week that it was ending many of the strictest measures, following three years during which it enforced some of the world's tightest virus restrictions.

Last month in Beijing and several other cities, protests over the restrictions grew into calls for leader Xi Jinping and the Communist Party to step down — a level of public dissent not seen in decades.

While met with relief, the relaxation has also sparked concerns about a new wave of infections potentially overwhelming health care resources in some areas.

With so many people staying home, Beijing's downtown streets were eerily quiet on Tuesday. Small lines formed outside fever clinics — the number of which has been recently increased from 94 to 303 — and at pharmacies, where cold and flu medications have become harder to find.

Many residents of mainland China have taken to ordering medication from pharmacies in Hong Kong, which has already relaxed many restrictions.

The government of the semi-autonomous southern city took a further step Tuesday, saying it would remove restrictions for arriving travelers that currently prevent them from dining in restaurants or going

to bars for the first three days.

It would also scrap the use of its contact-tracing app, although vaccine requirements to enter venues like restaurants will remain in place. Those going from Hong Kong to mainland China and Macao will no longer have to take a PCR test at border checkpoints, although they still face several days in quarantine on the mainland side. The new measures take effect Wednesday.

Hong Kong will gradually reduce PCR testing, including the compulsory screening notices issued to residential buildings, and more rapid test kits will be given out in the community, according to the city's health minister.

The easing of control measures on the mainland means a sharp drop in obligatory testing from which daily infections numbers are compiled, but cases appear to be rising rapidly, with many testing themselves at home and staying away from hospitals.

China reported 7,451 new infections on Monday, bringing the nation's total to 372,763 — more than double the level on Oct. 1. It has recorded 5,235 deaths — compared to 1.1 million in the United States.

China's government-supplied figures have not been independently verified and questions have been raised about whether the ruling Communist Party has sought to minimize numbers of cases and deaths.

The U.S. consulates in the northeastern Chinese city of Shenyang and the central city of Wuhan will offer only emergency services from Tuesday "in response to increased number of COVID-19 cases," the State Department said.

"Mission China makes every effort to ensure full consular services are available to U.S. citizens living in the PRC, but further disruptions are possible," an e-mailed message said, using the initials for China's official name, the People's Republic of China.

Xi's government is still officially committed to stopping virus transmission, the last major country to try. But the latest moves suggest the party will tolerate more cases without quarantines or shutting down travel or businesses as it winds down its "zero-COVID" strategy.

Amid the unpredictable messaging from Beijing, experts warn there still is a chance the ruling party might reverse course and reimpose restrictions if a large-scale outbreak ensues.

The change in policy comes after protests erupted Nov. 25 after 10 people died in a fire in the northwestern city of Urumqi. Many questioned whether COVID-19 restrictions impeded rescue efforts. Authorities denied the claims spread online, but demonstrators gave voice to longstanding frustration in cities such as Shanghai that have endured severe lockdowns.

The party responded with a massive show of force and an unknown number of people were arrested at the protests or in the days following.

Musk's Twitter disbands its Trust and Safety advisory group

By MATT O'BRIEN and BARBARA ORTUTAY AP Technology Writers

Elon Musk's Twitter has dissolved its Trust and Safety Council, the advisory group of around 100 independent civil, human rights and other organizations that the company formed in 2016 to address hate speech, child exploitation, suicide, self-harm and other problems on the platform.

The council had been scheduled to meet with Twitter representatives Monday night. But Twitter informed the group via email that it was disbanding it shortly before the meeting was to take place, according to multiple members.

The council members, who provided images of the email from Twitter to The Associated Press, spoke on the condition of anonymity due to fears of retaliation. The email said Twitter was "reevaluating how best to bring external insights" and the council is "not the best structure to do this."

"Our work to make Twitter a safe, informative place will be moving faster and more aggressively than ever before and we will continue to welcome your ideas going forward about how to achieve this goal," said the email, which was signed "Twitter."

The volunteer group provided expertise and guidance on how Twitter could better combat hate, harassment and other harms but didn't have any decision-making authority and didn't review specific content

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disputes. Shortly after buying Twitter for \$44 billion in late October, Musk said he would form a new "content moderation council" to help make major decisions but later changed his mind.^a

"Twitter's Trust and Safety Council was a group of volunteers who over many years gave up their time when consulted by Twitter staff to offer advice on a wide range of online harms and safety issues," tweeted council member Alex Holmes. "At no point was it a governing body or decision making."

Twitter, which is based in San Francisco, had confirmed the meeting with the council Thursday in an email in which it promised an "open conversation and Q&A" with Twitter staff, including the new head of trust and safety, Ella Irwin.

That came on the same day that three council members announced they were resigning in a public statement posted on Twitter that said that "contrary to claims by Elon Musk, the safety and wellbeing of Twitter's users are on the decline."

Those former council members soon became the target of online attacks after Musk amplified criticism of them and Twitter's past leadership for allegedly not doing enough to stop child sexual exploitation on the platform.

"It is a crime that they refused to take action on child exploitation for years!" Musk tweeted.

A growing number of attacks on the council led to concerns from some remaining members who sent an email to Twitter earlier on Monday demanding the company stop misrepresenting the council's role.

Those false accusations by Twitter leaders were "endangering current and former Council members," the email said.

The Trust and Safety Council, in fact, had as one of its advisory groups one that focused on child exploitation. This included the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children, the Rati Foundation and YAKIN, or Youth Adult Survivors & Kin in Need.

Former Twitter employee Patricia Cartes, whose job it was to form the council in 2016, said Monday its dissolution "means there's no more checks and balances." Cartes said the company sought to bring a global outlook to the council, with experts from around the world who could relay concerns about how new Twitter policies or products might affect their communities.

She contrasted that with Musk's current practice of surveying his Twitter followers before making a policy change affecting how content gets moderated.

"He doesn't really care as much about what experts think," she said.

Former FTX CEO Sam Bankman-Fried arrested in the Bahamas

By KEN SWEET AP Business Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — The former CEO of failed cryptocurrency firm FTX, Sam Bankman-Fried, has been arrested in the Bahamas at the request of the U.S. government, U.S. and Bahamian authorities said Monday.

The arrest was made Monday after the U.S. filed criminal charges that are expected to be unsealed Tuesday, according to U.S. Attorney Damian Williams. Bankman-Fried had been under criminal investigation by U.S. and Bahamian authorities following the collapse last month of FTX. The firm filed for bankruptcy on Nov. 11, when it ran out of money after the cryptocurrency equivalent of a bank run.

"We expect to move to unseal the indictment in the morning and will have more to say at that time," Williams said.

Bahamian Attorney General Ryan Pinder said the Bahamas would "promptly" extradite Bankman-Fried to the U.S. once the indictment is unsealed and U.S. authorities make a formal request. FTX is headquartered in the Bahamas and Bankman-Fried has largely remained in his Bahamian luxury compound in Nassau since the company's failure.

A spokesman for Bankman-Fried had no comment Monday evening. Bankman-Fried has a right to contest his extradition, which could delay but not likely stop his transfer to the U.S.

Bankman-Fried's arrest comes just a day before he was due to testify in front of the House Financial Services Committee. Rep. Maxine Waters, D-Calif., chairwoman of the committee, said she was "disappointed" that the American public, and FTX's customers, would not get to see Bankman-Fried testify under oath.

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Bankman-Fried was one of the world's wealthiest people on paper, with an estimated net worth of \$32 billion. He was a prominent personality in Washington, donating millions of dollars toward mostly left-leaning political causes and Democratic political campaigns. FTX grew to become the second-largest cryptocurrency exchange in the world.

That all unraveled quickly last month, when reports called into question the strength of FTX's balance sheet. Customers moved to withdraw billions of dollars, but FTX could not meet all the requests because it apparently used its customers deposits to cover bad bets at Bankman-Fried's investment arm, Alameda Research.

Bankman-Fried said recently that he did not "knowingly" misuse customers' funds, and said he believes his millions of angry customers will eventually be made whole.

The House Financial Services Committee is still expected to hear testimony Tuesday from current CEO John Ray III. Ray, who took over FTX on Nov. 11 and is a long-time restructuring specialist, has said in court filings that the financial conditions at FTX were worse than at Enron.

Bahamian authorities plan to continue their own investigation into Bankman-Fried.

"The Bahamas and the United States have a shared interest in holding accountable all individuals associated with FTX who may have betrayed the public trust and broken the law," said Bahamian Prime Minister Philip Davis, in a statement.

The U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission said it had authorized separate charges related to alleged violations of securities laws and would file them publicly Tuesday.

Exclusive dining: Pakistani hole-in-the wall dishes up faves

By RIAZAT BUTT Associated Press

LAHORE, Pakistan (AP) — No menu. No delivery. No walk-ins. Advance orders only. Explanations and instructions while you eat.

Welcome to Baking Virsa, a hole-in-the-wall in the eastern Pakistani city of Lahore described as the country's most expensive restaurant for what it serves — household favorites like flatbreads and kebabs.

It attracts diners from across Pakistan and beyond, curious about the limited offerings, the larger-than-life owner, and the rigid, no-frills dining experience that sets it apart from other restaurants in the area.

The windowless space opens out onto Railway Road in Gawalmandi, a neighborhood crammed with people, vehicles, animals, and food stalls. Restaurants belch out smells of baking bread, frying fish, grilling meats, and opinionated spicing into the early hours of the morning, when preparations begin for breakfast.

Lahore is a culinary powerhouse in Pakistan and, for years, Gawalmandi was famous for having a pedestrian area with restaurants and cafes.

Many of Gawalmandi's original communities migrated from Kashmir and eastern Punjab province before partition in 1947, when India and Pakistan were carved from the former British Empire as independent nations. The mix of Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims enriched Gawalmandi's commerce, culture and cuisine.

Some upscale parts of Lahore used to see Gawalmandi as "virtually a no-go area," said Kamran Lashari, the director-general of the Lahore Walled City Authority. But a makeover more than 20 years ago helped pull in the crowds and turn it into a magnet for diners.

"We had street performers. President Pervez Musharraf sat in the street with people all around him. The prince of Jordan also visited. Indian newspapers reported on Gawalmandi," Lashari said.

Restaurants in the neighborhood tend to be cheap and cheerful places.

And then there is Baking Virsa, where dinner for two can quickly come to \$60 without drinks because drinks, even water, are not served. By comparison, a basket of naan at the five-star Serena Hotel in the capital, Islamabad, sells for a dollar and a plate of kebabs is \$8. In Gawalmandi, one naan usually costs as little as 10 cents.

There are five items in Baking Virsa's repertoire: chicken, chops, two types of naan, and kebabs. Owner Bilal Sufi also does a roaring trade in bakarkhani, buttery, savory, crispy pastry discs best enjoyed with a cup of pink Kashmiri chai. Everything is available for takeaway but must be ordered days in advance,

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even when dining in.

It is not a restaurant but a tandoor, a large oven made of clay, the 34-year-old Sufi tells people. It has been in the same location for 75 years, serving the same items for decades.

Sufi says he is only doing what his father and grandfather have done, detailing his marinade ingredients, cooking methods, meat provenance and animal husbandry. His sheep are fed a diet of saffron milk, dates and unripe bananas.

He also tells people how to eat their food. "Pick it up with your hands! Take a big bite! Eat like a beast!" he urges them.

There is no salad, no yogurt, and no chutney, he tells a potential customer on the phone. "And if you ask for these you won't get them."

Sufi has run Baking Virsa for more than three years, taking over from his father Sufi Masood Saeed, who ran it before him and his grandfather Sufi Ahmed Saeed before that.

"In Pakistan, people think the spicier the better," said the third-generation tandoor owner. "Everywhere in Pakistan you'll have sauce or salad. If you have those on your taste buds, will you taste the yogurt or the meat?"

The meal arrives in a sequence.

First, Sufi presents a whole chicken, for \$30, followed by mutton chops at \$12.50, then a kebab, which costs \$8. Sufi says one kebab is enough for two people. A female diner asks for a plain naan with her chicken but is told she can't have it until she gets her kebab.

Her companion asks for a second kebab but is declined.

"All our kebabs are committed," Sufi tells him solemnly.

Another diner wants the mutton-stuffed naan but is told she can't have it as it wasn't part of the telephone order made three nights earlier.

Dinner comes on plastic plates atop plastic stools to a soundtrack of tooting rickshaws and other street life. Neighbors complain that the SUVs and sleek cars with Islamabad license plates block their doorways. Nobody moves their vehicles.

Sufi is unapologetic about everything. If he doesn't get the quality of meat he wants, he won't serve it. He'll cancel the order and return the money to customers.

If there aren't enough orders, he won't open on that particular day.

"It isn't necessary to open every day," he says. "We need to fulfil a minimum quantity for the recipes, that's 10-12 people."

He insists on his customers knowing what they eat, where it comes from, how it's made — and "why it tastes so different."

Baking Virsa, like the properties surrounding it, has no gas or running water. There is little to no street lighting on Railway Road. Any illumination comes from traffic, homes, and businesses. Away from the lip-smacking aroma of food, there is the occasional whiff of sewage.

Lashari, the city official, laments the "decay and disorder" that blights Gawalmandi and other traditional neighborhoods like it. He says they have a lot of commercial, residential and tourism potential but need an urban regeneration program.

Sufi, unperturbed by his very basic surroundings, has no intention of changing anything.

"Baking Virsa is a legacy," he says. "I'm doing this out of love and affection for my father."

New Zealand PM Ardern caught name-calling rival on hot mic

By NICK PERRY Associated Press

WELLINGTON, New Zealand (AP) — New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern was caught on a hot mic Tuesday using a vulgarity against a rival politician in a rare misstep for a leader known for her skill at debating and calm, measured responses.

After five years as prime minister, Ardern faces a tough election campaign in 2023. Her liberal Labour Party won reelection two years ago in a landslide of historic proportions, but recent polls have put her

party behind its conservative rivals.

The comment came after lawmaker David Seymour, who leads the libertarian ACT party, peppered Ardern with questions about her government's record for around seven minutes during Parliament's Question Time, which allows for spirited debate between rival parties.

As an aside to her deputy Grant Robertson, Ardern said what sounded like, "He's such an arrogant pr——," after sitting down. Her words are barely audible on Parliament TV but are just picked up in the background by her desk microphone as House Speaker Adrian Rurawhe talks.

Ardern's office said she apologized to Seymour for the comment. When asked by The Associated Press to clarify, Ardern's office did not dispute the comment. In an interview with the AP, Seymour said she had used those words.

"I'm absolutely shocked and astonished at her use of language," Seymour said. "It's very out of character for Jacinda, and I've personally known her for 11 years."

He said it was also ironic because his question to the prime minister had been about whether she had ever admitted a mistake as leader and then fixed it. "And she couldn't give a single example of when she's admitted she's wrong and apologized," Seymour said.

Seymour said that in her text, Ardern wrote that she "apologized, she shouldn't have made the comments, and that, as her mom said, if you don't have anything nice to say, don't say it."

Seymour, who said he admired some of Ardern's political skills immensely, said he'd written back to Ardern thanking her for the apology and wishing her a very Merry Christmas.

US scientists set to announce fusion energy breakthrough

By MICHAEL PHILLIS, JENNIFER McDERMOTT, MADDIE BURAKOFF and MATTHEW DALY Associated Press WASHINGTON (AP) — Energy Secretary Jennifer Granholm was set to announce a "major scientific breakthrough" Tuesday in the decades-long quest to harness fusion, the energy that powers the sun and stars.

Researchers at the Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory in California for the first time produced more energy in a fusion reaction than was used to ignite it, something called net energy gain, according to one government official and one scientist familiar with the research. Both spoke on the condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to discuss the breakthrough ahead of the announcement.

Granholm was scheduled to appear alongside Livermore researchers at a morning event in Washington. The Department of Energy declined to give details ahead of time. The news was first reported by the Financial Times.

Proponents of fusion hope that it could one day produce nearly limitless, carbon-free energy, displacing fossil fuels and other traditional energy sources. Producing energy that powers homes and businesses from fusion is still decades away. But researchers said it was a significant step nonetheless.

"It's almost like it's a starting gun going off," said Professor Dennis Whyte, director of the Plasma Science and Fusion Center at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and a leader in fusion research. "We should be pushing towards making fusion energy systems available to tackle climate change and energy security."

Net energy gain has been an elusive goal because fusion happens at such high temperatures and pressures that it is incredibly difficult to control.

Fusion works by pressing hydrogen atoms into each other with such force that they combine into helium, releasing enormous amounts of energy and heat. Unlike other nuclear reactions, it doesn't create radioactive waste.

Billions of dollars and decades of work have gone into fusion research that has produced exhilarating results — for fractions of a second. Previously, researchers at the National Ignition Facility, the division of Lawrence Livermore where the success took place, used 192 lasers and temperatures multiple times hotter than the center of the sun to create an extremely brief fusion reaction.

The lasers focus an enormous amount of heat on a small metal can. The result is a superheated plasma environment where fusion may occur.

Riccardo Betti, a professor at the University of Rochester and expert in laser fusion, said an announce-

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ment that net energy had been gained in a fusion reaction would be significant. But he said there's a long road ahead before the result generates sustainable electricity.

He likened the breakthrough to when humans first learned that refining oil into gasoline and igniting it could produce an explosion.

"You still don't have the engine and you still don't have the tires," Betti said. "You can't say that you have a car."

The net energy gain achievement applied to the fusion reaction itself, not the total amount of power it took to operate the lasers and run the project. For fusion to be viable, it will need to produce significantly more power and for longer.

It is incredibly difficult to control the physics of stars. Whyte said it has been challenging to reach this point because the fuel has to be hotter than the center of the sun. The fuel does not want to stay hot -- it wants to leak out and get cold. Containing it is an incredible challenge, he said.

Net energy gain isn't a huge surprise from the California lab because of progress it had already made, according to Jeremy Chittenden, a professor at Imperial College in London specializing in plasma physics.

"That doesn't take away from the fact that this is a significant milestone," he said.

It takes enormous resources and effort to advance fusion research. One approach turns hydrogen into plasma, an electrically charged gas, which is then controlled by humongous magnets. This method is being explored in France in a collaboration among 35 countries called the International Thermonuclear Experimental Reactor as well as by researchers at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and a private company.

Last year the teams working on those projects in two continents announced significant advancements in the vital magnets needed for their work

From blizzards to tornadoes, US braces for wild weather week

By STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — Much of the central United States from the Rocky Mountains to the Midwest was braced Tuesday for blizzard-like conditions, while states farther to the south were warned of the risk of flash flooding and tornadoes from a massive storm blowing across the country.

An area stretching from Montana into western Nebraska and Colorado was under blizzard warnings, and the National Weather Service said that as much as 2 feet (61 centimeters) of snow was possible in some areas of western South Dakota and northwestern Nebraska. Meanwhile, ice and sleet were expected in the eastern Great Plains.

