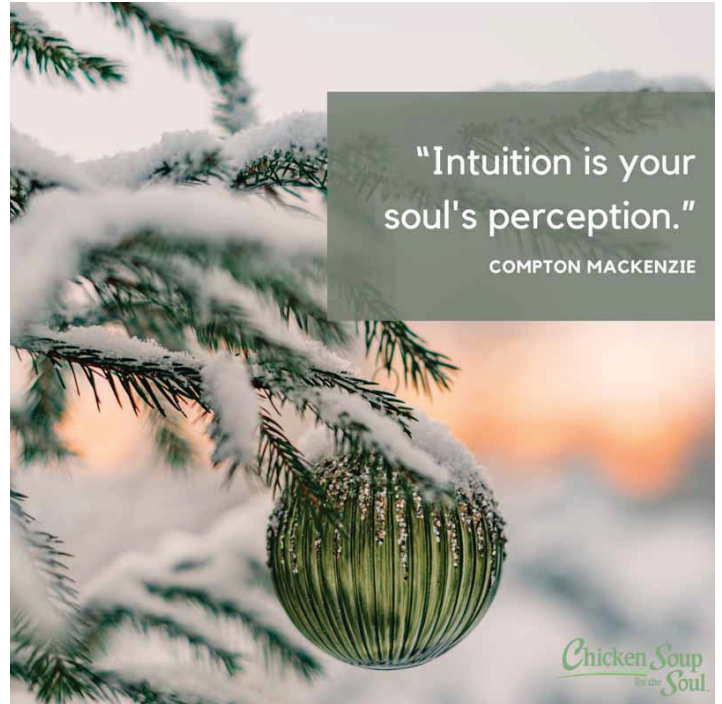


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## Groton Community Calendar

Wednesday, Dec. 14

### NO SCHOOL

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

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

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

School Breakfast: Oatmeal with toppings.

School Lunch: Hamburgers, fires.

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.

**Groton Daily Independent**

**PO Box 34, Groton SD 57445**

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

### 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.)

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

Common Cents Community Thrift Store, 10 a.m. to 1 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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## Nursing Home to Close in Arlington

**Funding Challenges Continue to Have  
Devastating Impact on Long Term Care**

SIOUX FALLS, SD, December 12, 2022 – Yet another South Dakota nursing home is closing its doors. Avantara Arlington has announced its upcoming closure. As with other recent nursing home closures, the primary factors are a combination of the ongoing underfunding of Medicaid, the current staffing crisis, and costs related to the COVID-19 pandemic.

This marks the 7th nursing home closure this calendar year. Over the past six years, there have been 16 closures. Communities where closures have occurred include Elk Point, Armour, Salem, Lennox, Clear Lake, Ipswich, Custer, Hudson, Sioux Falls, Huron, Madison, Mobridge, Tripp, Bryant, and Rosholt.

“Many nursing homes have now gone from crisis to catastrophe,” said Mark B. Deak, Executive Director of the South Dakota Health Care Association. “Between longstanding Medicaid underfunding, the ongoing staffing crisis, and costs from COVID, nursing homes are facing unprecedented pressures. South Dakota communities where these closures have occurred are permanently losing access to a vitally important service for the elderly and disabled.”

South Dakota’s Medicaid reimbursement rates are below those of all our neighboring states. A recent report indicated that Medicaid reimbursement only covers 70.5% of the costs of care and recommended an investment of \$62.5 million to bring the Medicaid reimbursement closer to covering the costs of care.

A significant majority (54%) of the total resident population in South Dakota nursing homes relies on Medicaid to pay for their care. In addition to the closures, this disparity fuels staffing challenges, including difficulty hiring caregivers and high turnover among nursing home staff. Improving ongoing Medicaid reimbursement is the most important step that must be taken to stop the closure crisis.

“Governor Noem is proposing a 21% Medicaid increase for nursing homes in her budget, which is very welcome news,” continued Deak. “With the legislative session beginning soon, I hope lawmakers will also see the need for quick action. Otherwise, it is all but certain that there will be more closures to come.”

####

South Dakota Health Care Association (SDHCA) is a statewide not-for-profit association, representing nursing centers, assisted living centers, and senior living centers that provide long term care to South Dakotans.

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

We're in deep trouble again. I don't like it, but it's a real thing anyhow. At midday today we're showing a 10-day new-case average of 66,585, up from 45,219 just about a week ago. That's pretty rough. Total reported cases in this pandemic are now up to 99,134,858, which means we've passed another million. Here's the recent history.

March 3 – 79 million – 15 days  
March 31 – 80 million – 28 days  
April 27 – 81 million – 27 days  
May 11 – 82 million – 14 days  
May 20 – 83 million – 9 days  
May 31 – 84 million – 11 days  
June 8 – 85 million – 8 days  
June 17 – 86 million – 9 days  
June 27 – 87 million – 10 days  
July 7 – 88 million – 10 days  
July 14 – 89 million – 7 days  
July 21 – 90 million – 7 days  
July 29 – 91 million – 8 days  
August 8 – 92 million – 10 days  
August 17 – 93 million – 9 days  
August 29 – 94 million – 12 days  
September 9 – 95 million – 11 days  
September 28 – 96 million – 19 days  
October 26 – 97 million – 28 days  
November 19 – 98 million – 23 days  
December 8 – 99 million – 20 days

Hospitalizations are at a seven-day average of 37,0630, up from 32,445. And deaths are soaring again; the seven-day average sits at 466 up from 262. That's scary. Total deaths are now at 1,134,393. We're in a surge created, I'm guessing, by a confluence of the onset of cold weather across much of the country, holiday gatherings, and general don't-give-a-damn. I don't have suggestions to solve this.

Some states and territories are showing massive increases in new cases. Near or over 100 percent increases in the past week are Nebraska (408%), Oklahoma (211%), Mississippi (160%), Georgia (145%), South Carolina (122%), Nevada (119%), Alabama (102%), Arkansas (100%), New York (99%), Texas (98%), Indiana (95%), Iowa (94%), and California (92%). We have 10 more states and territories showing 50 percent or greater growth and 21 more in double digits. Only eight show decreases. We should note in all this that the vast majority of cases are not being reported; they're being diagnosed (if at all) by at-home tests that are not being reported. So the real totals are far in excess of the numbers you're seeing here. This is depressing.

Hospitalizations are at their highest level in almost three months. Daily new hospital admissions are over 9000, which is far above the 5000-7000 we'd been seeing in the past few months. This count started to rise before the Thanksgiving holiday and continues to rise since. Winter's always rough, but this winter is looking very bad. While we know that new cases are vastly underreported, hospitalizations are a far more accurate count of how things look today, and the news from hospitals is not good. While Covid-19 admissions are making up a smaller proportion of hospital admissions overall, adding to this are hospitalizations

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for flu and RSV (respiratory syncytial virus); this spells a crisis in the health care system in many places. Children's hospitals and wards are under great strain, but the largest proportion of hospital admissions are still the elderly, those forgotten ones, the ones we've decided to sacrifice on the altar of getting back to normal. Along with staffing shortages exacerbated by the pandemic, these new demands on hospitals are creating a crisis situation. Family and friend gatherings over the holidays have posed and continue to pose a real risk for cases of not just Covid-19, but also the other respiratory viruses circulating at this time.

Additionally, more than 100,000 people in the US missed work in October to care for sick children, an all-time high according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics. Schools are closing due to illness, and those that are still open have families struggling to keep their kids coming. Masks in schools would help, but I'm afraid that ship has sailed long ago; no one has an appetite for requiring those at this point. Even though studies have showed that masking in the classroom does not interfere with student learning, parents and communities are convinced they do, so that even though other studies have found masking reduces the likelihood of school closures, I don't see us going back there. I can't figure out a way to fix this either.

We've talked about the fact that the now-dominant subvariants of Omicron, BQ.1 and BQ.1.1, together responsible for around 57 percent of new cases, resist our current monoclonal antibody therapies, and now the FDA has pulled the emergency use authorization (EUA) for the last of them, bebtelovimab, and Eli Lilly has stopped distribution. And that's that. While Evusheld, the long-term pre-exposure monoclonal, retains its EUA, I don't expect that will last much longer either. We have nothing very far along in the pipeline to replace it, and absent a large infusion of cash from the federal government, I don't think we'll see much more on this front. These are simply too expensive to develop and get through the approval process without some assurance they can be sold for more than a few months in order to recoup those costs, and we have no signs Congress is willing to step in and help; so this is likely as good as it gets.

Here's what's still available for immunocompromised people who do not typically respond robustly to vaccination and others who are at high risk for severe disease: Paxlovid, molnupiravir (not as effective as Paxlovid), Remdesivir (helps prevent hospitalization, but must be given intravenously over a three-day period). Thin line of defense for those folks. The good news is that these all appear to be retaining their effectiveness very well against these new subvariants. For the record, BQ.1 and BQ.1.1 were at only about a quarter of cases a month ago, so they're coming on fast. We can expect this trend to continue into the future because our antibodies, whether from prior infection or vaccination, are not going to be as protective against these subvariants as they were against earlier versions of the virus. Looking to Europe, the modeling suggested we'd be over 50 percent with these subvariants by December 1—which came true—and that we'll be over 80 percent by January 1. I wouldn't bet against those models. I would also get boosted if I hadn't been; in this situation, more antibodies are better.

The flu season continues to worsen; we're up to 44 states reporting high or very high activity. As of today, 7.5 percent of doctor's visits were for flu, which matches the peak of the entire 2017-18 season; peaks don't generally come until February or after, so it's not likely this is as bad as it gets. Worse, the dominant influenza virus strain is a particularly severe one that is generally associated with higher hospitalization rates; it is especially hard on people 65 and over. There have been 4500 deaths so far this year, including at least 14 children. The good news is that this year's flu vaccine is a very good match for the strains that are circulating, so they should be quite effective for those who choose to receive them.

The new bivalent boosters from both Moderna and Pfizer/BioNTech were authorized on Thursday by the FDA for use in children down to the age of six months. Children from six months to five years will receive the updated booster for their third dose of vaccine. Those who've already had three doses of the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine will not yet be eligible for a fourth shot at this time; it is possible this will change in the



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next month or two. The CDC has yet to sign off on this new authorization, but approval is expected in the next day or two.

I've been updating you periodically about the flu season. While I've restricted my discussions here pretty much to Covid-19, ignoring monkeypox and various other infections because I have only so much bandwidth and this is not my full-time job, I have been reporting on influenza because the expected surge in cases is so tied to the Covid-19 pandemic. And from all appearances, we are in the middle of one barnburner of a flu season. How bad? Bad.