The National Weather Service warned that up to about half an inch (2.5 centimeters) of ice could form and winds could gust up to 45 miles per hour (72 kilometers per hour) in parts of Iowa, Minnesota and South Dakota. Power outages, tree damage, falling branches and hazardous travel conditions all threatened the region.

"This is a 'we are not kidding' kind of storm," the South Dakota Department of Public Safety said Monday in a tweet urging people to stock up on essentials, then stay home once the storm hits.

Portions of Interstate 90 and Interstate 29 through South Dakota were expected to be closed by mid-morning Tuesday due to "freezing rain, substantial snow totals, low visibility, drifting snow and high winds," the state's Department of Transportation said. Secondary highways will likely become "impassable," it said.

Those farther south in Texas and Louisiana could get heavy rains with flash flooding, hail and tornadoes by Tuesday, the National Weather Service said. The storm was forecast to continue southeast into Florida later in the week.

"It will be a busy week while this system moves across the country," said Marc Chenard, a meteorologist at the National Weather Service's headquarters in College Park, Maryland.

The weather is part of the same system that dumped heavy snow in the Sierra Nevada over the weekend before moving east.

In northern Utah, a tour bus crashed Monday morning as snow and frigid temperatures blanketed the

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region. The bus flipped onto its side in Tremonton after the driver lost control while switching lanes, the state's Highway Patrol said in a statement. The Highway Patrol said 23 passengers were injured, including some seriously.

Thousands of students from Native American communities across Wyoming, Nebraska and the Dakotas were traveling to Rapid City, South Dakota, for this week's Lakota Nation Invitational, a high school athletic event. Brian Brewer, one of the organizers, said he had urged schools and participants to travel early.

"We told them with this storm coming — if you leave tomorrow, there's a good chance you might not make it," he said Monday.

In Northern California, most mountain highways had reopened Monday. Remaining warnings in the Southern California mountains were expected to expire late Monday night, the National Weather Service said.

With winter still more than a week away, it was the latest fall storm to bring significant precipitation to California, which is dealing with the impacts of years of drought that have spurred calls for water conservation.

The UC Berkeley Central Sierra Snow Lab northwest of Lake Tahoe reported that the storm dropped 54.5 inches (138.5 centimeters) of snow.

The Sierra snowpack, which on average is at its peak on April 1, is normally a significant source of water when it melts in the spring. Throughout the drought experts have cautioned about optimism over early season storms as climate change makes what were once average conditions rare.

Last year, a powerful atmospheric river dumped huge amounts of rain on California in October and a wet stretch in December left parts of the Sierra Nevada buried in snow. Then the state experienced its driest January through April on record.

Nancy Pelosi's career chronicled in new film by her daughter

By MICHAEL BALSAMO Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — For Alexandra Pelosi, the brutal attack on her father earlier this year was a culmination of vitriol that had been building for decades. Her family's name, she says, has been weaponized for years, turned into a curse word for Republicans.

Then, in October, a man broke into the family's San Francisco home and attacked Paul Pelosi with a hammer, leaving him unconscious in a pool of his own blood.

The bubbling political rhetoric that led to that moment is chronicled in a new documentary premiering Tuesday night on HBO. The film, "Pelosi in the House," directed and produced by Alexandra Pelosi, the youngest of House Speaker Nancy Pelosi's five children, follows the elder Pelosi's career over three decades.

The film offers a rare behind-the-scenes look at her political life, chronicling major milestones from her election to Congress in 1987 to becoming the first female House speaker in 2007 to the insurrection at the U.S. Capitol on Jan. 6, 2021, as Congress was voting to certify Joe Biden's presidential win.

"There's a thread from the very first time they started taking ads out against Nancy Pelosi and turning her into a witch and turning our last name into a curse word. You can follow that thread 20 years later to my parents' doorstep to my father getting attacked," Alexandra Pelosi said in an interview with The Associated Press.

Pelosi's film follows her mother, literally, through the Capitol and behind the scenes as she negotiates key votes for major pieces of legislation. It also depicts threats the family received, including a severed pig's head that was delivered to the speaker's San Francisco home just days before the attack on the Capitol.

The camera was also rolling on Jan. 6 as the House speaker prepared for the certification of the presidential election and as rioters began smashing through the doors and windows, violently shoving past overwhelmed police officers, leaving many officers bruised and bloodied.

The film includes extended clips recorded as Pelosi and other congressional leaders are rushed out of the Capitol and evacuated to Fort McNair, a nearby Army base. It captures frantic leaders calling the defense secretary, attorney general, then-Vice President Mike Pence and other officials trying to get assistance to the Capitol.

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Some of the footage was played during a hearing of the House panel investigating the attack on the Capitol. Alexandra Pelosi and her team provided the footage to the committee.

"When they took Nancy Pelosi out of the chamber, she didn't even get to take her cellphone. They rushed her out. And she was making calls to the defense secretary, the attorney general, the vice president, and I thought there should be a record of this," Alexandra Pelosi said.

"She didn't get to take the House clerk, who has a transcript of all this, to record what was happening. This was historic what was happening, and somebody needed to have a record of what was said," she said.

Among those historic moments: discussion about whether to move the entire Congress – all 100 senators and 435 members of the House – by bus to Fort McNair and convene the joint session there to continue the certification of the election.

For the House speaker, the attack on the Capitol was one of the worst moments of her career, as her panicking staff members fled for cover, hiding silently under tables as rioters trashed the speaker's office and called out "Nancy!" as they searched for Pelosi.

"She thinks that the Capitol is sacred ground," Alexandra Pelosi says of her mother. "That's why January 6 really tore at her soul. Because to her, the Capitol is sacred ground, and the rioters literally pooped inside the sacred ground."

Less than two years after that attack, a man broke into the Pelosi family home in San Francisco, roused the speaker's husband and reportedly demanded "Where is Nancy?" Officers arrived at the home after Paul Pelosi called 911 and they arrested the intruder, David DePape. He appears to have made racist and often rambling posts online, including some that questioned the results of the 2020 election, defended former President Donald Trump and echoed QAnon conspiracy theories.

The Pelosi family has also received death threats. The FBI has stepped in on several cases involving threats to Pelosi's grandchildren and Alexandra Pelosi said she receives threatening messages nearly every day.

"It was so inevitable, because the rhetoric has just amped up so much over the past few years," Alexandra Pelosi said as she looked out the window of her New York home.

As the family gathered for Thanksgiving this year, a tactical team of police officers holding rifles lined the perimeter of the house. Alexandra Pelosi has been struggling to explain to her children why so many people want to kill their grandmother.

"My son comes into the kitchen in the morning for breakfast. He's like, 'Hey, did you see that that guy that said that he wanted to hang Nancy Pelosi from a lamppost got convicted?' That's just weird for a teenager to be talking about his own grandmother, being hung from a lamppost," she said.

"And as the mother you're trying to say all humanity is good. We are decent people. No, we're not."

US inflation report may show further slowing of price spikes

By CHRISTOPHER RUGABER AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — A high-profile report on inflation to be released Tuesday morning could show another month of cooling prices and add to evidence that the pressures on American households are gradually easing.

A milder inflation report would also encourage optimism that the Federal Reserve will suspend its interest rate hikes sometime early next year.

Economists have forecast that consumer prices rose 7.3% in November compared with a year ago, according to the data provider FactSet. Though still uncomfortably high, that would fall well below a recent peak of 9.1% in June and would amount to the fifth straight year-over-year slowdown in inflation.

Gas prices have dropped from their mid-summer highs and are lower than they were a year ago. Many supply chains have unsnarled, helping lower the costs of imported goods and parts. Prices for lumber, copper, wheat and other commodities have also fallen.

Fed officials and economists will focus more on Tuesday's month-to-month inflation figures for a better read on where prices might be headed. Prices are expected to have risen 0.3% from October to November, which would extend a streak of slowdowns. Measured month to month, inflation had soared 1% in May

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and 1.3% in June but has averaged just 0.2% over the past four months.

To some economists and Fed officials, such figures are a sign of improvement, even though inflation remains far above the central bank's annual 2% target and might not reach it until 2024.

Fed Chair Jerome Powell has said he is tracking price trends in three different categories to best understand the likely path of inflation: Goods, excluding volatile food and energy costs; housing, which includes rents and the cost of homeownership; and services excluding housing, such as auto insurance, pet services and education.

In a speech two weeks ago in Washington, Powell noted that there had been some progress in easing inflation in goods and housing but not so in most services. Physical goods like used cars, furniture, clothing and appliances have become steadily less expensive since the summer.

Used car prices, which had skyrocketed 45% in June 2021 compared with a year earlier, have fallen for most of this year. In October, their year-over-year price increase was just 2%.

Housing costs, which make up nearly a third of the consumer price index, are still rising. But real-time measures of apartment rents and home prices are starting to drop after having posted sizzling price acceleration at the height of the pandemic. Powell said those declines will likely emerge in government data next year and should help reduce overall inflation.

Still, services costs are likely to stay persistently high, Powell suggested. In part, that's because sharp increases in wages are becoming a key contributor to inflation. Services companies, like hotels and restaurants, are particularly labor-intensive. And with average wages growing at a brisk 5%-6% a year, price pressures keep building in that sector of the economy.

Services businesses tend to pass on some of their higher labor costs to their customers by charging more, thereby perpetuating inflation. Higher pay also fuels more consumer spending, which allows companies to raise prices.

"We want wages to go up strongly," Powell said, "but they've got to go up at a level that is consistent with 2% inflation over time."

On Wednesday, the Fed will likely raise rates for a seventh time this year, a move that will further increase borrowing costs for consumers and businesses. Still, the central bank is expected to raise its key short-term rate by a smaller half-point, after four straight three-quarter-point increases. That would leave its benchmark rate in a range of 3.75% to 4%, its highest level in 15 years.

Economists expect the Fed to further slow its rate hikes next year, with quarter-point increases in February and March if inflation remains relatively subdued.

US scientists set to announce fusion energy breakthrough

By MICHAEL PHILLIS, JENNIFER McDERMOTT, MADDIE BURAKOFF and MATTHEW DALY Associated Press WASHINGTON (AP) — Energy Secretary Jennifer Granholm was set to announce a "major scientific breakthrough" Tuesday in the decades-long quest to harness fusion, the energy that powers the sun and stars.

Researchers at the Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory in California for the first time produced more energy in a fusion reaction than was used to ignite it, something called net energy gain, according to one government official and one scientist familiar with the research. Both spoke on the condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to discuss the breakthrough ahead of the announcement.

Granholm was scheduled to appear alongside Livermore researchers at a morning event in Washington. The Department of Energy declined to give details ahead of time. The news was first reported by the Financial Times.

Proponents of fusion hope that it could one day produce nearly limitless, carbon-free energy, displacing fossil fuels and other traditional energy sources. Producing energy that powers homes and businesses from fusion is still decades away. But researchers said it was a significant step nonetheless.

"It's almost like it's a starting gun going off," said Professor Dennis Whyte, director of the Plasma Science and Fusion Center at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and a leader in fusion research. "We should be pushing towards making fusion energy systems available to tackle climate change and energy security."

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Net energy gain has been an elusive goal because fusion happens at such high temperatures and pressures that it is incredibly difficult to control.

Fusion works by pressing hydrogen atoms into each other with such force that they combine into helium, releasing enormous amounts of energy and heat. Unlike other nuclear reactions, it doesn't create radioactive waste.

Billions of dollars and decades of work have gone into fusion research that has produced exhilarating results — for fractions of a second. Previously, researchers at the National Ignition Facility, the division of Lawrence Livermore where the success took place, used 192 lasers and temperatures multiple times hotter than the center of the sun to create an extremely brief fusion reaction.

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Net energy gain isn't a huge surprise from the California lab because of progress it had already made, according to Jeremy Chittenden, a professor at Imperial College in London specializing in plasma physics.

"That doesn't take away from the fact that this is a significant milestone," he said.

It takes enormous resources and effort to advance fusion research. One approach turns hydrogen into plasma, an electrically charged gas, which is then controlled by humongous magnets. This method is being explored in France in a collaboration among 35 countries called the International Thermonuclear Experimental Reactor as well as by researchers at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and a private company.

Last year the teams working on those projects in two continents announced significant advancements in the vital magnets needed for their work

Ladakh herders endeavor to save future on climate frontier

By AIJAZ HUSSAIN Associated Press

KHARNAK, India (AP) — Nomad Tsering Angchuk vows to stay put in his remote village in India's Ladakh region.

His two sons and most of his fellow villagers have migrated to a nearby urban settlement but Angchuk is determined to herd his flock of fine cashmere-producing goats in the treeless Kharnak village, a hauntingly beautiful but unforgiving, cold mountainous desert.

The 47-year-old herds 800 sheep and goats and a flock of 50 Himalayan yaks in Kharnak. In 2013, he migrated to Kharnakling, an urban settlement in the outskirts of a regional town called Leh but returned a year later, not because his old home had become any better, he said, "but because the urban centers are getting worse and there are only menial jobs for people like us."

Nestled between India, Pakistan and China, Ladakh has faced both territorial disputes and the stark effects of climate change. The region's sparsely populated villages have witnessed shifting weather patterns that have already altered people's lives through floods, landslides and droughts.

Thousands of Ladakh nomads, known for their unique lifestyle in one of the most hostile landscapes in the world have been at the heart of these changes, compounded by border conflict and shrinking grazing

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land. The changes have forced hundreds to migrate to mainly urban settlements, while others work to make it a more habitable place.

Angchuk's sons didn't return — they don't want to be shepherds, he said — and settled in Leh. One became a construction contractor and the other works at a travel agency, part of the region's burgeoning tourism industry.

With 300-plus days of sunshine, the desert is in the rain shadows of the Himalayas and receives only about 4 inches (100 millimeters) of precipitation annually.

At an altitude of 15,000 feet (4,750 meters), temperatures can fall to minus 35 Celsius (minus 31 degrees Fahrenheit) during long winter months. But it's getting hotter.

There is no word for mosquito in the local Ladakhi language, but the region has lots of these insects now, said Sonam Wangchuk, an engineer working on solutions for sustainability at his Himalayan Institute of Alternative Ladakh.

"These are all coming with the viability of climate for them," he said.

Ladakh's thousands of glaciers, which help give the rugged region its title as one of the water towers of the world, are receding at an alarming rate, threatening the water supply of millions of people.

"This year we had an unprecedented melting of glaciers," said Prof. Shakil Romshoo, a leading glaciologist and earth scientist.

Romshoo said his team has been studying seven glaciers in the Kashmir and Ladakh Himalaya for nine years but "this year shows the maximum ablation," referring to the amount of snow and ice that has disappeared.

Drung-Drung, Ladakh's second largest glacier, melted five meters (197 inches) in its thickness this year compared to an average one meter (39 inches) annually in last few years.

The melting, experts say, has been exacerbated by an increase in local pollution that has worsened due to the region's militarization. Black carbon or soot from the burning of fossil fuels on the glaciers absorbs sunlight and contaminates waterways, threatening the region's security of food, water and energy.

The pollution is "a huge environmental onslaught," engineer Wangchuk said. "Most of it is due to heating shelters that can be easily replaced by non-carbon-based heating systems."

He added Ladakh today is "probably the densest militarized zone where the civilian-soldier ratio is 1:2."

The ongoing standoff between India and China has witnessed the deployment of tens of thousands of additional soldiers to the already militarized region.

"Climate change is a global mismanagement while the pollution is a local mismanagement. We're witnessing devastating effects of the mix in Ladakh," Wangchuk said.

"It's not just any little conflict, it's much more than that and whoever wins we all lose."

Herders say with access to the usual breeding and birthing grounds blocked by militaries on either side, newborn goats and sheep are perishing in the extreme cold of higher elevations.

Shepherds roamed these pasturelands atop the roof of the world along the unmarked borders with China for centuries where the harsh winds cause the goats to grow their super-soft wool.

Cashmere takes its name from disputed Kashmir, where artisans weave the wool into fine yarn and exquisite clothing items that cost up to thousands apiece in a major handicraft export industry.

"None of the other products get as much revenue as what they produce and they are the true generators of wealth in Ladakh," Wangchuk said about Kharnak nomads. "They're the most precious but they're the most neglected lot."

The nomads live a grueling life and follow a strict round-the-clock routine. They milk and shear their animals twice a day, maintain stone-walled pens, weave carpets, collect and sun-dry manure for fire and cook food. Shepherds also shuttle their animals from place to place more often than usual in search of greener grazing areas.

But there's almost no health care, school or a proper irrigation system.

"It's a whole year work here, no holidays. Even if you're sick you've to tend to animals," Angchuk, the nomad, said. "In a decade or so I think there won't be any Kharnak nomads although our people will be around. We'll be history."

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Authorities say they're doing everything they can to stop the flight of nomads. Today the village has solar panels for electricity, government-built prefab huts and water taps. Some parts have telecommunication coverage.

But the herders say it's not enough.

Tundup Namgail, the Leh district head of sheep husbandry department, said all facilities notwithstanding, the nomads need to be "lured back on practical terms, not by romanticizing their life."

The "only way to keep them there is to improve their profitability. Make them rich somehow," he said.

Other solutions are emerging. Ice stupas, an artificial glacier made by villagers and named after a type of sacred Buddhist structure, are becoming an alternate water source.

In winter, villagers store water in the form of conical-shaped ice heaps that dribble down as the temperature warms.

In the region's Kulum village this method has partially worked.

Some eight out of 11 families in the farming village migrated to other areas after a catastrophic drought followed deadly flooding in 2010 and dried up Kulum's water.

A decade later villagers and a team of environmental activists, including Wangchuk, formed an ice stupa up in the nearby mountain. Last year, some families returned as a trickle of water from the man-made glacier irrigated some patches of the village field.

Still, experts say the climate change-induced flash floods and droughts have disrupted the hydrological system of many villages.

"It's a kind of blessing in disguise that lesser people are doing farming now," Wangchuk said. "People who are not farming are in a way helping those who are farming by making available the little water that now comes."

Kharnak herder Paljor Tundup nevertheless worries he could be the last generation of shepherds in the region.

"Our children don't want this life," he said as he picked up a hank of wool to pass on to his daughter weaving a carpet nearby. "Honestly, we also don't have much to argue with them in favor of this kind of life."

Anger in rural areas fuels protests against Peru government

By FRANKLIN BRICEÑO and REGINA GARCIA CANO Associated Press

ANDAHUAYLAS, Peru (AP) — The anger of Peruvians against their government is nowhere more visible than in Andahuaylas, a remote rural Andean community where the poor have struggled for years and where voters' support helped elect now-ousted President Pedro Castillo, himself a peasant like them.

Their fury is such that their protests continued Monday despite the deaths of seven people, among them two young demonstrators over the weekend, including 17-year-old Beckham Romario Quispe Garfias.