The week of Thanksgiving, we had more positive flu tests than in any single week during any flu season on record by a lot—as in the previous high was right around 20,000 positive tests and this one reported over 34,000. Now I want to put this into perspective: A whole lot more people are being tested for flu than usual. Makes sense when you think about it: If you suspected you had the flu in 2019 or before, you probably said to yourself, "I must have the flu," and stayed home for a few days, whereas now you would wonder whether you had Covid-19 or the flu and tested for Covid-19 to find out. If that was negative, you're probably more likely these days to go in to your doctor for a flu test so you can be sure whether you should be isolating at home, etc. (Never mind that it would be a kindness to your co-workers or fellow students or whoever if you also isolated at home when you have the flu.) Still, these numbers are crazy-high, especially for this point in the season; peaks generally come a month or more from now.

Another clue these numbers aren't just an artifact of increased testing is the hospitalization rate for flu. It too is far above normal—higher than we've seen at this point in the season for at least 10 years, four times higher than usual. Worse, hospitals are also filling up with people infected with RSV and, of course, Covid-19 whose hospitalizations are on the rise again. We're not really equipped to deal with those pressures on the health care system with its pandemic-caused staffing shortages, serious dearth of surge capacity, and low resources. We've talked before about the fact that hospitals were under strain even before the pandemic and that two and a half years of seriously increased burden have come close to breaking the system entirely. Let's add to all of this a developing shortage of many important medications. We really didn't need this. It is not yet clear whether what we're seeing is an early influenza peak which will be followed by an early tapering, the start of a prolonged peak that lasts a few months, or the lead-in to a huge peak yet to come. Time will tell.

So what's going on? Why all the respiratory infections? I've been bumping into one school of thought lately in the place where all of us should be going for our medical advice: social media. (And yes, I totally get the irony of the fact that you have come to social media to read these very words. I will offer in my defense that I have long discouraged you from construing anything I'm telling you as medical advice; I am not equipped or qualified to offer that. What I offer is information.) What I'm seeing is summed up by one comment I read in the past few days: "I suspect our immune systems being out of shape from all the isolation and masking doesn't help."

Now we've had this talk before, starting as early as my Update #73 way back in the spring of 2020 (a lifetime ago, right?) and more than once since. Short version:

(1) Immune systems are not like muscles that go saggy and baggy with disuse. You don't need to keep them "in shape" really. And if you did, know what would help a lot? Vaccination, that's what. Excellent opportunity for your immune system to "work out."

(2) The idea that distancing, isolation at home, and masking somehow protect your immune system from exposure to "germs" is wildly inaccurate. You can't sanitize your house sufficiently to render it "germ-free"

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or even much reduced in microbial load (unless you were previously living in raw sewage or something before). The idea that avoiding going out in public or wearing a mask when you do will somehow protect you from enough bacteria and viruses to make a great deal of difference to your immune response is completely false.

(3) Masks protect you from respiratory microorganisms, not so much from others; that is, gastrointestinal bacteria, the ones that do challenge and strengthen your immune system, still manage to enter your body as you eat and drink. Since none of us gets by for long without doing these things, you have plenty of exposure, supposing you need that exposure, a proposition unsupported by the facts.

What's really going on is something a group of French pediatric infectious disease researchers at the Association Clinique et Thérapeutique Infantile du Val-de-Marne published about in the journal *Infectious Diseases* Now more than a year ago, something called immunity debt. The concept has been twisted by biased press outlets to refer to "our immune systems being out of shape from all the isolation and masking," which is not at all what these scientists meant. Here's the central idea: Generally speaking, for infectious diseases of all kinds, the first infection is the worst, and subsequent infections are milder than that one. This would mean that, since we've had a couple of pandemic years in which people, infants and children especially, were not exposed to respiratory viruses, those first—and worst—infections have been delayed. It would naturally follow that, once we were back to carelessly spreading things around, there will be a backlog of kids who have yet to experience their first contact with RSV, influenza, and Covid-19, kids who will all be very susceptible to that first and worst infection this winter. When we add to this the missed vaccinations both for older viruses like flu and new ones like SARS-CoV-2, we're going to see a lot of folks who are not well protected and a surge in caseload.

There's really nothing new here, and we are not facing a situation where immune systems are weakened by isolation and masking, but rather a situation where immune systems are naïve due to the protections of distancing, isolation, and masking. All those babies that didn't go to day care as they would have in normal times and all those kids who didn't go to school as they would have in normal times were protected from initial infections during those years. That provides us with a larger-than-usual population of susceptibles (who would normally have been infected fewer at a time over the past couple of winters) and therefore a surge of initial and more severe infections this year.

In addition, the lower rates of respiratory infections in the adults around those kids for the same reasons the kids weren't getting infected—distancing, isolation, and masking—has meant fewer opportunities for exposure from the others in their lives. So it's not that kids are getting sicker; it's that they ones who would have gotten sicker over the past two years are all doing that at once in the third year along with this year's crop of new susceptibles. According to Keren Landman at Vox who interviewed various experts, these folks believe the children now being hospitalized "would probably have been hospitalized in 2020 or 2021 if they'd been infected back then." If you divide by three, the current surge is more of a ripple. The armchair epidemiologists are simply spinning this situation in a way the facts do not support. Don't fall for it.

And with that, we'll wrap up for the day. Please keep yourself well, and we'll talk again.

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- Heavy-duty 14-gauge steel auger housing and side plates
- LED light bar on auger housing plus dual LED in-dash headlights
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- Heated hand grips
- OVH crank chute control w/ high-arc steel chute
- Heavy-duty cast aluminum gear box backed by 5-year limited warranty\*\*

MSRP  
**\$1,999\***



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Clear it all with the strength of the 3X 26" Trac featuring a powerful 357cc Cub Cadet OHV engine.

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

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- 16" x 6.5" X-Trac tires
- High-arc steel chute
- Heavy-duty cast aluminum auger gear box w/ 5-year limited warranty

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**\$1,899\***

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**Those are some mighty big snow flakes that came down for a spell on Tuesday. About four inches of snow fell during the evening hours resulting in one inch of moisture.** (Photo by Paul Kosel)

## Postponements

Due to the weather forecast for Wednesday, Bingo at the Groton American Legion will be postponed till Saturday the 17th. The plan for Wednesday was for trapshoot to do their Bingo night, Draw for their cash prizes and have a pork loin supper! It now will be held on Saturday the 17th. Plenty of room for everyone! The back room will be set up for bingo and the pork loin feed. Must be 21 to be here! You must be 21 to play Bingo! Bingo will be at its regular time at 6:30! Help support Trap shoot!

Due to no school today, the SEAS Christmas Program practice has been moved to Friday right after school.

The Gingerbread Bash scheduled for tonight at the Groton United Methodist Church has been postponed to next Wednesday night.





## SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

# Noem and some legislators want a board vetting foreign ownership of ag land

BY: JOSHUA HAIAR - DECEMBER 13, 2022 3:03 PM

Governor Kristi Noem and some legislators plan to introduce a bill to establish a vetting process for foreign purchases of agricultural land in South Dakota.

The plan includes creating a board to investigate proposed purchases of ag land by foreign interests, and to make recommendations of approval or denial.

"With this new process, we will be able to prevent nations who hate us – like Communist China – from buying up our state's agriculture land," Noem said in a news release.

The board would be called the Committee on Foreign Investment in the United States – South Dakota.

The prime sponsors of the legislation will be Sen. Erin Tobin, R-Winner, and Rep.-elect Gary Cammack, R-Union Center, according to a news release from the governor.

"With vital national security resources like Ellsworth Air Force Base, we cannot afford for our enemies to purchase land in South Dakota," Cammack said in the release.

The news release said the board's jurisdiction would cover transactions of any number of acres involving any foreign person, foreign government, foreign business, or any organization controlled by a foreign person, government or business.

Cammack said the group working on the bill is determining how the proposed committee might be alerted to potential purchases of land by foreigners.

### A state law exists

The Legislature passed a bill in 1979 that was designed to prevent some foreign individuals and governments from owning more than 160 acres of farmland.

Despite the existence of that state law, a Chinese firm owns a meatpacking plant in the state's largest city. And records revealed in 2016 by the Midwest Center for Investigative Reporting showed multiple examples of foreigners owning more than 160 acres in the state – more than 350,000 acres of South Dakota farmland in total.

Jon Van Patten is an assistant attorney general for the state. He told South Dakota Public Broadcasting in August that the 1979 law has a loophole because it only addresses foreign residents and governments.

"Who else besides an alien and a foreign government could own property? And the answer would be a corporation," Van Patten said.

But Cammack said the legislation will not attempt to close that loophole. He said the state wants to be careful not to sideline all foreigners with a blanket approach.



**Dave Fendrich (walking) helps Bryant Hofer (in combine) harvest a field of corn on Oct. 2, 2013, near Salem, South Dakota.**

(Photo by Scott Olson/Getty Images)

“For example, we have our neighbors to the north up in Canada that we do business with,” Cammack said. “We want to be careful not to ruin those relationships.”

According to data from the U.S. Department of Agriculture, foreign residents or entities now own over 350,000 acres of ag land in South Dakota — that’s about 1% of all South Dakota agricultural land, but a greater than 3,000% increase from 1979. The largest foreign owners of South Dakota farmland are from Europe.