As thousands of people spilled into the streets, Raquel Quispe recalled her brother as a talented athlete tired of feeling invisible in the eyes of politicians. He was named for English soccer great David Beckham and Romario, the Brazilian soccer phenomenon turned politician.

Clouds above her, she stood outside the hospital where his body was kept, and with a simmering anger in her voice, at times betrayed by tears, she summed up what drove him and others to protest since Castillo's ouster last week: an exclusionary democracy.

"For them, those who are there in Congress, the only opinion that is valid is that of Peruvians who have money, of wealthy people," said Quispe, an early childhood education teacher.

"They do whatever they want. For them... the vote of the provinces is not valid, it is useless. But the vote of the people of Lima is taken into account. That is an injustice for all of Peru."

About 3,000 people gathered in the streets of Andahuaylas Monday, to protest and to mourn and pay their respects before the white caskets of the young men who died over the weekend. Across the community, rocks were scattered on roads still marked by simmering fires. An airstrip used by the armed forces remained blocked, black smoke still etched on a nearby building.

Demonstrators across rural communities, including Andahuaylas, continued to call on President Dina

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Boluarte to resign and schedule general elections to replace her and all members of Congress. They also want authorities to free Castillo, who was detained Wednesday when he was ousted by lawmakers after he sought to dissolve Congress ahead of an impeachment vote.

While protesters have also gathered in Lima, the capital, the demonstrations have been particularly heated in rural areas that were strongholds for Castillo, a former schoolteacher and political newcomer from a poor Andean mountain district.

Protesters on Monday went a step further by blocking access to an international airport for several hours in southern Peru and occupying its runway. Demonstrations in Arequipa, where the airport is located, left one protester dead, Minister of Defense Alberto Otarola told lawmakers during a session of Congress focused on the civil unrest.

The Ombudsman's Office of Peru reported that seven people had died since the demonstrations began Wednesday. Five of them died Monday. All seven deaths happened outside Lima, including four in Andahuaylas.

The escalation came even after Boluarte gave in to protesters' demands hours earlier, announcing in a nationally televised address that she would send Congress a proposal to move up elections to April 2024 — a reversal of her previous assertion that she should remain president for the remaining 3 1/2 years of her predecessor's term.

Boluarte, in her address to the nation, also declared a state of emergency in areas outside Lima, where protests have been particularly violent.

"My duty as president of the republic in the current difficult time is to interpret ... the aspirations, interests and concerns ...of the vast majority of Peruvians," Boluarte said in announcing she would propose early elections to Congress.

Boluarte, 60, was swiftly sworn in Wednesday to replace Castillo, hours after he stunned the country by ordering the dissolution of Congress, which in turn dismissed him for "permanent moral incapacity." Castillo was arrested on charges of rebellion.

Members of Boluarte's Cabinet appeared before Congress Monday to give an account of the protests. Far-right lawmaker Jorge Montoya demanded appropriate measures to end the unrest, telling Castillo's supporters that now that he has been removed that "chapter is closed."

"These are not acts of protest, they are acts of terrorism that must be drastically punished," Montoya said. "You cannot defend a situation that is at the extremes."

Peru has had six presidents in the last six years. In 2020, it cycled through three in a week.

The latest presidential crisis is taking place as the Andes and its thousands of small farms struggle to survive the worst drought in a half-century. The country is also experiencing a fifth wave of COVID-19 cases.

Castillo's supporters had hoped that the populist outsider would address some of the challenges they have long faced. But during his 17 months in office, Castillo could not achieve any signature project and faced the racism and discrimination that his impoverished supporters often experience.

In Andahuaylas, about 80% of voters who cast a ballot during the runoff election last year supported Castillo. His proposals included rewriting the country's constitution, which was last drafted and approved in 1993 during the government of Alberto Fujimori, the disgraced former president whose daughter, Keiko, lost the presidency to Castillo.

Rosario Garfias was among those demonstrating outside the hospital where her 17-year-old son's body was being held. She expressed heartbreak over her son's death, speaking in Quechua, one of Peru's Indigenous languages.

"My mother is making a complaint in her language. I know that many do not understand her, not even Congress understands it," said her daughter, Raquel Quispe.

"She is saying that ... she is hurting deeply because they have killed him, like in a slaughterhouse. And my mom, like my family, asks for justice for my brother."

Bolsonaro supporters clash with police in Brazil's capital

By DIANE JEANTET Associated Press

RIO DE JANEIRO (AP) — Supporters of Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro clashed with police Monday, setting fire to several vehicles and allegedly attempting to invade the federal police's headquarters in capital city Brasilia.

Images of chaos as a small number of protesters, many wearing the yellow and green of Brazil's flag that has come to symbolize Bolsonarismo, roamed the city, circulated on local television channels and social media.

Brasilia's public security secretariat said in a statement that clashes broke out after police carried out an arrest warrant. Earlier that day, Supreme Court justice Alexandre de Moraes had ordered the temporary arrest of José Acácio Serere Xavante, suspected of participating in anti-democratic protests.

Since Bolsonaro lost re-election to da Silva on Oct. 30, many of his supporters have gathered outside military barracks across the country refusing to concede defeat and asking for the armed forces to intervene. Earlier Monday, the nation's electoral authority awarded da Silva and his vice president an official certification, sealing their victory.

Bolsonaro, who has repeatedly claimed that the nation's electronic voting system is prone to fraud and has not conceded defeat, told supporters Friday that his political future was in their hands.

"The depredation and attempted invasion of the Federal Police building in Brasilia is unacceptable," said Flavio Dino, future Justice and Public Security Minister in the upcoming administration of President-elect Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva.

The leader of the opposition in the Senate, Randolfe Rodrigues, said some protestors, whom he called "terrorists," had concentrated around the hotel where da Silva is staying.

Police in full gear were rushed to the Federal Police's headquarters as back up, as officers had to use stun grenades and rubber bullets, local media reported. Police also blocked several avenues and streets across Brasilia

Protesters elsewhere set at least one bus on fire and were seen gathering metal barriers.

Venezuela's Maduro to fully open border with Colombia

CARACAS, Venezuela (AP) — Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro on Monday announced his intention to fully open the border crossings with Colombia starting Jan. 1, a measure repeatedly postponed following the restoration of diplomatic and commercial ties between the South American neighbors.

Relations between the countries were broken off in 2019, but Maduro has said the environment is conducive to improved ties with the election of Gustavo Petro as Colombia's first leftist president. The neighbors resumed diplomatic relations in September.

"I am going to announce that we will be completely opening the border, for all of western Venezuela with Colombia, for the passage of vehicles, motorcycles, trucks" as of Jan. 1. Maduro said on state television.

"We are preparing everything to comply with what we announced, to fulfill what was promised to President Gustavo Petro," he said.

Petro has recognized Maduro as the legitimate president of Venezuela. His predecessor, Iván Duque, along with dozens of other countries, had said Maduro was returned to power in 2018 in fraudulent elections.

Petro also promoted the reopening of the countries' shared border on Sept. 26. Symbolically, the crossing of trucks from both sides of the border was allowed while restrictions remained on private vehicles and buses.

In the first week of November, the first commercial flight by a Colombian airline in years arrived in Venezuela. For now, only the small Colombian state airline Satena and the Venezuelan Turpial and Laser have permission from the Venezuelan authorities to operate the route.

Maduro did not mention if that would change in the near future.

Libyan accused in Lockerbie bombing appears in US court

By ERIC TUCKER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — More than three decades after a bomb brought down Pan Am Flight 103 over Lockerbie, Scotland, killing everyone aboard, a former Libyan intelligence official accused of making the explosive appeared Monday in federal court, charged with an act of international terrorism.

The extradition of Abu Agila Mohammad Mas'ud Kheir Al-Marimi marked a milestone in the decades-old investigation into the attack that killed 259 people aboard the plane and 11 on the ground. His arrival in Washington sets the stage for one of the Justice Department's more significant terrorism prosecutions in recent memory.

"Although nearly 34 years have passed since the defendant's actions, countless families have never fully recovered," Assistant U.S. Attorney Erik Kenerson said during a court proceeding attended by victims' relatives.

The Justice Department announced Sunday that Mas'ud had been taken into U.S. custody, two years after it revealed that it had charged him in connection with the explosion. Two other Libyan intelligence officials have been charged in the U.S. for their alleged involvement in the attack, but Mas'ud was the first defendant to appear in an American courtroom for prosecution.

The New York-bound Pan Am flight exploded over Lockerbie less than an hour after takeoff from London on Dec. 21, 1988. Citizens from 21 countries were killed. Among the 190 Americans on board were 35 Syracuse University students flying home for Christmas after a semester abroad.

The bombing laid bare the threat of international terrorism more than a decade before the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks and produced global investigations and punishing sanctions. Several victims' relatives who weren't sure a criminal case would ever be brought described as surreal the news that Mas'ud was finally in American custody.

Stephanie Bernstein, whose husband, Michael, was a Justice Department prosecutor returning from England aboard Pan Am 103, said she felt a "tremendous amount of satisfaction." She said her husband prosecuted Nazis and felt strongly that there was no statute of limitations for murder.

"He had a fortune cookie adage on his door that said, 'The law sometimes sleeps, but it never dies.' This shows that the law never dies, that the United States government is going to take care of its citizens in life and in death and that the government has not forgotten," Bernstein said.

Outside the courthouse Monday, Paul Hudson carried a photograph of his daughter, Melina, a 16-year-old student who had been returning for the Christmas holidays from an exchange program. He recalled how, after the crash, her belongings were scattered around the Lockerbie countryside. The family did get back her passport and her notebook.

"And the notebook had, on the cover, the quote 'No one dies unless they're forgotten,' and I've tried to live by that," he said. Remembrances of his daughter are an "everyday thing" and "this time of year, it gets stronger."

The bearded and balding Mas'ud wore a green jail uniform, and walked with a halting gait to the defense table. He spoke occasionally through an interpreter, and the federal defenders who represented him at the hearing said he wanted to be represented by lawyers of his own choice.

At one point, as the charges were being discussed, Mas'ud said in Arabic that he could not speak until he saw his attorney.

A detention hearing was set for later in the month.

The announcement of charges against Mas'ud on Dec. 21, 2020, came on the 32nd anniversary of the bombing and in the final days of the tenure of then-Attorney General William Barr. At the time, Mas'ud was in Libyan custody. The announcement was a career bookend for Barr, who in his first stint as attorney general in the early 1990s had announced criminal charges against two other Libyan intelligence officials.

The Libyan government initially balked at turning over those two men, Abdel Baset Ali al-Megrahi and Lamén Khalifa Fhimah, before ultimately surrendering them for prosecution before a panel of Scottish judges sitting in the Netherlands as part of a special arrangement.

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In Mas'ud's case, a newly unsealed Justice Department indictment includes three charges related to the explosion, including destruction of an aircraft, resulting in death. Prosecutors said in court that they would not be pursuing the death penalty because that punishment was not available for those specific crimes at the time the bombing occurred.

U.S. officials did not say how Mas'ud came to be taken into U.S. custody, but late last month local Libyan media reported that Mas'ud had been kidnapped by armed men on Nov. 16 from his residence in Tripoli, the capital. That reporting cited a family statement that accused Tripoli authorities of being silent on the abduction.

A breakthrough in the Justice Department's investigation came when U.S. officials in 2017 received a copy of an interview that Mas'ud, a longtime explosives expert for Libya's intelligence service, had given to Libyan law enforcement in 2012 after being taken into custody following the collapse of the government of the country's leader, Col. Moammar Gadhafi.

In that interview, U.S. officials said, Mas'ud admitted building the bomb in the Pan Am attack and working with two other conspirators to carry out the attack. He also said the operation was ordered by Libyan intelligence and that Gadhafi thanked him and other members of the team after the attack, according to an FBI affidavit.

That affidavit said Mas'ud told Libyan law enforcement that he flew to Malta to meet al-Megrahi and Fhimah. He handed Fhimah a medium-sized Samsonite suitcase containing a bomb, having already been instructed to set the timer so that the device would explode exactly 11 hours later, according to the document. He then flew to Tripoli, the FBI said.

Al-Megrahi was convicted in the Netherlands while Fhimah was acquitted of all charges. Al-Megrahi was given a life sentence, but Scottish authorities released him on humanitarian grounds in 2009 after he was diagnosed with prostate cancer. He died in Tripoli, still protesting his innocence.

Trump probe subpoena served on Georgia secretary of state

By KATE BRUMBACK Associated Press

ATLANTA (AP) — Nevada's most populous county and Georgia Secretary of State Brad Raffensperger have received subpoenas related to special counsel Jack Smith's investigation of former President Donald Trump, who focused strongly on the states as he sought to overturn his 2020 election loss.

Smith was appointed last month to oversee not only the Justice Department's Mar-a-Lago investigation but also aspects of Trump's scramble to stay in power — including his efforts in Georgia and Nevada — and the violent attack on the U.S. Capitol on Jan. 6, 2021.

In a Jan. 2 phone call, Trump had suggested that Raffensperger "find" the votes needed to give him a win in Georgia.

The Georgia subpoena, which is dated Friday and was received by Raffensperger's office Monday, follows others served last week in several states and counties. Like those other locations, Georgia was a target of Trump and his allies as they sought to overturn his loss in the 2020 election.

The special counsel is seeking "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 such as Bill Stepien and Justin Clark and lawyers John Eastman, Boris Epshteyn, L. Lin Wood, Sidney Powell and former New York Mayor Rudy Giuliani, according to the subpoena, which was obtained by The Associated Press.

Separately Monday, the AP obtained through a public records request the copy of a Nov. 22 subpoena sent by Smith to local election officials in Clark County, Nevada, the state's most populous county. The subpoena seeks similar information as the ones sent to other states.

Efforts by Trump and his associates to reverse his loss in Georgia are currently the subject of a separate investigation led by Fulton County District Attorney Fani Willis in Atlanta. A special grand jury seated to aid that investigation has heard from dozens of witnesses, including a number of high-profile Trump allies, over the past six months and is expected to wrap up its work soon.

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Among other things, Willis is investigating the Jan. 2, 2021, phone call between Trump and Raffensperger. It was not immediately clear whether any counties in Georgia had also received subpoenas from the special counsel.

In the weeks following the 2020 election, Trump focused in part on Fulton County, which includes most of the city of Atlanta, making unsupported allegations of election fraud. But the county had not received a subpoena by Monday morning, a spokesperson said.

USC's Williams, Alabama's Anderson lead AP All-America team

By RALPH D. RUSSO AP College Football Writer

Heisman Trophy winner Caleb Williams was one of three Southern California players selected to The Associated Press All-America team released Monday.

Offensive lineman Andrew Vorhees and defensive end Tuli Tuipulotu joined their quarterback to give USC more players on the first team than any other school. The AP All-America team is presented by Regions Bank.

Williams, named last week the AP player of the year, became the eighth USC player to win the Heisman over the weekend after accounting for 47 touchdowns this season and leading USC to the Pac-12 title game.

The Trojans also had center Brett Neilon and cornerback Mekhi Blackmon selected to the third team.

Alabama edge rusher Will Anderson Jr. was selected to the first team for the second straight season, along with Kansas State running back Deuce Vaughn, who made it as an all-purpose player for the second year in a row.

Joining Williams in the All-America first-team backfield is Texas running back Bijan Robinson and Michigan's Blake Corum.

Michigan also had center Olusegun Oluwatimi and kicker Jake Moody picked for the second team.

The second-ranked Wolverines face No. 3 TCU in the College Football Playoff semifinal at the Fiesta Bowl on Dec. 31. The Horned Frogs' lone first-team All-American was defensive back Tre'Vius Hodges-Tomlinson. TCU quarterback Max Duggan and guard Steve Avila made the second team.

Top-ranked Georgia placed two players on the first-team defense with tackle Jalen Carter and safety Christopher Smith. Tight end Brock Bowers and linebacker Jamon Dumas-Johnson were second-team selections.

The Bulldogs face No. 4 Ohio State in the CFP's Peach Bowl semifinal on New Year's Eve. Wide receiver Marvin Harrison Jr. was Ohio State's only first-team All-American, but the Buckeyes added four players on the second team: Offensive tackles Paris Johnson Jr. and Dawand Jones, linebacker Tommy Eichenberg and safety Ronnie Hickman.

First team breakdown/team

USC - 3

Georgia - 2

Notre Dame - 2

Texas, Northwestern, Florida, Michigan, Minnesota, Ohio State, Tennessee, Iowa State, Kansas State, North Carolina State, Alabama, Pitt, Cincinnati, Iowa, Arkansas, Utah, Illinois, Miami, TCU, Michigan State - 1

First team breakdown/conference

Big Ten - 7

SEC - 6

Big 12 - 4

Pac-12 - 4

ACC - 3

Independents - 2

American Athletic - 1.

FIRST TEAM

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Offense

Quarterback — Caleb Williams, second-year, Southern California.

Running backs — Bijan Robinson, third-year, Texas; Blake Corum, third-year, Michigan.

Tackles — Peter Skoronski, third-year, Northwestern; Joe Alt, second-year, Notre Dame.

Guard — O'Cyrus Torrence, fourth-year, Florida; Andrew Vorhees, sixth-year, Southern California.

Center — John Michael Schmitz, sixth-year, Minnesota.

Tight end — Michael Mayer, third-year, Notre Dame.

Wide receivers — Marvin Harrison Jr., second-year, Ohio State; Jalin Hyatt, third-year, Tennessee; Xavier Hutchinson, third-year, Iowa State.

All-purpose player — Deuce Vaughn, third-year, Kansas State.

Kicker — Christopher Dunn, fifth-year, North Carolina State.

Defense

Edge rushers — Will Anderson Jr., third-year, Alabama; Tuli Tuipulotu, third-year, Southern California.

Tackles — Jalen Carter, third-year, Georgia; Calijah Kancey, fourth-year, Pittsburgh.

Linebackers — Ivan Pace Jr., fourth-year, Cincinnati; Jack Campbell, fourth-year, Iowa; Drew Sanders, third-year, Arkansas.

Cornerbacks — Clark Phillips III, third-year, Utah; Devon Witherspoon, fourth-year, Illinois.

Safeties — Kamren Kinchens, second-year, Miami; Christopher Smith, fifth-year, Georgia.

Defensive back — Tre'Vius Hodges-Tomlinson, fourth-year, TCU.

Punter — Bryce Baringer, sixth-year, Michigan State.

SECOND TEAM

Offense

Quarterback — Max Duggan, fourth-year, TCU.

Running backs — Chase Brown, fifth-year, Illinois; Mohamed Ibrahim, sixth-year, Minnesota.

Tackles — Paris Johnson Jr., third-year, Ohio State; Dawand Jones, fourth-year, Ohio State.

Guards — Cooper Beebe, fourth-year, Kansas State; Steve Avila, fifth-year, TCU.