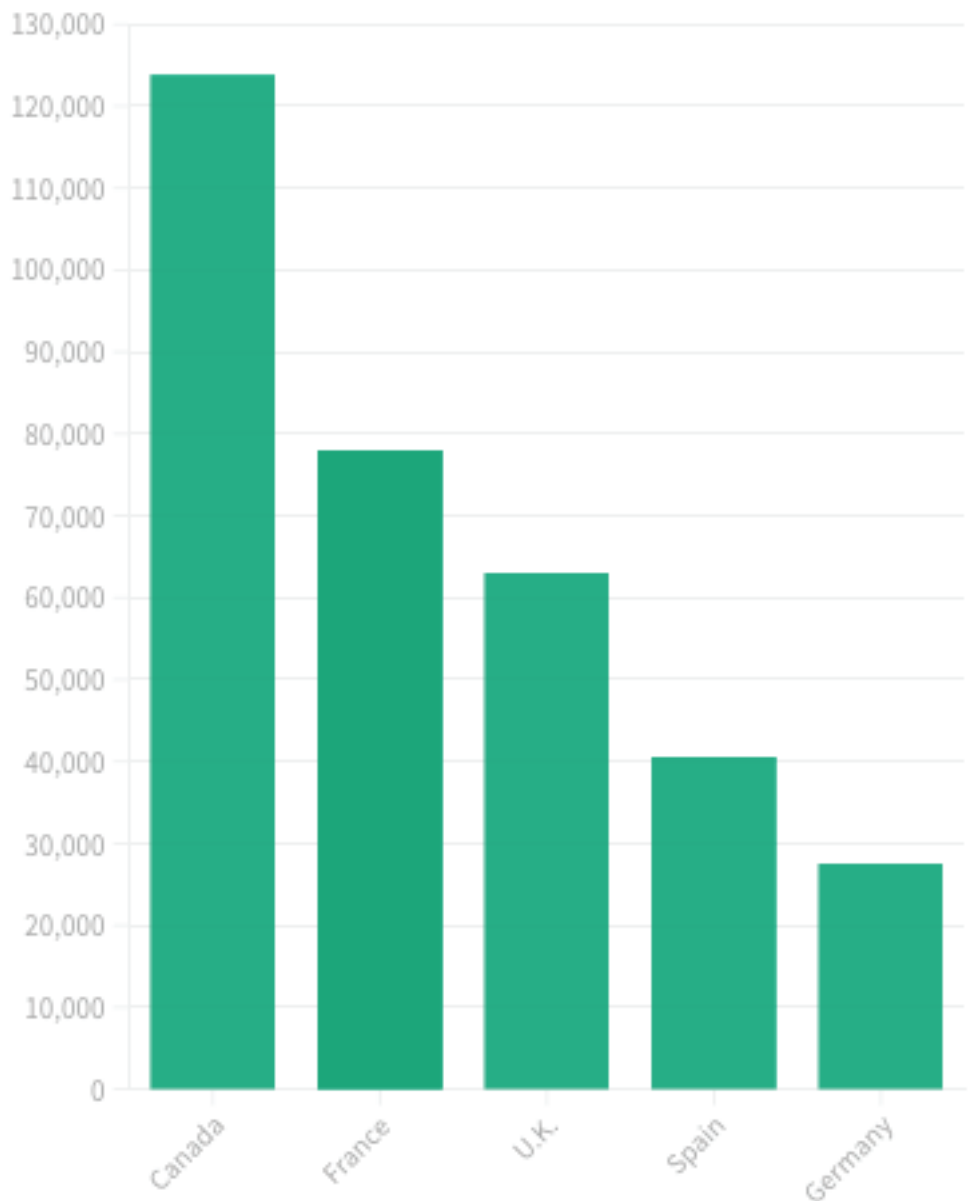
Cammack declined to release the legislation and said it’s still a draft. This year’s legislative session begins Jan. 10 at the Capitol in Pierre.

Similar efforts are already underway in other states such as Missouri, where legislators have filed several bills that would restrict foreign ownership of agricultural land.

South Dakota’s ag-land proposal is the continuation of a string of actions by Gov. Noem taking aim at the Chinese government. She recently issued an executive order banning the use of the TikTok app or website on state devices. TikTok is owned by a Chinese company, which Noem said is a security concern for the United States. And Noem also recently called on the South Dakota Investment Council to review all state investments for potential ties to countries including China.

## Largest foreign holdings of S.D. agricultural land

Through December 31, 2020



**JOSHUA HAIAR**  

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

Source: [USDA Foreign Holdings of U.S. Agricultural Land](#)

## Here's why food prices remain stubbornly high even as inflation cools

BY CASEY QUINLAN - DECEMBER 13, 2022

Shoppers hoping for a little relief at the grocery store for their holiday meals will be disappointed by the Consumer Price Index released Tuesday. The CPI shows inflation cooling but food prices — particularly for some holiday staples — remain high.

The CPI increased 0.1% in November, which was lower than some economists expected. Over the last 12 months, it rose 7.1%. Food went up 0.5% last month after an increase of 0.6% in October. The food index climbed 10.6% over last year.

"The headline inflation numbers are encouraging for the general economy but consumers are not being relieved at the grocery store," said David Ortega, associate professor at the department of agricultural food and resource economics at Michigan State University. "We're looking at November being the ninth consecutive month of double-digit grocery price inflation. Grocery prices are still 12% higher than they were a year ago."

In August, the cost of food shot up 11.4% over last year, which is a level not seen since May 1979, according to Marketwatch's analysis of government data.

"The good news is that food price increases and grocery price increases peaked in August," Ortega added, "They're just slowly starting to come down. We're headed in the right direction but consumers are still not feeling relief at the store and that's because inflation captures the rate of price increases over time, so just because the inflation rate starts to calm down a bit doesn't mean that things are getting cheaper. They're just not rising in price as quickly."

Supply chain disruptions, the conflict in Ukraine, climate change, the deadliest bird flu in U.S. history, transportation costs, and increased consumer spending on food, are all drivers of higher food prices, Ortega explained.

"We have supply chain disruptions and they're starting to ease from the pandemic. But then we have the conflict in Ukraine that led to a surge in commodity prices earlier this year. Those have come down significantly, but it takes time for that to be fully realized at the grocery store."

Climate change has also affected agricultural output, he said, which has meant less food out in the market and increased prices. Ortega said that although it's hard to say when food prices will begin to come down, he expects that it could happen in the next six months or so. The International Monetary Fund released a report in October that said Federal Reserve interest rate increases will put "downward pressure on prices through the end of next year."

Donna McCallister, assistant professor at the department of agricultural and applied economics at Texas Tech University, said prices always increase this time of year, compounding the problem for many Americans this month. According to Bankrate's Nov. 23 analysis of the cost of holiday essentials, six of 10 of the most inflated prices were for food, including turkey, bakery items, eggs, flour and prepared mixes.

Consumers preparing a Christmas ham, buying a frozen pie, or making sugar cookies for a party this month will find significantly higher prices than last year. Ham is up 7.8% year over year, frozen and refrigerated bakery products are up 19.4%, and eggs are up 49.1%, the CPI shows.

"A lot of that has to do with increased cost of production and transportation, but also increased demand for these things like butter, where people go out and buy things like eggs, butter, and flour for their cooking, so there's also a demand story here as well," Ortega said.

McCallister suggests cutting down on food waste by going to stores more frequently for specific meals, buying some items in bulk, or switching from name brand to store brand to save money this holiday season.

## Scientists announce a fusion breakthrough with big implications for clean energy

BY: ROBERT ZULLO - DECEMBER 13, 2022 3:22 PM

Scientists at a U.S. national laboratory announced Tuesday that they achieved fusion ignition, a breakthrough decades in the making that could have major implications for clean energy.

Researchers at the Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory near San Francisco said that on Dec. 5, for the first time anywhere in the world, they managed to produce more energy from a nuclear fusion reaction than was needed to produce it.

"This is what it looks like for America to lead. And we're just getting started," said U.S. Energy Secretary Jennifer Granholm.

However, at the announcement, officials said it would be years before a commercial application, such as a fusion power plant, might emerge.

"There are very significant hurdles, not just in the science but in technology," said Kim Budil, director of the Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory. "Probably decades. Not six decades I don't think. Not five decades, which is what we used to say. I think it's moving into the foreground and

probably with concerted effort and investment, a few decades of research on the underlying technologies could put us in a position to build a power plant."

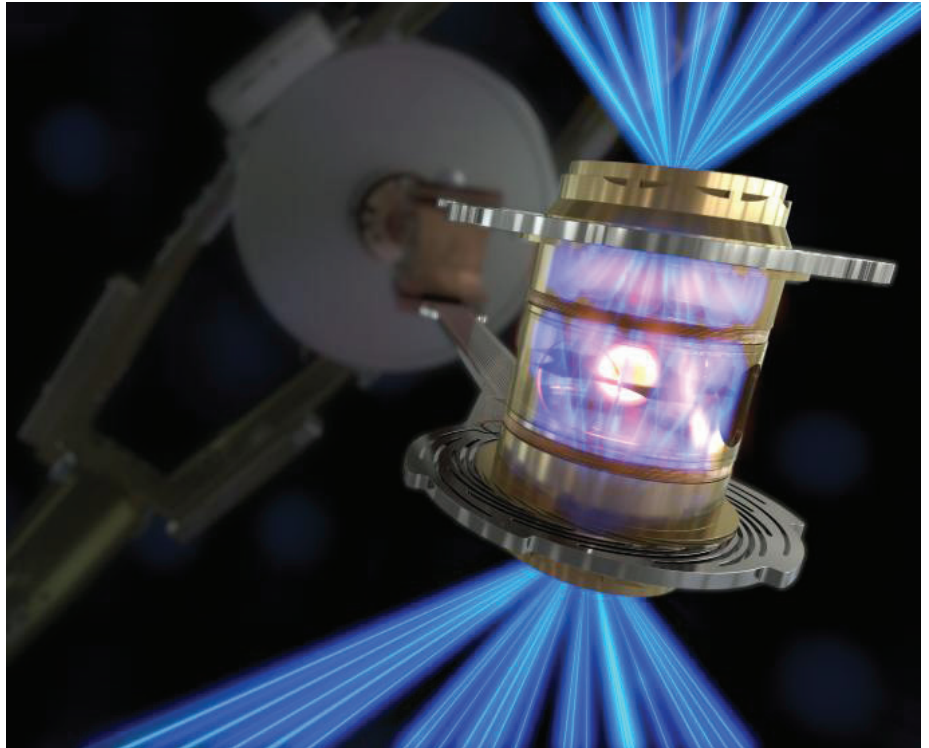
Granholm said the Biden administration has a goal of getting to a commercial fusion reactor in a decade.

"We've got to get to work and this shows that it can be done, which has been a question," she said, adding that now researchers can begin improving the technology necessary to bring a commercial project to fruition.

Fusion, the same scientific process by which the sun and other stars are powered, involves the merging of two light atomic nuclei to form a single, heavier nucleus, a reaction that releases "massive amounts of energy," according to the International Atomic Energy Agency.

Scientists have been attempting to harness fusion power since the 1930s because of its potential to provide vast amounts of clean energy, since fusion produces little waste and poses none of the hazards of nuclear fission, which splits atoms to generate heat. The challenge, however, has been recreating the conditions that allow fusion to occur, including extreme pressures and temperatures exceeding 100 million degrees Celsius.

"In this experiment we used the world's most energetic laser, the National Ignition Facility, to create X-rays that cause a tiny capsule to implode and create a very hot, very high pressure plasma," said Mark



**To create fusion ignition, the National Ignition Facility's laser energy is converted into X-rays inside the hohlraum, which then compress a fuel capsule until it implodes, creating a high temperature, high pressure plasma.** (Lawrence Livermore

National Laboratory)



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Herrmann, the lab's program director for weapon physics and design.