Center — Olusegun Oluwatimi, sixth-year, Michigan.

Tight end — Brock Bowers, second-year, Georgia.

Wide receivers — Charlie Jones, sixth-year, Purdue; Rashee Rice, fourth-year, SMU; Josh Downs, third-year, North Carolina.

All-purpose player — Zach Charbonnet, fourth-year, UCLA.

Kicker — Jake Moody, fifth-year, Michigan.

Defense

Edge rushers — Tyree Wilson, fifth-year, Texas Tech; Isaiah Foskey, fourth-year, Notre Dame.

Tackles — Jer'Zhan Newton, third-year, Illinois; Jonah Tavai, fifth-year, San Diego State.

Linebackers — Tommy Eichenberg, fourth-year, Ohio State; Jeremiah Trotter Jr., second-year, Clemson; Jamon Dumas-Johnson, second-year, Georgia.

Cornerbacks — Emmanuel Forbes, third-year, Mississippi State; Joey Porter Jr., fourth-year, Penn State.

Safeties — Kaevon Merriweather, fifth-year, Iowa; Ronnie Hickman, fourth-year, Ohio State.

Defensive back — Brian Branch, third-year, Alabama.

Punter — Tory Taylor, third-year, Iowa.

THIRD TEAM

Offense

Quarterback — Hendon Hooker, sixth-year, Tennessee.

Running backs — DeWayne McBride, third-year, UAB; Israel Abanikanda, third-year, Pittsburgh.

Tackles — Blake Freeland, fourth-year, BYU; Alex Palczewski, sixth-year, Illinois.

Guards — Jaxson Kirkland, sixth-year, Washington; Christian Haynes, fourth-year, Connecticut.

Center — Brett Neilon, sixth-year, Southern California.

Tight end — Dalton Kincaid, fifth-year, Utah.

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Wide receivers — Nathaniel Dell, fifth-year, Houston; Rome Odunze, third-year, Washington; Zay Flowers, fourth-year, Boston College.

All-purpose player — Jahmyr Gibbs, third-year, Alabama.

Kicker - Joshua Karty, third-year, Stanford.

Defense

Edge rushers — Felix Anudike-Uzomah, third-year, Kansas State; Jose Ramirez, fifth-year, Eastern Michigan.

Tackles — Dontay Corleone, second-year, Cincinnati; Mekhi Wingo, second-year, LSU.

Linebackers — Jason Henderson, two-year, Old Dominion; Nick Herbig, third-year, Wisconsin; Jaylan Ford, third-year, Texas.

Cornerbacks — Kool-Aid McKinstry, second-year, Alabama; Mekhi Blackmon, fifth-year, Southern California.

Safeties — Marcus Fuqua, fourth-year, Buffalo; Jordan Battle, fourth-year, Alabama.

Defensive back — Quinyon Mitchell, third-year, Toledo.

Punter — Mason Fletcher, second-year, Cincinnati.

Selection panel: Ryan Aber, The Oklahoman; Nathan Baird, Cleveland.com; Mike Berardino, South Bend Tribune; Ryan Thorburn, Casper Star-Tribune; Sam McKewon, Omaha World-Herald; Dave Reardon, Honolulu Star-Advertiser; Robert Cessna, Bryan-College Station Eagle; Bob Asmussen, The News Gazette (Ill.); Damien Sordelett, ; Garland Gillen, WVUE-TV (La.); Kayla Anderson, WKRN-TV (Tenn.); Kirk Bohls, Austin American-Statesman; Johnny McGonigal, PennLive.com; Matt Brown, The Athletic; Matt Baker, Tampa Bay Times; Adam Grosbar, Southern California News Group; Nate Mink, Syracuse Media Group; Josh Furlong, KSL.com (Utah).

EXPLAINER: Why fusion could be a clean-energy breakthrough

The Department of Energy is planning an announcement Tuesday about a “major scientific breakthrough” at the Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory, one of several sites worldwide where researchers have been trying to develop the possibility of harnessing energy from nuclear fusion.

It’s a technology that has the potential to one day accelerate the planet’s shift away from fossil fuels, which are the major contributors to climate change. The technology has long struggled with daunting challenges.

Here’s a look at exactly what nuclear fusion is, and some of the difficulties in turning it into the cheap and carbon-free energy source that scientists believe it can be.

WHAT IS NUCLEAR FUSION?

Look up, and it’s happening right above you — nuclear fusion reactions power the sun and other stars.

The reaction happens when two light nuclei merge to form a single heavier nucleus. Because the total mass of that single nucleus is less than the mass of the two original nuclei, the leftover mass is energy that is released in the process, according to the Department of Energy.

In the case of the sun, its intense heat — millions of degrees Celsius — and the pressure exerted by its gravity allow atoms that would otherwise repel each other to fuse.

Scientists have long understood how nuclear fusion has worked and have been trying to duplicate the process on Earth as far back as the 1930s. Current efforts focus on fusing a pair of hydrogen isotopes — deuterium and tritium — according to the Department of Energy, which says that particular combination releases “much more energy than most fusion reactions” and requires less heat to do so.

HOW VALUABLE WOULD THIS BE?

Daniel Kammen, a professor of energy and society at the University of California at Berkeley, said nuclear fusion offers the possibility of “basically unlimited” fuel if the technology can be made commercially viable. The elements needed are available in seawater.

It’s also a process that doesn’t produce the radioactive waste of nuclear fission, Kammen said.

HOW ARE SCIENTISTS TRYING TO DO THIS?

One way scientists have tried to recreate nuclear fusion involves what’s called a tokamak — a doughnut-

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shaped vacuum chamber that uses powerful magnets to turn fuel into a superheated plasma (between 150 million and 300 million degrees Celsius) where fusion may occur.

The Livermore lab uses a different technique, with researchers firing a 192-beam laser at a small capsule filled with deuterium-tritium fuel. The lab reported that an August 2021 test produced 1.35 megajoules of fusion energy — about 70% of the energy fired at the target. The lab said several subsequent experiments showed declining results, but researchers believed they had identified ways to improve the quality of the fuel capsule and the lasers' symmetry.

"The most critical feature of moving fusion from theory to commercial reality is getting more energy out than in," Kammen said.

Supreme Court won't block California flavored tobacco ban

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Supreme Court on Monday refused a request from tobacco companies to stop California from enforcing a ban on flavored tobacco products that was overwhelmingly approved by voters in November.

R.J. Reynolds and other tobacco companies sought the high court's intervention to keep the ban from taking effect by Dec. 21.

There was no additional comment from the justices and no noted dissents.

The ban was first passed by the state legislature two years ago but it never took effect after tobacco companies gathered enough signatures to put it on the ballot. But nearly two-thirds of voters approved of banning the sale of everything from cotton-candy vaping juice to menthol cigarettes.

Supporters of the ban say the law was necessary to put a stop to a staggering rise in teen smoking.

R.J. Reynolds filed a federal lawsuit filed the day after the Nov. 8 vote, but lower courts refused to keep the law on hold while the suit proceeds.

Menthol cigarettes make up about a third of the market in California, the companies said in urging the Supreme Court to keep them from losing so much business in the nation's largest state.

They argued that the authority to ban flavored products rests with the federal Food and Drug Administration.

California responded that federal law comfortably allows state and local governments to decide which tobacco products are to be sold in their jurisdictions. And the state noted that the companies only went to the Supreme Court after spending "tens of millions of dollars" in a losing cause at the polls.

California will be the second state in the nation, after Massachusetts, to enact a ban prohibiting the sale of all flavored tobacco products. A number of California cities, including Los Angeles and San Diego, have already enacted their own bans, and several states have outlawed flavored vaping products. So far no legal challenges to those bans have prevailed, but the companies have an appeal pending at the high court in their fight with Los Angeles.

It's already illegal for retailers to sell tobacco to anyone under 21. But advocates of the ban said flavored cigarettes and vaping cartridges were still too easy for teens to obtain. The ban doesn't make it a crime to possess such products but retailers who sell them could be fined up to \$250.

In addition to menthol and other flavored cigarettes, the ban also prohibits the sale of flavored tobacco for vape pens, tank-based systems and chewing tobacco, with exceptions made for hookahs, some cigars and loose-leaf tobacco.

US blizzard expected to impact millions in Rockies, Midwest

By STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — A massive winter storm blew toward the center of the U.S. on Monday, threatening millions of people with heavy snow, freezing rain and flooding.

The National Weather Service warned that there would be "numerous, widespread, and impactful weather hazards in the heart of the country this week." Across the Rockies and into the northern Plains and parts of the Midwest, people were warned to prepare for blizzard-like conditions. Those farther south in Texas

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and Louisiana could get heavy rains with flash flooding, hail and tornadoes by Tuesday. The storm will continue southeast into Florida later in the week, forecasters said.

"It will be a busy week while this system moves across the country," said Marc Chenard, a meteorologist at the National Weather Service's headquarters in College Park, Maryland.

Officials in western South Dakota told residents to brace for 6 inches (15 centimeters) or more of snow: "Get your shovels handy, get your groceries, and check other needed supplies. The roads will be hard to travel."

A swath of country stretching from Montana into western Nebraska and Colorado was under blizzard warnings Monday, and the National Weather Service said that as much as 2 feet (61 centimeters) of snow was possible in some areas of western South Dakota and northwestern Nebraska. Meanwhile, ice and sleet were expected in the eastern Great Plains.

National Weather Service warned that up to about half an inch (2.5 centimeters) of ice could form and winds could gust up to 45 miles per hour (72 kilometers per hour) in parts of Iowa, Minnesota and South Dakota. Power outages, tree damage, falling branches and hazardous travel conditions all threatened the region.

"This is a 'we are not kidding' kind of storm," the South Dakota Department of Public Safety said in a tweet urging people to stock up on essentials, then stay home once the storm hits.

Thousands of students from Native American communities across Wyoming, Nebraska and the Dakotas were traveling to Rapid City, South Dakota, for this week's Lakota Nation Invitational, a high school athletic event. Brian Brewer, one of the organizers, said he had urged schools and participants to travel early.

"We told them with this storm coming — if you leave tomorrow, there's a good chance you might not make it," he said Monday.

In northern Utah, a tour bus crashed Monday morning as snow and frigid temperatures blanketed the region. The bus flipped onto its side in Tremonton after the driver lost control while switching lanes, the Highway Patrol said in a statement. The Highway Patrol said 23 passengers were injured, including some seriously.

The weather is part of the same system that dumped heavy snow in the Sierra Nevada over the weekend.

In Northern California, most mountain highways had reopened Monday. Remaining warnings in Southern California mountains were expected to expire late Monday night, the National Weather Service said.

With winter still more than a week away, it was the latest fall storm to bring significant precipitation to California, which is dealing with the impacts of years of drought that have spurred calls for water conservation.

The UC Berkeley Central Sierra Snow Lab northwest of Lake Tahoe reported that the storm dropped 54.5 inches (138.5 centimeters) of snow.

The Sierra snowpack, which on average is at its peak on April 1, is normally a significant source of water when it melts in the spring. Throughout the drought experts have cautioned about optimism over early season storms as climate change makes what were once average conditions rare.

Last year, a powerful atmospheric river dumped huge amounts of rain on California in October and a wet stretch in December left parts of the Sierra Nevada buried in snow. Then the state experienced its driest January through April on record.

Breonna Taylor's boyfriend settles lawsuits over shooting

By DYLAN LOVAN Associated Press

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (AP) — The boyfriend of Breonna Taylor who fired a shot at police as they burst through Taylor's door the night she was killed has settled two lawsuits against the city of Louisville, his attorneys said Monday.

The city agreed to pay \$2 million to settle lawsuits filed by Kenneth Walker in federal and state court, one of his attorneys, Steve Romines, said in a statement. He added that Taylor's death "will haunt Kenny for the rest of his life."

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"He will live with the effects of being put in harm's way due to a falsified warrant, to being a victim of a hailstorm of gunfire and to suffering the unimaginable and horrific death of Breonna Taylor," Romines said.

Walker and Taylor were settled in bed for the night when they were roused by banging on her apartment door around midnight on March 13, 2020. Police were outside with a drug warrant, and they used a battering ram to knock down the door. Walker fired a single shot from a handgun, striking Sgt. John Mattingly in the leg. Mattingly and two other officers then opened fire, killing Taylor.

The case highlighted the issue of "no-knock" warrants — which allow law enforcement agents to enter a home without announcing their presence - and led to a reexamination of the practice.

Walker was initially charged with attempted murder of a police officer, but charges against him were eventually dropped as protests and news media attention on the Taylor case intensified in the spring of 2020.

Walker told investigators he didn't know police were at the door, and he thought an intruder was trying to break in.

Earlier this year, U.S. Justice Department prosecutors charged three Louisville officers with a conspiracy to falsify the Taylor warrant. One of the now-former officers, Kelly Goodlett, has pleaded guilty and admitted to helping create a false link between Taylor and a wanted drug dealer.

Walker wrote in an opinion piece in the Washington Post in August that a police officer had "finally taken some responsibility for the death of my girlfriend."

"Knowing all the problems that this failed raid would create, the Louisville police tried to use me as a scapegoat to deflect blame," he wrote. "It almost worked."

Two other former officers involved in the warrant, Joshua Jaynes and Kyle Meany, are scheduled to go on trial in federal court next year.

The city of Louisville paid a \$12 million settlement to Taylor's mother, Tamika Palmer, in September 2020.

Walker's attorneys said Monday that part of the settlement he received would be used to set up a scholarship fund for law school students interested in practicing civil rights law. Another portion will be contributed to the Center for Innovations in Community Safety, a police and community reform Center at Georgetown Law School.

BLM sets up student relief fund as loan forgiveness stalls

By AARON MORRISON AP National Writer

The Black Lives Matter Global Network Foundation launched a new relief fund Monday aimed at Black college students, alumni and dropouts overburdened by mounting education costs and the student loan debt crisis.

The foundation said it set aside \$500,000 for the fund and plans to award more than 500 recipients with relief payments ranging from \$750 to \$4,500. A public application process opened on Monday, and recipients will receive their money in January if selected. Details about the fund were shared with The Associated Press ahead of the launch.

The Student Solidarity Fund expands a previous initiative the foundation started last year as millions of Americans struggled to make ends meet amid economic uncertainty during the coronavirus pandemic. This time the foundation said it intends to use philanthropic dollars to draw attention to issues of economic injustice, especially while a proposed federal student debt forgiveness plan is held up by litigation from opponents.

"The fact of the matter is that Black people who work to get an education are struggling right now," BLM foundation board chair Cicley Gay said. "We recognize that we can't build a world of true liberation without the brilliance of Black people who are committed to furthering their education."

The relief is meant for bachelor's degree recipients, as well as those who did not complete their degree but still carry student loan debt. Applicants must have attended a college or university in the U.S. The foundation is asking applicants to submit loan documents to prove their eligibility.

If selected, applicants with \$75,000 or less in debt will receive \$1,500. Applicants with debt between \$75,001 and \$150,000 will receive \$3,000. And applicants with \$150,001 or more in debt will receive \$4,500.

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The money is not restricted for use only on student loan payments, but the foundation said its relief funds are meant to lower recipients' overall debt burden.

In a second phase of the fund, the BLM foundation said it will give \$750 microgrants to relief fund applicants currently attending historically Black colleges and universities to help with housing, food, technology, books and transportation costs.

Foundation board secretary Shalomyah Bowers, who runs the consulting firm that the movement organization hired to build out its philanthropic capacity, said Student Solidarity Fund applicants do not have to prove they are Black. But fund administrators will be working to weed out scammers.

"Black people shouldn't have to jump through hoops and jump over hurdles to get the access that they need," he said.

Tahir Murray, an HBCU ambassador for the Student Solidarity Fund, said he often hears from Black students who describe being distracted from their studies due to stress over lacking scholarships and grants.

"Black students have disproportionate access to aid and resources that take into account historical discrimination and the experiences of Black people navigating a society that does not see or treat us as equal," said Murray, a 2021 Howard University graduate who owns the HBCU lifestyle brand LegacyHistoryPride.

The relief fund comes less than two weeks after the Supreme Court agreed to decide whether the Biden administration can proceed with a plan to broadly cancel student loans. In August, President Joe Biden said the government would forgive \$10,000 in student loan debt for Americans with annual incomes below \$125,000, and would cancel up to \$20,000 for recipients of the Pell Grant.

More than 26 million people had already applied for the relief, with 16 million approved. But the government stopped processing applications in November after a federal judge in Texas struck down the plan. Conservative attorneys and Republican lawmakers are challenging the legality of the debt forgiveness plan, arguing Biden cannot take this step without congressional approval.

A high court ruling is expected by early summer.

"We could sit around and wait, and hope that legislators do what they promised by providing loan relief, or we could step up and do it ourselves. And we've decided to do the latter," Gay said.

Last year, while Americans waited for Congress to approve a \$2 trillion coronavirus relief package that included direct payments of \$1,400 to Americans earning less than \$75,000, the BLM foundation gave out \$3 million in microgrants of \$1,000 to nearly 3,000 Black people.

That initiative launched just as the foundation opened up about the tens of millions in donations it took in after the 2020 murder of George Floyd by a Minneapolis police officer, a case that sparked racial justice protests around the U.S. and world. Earlier this year, the foundation revealed in a nonprofit tax filing that it had nearly \$42 million in net assets at the end of the last fiscal year.

The tax filing also showed the foundation spent nearly \$6 million on a Los Angeles-area property that includes a home with six bedrooms and bathrooms, a swimming pool, a soundstage and office space. The property is intended as a campus for a Black artists fellowship, the foundation said.

The financial revelations set off a fresh wave of criticism from the left and right in the political world and from both inside and outside of the broader BLM movement. Several months after the disclosures, the foundation's structure remains the same. It is run by a three-member board of directors, including Gay and Bowers.

In August, a group of local chapters and activists known as BLM Grassroots filed a lawsuit in a California Superior Court against Bowers. The suit alleges that he and his consulting firm broke an agreement to turn over control of the foundation's digital assets and its finances to the grassroots organizers of BLM, allowing him to profit personally and professionally from the surge in donations.

Bowers told the AP the allegations are "frivolous" and untrue. An attorney for the foundation last week filed a court motion asking a judge to dismiss the lawsuit.

Regarding the relief fund, BLM Grassroots director Melina Abdullah said: "We are glad to hear that (the foundation) is using a portion of the vast funds that they appropriated from the movement for the benefit of Black college students, and hope they will be sure to distribute funds in a way that aligns with Black Lives Matter's mission of ending state-sanctioned violence against Black people."

Can James Cameron and 'Avatar' wow again? Don't doubt it.

By JAKE COYLE AP Film Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — James Cameron has been living on Pandora for a long time.

But 13 years after the original "Avatar" and five years after starting production on its sequel, "The Way of Water," Cameron is unveiling the long-awaited follow-up to the highest grossing film of all-time. Speaking the day after "The Way of Water" debuted in London, Cameron — back on Earth and self-admittedly out of practice with the hoopla of a red-carpet premiere — describes the experience of finally having the movie out in the world "surreal."

"You work on these films kind of in a bubble. You create this world around you with your artists, with your casts and so on," Cameron says. "Then one day you realize, 'Oh crap, we're going to have to show this to people at some point.'"

For a long time, the "Avatar" sequel was the "Waiting for Godot" of blockbusters — more theoretical than real, with release dates that kept spiraling into the future. Meanwhile, an unending parade of pieces pondered the original's curious place in entertainment: a box-office behemoth with little cultural footprint, a \$3 billion ghost.

But the first look at Cameron's "Avatar" sequel has thrown some cold water on that notion. The overwhelming reaction to the director's latest three-hour opus? Never bet against James Cameron.

"The important thing is that there are people willing to bet on me and on the ideas that interest me and I want to go forward with" Cameron says, speaking by video conference. "It was 20th Century Fox, Jim Gianopulos specifically, who OK'ed this film to go forward. Then we were acquired by Disney. That could have gone south but it didn't. The word I got from them all the way along was: 'We want quality. We want this movie. We want this movie for the theaters. We want to remind people what the theatrical experience is.'"

With a reported price tag of more than \$350 million, a third "Avatar" film already wrapped and two more films planned after that, the Walt Disney Co. is placing a very big wager, indeed, on "The Way of Water." But regardless of jokes about blue people or Papyrus font, Cameron's latest — a deep-blue ocean epic of natural splendor, ecological protectionism and family perseverance — is poised to again blow audiences away, and possibly, once more rake in billions.

The film, which opens in theaters Thursday, might be Cameron's most ambitious undertaking yet -- which is saying something for the 68-year-old filmmaker of "Titanic," "The Terminator" and "Aliens."

"I don't want to do anything but big swings," Cameron says. "I'm going to fall on my ass sooner or later. But if you're not ready to fall on your ass, you're not doing anything interesting."

We've been here before. After cost overruns and delays, "Titanic" was written off as a sure-to-bomb case study of Hollywood excess. Then it made \$2.2 billion in ticket sales and won 11 Oscars. Not everyone was pre-sold on "Avatar," either, which resuscitated 3-D after decades of dormancy.

"'Titanic' was assumed to be a big steaming pile," says Cameron. "That was a much bigger flip. And we had a similar flip on a smaller scale with the first 'Avatar.' People saw the trailer on a little window on their laptop and called it 'Smurfs' and 'videogame cinematic' and stuff like that. Then they went to see it in the movie theater and went, 'Wait, wait. It's pretty cool.'"

"There was a guarded skepticism around this film," he adds, "as there should always be with any new film."

"The Way of Water," which Cameron scripted with Rick Jaffa and Amanda Silver, takes place a decade after the events of the first "Avatar." Jake Sully (Sam Worthington), the paralyzed Marine who donned an avatar on Pandora, is now fully enmeshed in the remote world of the Na'vi. He and Neytiri (Zoe Saldana) have three teenage children. When human soldiers come hunting for him, Jake moves his family to a reef clan of Na'vi who live harmoniously with the ocean.

The trials the family endures turn surprisingly wrenching in what's already been called Cameron's most emotional film. That may be partly because much of Cameron's own experience as a father raising five children in New Zealand is woven into the film, as is his early life growing up in Ontario as the eldest son of an electrical engineer father.

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"I remember what that was like for me. I've been Lo-ak," says Cameron, referring to Jake and Neytiri's middle son. "I've been the kid whose father doesn't get him or see him. I don't mean to disparage my dad. He was a great dad of that period in the sense of putting a roof over our heads and out there working hard, breadwinner. But he didn't know what to do with an artist kid. He didn't know what to do with a flamboyant artist whose head was out in interstellar space all the time."

"The Way of Water," which is being shown in 3-D and 48-frames-per-second (double the standard), also means a new generation of technological advancement. While it's unlikely to be as much a milestone as the first was visually, the blend of CGI and live action, above ground and under water, makes for an even more strikingly detailed vistas.

"We're able to deliver a much greater ability of photorealism than we ever did before," says producer Jon Landau. "When we made the first movie, I would say to people, 'We need it to be photographic.' Now in this movie, we have so many Avatar, Na'vi characters in the live-action world and we have so many live-action characters in the Pandora world, we need to be photoreal. That's a new standard we have to live up to."

That's most beautifully rendered in the film's waters, where teeming science-fiction species of flora and fauna enrich an imagined ocean paradise. To Cameron, an avid deep-sea explorer whose passions for sea nearly outstrip his love of filmmaking, "The Way of the Water" is his grand ode to the ocean.

"It's also a cri de coeur to people around the world to protect and be guardians of the oceans, to be guardians of nature, in general. That's what these 'Avatar' movies are about," Cameron says. "In New Zealand, the Maori people call it kaitiakitanga and it basically means guardianship of nature. I don't think most people in so-called Western, industrial society really feel that strongly.

"Obviously, there are people of conscience, there are people who are activists for climate change and rain forest preservation and so on. But unfortunately, they're not the majority in the seat of power. So I think it's fair to say that we've got to change the way we do business or we're not going to have these things," Cameron says. "The ocean of Pandora is probably very much like how the ocean of Earth used to be, at least in terms of profusion."

"The Way of the Water" will arrive in theaters with expectations of a debut of at least \$150 million on opening weekend in North America. More notably, it will quench the thirst of multiplexes that have, after some big summer successes, seen the number of wide releases — and moviegoers — slide this fall. When he debuted the first "Avatar," streaming was nascent; Netflix was just getting into the business of making movies. Now, for a much different movie landscape, Cameron will again hope to show audiences the full power of visionary grand-scale filmmaking.

"I've been thinking a lot lately about what art is in its essence. And I think dreams have something to do with it," he says. "There's like a render engine or a narrative engine that runs in our heads every night. It puts images and scenarios together in some kind of sequence. Sometimes, most times, they're completely illogical. But they have a kind of momentary logic to them. I'm always telling everybody on the film, this is a movie with floating mountains. It doesn't have to always be logical. It just has to have that dream logic."

At the "Way of Water" premiere in London, Cameron was struck by how the audience looked different to him. It was a black-tie affair, unusual for him as a director, but that wasn't only it.

"I looked out at that audience and everybody looked so beautiful and they put so much energy into just showing up. It struck me that maybe we're back," Cameron says. "Maybe cinema's back. Maybe enough people out there do care about that dream of cinema."

Iran execution: Man publicly hanged from crane amid protests

By JON GAMBRELL Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — Iran executed a second prisoner on Monday convicted over crimes committed during the nationwide protests challenging the country's theocracy, publicly hanging him from a construction crane as a gruesome warning to others.

The execution of Majidreza Rahnavard came less than a month after he allegedly fatally stabbed two

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members of a paramilitary force after purportedly becoming angry about security forces killing protesters. The development underscores the speed at which Iran now carries out death sentences handed down for those detained in the demonstrations that the government hopes to put down.

Activists warn that at least a dozen people already have been sentenced to death in closed-door hearings. At least 488 people have been killed since the demonstrations began in mid-September, according to Human Rights Activists in Iran, a group that's been monitoring the protests. Another 18,200 people have been detained by authorities.

Iran's Mizan news agency, which falls under the country's judiciary, published a collage of images of Rahnavard hanging from the crane, his hands and feet bound, a black bag over his head.

Masked security force members stood guard in front of concrete and metal barriers that held back a gathered crowd early Monday morning in the Iranian city of Mashhad.

Mizan alleged Rahnavard had stabbed two security force members to death Nov. 17 in Mashhad and wounded four others.

Footage aired on state TV showed a man chasing another around a street corner, then standing over him and stabbing him after he fell against a parked motorbike. Another showed the same man stabbing another immediately after. The assailant, which state TV alleged was Rahnavard, then fled.

The Mizan report identified the dead as "student" Basij, paramilitary volunteers under Iran's Revolutionary Guard. The Basij (ba-SEEJ') have deployed in major cities, attacking and detaining protesters, who in many cases have fought back.

A heavily edited state television report aired after Rahnavard's execution showed clips of him in the courtroom. In the video, he says he came to hate the Basijis after seeing video clips on social media of the forces beating and killing protesters.

The Mizan report accused Rahnavard of trying to flee to a foreign country when he was arrested.

Mashhad, a Shiite holy city, is located some 740 kilometers (460 miles) east of the Iranian capital, Tehran. Activists say it has seen strikes, shops closed and demonstrations amid the unrest that began over the Sept. 16 death in custody of Mahsa Amini, a 22-year-old woman who had been detained by Iran's morality police.

Mizan said Rahnavard was convicted in Mashhad's Revolutionary Court. The tribunals have been internationally criticized for not allowing those on trial to pick their own lawyers or even see the evidence against them.

Rahnavard had been convicted on the charge of "moharebeh," a Farsi word meaning "waging war against God." That charge has been levied against others in the decades since the 1979 Islamic Revolution and carries the death penalty.

In the images of his execution, a banner bearing a Quranic verse: "Indeed the requital of those who wage war against Allah and His Apostle, and try to cause corruption on the earth, is that they shall be slain or crucified, or shall have their hands and feet cut off from opposite sides, or be banished from the land."

Executions conducted in public with a crane have been rare in recent years, though Iran used the same manner of hanging to put down unrest following the disputed 2009 presidential election and the Green Movement protests that followed.

Typically, those condemned are alive as the crane lifts them off their feet, hanging by a rope and struggling to breathe before they asphyxiate or their neck breaks.

Activists have put pressure on companies providing cranes to Iran in the past, warning they can be used for executions.

From Brussels, the European Union's foreign ministers expressed dismay at the latest execution. The bloc approved on Monday a fresh series of sanctions against Iran over its crackdown on protesters, and also for supplying drones to Russia for use in its war against Ukraine, the bloc's top diplomat said.

EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell said he spoke to Iran's foreign minister regarding Tehran's response to the protests and the latest execution and that it was "not an easy conversation."

"We are going to approve a very, very tough package of sanctions," Borrell told reporters as he arrived to chair the ministerial meeting in Brussels. Finland's foreign minister said that he also called his Iranian

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counterpart.

German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock described the execution as "a blatant attempt at intimidation" of Iranians.

"We are making clear that we stand beside innocent people in Iran," Baerbock said as she arrived at the Brussels meeting. "A system that treats its people in this way cannot expect to continue to have halfway normal relations with the European Union."

Iran is one of the world's top executioners and typically executes prisoners by hanging. It executed the first prisoner detained during demonstrations last Thursday. So far this year, it has executed over 500 prisoners, the highest number in five years, according to the Oslo-based group Iran Human Rights.

"In the absence of serious measures to deter the Islamic Republic from executing protesters, we will be facing even more horrific crimes like the 1980s mass execution of political prisoners," the group warned Monday. That refers to the 1988 executions in part overseen by Iran's current hard-line President Ebrahim Raisi that activists believe saw as many as 5,000 inmates put to death.

Amnesty International has said it obtained a document signed by one senior Iranian police commander asking that the execution for one prisoner be "completed 'in the shortest possible time' and that his death sentence be carried out in public as 'a heart-warming gesture towards the security forces.'"

Amid the unrest, Iran is also battered by an economic crisis that has seen the national currency, the rial, drop to new lows against the U.S. dollar.

Biden forms interagency group to draft antisemitism strategy

By ZEKE MILLER AP White House Correspondent

WASHINGTON (AP) — Amid a surge in hateful rhetoric and violence, President Joe Biden on Monday formed a new interagency group to develop a national strategy to combat antisemitism, the White House announced.

The action comes at a time when anti-Jewish vitriol is being spread by prominent public figures.

Led by the White House Domestic Policy and National Security councils, the new group will consult with community leaders, government officials, lawmakers and activists as it drafts a national strategy to tackle antisemitism and Holocaust denial.

The action follows on Biden's public commitment to healing the "soul of the nation" after seeing hate groups marching in Charlottesville, Virginia, with torches and swastikas in 2017, an episode that propelled his run for the White House.

"This strategy will raise understanding about antisemitism and the threat it poses to the Jewish community and all Americans, address antisemitic harassment and abuse both online and offline, seek to prevent antisemitic attacks and incidents, and encourage whole-of-society efforts to counter antisemitism and build a more inclusive nation," press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre said in a statement.

Former President Donald Trump recently hosted Nick Fuentes, a Holocaust-denying white supremacist, at Trump's Mar-a-Lago home in Florida. The rapper Ye — formerly known as Kanye West — expressed love for Adolf Hitler in an interview. Basketball star Kyrie Irving appeared to promote an antisemitic film on social media. Neo-Nazi trolls are clamoring to return to Twitter as new CEO Elon Musk grants "amnesty" to suspended accounts.

The announcement comes a week after Doug Emhoff, the husband of Vice President Kamala Harris, played host to Jewish leaders to discuss the rise in antisemitism in the U.S. and around the world.

The White House said the new group also will coordinate efforts to counter Islamophobia in the U.S.

Ukraine president again presses West for advanced weapons

By JAMEY KEATEN and JOHN LEICESTER Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy pressed Western leaders again on Monday to provide more advanced weapons to help his country in its war with Russia, and he repeated his calls

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for Russian forces to withdraw from occupied areas of Ukraine, suggesting Christmas as a date to retreat.

During a video conference, Zelenskyy told host Germany and other leaders of the Group of Seven industrial powers: "It would be right to begin the withdrawal of Russian troops from the internationally recognized territory of Ukraine this Christmas. If Russia withdraws its troops from Ukraine, then a reliable cessation of hostilities will be ensured."

He added: "The answer from Moscow will show what they really want there: either a further confrontation with the world or finally an end to aggression."

The G-7 leaders supported Zelenskyy's appeal, saying in a statement after their meeting that "Russia can end this war immediately by ceasing its attacks against Ukraine and completely and unconditionally withdrawing its forces from the territory of Ukraine."

The Kremlin has rejected all previous appeals to reverse its land grabs in Ukraine. It didn't immediately respond to this latest one.

The two countries haven't engaged in any recent peace talks and there is no end in sight for the war, which is in its 10th month and has killed and wounded tens of thousands of people and left dozens of Ukrainian cities and towns in ruins .

Russia has illegally annexed parts of eastern and southern Ukraine, including the Crimean Peninsula in 2014, though it doesn't fully control all of them. Zelenskyy has said his goal is to reclaim all occupied territory, while Russian President Vladimir Putin insists on solidifying his forces' control over the areas.

In his address to the G-7, Zelenskyy echoed his prime minister's Sunday appeal for long-range missiles, modern tanks, artillery and missile batteries and other high-tech air defense systems to counter Russian attacks that have knocked out electricity and water supplies for millions of Ukrainians. He acknowledged that, "Unfortunately, Russia still has an advantage in artillery and missiles."

Prime Minister Denys Shmyhal told French broadcaster LCI that in addition to making Ukrainians suffer, Russia wants to swamp Europe with Ukrainian refugees by striking power stations and other infrastructure. Zelenskyy told the G-7 that protecting Ukraine's energy facilities from Russian missiles and Iranian drones "will be the protection of the whole of Europe, since with these strikes Russia is provoking a humanitarian and migration catastrophe not only for Ukraine, but also for the entire EU."

Poland's president, Andrzej Duda, said his nation already has seen an increased demand to shelter refugees.

"The number of refugees in Poland has risen (recently) to some 3 million. That will probably also mean an increase in their numbers in Germany," Duda said following talks with German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier in Berlin.

On Monday, Russian shelling again mostly focused on eastern and southern regions that Putin illegally annexed.

To defend against further strikes, Shmyhal repeated Ukrainian calls for Patriot surface-to-air missiles — a highly sophisticated system. During the LCI interview, he also asked for more German and French air-defense systems, resupplies of artillery shells and modern battle tanks.

Providing Patriot missiles to Ukraine would advance the kinds of defense systems the West is sending to help the country repel Russian aerial attacks, and would likely mark an escalation.

A U.S. official told reporters the Pentagon has no current plans to send Patriot missiles to Ukraine, but that discussions continue. The key issue is that the complex, high-tech system requires significant maintenance and training, said the official, who spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss ongoing operations in Ukraine.

Air defenses were also a topic of a phone call Zelenskyy held Sunday with U.S. President Joe Biden. Biden "highlighted how the U.S. is prioritizing efforts to strengthen Ukraine's air defense through our security assistance, including the Dec. 9 announcement of \$275 million in additional ammunition and equipment that included systems to counter the Russian use of unmanned aerial vehicles," the White House said.

The G-7 leaders said in their statement that they've set an "immediate focus on providing Ukraine with air defense systems and capabilities."

Even with their current systems, Ukrainian forces have already succeeded in intercepting missiles and

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drones, and a spokeswoman for the country's southern armed forces, Natalia Humeniuk, said Monday on Ukrainian TV that "the effectiveness of anti-aircraft defense is 85%-90%" against weaponized drones.

U.S. officials agree with Ukraine's reported success in shooting down drones and missiles, attributing the high kill rate in part to intelligence that the U.S. and other allies are providing.

Russian drones are still active. Their attacks near the Black Sea port of Odesa over the weekend destroyed several energy facilities and left all customers except hospitals, maternity homes, boiler plants and pumping stations without power.

Slovakia said that in cooperation with Germany, it has opened a center to repair Ukrainian howitzers and air defense systems of Western origin. The center is located inside a military base in the town of Michalovce, some 35 kilometers (22 miles) west of the border with Ukraine, the EU member nation's Defense Ministry said.

In Ukraine, the eastern Donbas region, made up of Donetsk and Luhansk provinces, again has become a focus of intense fighting, particularly around the city of Bakhmut.

Ukrainian officials said Monday the country's forces hit a hotel in the Luhansk region that served as a headquarters of the Wagner Group, a private Russian military contractor and mercenary group that has played a prominent role in eastern Ukraine.

The region's Ukrainian governor, Serhiy Haidai, said in an unverified claim that hundreds of Russians were killed in the strike on Kadiivka on Sunday. Moscow-backed local officials in Luhansk confirmed that a Ukrainian strike destroyed a hotel building in Kadiivka but claimed it was unused.

Ivan Fedorov, the Ukrainian mayor of the southeastern town of Melitopol, reported that Ukraine attacked a hotel that reportedly housed analysts from Russia's top security agency, the FSB. Moscow did not comment on that claim, and none of the reports could be independently confirmed. Russian officials, meanwhile, accused Ukrainian forces of blowing up pillars of a bridge in a suburb of Melitopol on Monday night. Various reports said Russian forces had been using the bridge to transport supplies and that traffic across it has now stopped.