"And that plasma wants to immediately lose its energy. It wants to blow apart, it wants to radiate. It's looking for ways to cool down. But the fusion reactions are depositing heat in that plasma. ... So there's a race between heating and cooling. And if the plasma gets a little bit hotter, the fusion reaction rate goes up, creating even more fusions ... which gets even more heating. And so the question is can we win the race? And for many many decades we lost the race. ... But last Monday that all changed."

Herrmann and other officials said the fusion breakthrough will also help ensure the safety and effectiveness of the nation's nuclear weapon stockpile, which is also part of Lawrence Livermore's mission, without underground weapons testing, since fusion ignition is a component of thermonuclear weapons.

Arati Prabhakar, director of the White House's Office of Science and Technology Policy, recalled the summer she spent at Livermore as a student in 1978 working on lasers related to fusion experiments.

"They never lost sight of this goal," she said. "And last week lo and behold, indeed they shot a bunch of lasers at a pellet of fuel and more energy was released from that fusion ignition than the energy of the lasers going in. ... I just think this is such a tremendous example of what perseverance really can achieve."

Andrew Holland, CEO of the Fusion Industry Association, a nonprofit working to commercialize fusion power that calls itself "the unified voice of the fusion industry," said in a statement that the announcement is "an important milestone" and evidence that fusion "is not science fiction."

"This will give governments around the world further incentive to support the development of commercial fusion energy," Holland said. "It also shows that now is the time to establish regulatory regimes which both protect the public and encourage innovation. The FIA and our member companies will continue to meet milestones and drive rapid increases in fusion investment, while supporting efforts to increase interest from governments around the world."



**The target chamber of Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory's National Ignition Facility, where 192 laser beams delivered more than 2 million joules of ultraviolet energy to a tiny fuel pellet to create fusion ignition on Dec. 5, 2022.** (Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory)

## FTX failure divides lawmakers on how tough to get with crypto regulation

BY: JACOB FISCHLER - DECEMBER 13, 2022 4:41 PM

Members of a U.S. House committee disagreed at a Tuesday hearing about whether more aggressive federal regulation would have protected customers from the collapse of cryptocurrency firm FTX and the alleged fraud of its founder, Samuel Bankman-Fried.

Lawmakers at the four-hour House Financial Services Committee hearing appeared to view the unfolding scandal around Bankman-Fried, arrested Monday in the Bahamas, through the prisms of their existing positions on cryptocurrency, a relatively new technology whose regulations are still being written.

Meanwhile, the sole witness at the hearing, FTX CEO John Jay Ray III, who was hired last month to oversee FTX's bankruptcy, called the crypto scheme "old-fashioned embezzlement." Bankman-Fried had been scheduled to appear before Congress until his arrest.

A federal prosecutor also alleged Tuesday afternoon that Bankman-Fried's crimes include unspecified violations of campaign finance law in contributions to federal candidates from both political parties.

A handful of Democrats on the House panel argued that Bankman-Fried would not have been allowed to easily commingle customer funds and loan money to himself — as federal prosecutors have alleged — if FTX was subject to more aggressive oversight.

Some Republicans, though, said Bankman-Fried's actions were nearly identical to other fraud schemes using other financial instruments — and should not be viewed as a problem inherent to crypto.

Bankman-Fried shifted customer money from FTX to Alameda Research, a hedge fund he almost entirely held, committee Chairwoman Maxine Waters, a California Democrat, said, allowing him "to effectively gamble with customer money without their knowledge or consent."

"If FTX was registered as a securities exchange, several laws would have required the segregation of customer assets and prevented such clear conflicts of interest," she said.

Another California Democrat, longtime crypto critic Brad Sherman, said the FTX example validated his view that cryptocurrency holds little purpose other than to help criminals avoid detection.

"My fear is that we'll view Sam Bankman-Fried as just one big snake in a crypto Garden of Eden," Sherman said. "The fact is, crypto is a garden of snakes."

### Incoming chairman says FTX unique

But others, including ranking Republican Patrick McHenry, a North Carolinian who is set to become the chairman of the committee when Republicans take over the U.S. House in January, said Bankman-Fried was a unique example.

McHenry compared Bankman-Fried's conduct with famous fraud schemes related to railroads, real estate and Enron's accounting scandal. Those crimes did not mean anything about the underlying industries, and



**CEO of FTX Sam Bankman-Fried testifies during a hearing before the House Financial Services Committee at Rayburn House Office Building on Capitol Hill Dec. 8, 2021, in Washington, DC.** (Photo by Alex Wong/Getty Images)



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Bankman-Fried's shouldn't be made to impugn crypto, he said.

"It appears to be the same old-school fraud, just using new technology," McHenry said. "We have to separate out the bad actions of an individual from the good created by an industry and an innovation. I believe in the promise of digital assets and those around the world building on blockchain technologies."

U.S. Rep. Tom Emmer, the No. 3 House Republican, also said Bankman-Fried — not crypto itself — was to blame for billions of dollars in customer losses.

"I encourage my colleagues to understand Sam Bankman-Fried's con for what it is: a failure of centralization, a failure of business ethics and a crime," the Minnesota Republican said. "It is not a failure of technology."

Emmer, a co-chair of the bipartisan Congressional Blockchain Caucus, has been a leading advocate in the House for crypto firms. He led a letter in March that objected to the Securities and Exchange Commission's approach to enforcing cryptocurrencies. He's said recently the FTX failure was an example of flawed enforcement.

As chair of the House Republican Campaign Committee, Emmer raised \$2.75 million from FTX employees, including co-CEO Ryan Salame, for GOP candidates in the 2022 election cycle. He also accepted \$5,800 from Salame — the maximum allowed by law — for his own reelection race.

U.S. Rep. Ted Budd, another member of the Congressional Blockchain Caucus who signed the March letter and received more than \$500,000 from Salame's independent expenditure political action committee, sits on the Financial Services panel but was not present at Tuesday's hearing.

Budd, a North Carolina Republican, won a U.S. Senate seat last month and will take that office in January.

## Campaign cash

Political contributions were part of Bankman-Fried's scheme, prosecutors have said.

Shortly after the hearing, Damian Williams, the lead prosecutor for the federal Southern District of New York where Bankman-Fried is being prosecuted, expanded on the allegations in a news conference.

Williams outlined four general areas of misconduct alleged by authorities.

The FTX founder defrauded customers of the crypto exchange known as FTX.com, lenders to the hedge fund known as Alameda Research and investors in FTX and violated campaign finance laws, Williams said, calling it "one of the biggest financial frauds in American history."

Bankman-Fried diverted to the hedge fund billions of dollars that belonged to FTX customers. He lied to FTX investors about the source of the money, Williams said.

After taking money from FTX customers and putting it into the hedge fund, he also broke campaign finance law by making "tens of millions" of dollars in payments from the hedge fund to political candidates of both parties, using "wealthy co-conspirators" as intermediaries, Williams said, without naming any of the political beneficiaries or the co-conspirators.

"All of this dirty money was used in service of Bankman-Fried's desire to buy bipartisan influence and impact the direction of public policy in Washington," he said.

Bankman-Fried was previously known to be a major funder of Democratic campaigns, contributing \$27 million to a political action committee that supported Democrats in 2022.

Sherman at the hearing urged his colleagues to reject Bankman-Fried's desired influence and not pass a bill that he said would create unserious "baby regulations" on crypto.

"Don't trash Sam Bankman-Fried and then pass his bill," Sherman said. "I fear that could happen because Sam was not the only crypto bro with PACs and lobbyists, and there is no PAC or lobbyist here to work for efficient tax enforcement or sanctions enforcement."

Sherman didn't specify a particular bill, but Bankman-Fried was a vocal supporter of a measure that would give the Commodity Futures Trading Commission more authority to regulate cryptocurrencies and other digital commodities.

## 'Not sophisticated'

Members of the panel lamented that they were unable to question Bankman-Fried under oath, with some speculating that prosecutors could have added a lying-to-Congress charge to his indictment.

Ray, an experienced bankruptcy lawyer who was also installed as the CEO of Enron in 2001 to oversee that company's bankruptcy sparked by a fraud scandal, did not commit to a position about the proper role of federal regulation in crypto.

Ray did say FTX's poor record keeping and lack of internal controls were among the worst he had ever seen.

"I've just never seen an utter lack of record keeping, absolutely no internal controls whatsoever," he told New York Democrat Nydia Velázquez, and called it "old-fashioned embezzlement" in an exchange with another member.

He also said it was not a "sophisticated" plan.

"This just taking money from customers and using it for your own purpose," he said. "Not sophisticated — sophisticated ... perhaps in the way they were able to sort of hide it from people, frankly, right in front of their eyes — but this isn't this sophisticated whatsoever. This is just plain old embezzlement."



## JACOB FISCHLER

Jacob covers federal policy as a senior reporter for States Newsroom. Based in Oregon, he focuses on Western issues. His coverage areas include climate, energy development, public lands and infrastructure.



## Lakota Nation Invitational brings unique energy to Rapid City area

**Forty-fifth tournament now includes esports, Lakota language competitions, traditional competition**

**BY: JOHN HULT - DECEMBER 13, 2022 3:38 PM**

Ask Sage Brings Plenty what basketball means to Marty Indian School, and the boys varsity coach will give you a blunt answer.

"If we did not have a basketball program, I don't know if we'd have enough kids to have class," said Brings Plenty, who also serves as the school resource officer. "I keep track of attendance rates and things like that, and everything shot up these last few weeks."

Brings Plenty's players "live and die in the gym" alongside the teammates who double as relatives or lifelong childhood friends. The game is an escape from stressors and poverty and trauma that touch so many of the players' lives.

Basketball is an escape for reservations and schools with a wealth of Native talent across South Dakota, which have produced legendary players like SuAnne Big Crow and perennial powerhouse competitors like White River.

Brings Plenty and his Marty Braves were among the thousands of coaches, students, parents and visitors to walk through the doors of The Monument events center in Rapid City this week for the 45th iteration of a basketball tournament unlike any other in the state of South Dakota, and perhaps the country: the Lakota Nation Invitational, or LNI.

The Braves and Lady Braves each won their brackets last year, and Brings Plenty has high hopes for his team, whose varsity roster is full of kids who've played together since early childhood.

"It's a place for Native kids to showcase their talents," Brings Plenty said. "A lot of times they don't get the coverage or the opportunities to showcase their talents that other schools might."