Elsewhere, the Ukrainian prosecutor general's office said two civilians were killed and 10 were wounded in Russia's shelling of the town of Hirnyk in the Donetsk region.

Yaroslav Yanushevych, the governor of the Kherson region, said a Russian strike on the southern city of the same name, which Ukraine reclaimed a month ago, killed two civilians and left five wounded Monday. He said the Russian shelling hit residential buildings and damaged power lines.

And in Skadovsk, about 62 miles (100 kilometers) south of Kherson where the Russian-installed Kherson regional administration had been relocated, a senior government official was lightly injured Monday in an assassination attempt, the Russian Ria-Novosti news agency reported. The driver of a car carrying the official was killed in the attack, it said.

Prosecutor: Oath Keepers saw Jan. 6 as 'first battle' in war

By MICHAEL KUNZELMAN and ALANNA DURKIN RICHER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Four Oath Keepers charged with plotting to stop the transfer of presidential power from Donald Trump to Joe Biden accepted an "invitation to sedition" issued by the far-right extremist group's founder, a federal prosecutor said Monday at the start of a second trial for group leaders and members.

Jurors heard opening statements two weeks after a different jury convicted Oath Keepers founder Stewart Rhodes and Florida chapter leader Kelly Meggs of seditious conspiracy and other charges stemming from a mob's attack on the U.S. Capitol on Jan. 6, 2021.

Rhodes is jailed awaiting sentencing and wasn't in court on Monday, but a prosecutor repeatedly brought up his name. Assistant U.S. Attorney Troy Edwards said Rhodes issued a "call to action" before his followers carried out a violent plot to stop Congress from certifying Biden's electoral victory.

"This was an invitation to sedition," the prosecutor said.

The defendants in the latest trial are Joseph Hackett of Sarasota, Florida; Roberto Minuta of Prosper, Texas; David Moerschel of Punta Gorda, Florida; and Edward Vallejo of Phoenix. They are charged with

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several other felonies in addition to seditious conspiracy.

Their lawyers' opening statements often echoed arguments that Oath Keepers' attorneys made at the first trial. In particular, they said group members never had a plan to attack the Capitol or stop Congress from certifying the Electoral College vote.

Moerschel's attorney, Scott Weinberg, accused prosecutors of "overpromising and underdelivering." The lawyer said many Oath Keepers members were elderly, out-of-shape men who were "playing military" and prone to bluster in their online chats.

"These gentlemen used Twitter fingers, not trigger fingers," Weinberg told jurors, paraphrasing lyrics by the Canadian rapper Drake.

Jurors are expected to hear testimony from prosecutors' first witness on Tuesday.

Prosecutors say Oath Keepers members stashed guns at a hotel in Virginia for a "quick reaction force" that could shuttle weapons into Washington, D.C., on Rhodes' order. On Jan. 6, two groups of Oath Keepers stormed the Capitol after thousands of other rioters breached the building. The guns stashed at the hotel were never deployed.

Rhodes and other Oath Keepers viewed the Jan. 6 attack as the "street fighting phase" and "just the first battle in a war," Edwards said.

Defendant Hackett's attorney, Angela Halim, said the Oath Keepers came to Washington not to attack but to provide security details at a "Stop the Steal" rally where Trump addressed a crowd of his supporters.

"At no point did anyone say that they were going to attack the Capitol," Halim told jurors. "There was no unity of purpose."

The defense lawyer accused prosecutors of presenting a "warped version" of the defendants' actions.

"There was a rush to judgment," Halim said.

Hackett, Moerschel and other Oath Keepers approached the Capitol in a military-style stack formation before they entered the building, according to prosecutors. Minuta and his group from a second stack of Oath Keepers clashed with police after heeding Rhodes' call to race to the Capitol, Edwards said.

Minuta was a New York leader for Rhodes and believed the Oath Keepers were "part of a revolution," according to Edwards. The prosecutor said Minuta was "filled with rage about the election" that Trump, the Republican incumbent, falsely claimed was stolen from him.

Hackett repeatedly warned other Oath Keepers about "leaks" and the need to secure their communications before Jan. 6, according to Edwards. Moerschel was "careful with his words but intentional in his actions," the prosecutor said.

Vallejo, a U.S. Army veteran and Rhodes ally, drove from Arizona to prepare with the "QRF" — the quick reaction force — at the hotel outside Washington. Jurors heard an audio recording of Vallejo talking about a "declaration of a guerilla war" on the morning of Jan. 6.

The four defendants "perverted the constitutional order" and conspired to "impose their views of the Constitution, their views of America, on the rest of the country," Edwards said.

"That day, these defendants halted the peaceful transfer of presidential power," he said.

While the convictions of Rhodes and Meggs were a major victory for the Justice Department, three of their co-defendants were acquitted of seditious conspiracy. The question for the second trial is whether prosecutors will be persuade jurors to convict lower-level defendants.

Seditious conspiracy, a Civil War-era offense, can be difficult to prove, especially when the alleged plot is unsuccessful. Rhodes and Meggs were the first people in decades found guilty at trial of the charge, which carries up to 20 years in prison.

Thomas Caldwell, of Berryville Virginia; Jessica Watkins of Woodstock, Ohio, and Kenneth Harrelson of Titusville, Florida, were acquitted of sedition in the first case. But all five defendants in that case were convicted of obstructing Congress' certification of Biden's win, a conviction that calls for as many as 20 years behind bars.

In Rhodes' case, prosecutors spent weeks arguing the Oath Keepers were not whipped into an impulsive frenzy by Trump on Jan. 6 but came to Washington intent on keeping him in power at all costs. Authorities say the Oath Keepers discussed their plans in encrypted chats for weeks before the riot and stashed the

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weapons in case they were needed to support their plot.

But while investigators combed through thousands of messages sent by Rhodes and his co-defendants, none specifically spelled out a plan to attack the Capitol itself. Defense attorneys emphasized that fact throughout the trial to argue there was never any plot. They said the Oath Keepers didn't come to Washington for violence but to provide security for people like Trump ally Roger Stone at events before the riot.

Three other Oath Keepers have pleaded guilty to seditious conspiracy and agreed to cooperate with investigators in the hopes of getting lighter sentences. But they were never called by prosecutors to the witness stand in Rhodes' case. It's unclear whether they might take the stand in the latest trial.

Another sedition trial is also expected to begin later this month against former Proud Boys national chairman Enrique Tarrío and other leaders of that extremist group.

Twitter relaunching subscriber service after debacle

NEW YORK (AP) — Twitter is once again attempting to launch its premium service, a month after a previous attempt failed.

The social media platform said it would let users buy subscriptions to Twitter Blue to get a blue check mark and access special features starting Monday.

The company owned by billionaire Elon Musk has also started granting a new gold-colored check mark to businesses on the platform. The gold label began appearing Monday on the account profiles for Coca-Cola, Nike, Google and dozens of other big corporations.

"The gold checkmark indicates that the account is an official business account through Twitter Blue for Business," the company says on a support web page.

Twitter's blue check mark was originally given to companies, celebrities, government entities and journalists verified by the platform. After Musk bought Twitter for \$44 billion in October, he launched a service granting blue checks to anyone willing to pay \$8 a month. But it was inundated by imposter accounts, including those impersonating Nintendo, pharmaceutical company Eli Lilly and Musk's businesses Tesla and SpaceX, so Twitter suspended the service days after its launch.

The relaunched service will cost \$8 a month for web users and \$11 a month for iPhone and iPad users. San Francisco-based Twitter says subscribers will see fewer ads, be able to post longer videos and have their tweets featured more prominently. Twitter's website doesn't say if business accounts must pay extra for the gold label or if it is granted automatically.

US almost sent Reyna home from World Cup for lack of hustle

By RONALD BLUM AP Sports Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — American midfielder Gio Reyna almost was sent home from the World Cup because of a lack of hustle in training, for which he later apologized.

U.S. coach Gregg Berhalter revealed the team's concerns about a player when he spoke last week at the HOW Institute for Society's Summit on Moral Leadership in New York. Excerpts of his remarks were later published in a newsletter by Charter Works, which analyzes management and workplace trends.

"In this last World Cup, we had a player that was clearly not meeting expectations on and off the field," Berhalter was quoted as saying. "One of 26 players, so it stood out. As a staff, we sat together for hours deliberating what we were going to do with this player. We were ready to book a plane ticket home, that's how extreme it was. And what it came down to was, we're going to have one more conversation with him, and part of the conversation was how we're going to behave from here out. There aren't going to be any more infractions."

"But the other thing we said to him was, you're going to have to apologize to the group, but it's going to have to say why you're apologizing. It's going to have to go deeper than just 'Guys, I'm sorry,'" Berhalter went on. "And I prepped the leadership group with this. I said, 'OK, this guy's going to apologize to you as a group, to the whole team.' And what was fantastic in this whole thing is that after he apologized, they stood up one by one and said: 'Listen, it hasn't been good enough. You haven't been meeting our

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expectations of a teammate and we want to see change.' They really took ownership of that process. And from that day on there were no issues with this player."

While Berhalter didn't identify the player, several media outlets reported Sunday it was Reyna, and a person familiar with the matter confirmed the identity to The Associated Press on condition of anonymity because no announcement was made.

"Just before the World Cup, coach Berhalter told me that my role at the tournament would be very limited. I was devastated," Reyna said in a statement Monday. "I fully expected and desperately wanted to contribute to the play of a talented group as we tried to make a statement at the World Cup.

"I am also a very emotional person, and I fully acknowledge that I let my emotions get the best of me and affect my training and behavior for a few days after learning about my limited role," Reyna said. "I apologized to my teammates and coach for this, and I was told I was forgiven. Thereafter, I shook off my disappointment and gave everything I had on and off the field."

Charter posted an editor's note Sunday that said: "Berhalter's comments were ... erroneously greenlit for publication by someone representing the event organizers."

"There was never an intention for the content to become public nor for the identity of the player to become known," Berhalter said in a statement.

"It was the team's strong culture which enabled us to work through the issue and emerge in a stronger, more unified position," Berhalter said.

Reyna, a son of former U.S. captain Claudio Reyna and former U.S. women's national team player Danielle Egan, missed most of Borussia Dortmund's 2021-22 season because of leg injuries and has not played a 90-minute match this season as his condition was monitored.

"I am disappointed that there is continuing coverage of this matter ... and extremely surprised that anyone on the U.S. men's team staff would contribute to it," Reyna said. "Coach Berhalter has always said that issues that arise with the team will stay 'in house.'"

Reyna turned 20 the week before the World Cup and did not play in the Americans' opening 1-1 draw against Wales on Nov. 21, sparking questions for Berhalter. Reyna appeared for the last eight minutes of the 0-0 draw against England four days later, did not play in the 1-0 win over Iran on Nov. 29 and entered the 3-1, round-of-16 loss to the Netherlands at the start of the second half with the Americans trailing by two goals.

Berhalter said after the opener that Reyna felt "tightness" after a Nov. 17 friendly against Al-Gharafa but did not specify where. Reyna said after the Wales match, "I felt ready to go."

Eric Wynalda, a former teammate of Claudio Reyna, told the Los Angeles Times on a Twitter Spaces interview ahead of the England game there was "internal strife with the manager" regarding Gio Reyna.

"He was fit to play," Wynalda said. "Berhalter did lie to the media and say that it was an injury, asked the player to kind of go along with that story, which caused a rift between the two of them."

Berhalter said on Nov. 28: "I'll leave it to you to decide if I asked Gio to lie about it. That's just not who I am.

"So if you have to take Eric's word or my word or whatever, feel free. But I know what happened."

Purdue moves to No. 1 in AP Top 25, Alabama cracks top 5

By JOHN MARSHALL AP Basketball Writer

Purdue picked up wins over West Virginia, No. 15 Gonzaga and No. 12 Duke in consecutive weeks to win the Phil Knight Legacy tournament earlier in the season.

Wins over Hofstra and Nebraska last week, combined with a loss by Houston, were enough to move the Boilermakers to No. 1 the AP Top 25 for the second straight season.

Purdue moved up three spots in The Associated Press men's college basketball poll released on Monday, receiving 27 first-place votes from a 62-person media panel. No. 2 Virginia received 19 first-place votes to move up a spot, No. 3 Connecticut received 15 and No. 6 Tennessee also got one.

Alabama and Houston rounded out the top five.

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Purdue (10-0, 2-0 Big Ten) has made a steady climb after being unranked in the preseason, moving up to No. 5 by winning the Legacy tourney in Oregon. The Boilermakers were No. 4 last week, then blew out Hofstra and scratched out a 65-62 overtime win over Nebraska despite poor shooting and a quiet scoring afternoon by 7-foot-4 center Zach Edey.

"Can you can you find a way to win a game when you don't shoot the ball well? We were able to do that," Purdue coach Matt Painter said.

The Boilermakers hope this run at No. 1 will last longer than their last one. Purdue went to No. 1 for the first time in school history in Week 4 last season and promptly lost to Rutgers.

RISING TIDE

Alabama had to replace three of its top four scorers and started the season without dynamic guard Jahvon Quinerly while he recovers from knee surgery.

None of it has slowed the Crimson Tide's ride to a second top-five ranking in three seasons.

Alabama knocked North Carolina off its top-ranked perch in four overtimes on Nov. 27 and became the second team — with Oklahoma in 1990 — to beat two No. 1 teams in the same season with its 71-65 win over Houston on Saturday.

The Crimson Tide moved up four spots in this week's poll.

"Huge program win," Alabama coach Nate Oats said. "Not sure how many teams get the chance to play two No. 1 teams in nonconference, let alone beat them, but I think that shows where we've gotten this program to that we can play with anyone in the country at this point."

RISING AND FALLING

No. 17 Mississippi State had the biggest jump in the poll, moving up six spots after beating Minnesota.

No. 19 Auburn had the biggest drop, losing eight spots following an 82-73 loss to Memphis. No. 20 Maryland dropped with consecutive losses to No. 22 Wisconsin and No. 6 Tennessee.

No. 7 Texas lost a chance to move up to No. 1 after its overtime loss to Illinois, dropping five spots instead.

IN AND OUT

No. 22 Wisconsin moved into the poll for the first time this season following wins over Maryland and Iowa. No. 24 Virginia Tech is ranked for the first time since 2020-21 after wins over Dayton and Oklahoma State.

No. 25 Miami beat Cornell and North Carolina State to get ranked for the first time since 2017-18.

Creighton dropped out of the poll after reaching No. 7 earlier this season. The Bluejays, ranked 21st last week, have lost four straight.

Iowa State dropped out from No. 20 after a lopsided loss to Iowa while San Diego State fell out from No. 22 after losing to Saint Mary's in Phoenix.

CONFERENCE WATCH

The Southeastern and Big Ten conferences led the way with six ranked teams each. The Atlantic Coast Conference and Big 12 had four each and the Pac-12 three.

The Big East, American Athletic and West Coast conferences had one ranked team each.

Messi, Modric get Argentina, Croatia to World Cup semifinals

By STEVE DOUGLAS AP Sports Writer

DOHA, Qatar (AP) — Tears are flowing from soccer's biggest superstars as they make emotional exits from what might be their last World Cup.

First it was Neymar. Then it was Cristiano Ronaldo. Could Lionel Messi be next?

Momentum is building behind Messi's push to cap his career with the biggest prize in the game. The 35-year-old Argentina playmaker has carried his team to the semifinals, almost in the same way Diego Maradona — the man with whom Messi is so often compared — led the South American nation to its second and most recent World Cup title in 1986.

Now in Argentina's way is Croatia, a country with a population of 4 million which is establishing a reputation as the most stubborn and durable of opponents while also boasting one of soccer's most graceful players in Luka Modric.

The teams go head to head at Lusail Stadium — also the venue for Sunday's final — in a meeting be-

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tween the last two runners-up at the tournament: Argentina in 2014 and Croatia in 2018.

Argentina might have been expected to be in this position. The team arrived at the World Cup as the Copa America champion, on a 36-match unbeaten run and with Messi back in sublime form for Paris Saint-Germain.

Messi has continued that form in Qatar, scoring four goals.

"For us, he is our leader — he drives us, motivates us," Argentina defender Nicolas Tagliafico said Monday. "We have that little bit extra when we go on the field. We are delighted that he is our captain."

There was much less noise around the Croatians, yet they keep on surprising just like four years ago when their run to the final included a 3-0 victory over Argentina in the group stage. They also reached the World Cup semifinals in 1998.

Croatia coach Zlatko Dalić said his team's World Cup performances are proving to be an inspiration to other underdogs, such as fellow semifinalist Morocco.

"Everyone in life has a right to make dreams," Dalić said. "The Croatia national team made that dream a reality for all small countries four years ago. We gave other countries the right to have those dreams.

"They are encouraged by our example, by our fight, our qualities. All other national teams are living their dreams and Morocco is no exception ... But let us share the same dream."

Both teams have come through uncomfortable moments. Argentina's darkest time was right at the start of the tournament, after a 2-1 loss to Saudi Arabia in what will go down as one of the World Cup's biggest upsets.

Inspired by Messi and one of the most fervent fan followings in Qatar, Argentina won its final two group games, ended up squeezing past Australia 2-1 in the round of 16 and then required penalties to get past the Netherlands in a wild quarterfinal match.

Messi is one goal behind top scorer Kylian Mbappé. They are probably the two standout players at a World Cup that has seen many other top players live up to their lofty reputations.

Modric is a case in point.

He might not have scored a goal. He hasn't even had an assist. But don't underestimate the importance to Croatia of the little magician who keeps things ticking in midfield and manages to assert some control for a team which fights until the last minute.

In 2018, each of Croatia's knockout games went into extra time before the team lost to France in the final. The same thing is happening in Qatar, with victories in penalty shootouts over Japan in the last 16 and Brazil in the quarterfinals.

Croatia looked more comfortable against Brazil than against Japan, which shows the team might be happier to invite pressure and choose its moments to break forward rather than control games and be more susceptible to the counterattack.

Containing Messi will be key and much of the responsibility there lies with holding midfielder Marcelo Brozovic, who protected Croatia's defense so well against Brazil.

Argentina will be without two players because of suspension: left back Marcos Acuña and right back Gonzalo Montiel. Acuña is the bigger miss, having impressed since coming into the team after the loss to Saudi Arabia, and he is likely to be replaced by Tagliafico.

Dalic said Croatia was free from injuries.

"If we manage to win tomorrow," he said, "that would make it the greatest game for Croatia of all time."

A diminished US workforce could lead Fed to keep rates high

By CHRISTOPHER RUGABER AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — Still eager to hire, America's employers are posting more job openings than they did before the pandemic struck 2½ years ago. Problem is, there aren't enough applicants. The nation's labor force is smaller than when the pandemic struck.

The reasons vary — an unexpected wave of retirements, a drop in legal immigration, the loss of workers to COVID-19 deaths and illnesses. The result, though, is that employers are having to compete for a

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smaller pool of workers and to offer steadily higher pay to attract them. It's a trend that could fuel wage growth and high inflation well into 2023.

In a recent speech, Federal Reserve Chair Jerome Powell pointed to the shortfall of workers and the resulting rise in average pay as the primary remaining driver of the price spikes that continue to grip the economy.

Though inflation pressures have eased slightly from four-decade highs — average gasoline prices are now below where they were a year ago — costs are still rising fast in much of the economy's vast service sector. As a result, the Fed is expected Wednesday to raise its benchmark short-term rate for a seventh time this year, though by a smaller amount than it has recently.

The central bank has boosted its key rate by a substantial three-quarters of a point four straight times, to a range of 3.75% to 4%, the highest level in 15 years. Powell has signaled that the Fed will likely raise its benchmark rate by a half-point this week, and many economists expect quarter-point rate hikes after that.

Cumulatively, those rate increases may be helping slow inflation. But they have also sharply increased borrowing costs for consumers and businesses — on mortgages, auto loans and credit cards, among other loans. Many economists have warned that the resulting decline in borrowing and spending will likely cause a recession in 2023.

Yet with price increases still uncomfortably high, Powell and other Fed officials have underscored that they expect to keep rates at their peak for an extended period, possibly through next year. On Wednesday, members of the Fed's rate-setting committee will update their projections for interest rates and other economic barometers for 2023 and beyond.

The higher wages that many employers are having to offer don't always lead to higher inflation. If companies invest in more efficient machines or technology, workers can become more productive: They can increase their output per hour. Under that scenario, businesses could raise pay without having to raise prices.

But productivity has been especially weak in the past year. And Powell has noted that higher pay will likely feed too-high inflation in the service sector — everything from restaurants and hotels to retail stores, medical care and entertainment. The employers in these industries are labor-intensive, and they tend to pass their higher labor costs on to their customers through higher prices.

Higher wages also typically spur Americans to keep spending, a trend that can perpetuate a cycle that keeps prices high.

"This labor shortage that we have," the Fed chair said, "it doesn't look like it's going away anytime soon. It's been very disappointing and a little bit surprising."

The leading cause of the worker shortfall, according to research by the Fed, is a surge in retirements. In his recent speech, Powell noted that there are now about 3.5 million fewer people who either have a job or are looking for one compared with pre-pandemic trends. Of the 3.5 million, about 2 million consist of "excess" retirements — an increase in retirements far more than would have been expected based on pre-existing trends. Roughly 400,000 other working-age people have died of COVID-19. And legal immigration has fallen by about 1 million.

For Diane Soini, it was the experience of working from home and then having to endure a dismal return to the workplace that led her to retire after working 11 years as a computer programmer with the University of California, Santa Barbara. Before the pandemic, Soini had enjoyed going into work. She felt respected by colleagues. She had asked for, and received, her own office.

"And the pandemic came along and took it all away," said Soini, 57, who lives in Santa Barbara.

She disliked communicating over Zoom and felt disconnected from her co-workers. Once she returned to the office, she often found it mainly empty. Motion-sensitive lights would turn off, and she'd have to walk around to turn them back on. Women's bathrooms in her building, Soini said, were often locked.

"I just thought, this is horrible, I hate this," she said.

Soini retired in July. Soon after, she hiked 800 miles of the Continental Divide trail along the Montana and Idaho borders. Next spring, she plans to hike the Arizona National Scenic Trail from the border with Mexico to Utah.

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Soini and her partner are financially secure, she said. She puts the likelihood of her ever returning to work at maybe one-third. She quit a volunteer job she had taken once it began to seem like work.

Besides fueling inflation, a smaller workforce is causing other consequences. Some businesses, particularly retailers and restaurants, have had to cut back their hours of operation, losing revenue and frustrating customers.

Jeffrey Moriarty, who manages a family-owned 42-year-old jewelry company called Moriarty's Gem Art in Crown Point, Indiana, said his company had to close its jewelry repair business late last year, a service it had provided for 30 years, because it couldn't replace its longtime employee. Though the repair service accounted for only about 15% of Moriarty's revenue, it allowed the business to distinguish itself from rivals in the area.

"It's hard enough finding workers, but a bench jeweler is a dying breed," said Moriarty, referring to an artisan who does stone setting and engraving. "You just can't bring someone in with no experience."

How the Fed will manage a robust labor market, with its effect on inflation, could prove perilous. Powell and other Fed officials have said they hope their rate hikes will slow consumer spending and job growth. Businesses would then remove many of their job openings, easing the demand for labor. With less competition for workers, wages could begin to grow more slowly.

Powell has even named a wage target: He regards annual pay growth at a rate of about 3.5% as compatible with 2% inflation. Right now, average pay is growing about 5%-6% a year.

Three months ago, the Fed's policymakers estimated that the unemployment rate would rise to 4.4% next year, from 3.7% now. On Wednesday, the policymakers may forecast a higher unemployment rate by the end of 2023. If so, that would suggest that they foresee more layoffs and likely a recession.

"What will it take to get wage growth to slow to the extent that inflationary pressures go away?" asked Matt Klein, an economics commentator who writes The Overshoot newsletter. "We don't really know the answer."

Jelly doughnuts: How to make the ultimate Hanukkah pastry

By KATIE WORKMAN Associated Press

Jelly doughnuts, also known as sufganiyot, have become a classic Hanukkah treat, one of a number of foods fried in oil that are popular on the holiday (latkes, or potato pancakes, are another).

They're doughnuts without a central hole, fried and stuffed with jelly or jam. In Israel, jelly doughnuts for Hanukkah are especially popular, and are sometimes filled with chocolate or halvah too. They also can be prepared in savory versions, stuffed with meat or vegetables.

The story goes that over 2,000 years ago, after the Second Temple of Jerusalem was ransacked by invaders, there was only enough oil to keep the temple candles lit for one day and night. Inexplicably, the oil burned for eight days and eight nights, a feat now celebrated as Hanukkah, the eight-day "festival of lights." (This year, Hanukkah begins on Sunday evening, Dec. 18.)

There are two ways to fill jelly doughnuts. You can fill them before frying (the jelly is sandwiched between two disks of yeast dough, sealed and fried). Or you can fry them first and then inject them with filling, which is what I do here. This technique removes the risk of not-properly-sealed doughnuts coming apart in the pan and leaking their filling.

The traditional yeast dough used to make doughnuts requires two risings, one for the ball of dough itself and the other for the shaped doughnuts before they are fried. Both risings are necessary for light and fluffy doughnuts.

You can use any type of jam you like; strawberry and raspberry jelly are popular.

JELLY DOUGHNUTS

Serves 16

1 (.25-ounce) package active dry yeast or 1 tablespoon dry yeast

¾ cup warm milk (about 100° F)

¼ cup melted butter

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¼ teaspoon kosher salt
½ cup sugar
1 large egg and 1 egg yolk, lightly beaten
2 ½ to 3 cups all-purpose flour, divided
¼ teaspoon ground nutmeg, mace or cinnamon
Vegetable oil for frying
¾ cup jam or jelly, any flavor
For the Coating:

1 cup sugar
1 teaspoon ground cinnamon

Generously flour a clean work surface and lightly oil a medium-size bowl.

In a large bowl or the bowl of a standing mixer, add the warm milk, then sprinkle the yeast over the milk. Using an electric mixer, or the dough hook for a standing mixer, stir to dissolve and allow it to sit until it gets foamy, about 10 minutes. Add the butter, salt and sugar, and stir or blend to combine. Blend in the egg and egg yolk, then beat in 2 cups of the flour. Beat until the dough starts to pull away from the sides of the bowl, then beat in another ½ cup of the remaining flour plus the nutmeg, mace or cinnamon.

When the batter has formed into a cohesive ball, turn it onto the floured work surface and knead the dough for two minutes. Add more flour as needed if the dough feels too sticky. Form the dough into a ball, and place in the oiled bowl. Cover with a dishtowel or plastic wrap and let sit in a warm, draft-free place until the dough has doubled in volume, about 1 hour.

Clean and re-flour your work surface. Turn the dough onto the floured surface and roll it out with a floured rolling pin to a ½-inch thickness.

With a 3-inch biscuit or cookie cutter, cut as many rounds as you can, minimizing the space between each round. Gather the scraps, let them sit for another 15 minutes, then roll the dough out again, and cut as many more circles as possible. Place the circles on a very lightly floured baking sheet with a couple of inches between each doughnut, cover with a clean dishtowel or loose plastic wrap, and let sit for about 1 hour, until they are quite puffy, about 1 inch thick.

About 15 minutes before you are going to fry the doughnuts, place paper towels on a clean surface. Make the sugar coating: In a shallow bowl, mix together the 1 cup sugar with the cinnamon. And pour at least 2 inches of oil into a deep skillet or pan. Heat to 375° F over medium heat.

Use a spatula to transfer two or three doughnuts into the pan. They will rise and bob on the surface; fry for about 1 minute, until golden brown on the underside, then flip them and cook until the second side is golden brown, another 1 to 2 minutes. You can occasionally gently press the doughnuts down into the oil to cook the sides evenly. Remove the doughnuts, allowing excess oil to drain back into the pan, and let them rest for a minute on the paper towels.

Then place them in the bowl with the sugar coating and turn to coat completely.

Use a chopstick or wooden dowel to poke a hole into the side of each doughnut, and as you slide it in, give it a wiggle to create a small pocket in the center of the doughnut. Fill a pastry bag or sturdy plastic bag with the jelly. If you are using a plastic bag, cut a very small triangle from one of its bottom corners. Insert the pastry bag or snipped corner of the plastic bag into the hole on the side of the doughnut. Gently squeeze a couple of teaspoons of jelly into the middle of the doughnut. Remove the bag carefully from the doughnut, and repeat until all the doughnuts are filled.

Serve warm or at room temperature.

Katie Workman writes regularly about food for The Associated Press. She has written two cookbooks focused on family-friendly cooking, "Dinner Solved!" and "The Mom 100 Cookbook." She blogs at <http://www.themom100.com/about-katie-workman>. She can be reached at Katie@themom100.com.

Morocco's World Cup streak brings a joyful Arab embrace

By LEE KEATH Associated Press

DOHA, Qatar (AP) — It's a rare moment in the Middle East when the public's voice roars louder than those of the governments. But Morocco's surprise string of wins at the World Cup in Qatar have stirred a joy and pride among Arab fans that have, at least for a moment, eclipsed the region's many political divisions.

Perhaps most striking is the love fest between Palestinians and the Moroccan team, despite the Moroccan government's normalization of ties with Israel as part of the 2020 Abraham Accords.

The Moroccan team waved a Palestinian flag after its victory over Spain last week, thrilling Palestinians. Throughout the tournament, the Palestinian flag has been unfurled all over, carried by Arab fans and some non-Arabs — so much so that the running joke is that Palestine is the 33rd team at the World Cup.

Palestinians see it as a sign Arab public support still runs strong for their cause even as they feel Arab governments have abandoned them, with the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain and Sudan also normalizing ties with Israel.

"I didn't expect this. It's spreading the word and showing that Palestine is not just a political issue, it's a human issue," said Ahmed Sabri, a young Palestinian in Doha after watching Morocco's win over Portugal on Saturday. He had the Palestinian flag draped over his back.

His Egyptian friend, Yasmeen Hossam, wrapped in a Moroccan flag, said, "This is the first World Cup in the Middle East and the first one FOR the Middle East."

Morocco is the first Arab and African team to make it this far in a World Cup, playing a semifinal Wednesday against France. Part of the Arab embrace of the team has come simply from having something to celebrate in a region where many countries are mired in economic crises, armed conflicts and political repression.

For some, it's gratifying to see their culture displayed in a positive way on a massive international stage — whether it's the Moroccan team doing a quick Muslim prayer during huddles or Morocco winger Soufiane Boufal dancing with his veiled mother on the pitch after the quarterfinal victory over Portugal.

"We are all clinging to this Moroccan team as some sort of source of hope and happiness in a time where I think we all could really use some good news," said Danny Hajjar, a Lebanese-American music writer.

The excitement with each victory has crossed boundaries and political divisions.

Algerians joined in, even though their government cut ties with Morocco last year. The two countries have a long-running conflict over Western Sahara, which Morocco annexed in 1975 and where Algeria long supported Sahrawis in the Polisario Front seeking independence. Algeria was angered by the U.S. recognition of Moroccan sovereignty in the territory in exchange for normalization with Israel.

At Morocco and Algeria's often tense border, fans lined up on both sides and cheered to each other across no-man's land, videos on social media showed. In the French city of Nice, diaspora Algerians and Tunisians joined Moroccans in cafes and in each others' homes for the matches, setting off fireworks in celebration on the famed Mediterranean boardwalk Promenade des Anglais.

In contrast, Algerian state TV has not even reported on Morocco's wins, leaving them out of daily World Cup reports.

For Palestinians, the games have been a breath of fresh air. The peace process with Israel has long mouldered in a jar on the shelf; a far-right government in Israel is poised to take office; tensions have risen in recent months with several deadly Palestinian attacks in Israel, near daily Israeli raids in the West Bank and increasing harassment by Jewish settlers.

At the same time, many Palestinians feel they have been forgotten by Arab governments; besides the Abraham Accords, countries like Egypt and Jordan have largely gone silent on the Palestinians' future while increasing cooperation with Israel.

World Cup host Qatar has been a vocal supporter of Palestinians and a major economic lifeline for the Gaza Strip, governed by the Hamas militant group and under Egyptian and Israeli closure for years.

Ahmed Abu Suleiman, a soccer coach from the Shati refugee camp in Gaza City, said he feels proud seeing the Palestinian flag so much among fans in Doha.

"Regimes change, but the people remain unchanged. They are thinking about the Palestinian issue, about

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the Palestinian wound," he said.

Thousands of people packed a Gaza City sporting hall with a large screen donated by Qatar to watch the Morocco-Portugal match. Many held posters showing the Palestinian and Morocco flags and the slogan, "One People, One Country."

"It's an indescribable feeling. I swear it's as if it's Palestinians that were playing," said one fan, Ibrahim al-Lilli. "All of us are Morocco."

Scenes of jubilation also took place across the West Bank after the win. In east Jerusalem, two men stood atop the Old City's Damascus gate holding a red Moroccan flag while hundreds below cheered and chanted, "God, Morocco, Jerusalem is Arab."

The Moroccan victory also reverberated in Israel, home to hundreds of thousands of Jews of Moroccan descent. Many Israelis, including ones attending in Doha, were rooting for the team.

Avi Nachmani, a spokesman for the Israel-based World Federation of Moroccan Jewry, said many Israelis of Moroccan origin maintain a strong connection to their roots. "This flourishing of the team really adds to the affinity," he said.

He said scenes of players celebrating with their mothers reminded him of the way Moroccan Jews honor their parents. "They don't forget where they came from," he said.

But some were dismayed by shows of the Palestinian flag. In Israel and east Jerusalem, police move quickly to tear down any display of the flag, though it is not specifically banned.

Rudy Rochman, an Israeli of Moroccan descent, said he felt a connection to the Moroccan team. But he called the unfurling of the Palestinian flag "intentionally offensive to Israel."

On social media, some said Arab enthusiasm for Morocco erases the large ethnic Berber population that is equally if not more a part of the country's identity. Other voices said Morocco's hold on Western Sahara and discrimination felt by many Sahrawis were lost in the cheers.

Lebanon may be the most complicated, as sectarian divisions seep into soccer loyalties. While Lebanese are overwhelmingly Brazil or Germany fans, many have adopted Morocco and rejoiced in the streets after the win over Portugal.

The semifinal with France is more divisive. Much of the Arab world sees a chance for a former colony to give its one-time colonizer its comeuppance. But some in Lebanon feel cultural affinity with France, particularly Christians.

After the Portugal game, scuffles broke out in Beirut after a group of Morocco fans from a Muslim-majority neighborhood rode through a Christian area on motorcycles, some hoisting Palestinian flags and chanting "God is the greatest." They were accosted by a group of men from the area who saw the convoy as a sectarian provocation.

Given the history of divisions and the 15-year civil war, the music writer Hajjar said he wouldn't be surprised if there was more street friction around the semifinal. But, he said, he was "hoping that we can all just enjoy the match for what it will be."

Stadium sensory rooms allow fans World Cup games experience

By LUIS ANDRES HENAO Associated Press

DOHA, Qatar (AP) — Away from the roaring noise, lights and fireworks of World Cup games, there's a safe space for fans who might get overwhelmed in a stadium environment.

The "sensory rooms," at three stadiums in Qatar, provide a calm refuge for children and young adults with autism, learning difficulties or other sensory access requirements.

Located at the stadium skyboxes at the Al Bayt, Education City and Lusail stadiums, the rooms feature soft furnishings, noise cancelling headphones and interactive tools and toys to help children cope with the loud atmosphere and allow them to alleviate anxiety and enjoy the unique experience of a World Cup game.

"Having a space like this is a respite. It's like a warm hug," said Raana Smith, co-founder of Sensory Souk, a Doha-based company that staffs the sensory rooms.

"Everybody should have the right and the opportunity to experience football," she said. "If someone has

limited speech, limited mobility, that shouldn't be a barrier ever to experience something as wonderful and as crowd-pleasing."

The dimmed-lit rooms include soft cushions, soothing colorful lights and rising bubble tubes and boards mounted on walls that provide different textures to help people calm down and refocus. Fans are also provided with sensory bags that include noise-cancelling headphones, weighted lap pads and fidget toys like plastic clappers and gloves.

Large floor to ceiling windows let families keep an eye on the field. The ultimate goal is to gradually introduce fans to the game, allowing them to sit in the stands for periods at a time and then returning to the sensory room when needed, Alison Saraf, co-founder of Sensory Souk, said at the 80,000-capacity Lusail Stadium, where the World Cup final will be played.

"In children, what we ideally want to do is ignite passion for a new sport," Saraf said. "...The aim is always really to have as many people enjoy the game outside and experiencing everything that's here."

The initiative is run by FIFA and the host country's Supreme Committee for Delivery and Legacy.

Sensory rooms have also been introduced in recent years in professional sports in the United States, including at the MLS, NBA and the NFL to provide calming spaces for fans with sensory challenges.

"This is really a worldwide phenomenon as people are understanding more and more the fact that they need to broaden the appeal of sports to every single demographic," said Dr. Julian Maha, co-founder of KultureCity, a U.S.-based organization that has helped sports teams across the U.S. with programs for visitors with a range of sensory issues, including people who have autism.

"Because of their sensory issues, where going to a large-scale sporting event like a stadium cannot only be overwhelming but physically painful because of the crowds, the noise, the smells, a lot of these individuals tend to withdraw from the community and don't engage," Maha said.