At LNI, the "ball is life" attitude that permeates South Dakota's Native American communities manifests as a five day, wall-to-wall celebration of not just the sport, but the vibrancy of the art and culture of South Dakota's original residents.

The tournament includes basketball and wrestling, but also archery, the Lakota game of handball, a Lakota language competition, an art show, chess tournament, slam poetry presentations, and this year, an esports symposium.

For many attendees, LNI is more important than the state tournament.

"Every reservation is involved, and we know every reservation takes a lot of pride in their teams," said Chuck Miller, president of the LNI Board of Directors and the athletics director for Todd County. "I just think the atmosphere it produces kind of puts you into a special place."



**Lower Brule boys basketball coach Brian LaRoche gives pointers to his team during a timeout at a game against Marty Indian School on Dec. 10, 2022, in Marty.** (John Hult/South Dakota Searchlight)

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## Humble beginnings

LNI began more than four decades ago with an eight-team tournament in Pine Ridge. This week's LNI will have 24 boys and 24 girls teams for the marquee basketball tournament, but that portion of the event is only the most well-known part of a community gathering that's become a focal point for more than school activities.

Tribal organizations schedule training workshops for adults to coincide with LNI, for example.

"That's considered a part of LNI, even though it doesn't involve the kids. That's how important LNI has become," Miller said. "People want to be involved with this."

The range of events has always struck Daniel Swartos, executive director of the South Dakota High School Activities Association.

"I'll never forget my first time going to it. My jaw was on the floor almost the whole time, from the logistics alone," said Swartos. "Every square inch of that facility is being used for something."

The basketball games that formed LNI's beginnings remain its focal point.

Some teams from LNI are almost certain to show up in the state basketball tournament, Swartos said. The boys varsity squad out of Lower Brule, Marty Indian School's opponents for a Dec. 10 doubleheader in Marty, were state runners-up last year. White River is also a team to beat.

By the time the final games kick off, Swartos said, there's an electricity in The Monument that rivals any event in South Dakota.

"The championships at LNI are right up there with the state championships in terms of atmosphere," Swartos said.

'They get to be themselves'

Some non-Native schools compete at LNI, but the event has special significance for South Dakota's nine tribal nations.

Brian LaRoche has coached the Lower Brule Sioux boys since 2004. LNI was started in part because four decades ago, non-Native schools weren't always willing to play schools like Lower Brule. Sometimes it's still a struggle to fill out a schedule, LaRoche said. Fans from white-majority schools like to watch teams raised on the run-and-gun style of "rez ball," he said, but there's a feeling of otherness at typical tournaments.

At LNI, LaRoche said, "They get to be themselves."

"Growing up on the reservation, it's different from the outside world," LaRoche said. "They don't get judged at LNI."

Lower Brule Senior Gavin Thigh is always ready to play, but the fans and family members make LNI crowds different.

"You get to play against your own people, that makes it more fun," Thigh said. "It's great to see Native teams go at each other."

Marty Senior Alanzo Young has gone to LNI since childhood. Early on, he accompanied his father, who sold blankets as a vendor. Then, he'd duck out from the blanket booth to watch games. Now, he's primed for his second trip to the tournament as a player.

Then and now, on and off the court, LNI felt like an oversized family gathering.

"It's kind of like a holiday for Natives," said Young.

It's also a celebration of positivity for kids who use the basketball season as a bulwark against negative peer pressure at home. Basketball is important for Lower Brule senior Courtney Traversie and her teammates because it focuses their attention on competition.

"Basketball is the main thing that keeps us away from all the bad stuff like drinking or smoking," said Traversie.

## Building a future

Traversie's explanation of basketball's importance could be an understatement.

Ten of the players on last year's LNI squad had lost a parent at some point in their lives, said Lower Brule Superintendent Lance Witte, and up to 75% of the students in the district have struggled with homelessness.

The motivational strength of sporting programs to resist negative coping mechanisms is nearly as important to the school district as academics, Witte said, because it has to be.

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"You want it to be about the education and it is, but it also has to be about the sports programs," Witte said.

Witte was among the organizers of the All Nations Football Conference as a way to generate interest in football in Indian Country. The Native schools that fielded teams before the launch of All Nations in 2018 so often found themselves pitted against powerhouse schools like Dakota Valley and "just weren't very competitive," Witte said.

"When we started All Nations, participation went way up," he said.

It remains to be seen if the effort will put football on the same path to the kind of steady growth in interest and excitement that has made LNI what it is today. What is clear is that the seed planted 45 years ago for basketball has grown into one of the most anticipated and impactful events of the year for high school students and the city that plays host.

Tourism organization Visit Rapid City recently partnered with LNI to quantify the economic impact, according to Stacie Granum, the group's chief strategy officer. They're working with Monument staff to tally visitors, and will pull together that information with other data sources to set a benchmark.

"We know this event has a big economic impact on this community and hope to provide data that helps to show just how much," Granum wrote in an email. "This event has a big impact on the community, but also on the kids and families that are part of it."

It's an impact that comes home, according to Brings Plenty. Kids who don't play basketball still watch the games and come home with hoop dreams of their own.

That's a huge payoff for coaches and educators.

"Seeing how big basketball is at LNI, it really pushes these kids to try it out," Brings Plenty said.



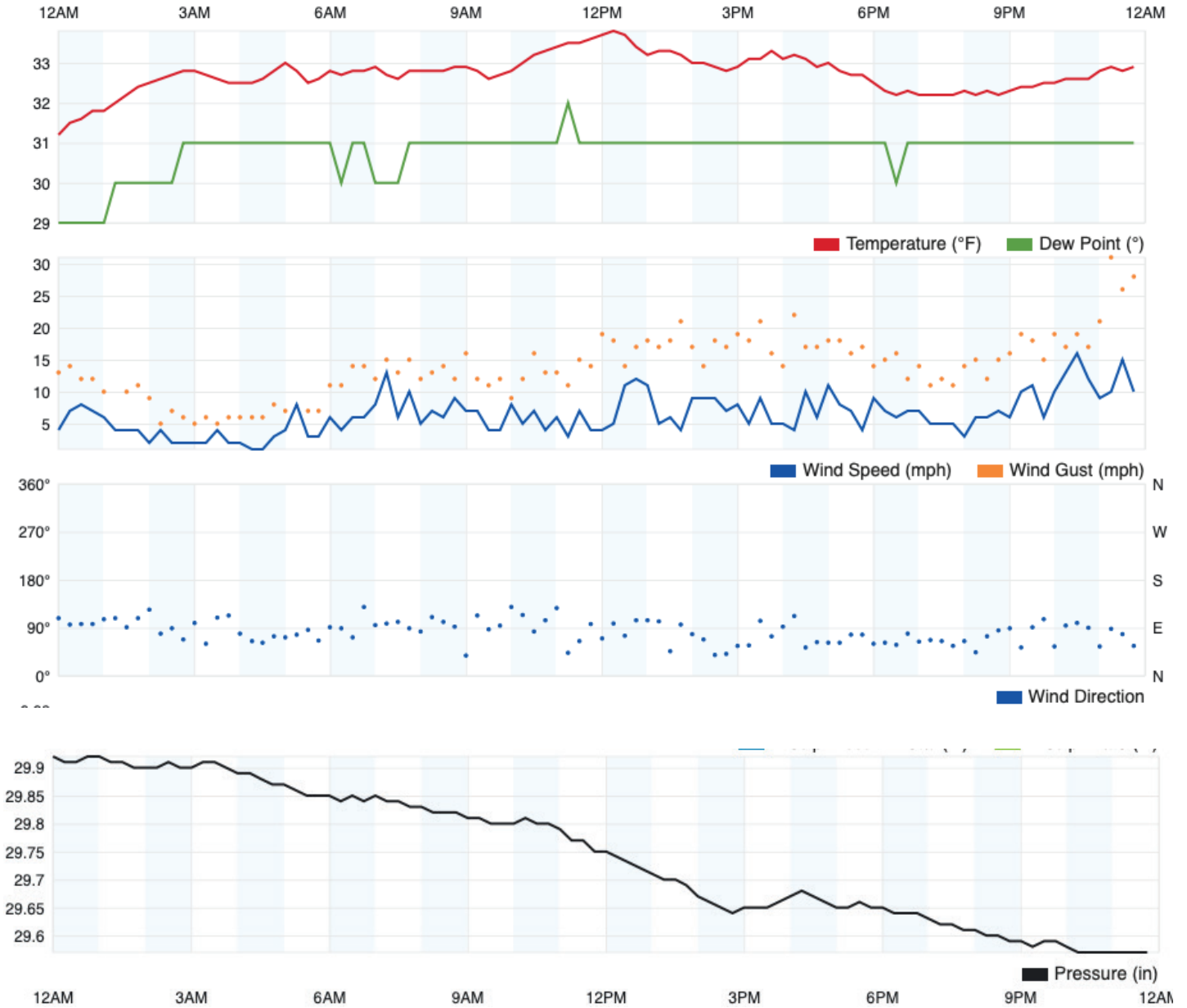
**JOHN HULT**  

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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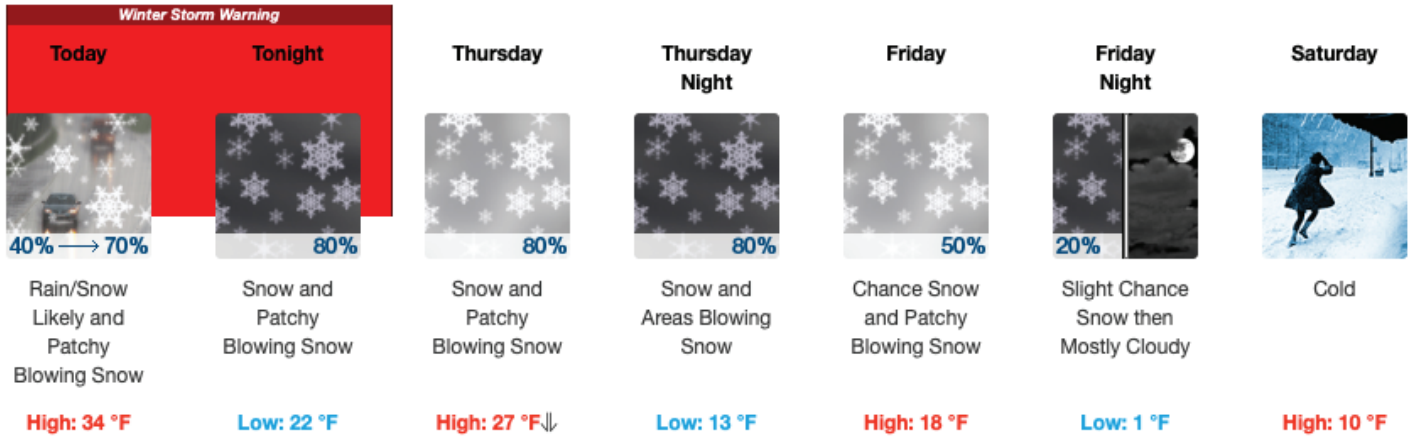
## Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs





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## Winter Storm Continues Through Thursday

December 14, 2022  
4:07 AM

### Key Messages

- Travel difficulties will continue into at least Thursday.
- Snow and gradually increasing winds will be the main driver of the weather impacts for the coming days
- The potential for reduced visibilities from blowing snow will increase Wednesday and Thursday.

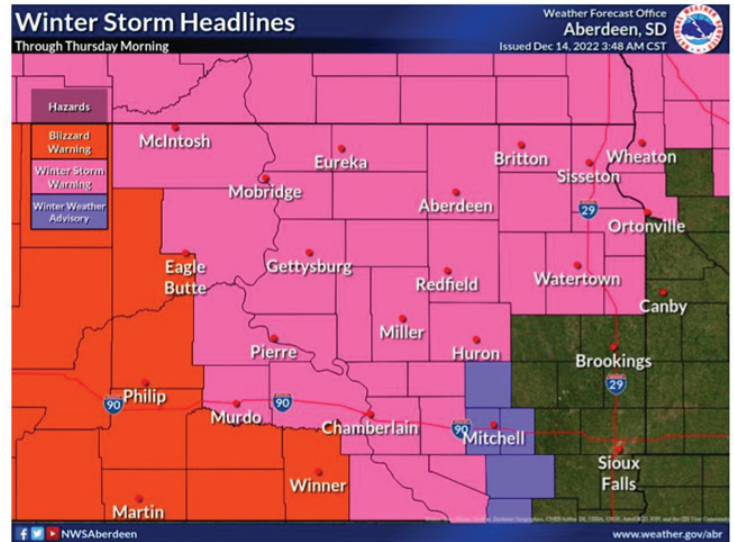
NEW

### Important Updates

- Headlines remain unchanged. Winter Storm Warning continues through 6 AM Thursday.

### Next Scheduled Briefing

- Wednesday afternoon



Valid as of 3 PM Dec 12, 2022



National Weather Service  
Aberdeen, SD

A Winter Storm Warning is still in effect until Thursday morning. Travel difficulties will continue through at least Thursday. There are several no travel advisories around the area so check [www.sd511.org](http://www.sd511.org) for updates.

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## Additional Snowfall Accumulations

December 14, 2022  
4:08 AM

Through Friday evening

### Timing/Trends

- **Wed → Thurs:** Area of heaviest snow expected southeast of a line from Murdo to Britton.
- **Friday:** Light snow possible during the day with snow ending Friday night.

### Impacts

- Snow covered and slippery roads are expected through at least Friday.

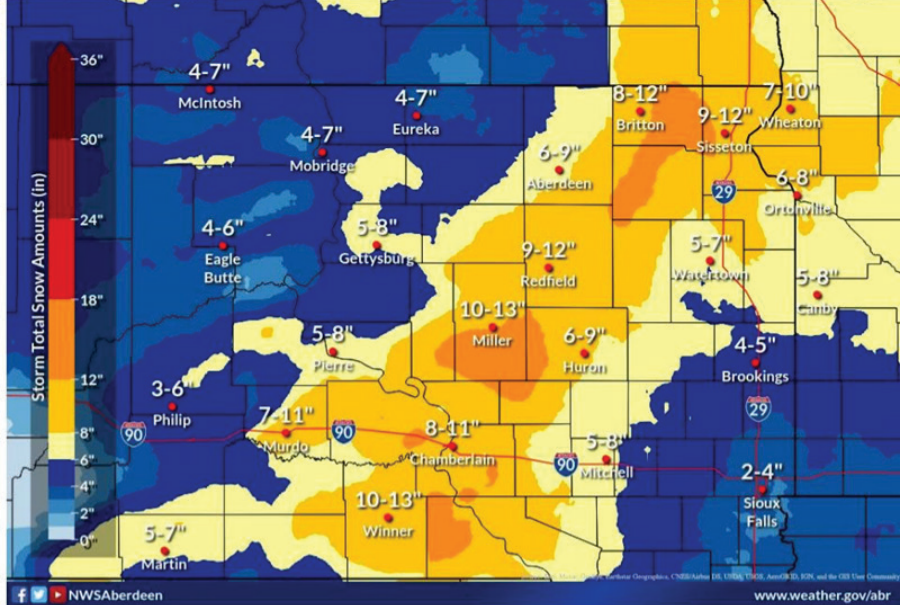
### Expected Snowfall - Official NWS Forecast

Valid Wed 6:00AM through Sat 12:00AM CST

Weather Forecast Office

Aberdeen, SD

Issued Dec 14, 2022 2:08 AM CST



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

National Weather Service  
Aberdeen, SD

More snow is on the way today. Highest additional accumulations lay southeast of a line from Murdo to Britton. Some light snow is possible during the day Friday.

## Winter Storm Warning

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

\* **WHAT...**Snow. Additional snow accumulations of 2 to 4 inches. Winds gusting to 25 mph today, and to 35 mph tonight.

\* **WHERE...**Brown County.

\* **WHEN...**Until 6 AM CST Thursday.

\* **IMPACTS...**Plan on slippery road conditions. 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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## Wind Gust and Direction Forecast

December 14, 2022  
4:10 AM

### Key Points

- **Central SD:**
  - ◆ Northwest wind gusts of 35 to 45 mph are expected this afternoon through Friday.
- **Eastern SD:**
  - ◆ Northwest winds of 20-30 mph tonight will increase to 25 to 40 mph on Thursday and Friday.

	12/14 Wed			12/15 Thu			12/16 Fri						
	6am	12pm	6pm	12am	6am	12pm	6pm	12am	6am	12pm	6pm	12am	6am
<b>Aberdeen</b>	29	29	30	31	37	41	41	36	35	35	26	24	21
Britton	25	26	25	26	35	37	37	33	33	33	28	24	22
<b>Eagle Butte</b>	40	41	41	41	41	43	43	41	41	40	36	28	21
Eureka	29	32	30	35	39	41	41	39	39	39	32	28	22
Gettysburg	33	38	37	39	41	43	43	39	41	43	32	28	24
Kennebec	36	41	43	44	44	43	41	40	41	41	33	28	25
McIntosh	38	39	37	38	43	43	43	40	41	43	36	24	18
Milbank	26	23	18	21	32	36	36	30	29	29	24	24	23
Miller	30	32	33	37	41	41	41	37	36	36	29	25	24
Mobridge	31	37	33	35	38	41	41	38	38	38	33	21	18
Murdo	44	46	43	44	43	41	41	39	39	39	32	26	21
<b>Pierre</b>	36	40	39	39	39	41	41	39	37	38	29	24	20
Redfield	30	30	31	35	39	41	41	37	36	35	26	24	21
Sisseton	22	22	21	24	35	37	36	33	32	33	26	26	25
<b>Watertown</b>	29	29	21	25	33	37	37	33	32	32	25	25	24
Webster	30	30	25	28	36	38	38	35	33	38	29	28	25
Wheaton	25	22	20	21	31	33	32	29	28	29	23	23	23



National Weather Service  
Aberdeen, SD

Gusty winds today could result in reduced visibility as falling snow is blown around. Please drive carefully if you have to be out and about. These gusty conditions are expected to continue through at least Friday.



## SHOVEL SMART!



*Shoveling heavy, wet snow can cause back injuries and heart attacks. Don't push yourself!*



**Dress warmly**, making sure to cover your head, fingers and toes.



**Stay hydrated**, but avoid heavy meals right before or after shoveling.



**Move only small amounts of snow** with each pass of the shovel.



**Take frequent breaks.**  
Stop shoveling entirely if you feel exhausted!

weather.gov



Heavy and Wet Snow can not only be difficult to shovel, but could cause back issues and heart attacks. Don't push yourself too hard, and take frequent breaks.



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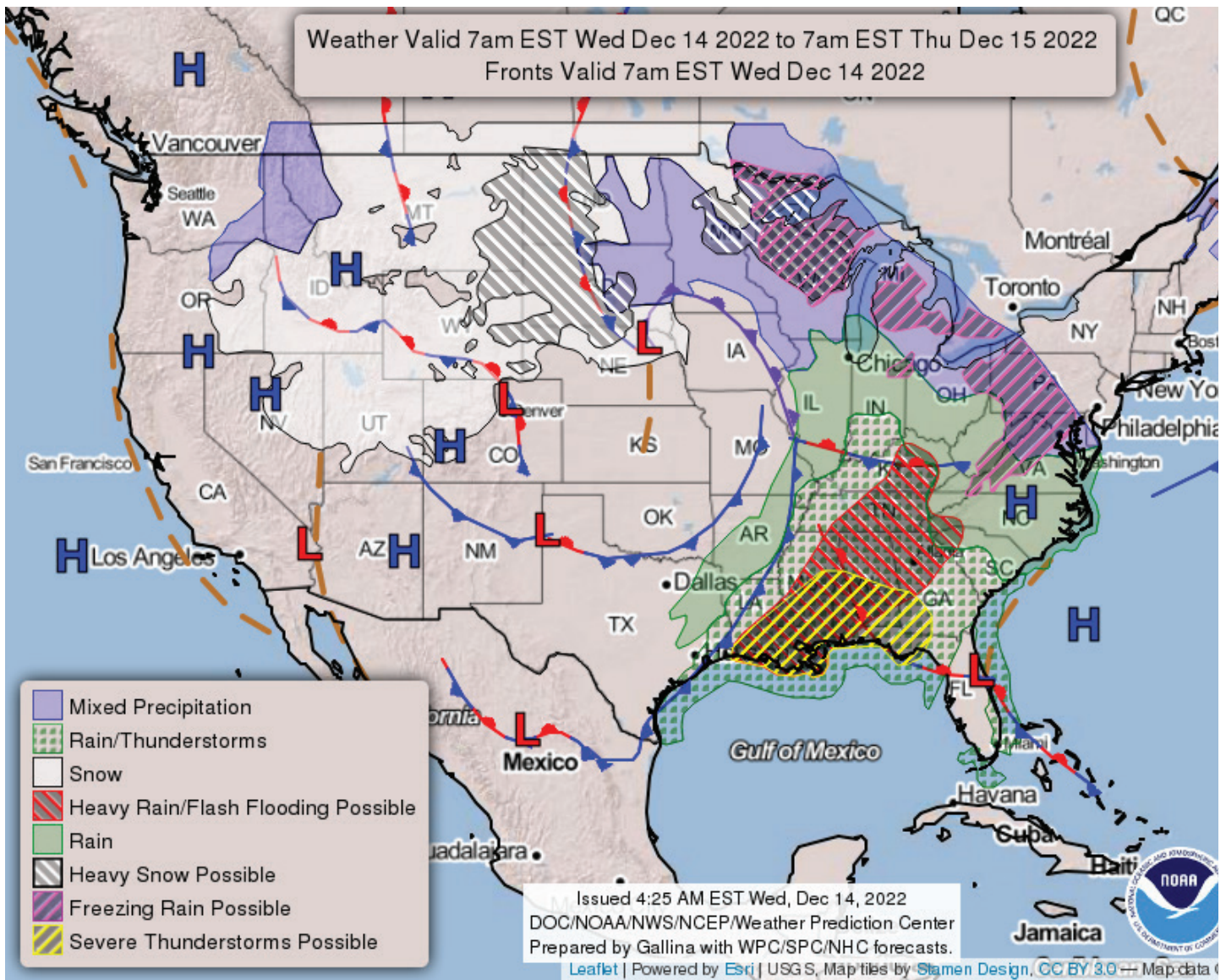
## Yesterday's Groton Weather