By providing sensory rooms, he said, the World Cup is "opening up the game to really a ton more people, people who have largely been demarginalized and not included, and giving them the opportunity to reengage and become part of the community again and enjoy all the things that we as neurotypical individuals take for granted."

Taliban: Assailants attack hotel in Afghan capital Kabul

By RAHIM FAIEZ Associated Press

ISLAMABAD (AP) — A hotel catering to foreign visitors in Afghanistan's capital of Kabul was attacked Monday and three of the assailants were killed, a Taliban official said.

Two foreign residents were injured when they jumped out of windows to escape, said Zabihullah Mujahid, the Taliban government's spokesman. Residents reported explosions and gunfire and photos and video posted on social media showed smoke rising from the building.

The Emergency Hospital in Kabul said in a tweet that there was an explosion and gunfire near a hotel approximately a kilometer away. "So far, we have received 21 casualties — 3 were already dead on arrival."

Khalid Zadran, the Taliban-appointed spokesman for the Kabul police chief, said the attack lasted several hours. He said a "clean-up" operation was ongoing.

No one immediately claimed responsibility for the attack but the regional affiliate of the Islamic State group — known as the Islamic State in Khorasan Province and a rival of Afghanistan's ruling Taliban — has increased its attacks since the Taliban takeover of the country last year.

A resident of the Shar-e Naw neighborhood where the attack happened told The Associated Press that he heard explosions and then several gunshots. He spoke on condition of anonymity for fear of reprisals from Taliban officials.

Another resident in the Shar-e Naw neighborhood told the AP that a gun battle was still going on. He said he and his family were staying inside their home about three blocks away from the attack site. He also spoke on condition of anonymity for fear of reprisals.

Taliban forces rushed to the area and blocked all roads leading to the site, said Zadran, the police chief spokesman.

Free ride: DC unveils bold plan to boost public transit

By HOPE YEN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The COVID-19 pandemic laid bare for the District of Columbia and other major cities that public transit was a lifeline for essential workers and that even modest fares could be a burden to them. So the nation's capital is introducing a groundbreaking plan: It will begin offering free bus fares to residents next summer.

Other cities, including Los Angeles and Kansas City, Missouri, suspended fare collection during the height of the pandemic to minimize human contact and ensure that residents with no other travel options could reach jobs and services at hospitals, grocery stores and offices.

But D.C.'s permanent free fare plan will be by far the biggest, coming at a time when major cities including Boston and Denver and states such as Connecticut are considering broader zero-fare policies to improve equity and help regain ridership that was lost with the rise of remote and hybrid work. Los Angeles instituted free fares in 2020 before recently resuming charging riders. Lately LA Metro has been testing a fare-capping plan under which transit riders pay for trips until they hit a fixed dollar amount and then ride free after that, though new Mayor Karen Bass has suggested support for permanently abolishing the fares.

Analysts say D.C.'s free fare system offers a good test case on how public transit can be reshaped for a post-pandemic future.

"If D.C. demonstrates that it increases ridership, it reduces the cost burden for people who are lower income and it improves the quality of transit service in terms of speed of bus service, and reduces cars on the road, this could be a roaring success," said Yonah Freemark, a senior research associate at the Urban Institute. "We just don't know yet whether that would happen."

The \$2 fares will be waived for riders boarding Metrobuses within the city limits beginning around July 1. In unanimously approving the plan last week, the D.C. Council also agreed to expand bus service to 24 hours on 12 major routes downtown, benefiting nightlife and service workers who typically had to rely on costly ride-share to get home after the Metro subway and bus system closed at night.

A new \$10 million fund devoted to annual investments in D.C. bus lanes, shelters and other improvements was also approved to make rides faster and more reliable.

"The District is ready to be a national leader in the future of public transit," said D.C. Councilmember Charles Allen, who first proposed free fares in 2019 and says the program can be fully paid-for with surplus D.C. tax revenue. Roughly 85% of bus riders are D.C. residents. The Metro system also serves neighboring suburbs in Maryland and Virginia.

About 68% of D.C. residents who take the bus have household incomes below \$50,000, and riders are disproportionately Black and Latino compared with Metrorail passengers, according to the council's budget analysis.

Not everyone is a fan.

Peter Van Doren, a senior fellow at the D.C.-based Cato Institute, said the plan risks high costs and mixed results, noting that the opportunity to improve ridership may be limited because bus passengers have been quicker to return to near pre-pandemic levels. He said government subsidies to help lower-income people buy cars would go farther because not everyone has easy access to public transit, which operates on fixed routes.

"The beauty of automobiles is they can go anywhere and everywhere in a way that transit does not," he said. "We don't know the subset of low-income people in D.C. where transit is a wonderful option as opposed to not such a wonderful option."

The council's move, which will be finalized in a second vote later this month, came over the concerns of D.C. Mayor Muriel Bowser, who supports the concept of free fares but raised questions about the \$42 million annual cost over the long term. "District residents and taxpayers will have to pay for this program," she wrote in a letter to council members. "Our neighbors, Virginia and Maryland, should absorb some of these costs as their residents will benefit from this program as well."

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Allen also had proposed a \$100 monthly transit benefit for D.C. residents to access the Metrorail system, but shelved the plan until at least fall 2024 due to the \$150 million annual estimated cost. He described free bus fares as a "win-win-win" for the District because they will help the transit system recover and offer affordable, green-friendly travel while boosting economic activity downtown.

The Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority, which currently faces a budget deficit of \$185 million, part of which it attributes to fare evasion, praised the plan as "bold." It said it looked forward to working with the city council, mayor and regional stakeholders "toward our goal of providing more accessible and equitable service for our customers."

Nationwide, while transit ridership has returned to about 79% of pre-pandemic levels, that figure varies widely by region. In New York City, for instance, MTA chief executive Janno Lieber has suggested that city and state government step up to pay for trains and buses more like essential public services, such as a fire department, citing millions of transit riders he believes may never come back. In 2019, fares made up over 40% of total transit revenue there but have since slid to 25%, leading to an anticipated \$2.5 billion deficit in 2025 along with the risk of soon using up the transportation authority's federal COVID relief funds.

In D.C., where bus fares amount to a modest 7% of total transit operating revenues, the transit agency may be able to more easily absorb losses from zero fares, said Art Guzzetti, the American Public Transportation Association's vice president of mobility initiatives and public policy. He noted savings for city taxpayers from speeding up boarding, which could allow for more routes and stops, as well as reducing traffic congestion and eliminating the need for transit enforcement against fare evaders.

Currently, D.C. bus ridership stands at about 74% of pre-pandemic levels on weekdays compared to 40% for Metrorail.

Still, free fares can be a tough choice for cities. "If the consequence of a zero-fare program is you have less funds to invest in frequent service, then you're going backwards," Guzzetti said.

In Kansas City, which began offering zero-fares for its buses in March 2020 and has no planned end date, officials said the program has helped boost ridership, which has risen by 13% in 2022 so far compared with the previous year. The free fares amount to an \$8 million revenue loss, with the city paying for more than half of that and federal COVID aid covering the rest through 2023, said Cindy Baker, interim vice president for the Kansas City Area Transportation Authority, who describes the program as a success.

The program has eliminated altercations between passengers and bus drivers over fares, although there have been more instances of passenger disputes due to an increase in homeless riders, according to the agency. Baker said the transit agency has been adding security in response to some rider complaints.

Ché Ruddell-Tabisola, director of government affairs for the Restaurant Association Metropolitan Washington, cheered free fares as a much-needed economic boost, showing D.C.'s commitment to the well-being of late-night bartenders and restaurant workers needing an affordable way home.

"A lot of industries have moved on from the pandemic, but for D.C.'s bars and restaurants, the pandemic is still happening everyday," he said, citing the effects of hybrid work, inflation, gun violence and other factors that have hollowed out the downtown. "Anything that helps encourage diners to get to downtown D.C. and enjoy the world-class dining and entertainment we have is a great thing."

3 children die after fall into icy lake; UK gripped by storm

By DANICA KIRKA Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — Three young boys who fell through ice covering a lake in central England have died and a fourth remains hospitalized as weather forecasters issued severe weather warnings for large parts of the United Kingdom.

Police in full uniform jumped into the water and broke through the ice using their bare hands to pull the boys, ages 8, 10 and 11, from the icy waters Sunday afternoon and rushed them to the hospital in the West Midlands, about 100 miles (160 kilometers) north of London. But they could not be revived after suffering cardiac arrest.

The fourth child, who is 6, remains in critical condition. Emergency workers searched through the night

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and into Monday for two other children who were reportedly with the group, though it is uncertain whether there were additional victims of the tragedy.

"It's important to stress ... that we've had no contact from anybody suggesting that there's anybody else missing, but until we're 100% certain we will be carrying on searches throughout the course of today," West Midlands Police Superintendent Richard Harris said.

Harris declined to say whether the children were members of a single family.

The news came as the Met Office, Britain's national weather service, issued severe weather alerts for large parts of the country. Roads in eastern and southeastern England were among the most affected. Some travelers were stuck for hours due to the closure of the UK's busiest highway, the M25, which circles greater London.

Gatwick and Stansted airports warned of flight delays on Monday, and London City Airport said it was experiencing "some disruption" because aircraft were out of position after flight cancellations on Sunday night.

The country recorded its coldest night of the year so far in northern Scotland at minus 15.7 degrees Celsius (3.7 degrees Fahrenheit).

"Frozen lakes, ponds, canals and reservoirs can look picturesque but they can be lethal, and there are no greater warnings of this than yesterday's tragic events," West Midlands Fire Service area commander Richard Stanton said. "Yesterday's incident is a stark reminder to us all of the dangers of open water, especially during the winter months."

Dog therapy for kids facing the trauma of the war in Ukraine

By E. EDUARDO CASTILLO Associated Press

BOYARKA, Ukraine (AP) — Bice is an American pit bull terrier with an important and sensitive job in Ukraine — comforting children traumatized by Russia's war.

The playful 8-year-old gray dog arrived on time this week to a rehabilitation center on the outskirts of the Ukrainian capital, ready to start his duties.

As Bice waited in a hallway, inside of what looked like a school classroom with paintings and some books, a dozen children were seated around a table listening to Oksana Sliepova, a psychologist.

"Who has a dog?," she asked and several hands raised at once while the space filled with shouts of "Me, me, me!"

One youngster said his dog was named Stitch; "Tank," said another boy, adding that he has a total of five, but he forgot all their names. Everyone burst out laughing.

The seven girls and nine boys — ranging in age from a 2-year-old boy to an 18-year-old young woman — look at first like schoolchildren enjoying class. But they have particular stories: Some witnessed how Russian soldiers invaded their hometowns and beat their relatives. Some are the sons, daughters, brothers or sisters of soldiers who are on the front lines, or were killed on them.

They come together at the Center for Social and Psychological Rehabilitation, a state-operated community center where people can get help coping with traumatic experiences after Russia's invasion in February. Staffers provide regular psychological therapy for anyone who has been affected in any way by the war.

In the past they have worked with horses, but now they are adding support from another four-legged friend: Canine therapy.

Located in Boyarka, a suburb around 20 kilometers (12 miles) southwest of Kyiv, the center was established in 2000 as part of an effort to give psychological support to people affected, directly or indirectly, by the explosion at the nuclear plant in Chernobyl in 1986.

Now it focuses on people affected by the war. These days, when some areas are without power after the Russian attacks to Ukrainian energy infrastructure, the two-story building is one of the few places with light and heating.

With the kids gathered, some wearing festive blue or red Christmas hats, Sliepova cagily asked if they wanted to meet someone. Yes, they did, came the response. The door opened. The faces of the children

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glowed. They smiled.

And in came Bice, the tail-wagging therapist.

Darina Kokozei, the pooch's owner and handler, asked the children to come one by one, to ask him to do a trick or two. He sat. He stood up on his hind legs. He extended a paw, or rolled over. Then, a group hug — followed by a few tasty treats for him.

For more than 30 minutes, Bice let everybody to touch him and hug him, without ever barking. It was as if nothing else mattered at that moment, as if there were nothing to worry about — like, say, a war ravaging their country.

This is the first time that Sliepova has worked with a dog as part of her therapies. But, she said, "I read a lot of literature that working with dogs, with four-legged rehabilitators, helps children reduce stress, increase stress resistance, and reduce anxiety."

The kids did not seem stressed out, but of course the reality is still out there.

She observed how some children are scared of loud noises, like when someone closes a window or when they hear the sound of a jet. Some drop to the floor or start asking whether there's a bomb shelter close.

Among the children were a brother and sister from Kupyansk, a city in the eastern region of Kharkiv, who witnessed Russian soldiers storming into their home with machine guns, grabbing their grandfather, putting a bag on his head and beating him, Sliepova said.

"Each child is psychologically traumatized in different ways," she said.

The moms of some of the kids remained almost all the time seated along one of the walls, watching and listening at distance. When Bice came, some took pictures of their children.

Lesya Kucherenko was here with her 9-year-old son, Maxim. She said she can't stop thinking about the war and what could happen to her oldest son, a 19-year-old paratrooper fighting in the town of Bakhmut in the the eastern Donetsk region — one of the most active fronts these days.

Maxim smiled as he plays with Bice, but he was always checking on his mom and turned his head around to see her every once in a while.

Kucherenko said sometimes she breaks into tears when thinking about her soldier son. Right before this session, she got a call from him. He told her that he was fine, and by just remembering that, she started crying. The next second, Maxim was there, asking why.

"You see? He's comforting me — not me him," she said.

As for the comforting canine, what's the best message that Bice offers the kids?

Owner Kokozei needs to think for only a couple of seconds, and replies: "Freedom."

"Freedom from problems, and happiness," she adds.

Today in History: December 13, George W. Bush claims victory

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Tuesday, Dec. 13, the 347th day of 2022. There are 18 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On Dec. 13, 2000, Republican George W. Bush claimed the presidency a day after the U.S. Supreme Court shut down further recounts of disputed ballots in Florida; Democrat Al Gore conceded, delivering a call for national unity.

On this date:

In 1862, Union forces led by Maj. Gen. Ambrose Burnside launched futile attacks against entrenched Confederate soldiers during the Civil War Battle of Fredericksburg; the soundly defeated Northern troops withdrew two days later.

In 1937, the Chinese city of Nanjing fell to Japanese forces during the Sino-Japanese War; what followed was a massacre of war prisoners, soldiers and citizens. (China maintains that up to 300,000 people were killed; Japanese nationalists say the death toll was far lower, and some maintain the massacre never happened.)

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In 1981, authorities in Poland imposed martial law in a crackdown on the Solidarity labor movement. (Martial law formally ended in 1983.)

In 1993, the space shuttle Endeavour returned from its mission to repair the Hubble Space Telescope.

In 1996, the U.N. Security Council chose Kofi Annan (KOH'-fee AN'-nan) of Ghana to become the world body's seventh secretary-general.

In 2001, the Pentagon publicly released a captured videotape of Osama bin Laden in which the al-Qaida leader said the deaths and destruction achieved by the September 11 attacks exceeded his "most optimistic" expectations.

In 2002, President George W. Bush announced he would take the smallpox vaccine along with U.S. military forces, but was not recommending the potentially risky inoculation for most Americans.

In 2003, Saddam Hussein was captured by U.S. forces while hiding in a hole under a farmhouse in Adwar, Iraq, near his hometown of Tikrit.

In 2007, Major League Baseball's Mitchell Report was released, identifying 85 names to differing degrees in connection with the alleged use of performance-enhancing drugs.

In 2014, thousands of protesters marched in New York, Washington and other U.S. cities to call attention to the killing of unarmed Black men by white police officers who faced no criminal charges.

In 2019, the House Judiciary Committee approved two articles of impeachment accusing President Donald Trump of abuse of power in his dealings with Ukraine and obstruction of Congress in the investigation that followed.

In 2020, the first vials of the Pfizer vaccine against COVID-19 began making their way to distribution sites across the United States.

Ten years ago: U.N. Ambassador Susan Rice withdrew from consideration to replace outgoing Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton after running into opposition from Republicans over her explanation of the September attack on the U.S. consulate in Benghazi, Libya, that killed Ambassador Chris Stevens and three other Americans. (Rice had said the attack stemmed from a spontaneous protest over an anti-Islamic video, an assertion which later proved incorrect.)

Five years ago: Congressional Republicans reached agreement on a major overhaul of the nation's tax laws that would provide generous tax cuts for corporations and the wealthiest Americans; middle- and low-income families would get smaller tax cuts. The New York Times published claims by three women that they had been raped by music mogul Russell Simmons in the 1980s and 1990s; Simmons denied the allegations.

One year ago: The House panel investigating the Jan. 6 Capitol insurrection voted to pursue contempt charges against former White House chief of staff Mark Meadows; lawmakers also revealed a series of frantic texts he received as the attack was under way, in which members of Congress, Fox News anchors and even President Donald Trump's son urged Meadows to push Trump to act quickly to stop the siege by his supporters. (The House voted to hold Meadows in contempt, but the Justice Department declined to prosecute.) The Air Force said it had discharged 27 people for refusing to get the COVID-19 vaccine; they were believed to be the first service members removed for disobeying the mandate to get the shots. The Supreme Court refused to halt a COVID-19 vaccine requirement for health care workers in New York that did not offer an exemption for religious reasons. The Biden administration released a federal strategy to build 500,000 charging stations for electric vehicles across the country and ultimately transform the U.S. auto industry.

Today's Birthdays: Actor-comedian Dick Van Dyke is 97. Country singer Buck White is 92. Music/film producer Lou Adler is 89. Singer John Davidson is 81. Actor Kathy Garver (TV: "Family Affair") is 77. Singer Ted Nugent is 74. Rock musician Jeff "Skunk" Baxter is 74. Actor Robert Lindsay is 73. Country singer-musician Randy Owen is 73. Actor Wendie Malick is 72. U.S. Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack is 72. Former Federal Reserve Chairman Ben Bernanke is 69. Country singer John Anderson is 68. Singer-songwriter Steve Forbert is 68. Singer-actor Morris Day is 66. Actor Steve Buscemi (boo-SEH'-mee) is 65. Actor Johnny Whitaker (TV: "Family Affair") is 63. Rock musician John Munson (Semisonic; Twilight Hours) is 60. Actor-reality TV star NeNe Leakes is 56. Actor-comedian Jamie Foxx is 55. Actor Lusia Strus is 55. Actor Bart

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Johnson is 52. Actor Jeffrey Pierce is 51. TV personality Debbie Matenopoulos is 48. Rock singer-musician Thomas Delonge is 47. Actor James Kyson Lee is 47. Actor Kimee Balmilero (TV: "Hawaii Five-0") is 43. Actor Chelsea Hertford is 41. Rock singer Amy Lee (Evanescence) is 41. Actor Michael Socha is 35. Actor Marcel Spears (TV: "The Mayor") is 34. Singer Taylor Swift is 33. Actor Maisy Stella is 19.