**High Temp: 34 °F at 12:07 PM**  
**Low Temp: 31 °F at 12:00 AM**  
**Wind: 31 mph at 11:09 PM**  
**Precip: : 4" of Snow. 1" of moisture**

Day length: 8 hours, 48 minutes

## Today's Info

Record High: 55 in 1998  
Record Low: -30 in 1917  
Average High: 29°F  
Average Low: 8°F  
Average Precip in Dec.: 0.27  
Precip to date in Dec.: 1.00  
Average Precip to date: 21.48  
Precip Year to Date: 18.50  
Sunset Tonight: 4:51:16 PM  
Sunrise Tomorrow: 8:03:47 AM



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## Today in Weather History

December 14, 1994: Snow accumulated over all of South Dakota on the 14th but was heavy in the central part of the state and at a few places in the northwest. The greatest accumulations were 11 inches at Murdo and 10 inches at the Lake Sharpe project and near Stephan. The storm caused numerous accidents, but no fatalities or injuries were reported. Eight inches of snow fell at McLaughlin and Miller, with 7 inches at Faulkton and McIntosh, 6 inches at Eagle Butte and Timber Lake, and 5 inches at Mobridge, Kennebec, and near Highmore.

December 14, 1996: Heavy snow of 6 to 20 inches fell across most of central, north central, and part of northeast South Dakota during the late evening of the 14th. Strong north winds of 20 to 35 mph created near-blizzard conditions and heavy drifting across the area. Travel was tough if not impossible, with several cars going into the ditch. A two-car accident between Blunt and Pierre left several people injured. Many activities were postponed or canceled. Some snowfall amounts included 6 inches at Fort Pierre, Ipswich, Kennebec, Aberdeen, and Pollock; 7 inches at Mobridge; 8 inches at Lake Sharpe, Clark, and Mellette; 9 inches at Roscoe, Gettysburg, and McIntosh; 10 inches at Highmore, Eagle Butte, 22 miles SSW of Keldron, and at West Whitlock; 11 inches at Blunt and Miller; 12 inches at Ree Heights, McLaughlin, and Onida; 13 inches at Highmore; 14 inches at Redfield; 15 inches at Timber Lake; 18 inches at Faulkton; and 20 inches at Hoven.

December 14, 1287: A powerful storm affected the Netherlands and Northern Germany on this day. Called the St. Lucia's flood, which was the day before, this storm broke a dike, flooding much of the land in what is now the Waddenzee and IJsselmeer. A significant percentage of the country's population perished in this disaster and had been rated as one of the most destructive floods in recorded history. The death toll from this storm was between 50,000 to 80,000 people. Also, 180 residents of Hickling village, which is 137 miles north-east of London was impacted by this storm. The storm surge rose a foot above the high altar in the church. From British-History.ac.uk, "Hickling was one of the townships that suffered most severely from the tremendous storm of December, 1287, no fewer than nine score persons being drowned there. In the priory the water rose more than a foot above the high altar, and all the canons fled away except two, who stayed behind and managed to save the horses and other property by bringing them up into the dormitory over the vaulted undercroft."

December 14, 1952: Trace of snow or sleet at or near Pensacola, Crestview, DeFuniak Springs, Quincy, Carrabelle, Tallahassee, St. Marks, Monticello, Madison, Mayo, Live Oak, Lake City, Glen St. Mary, and Hilliard in Florida. Frozen precipitation occurred before noon at most points, but happened in the afternoon at Mayo and Lake City and near Hilliard. Temperatures were above freezing and snow or sleet melted as it fell.

December 14, 1997: Central Mississippi and western Alabama saw significant snowfall of 4 to 8 inches on this day. In Mississippi, this was one of the heavier snowfalls to occur since 1929. The weight of the snow caused limbs of trees to break, which knocked down power lines.

1924 - The temperature at Helena, MT, plunged 79 degrees in 24 hours, and 88 degrees in 34 hours. The mercury plummeted from 63 above to 25 below zero. At Fairfield MT the temperature plunged 84 degrees in just 12 hours, from 63 at Noon to 21 below zero at midnight. (David Ludlum)

2006 - The Hanukkah Eve Wind Storm of 2006 caused storm to hurricane-force wind gusts and heavy rainfall hit the Pacific Northwest and southern British Columbia. Damage estimates in Washington and Oregon totaled \$220 million. Over 1.8 million residences and businesses without power. 18 people were killed, most of whom died of carbon monoxide poisoning in the days following the storm because of improper use of barbecue cookers and generators indoors.

2010 - A rare tornado struck the small town of Aumsville, Oregon, tearing roofs off buildings, hurling objects into vehicles and homes and uprooting trees. No one was injured but the destruction left behind was severe. The National Weather Service classified the tornado as an EF2 with wind speeds of 110-120 mph and they said the tornado's damage trail was five miles long and 150 yards wide. 50 houses in Aumsville and the surrounding county area were affected, with 10 of them being unsuitable for occupancy. (KATU)



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Daily Devotionals

## Seeds of Hope

### FACING FEAR WITH FACTS

A bright light on a dark night would frighten most individuals if it was unexpected. How much more frightening would it be if an angel of the Lord suddenly appeared and God's glory lit up the area where sheep were quietly sleeping, and shepherds were watching them carefully and constantly to make certain that they were safe.

Sensing the fear of the shepherds, the angel said confidently, "Don't be afraid of this Light!" The angel wanted to calm their pounding hearts. "I came with Good News. News that will bring great joy to everyone, everywhere who is willing to accept this Good News!"

How gracious is our God! The shepherds did what any of us would have done: react with apprehension and fear. Yet, God, in His love and mercy, first gave them His assurance that they were safe and then explained to them what had happened: "A Savior, Christ, who is the Anointed One, the One that you have been waiting for, even the LORD, has been born!"

There is a wonderful lesson here for each of us. Rarely do we get through any day without something unusual – sometimes a tragedy, perhaps a life-threatening or grief-producing event – invading our lives. It is normal and natural to react with fear when the unwelcomed comes.

But, as God said to the shepherds then and as He says to us every day, "Don't be afraid. Good News awaits you. Your Savior is with you. Turn to Him in faith and He will save you!"

Prayer: How thankful we are, Father, to know that Your Son, our Savior, is with us every moment of every day. Calm our fears and bring peace to our hearts through Him. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: Luke 2:8-12 Then the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people.



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

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## 2022-23 Community Events

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



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## News from the Associated Press

### **US storm brings tornadoes, blizzard-like conditions; 2 dead**

By JAMIE STENGLE and STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press

DALLAS (AP) — A destructive storm marched across the United States, spawning tornadoes that touched down in parts of Texas, Oklahoma and Louisiana, where two deaths were reported, and it delivered blizzard-like conditions to the Great Plains and threatened more severe weather Wednesday in the South.

A young boy was found dead in the Pecan Farms area of Keithville, Louisiana, where his home was destroyed Tuesday after a tornado hit about 10 miles (16 kilometers) from Shreveport, and his mother's body was found nearby under debris, the Caddo Parish Sheriff's office said early Wednesday.

First responders were searching the area, but no one else had been reported missing, the sheriff's office said.

Five tornadoes were confirmed across north Texas as of Tuesday afternoon based on video and eyewitness reports, but potentially a dozen may have occurred, the National Weather Service in Fort Worth, Texas, reported.

Dozens of homes and businesses were damaged by the line of thunderstorms, and several people were injured in the suburbs and counties stretching north of the Dallas-Fort Worth area. More than 1,000 flights into and out of area airports were delayed, and over 100 were canceled, according to the tracking service FlightAware.

The severe weather threat continued into Wednesday for Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama and the Florida Panhandle, according to the Storm Prediction Center in Norman, Oklahoma.

Blizzard warnings stretched from Montana into western Nebraska and Colorado, and the National Weather Service said as much as 2 feet (61 centimeters) of snow was possible in some areas of western South Dakota and northwestern Nebraska. Winds of more than 50 mph (80 kph) at times will make it impossible to see outdoors in Nebraska, officials said.

"There's essentially no one traveling right now," said Justin McCallum, a manager at the Flying J truck stop at Ogallala, Nebraska.

Forecasters expect the storm system to hobble the upper Midwest with ice, rain and snow for days, as well as move into the Northeast and central Appalachians. Residents from West Virginia to Vermont were told to watch out for a possible significant mix of snow, ice and sleet, and the National Weather Service issued a winter storm watch from Wednesday night through Friday afternoon, depending on the timing of the storm.

The boy found dead in Louisiana was about 5 of 6 years old, Caddo Parish Sheriff Steve Prator said. One more injury was reported after an adult male was transported to a local hospital. The extent of injuries was unknown.

"It's really a sad, sad situation," Prator said.

In the Dallas suburb of Grapevine, police spokesperson Amanda McNew reported five confirmed injuries Tuesday.

A possible tornado blew the roof off the city's service center — a municipal facility — and left pieces of the roof hanging from powerlines, said Trent Kelley, deputy director of Grapevine Parks and Recreation.

It was also trash day, so the storm picked up and scattered garbage all over, he said.

Photos sent by the city showed downed power lines on rain-soaked streets, as well as toppled trees, damaged buildings and a semitrailer that appeared to have been tossed around a parking lot.

In Colorado, all roads were closed in the northeast quadrant of the state. The severe weather in the ranching region could also threaten livestock. Extreme winds can push livestock through fences as they follow the gale's direction, said Jim Santomaso, a northeast representative for the Colorado Cattlemen's Association.

"If this keeps up," said Santomaso, "cattle could drift miles."

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A blizzard warning has been issued on Minnesota's north shore, as some areas are expecting up to 24 inches of snow and wind gusts up to 40 mph. And in the south of the state, winds gusting up to 50 mph (80 kph) had reduced visibility.

National Weather Service meteorologist Melissa Dye in the Twin Cities said this is a "long duration event" with snow, ice and rain through Friday night. Minnesota was expecting a lull Wednesday, followed by a second round of snow.

The same weather system dumped heavy snow in the Sierra Nevada and western U.S. in recent days.

## SD Lottery

By The Associated Press undefined

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

Mega Millions

14-22-48-58-68, Mega Ball: 6, Megaplier: 2

(fourteen, twenty-two, forty-eight, fifty-eight, sixty-eight; Mega Ball: six; Megaplier: two)

Estimated jackpot: \$429,000,000

Powerball

Estimated jackpot: 134,000,000

## Tuesday's Scores

The Associated Press

GIRLS PREP BASKETBALL=

Beresford 47, Dakota Valley 40

Centerville 47, Freeman Academy/Marion 21

Harrisburg 54, Sioux Falls Lincoln 52

O Gorman 50, Sioux Falls Roosevelt 22

Scotland 47, Menno 33

Sioux Falls Jefferson 47, Brandon Valley 3

POSTPONEMENTS AND CANCELLATIONS=

Avon vs. Corsica/Stickney, ppd. to Dec 17th.

Bennett County vs. Colome, ppd.

Canton vs. Garretson, ppd.

Chester vs. Howard, ppd. to Jan 20th.

Deuel vs. Deubrook, ppd.

Estelline/Hendricks vs. Langford, ppd.

Freeman vs. McCook Central/Montrose, ppd.

Highmore-Harrod vs. James Valley Christian, ppd.

Huron vs. Brookings, ppd.

Jones County vs. Kadoka Area, ppd.

Kimball/White Lake vs. Platte-Geddes, ppd. to Dec 23rd.

Lyman vs. Sully Buttes, ppd.

Mitchell vs. Watertown, ppd. to Dec 22nd.

Newell vs. Lead-Deadwood, ccd.

Timber Lake vs. Herreid/Selby Area, ppd.

Tripp-Delmont/Armour vs. Parkston, ppd. to Dec 19th.

Vermillion vs. West Central, ppd.

Wilmot vs. Northwestern, ppd.

Yankton vs. Sioux Falls Washington, ppd.

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## BOYS PREP BASKETBALL=

Dakota Valley 82, Beresford 42

Sioux Falls Lincoln 68, Harrisburg 63

Sioux Falls Roosevelt 58, Sioux Falls O'Gorman 50

## POSTPONEMENTS AND CANCELLATIONS=

Avon vs. Corsica/Stickney, ppd. to Dec 17th.

Canton vs. Garretson, ppd.

Chester vs. Howard, ppd. to Jan 26th.

DeSmet vs. Clark/Willow Lake, ppd.

Deuel vs. Deubrook, ppd.

Estelline/Hendricks vs. Langford, ppd.

Gregory vs. Chamberlain, ppd.

Huron vs. Brookings, ppd.

Lyman vs. Sully Buttes, ppd.

McCook Central/Montrose vs. Hanson, ppd.

Newell vs. Lead-Deadwood, ccd.

Philip vs. Faith, ppd. to Jan 23rd.

Sioux Falls Washington vs. Yankton, ppd.

Sturgis Brown vs. Belle Fourche, ppd.

Timber Lake vs. Herreid/Selby Area, ppd.

Tri-Valley vs. Madison, ppd.

Tripp-Delmont/Armour vs. Parkston, ppd. to Dec 19th.

Vermillion vs. West Central, ppd.

Watertown vs. Mitchell, ppd. to Dec 22nd.

Wilmot vs. Northwestern, ppd.

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

## SD prosecutors drop all charges against Indigenous activist

SIOUX FALLS S.D. (AP) — South Dakota prosecutors have dropped all charges against the head of an Indigenous-led advocacy organization stemming from a protest during then-President Donald Trump's visit to Mount Rushmore, the group announced Tuesday.

NDN Collective President Nick Tilsen was among those arrested July 3, 2020, when the protest seeking return of the Black Hills to Lakota control escalated into a scuffle with law enforcement. The charges included robbery and assault of a law enforcement officer.

Tilsen agreed to participate in a diversion program rather than face prison time, but claimed prosecutors backed out of the agreement last year after he spoke to the media about it. In his motion for dismissal, Tilsen said his remarks were protected by the First Amendment.

Deputy State's Attorney Colleen Moran filed the dismissal Nov. 18, court documents show.

"My case held a mirror up to the so-called legal system, where prosecutors — fueled by white fragility and fear of Indigenous power — wasted years of state resources to intimidate, criminalize, and violate me," Tilsen said in a statement Tuesday. "The fact that I've gone from facing 17 years in prison to all charges dismissed is not a coincidence or an act of justice — it's evidence that the charges were bogus from the start."

The case was transferred earlier from Pennington County in Rapid City to Minnehaha County in Sioux Falls. The original prosecutor, Pennington County State's Attorney Mark Vargo, who is temporarily serving as South Dakota's interim attorney general, said he had a conflict of interest because he was called to testify.

Minnehaha County States Attorney Daniel Hagggar did not immediately return a phone call seeking comment on the decision to dismiss the charges.



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## Veteran QB Lindsey Scott of UIW leads FCS All-America team

By RALPH D. RUSSO AP College Football Writer

Incarnate Word quarterback Lindsey Scott, who started his college football career at LSU in 2016, leads The Associated Press FCS All-America team presented by Regions Bank and released Tuesday.

Scott has thrown for 4,404 yards and a Championship Subdivision record 59 touchdowns. The Division I record is 60 set by LSU's Joe Burrow in the 2019 season.

Scott and UIW face North Dakota State on Friday in an FCS semifinal game. Scott made stops at junior college and Missouri before landing at UIW.

Four of Scott's teammates were selected to the third team, including receivers Taylor Grimes and Darion Chafin, offensive lineman Caleb Johnson and linebacker Kelechi Anyalebechi.

North Dakota State and South Dakota State lead the way with three players each on the first team, all on the lines.

North Dakota State's Cody Mauch is the only lineman among 30 finalists for this year's Walter Payton Award, which goes to the best offensive player in FCS. Nash Jensen of North Dakota also made the first team. South Dakota State offensive linemen Garret Greenfield and Mason McCormick were also selected to the first team.

On defense, Spencer Waege of North Dakota State and Caleb Sanders of South Dakota State hold down the line.

Top-ranked South Dakota State faces Montana State on Saturday in the second FCS semifinal.

### FIRST TEAM

#### Offense

Quarterback — Lindsey Scott, seventh-year, Incarnate Word.

Running backs — Jaleel McLaughlin, fifth-year, Youngstown State; Geno Hess, fifth-year, Southeast Missouri State.

Offensive linemen — Cody Mauch, sixth-year, North Dakota State; Garret Greenfield, fifth-year, South Dakota State; Mason McCormick, fifth-year, South Dakota State; Colby Sorsdal, fifth-year, William & Mary; Nash Jensen, sixth-year, North Dakota State.

Tight end — Ryan Miller, fifth-year, Furman.

Wide receivers — Hayden Hatten, fourth-year, Idaho; Fotis Kokosioulis, fifth-year, Fordham; Xavier Gipson, fourth-year, Stephen F. Austin.

All-purpose player — Dylan Laube, fifth-year, New Hampshire.

Kicker — Skyler Davis, fifth-year, Elon.

#### Defense

Linemen — David Walker, third-year, Central Arkansas; Spencer Waege, sixth-year, North Dakota State; Jay Person, fifth-year, Chattanooga; Caleb Sanders, fifth-year, South Dakota State.

Linebackers — Zeke Vandenburgh, sixth-year, Illinois State; John Pius, third-year, William & Mary; Johnny Buchanan, fifth-year, Delaware.

Defensive backs — Marte Mapu, sixth-year, Sacramento State; Alijah Huzzie, fourth-year, East Tennessee State; Marcus Hillman, fifth-year, Elon; Robby Hauck, fifth-year, Montana; Khalil Baker, third-year, North Carolina Central.

Punter — Jake Gerardi, third-year, Southern Utah.

### SECOND TEAM

#### Offense

Quarterback — Tim DeMorat, fifth-year, Fordham.

Running backs — Jaden Shirden, fourth-year, Monmouth; Ulonzo Gilliam, sixth-year, UC Davis.

Offensive linemen — McClendon Curtis, sixth-year, Chattanooga; Mark Evans II, fifth-year, Arkansas-Pine Bluff; Ryan Coll, , Richmond; Nick Amoah, , UC Davis; Brandon Weldon, sixth-year, Sacramento State.

Tight end — Martin Marshel, fourth-year, Sacramento State.

Wide receivers — Andrei Iosivas, fifth-year, Princeton; Joey Hobert, third-year, Utah Tech; Xavier Smith,

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fifth-year, Florida A&M.

All-purpose player — Hunter Luepke, fifth-year, North Dakota State.

Kicker — Matthew Cook, fourth-year, Northern Iowa.

Defense

Linemen — Ty French, third-year, Gardner-Webb; Malik Hamm, fifth-year, Lafayette; Devonnsha Maxwell, sixth-year, Chattanooga; Josiah Silver, second-year, Delaware.

Linebackers — Joe Andreesen, fifth-year, Bryant; BJ Davis, fourth-year, South Carolina State; Aubrey Miller Jr., fifth-year, Jackson State.

Defensive backs — Justin Ford, fifth-year, Montana; Kameron Brown, fourth-year, Chattanooga; Maxwell Anderson, fourth-year, Weber State; Eddie Heckard, sixth-year, Weber State; Luke Glenna, fifth-year, St. Thomas.

Punter — Patrick Rohrbach, first-year, Montana.

THIRD TEAM

Offense

Quarterback — Michael Hiers, fifth-year, Samford.

Running backs — ShunDerrick Powell, second-year, North Alabama; Cameron Skattebo, third-year, Sacramento State.

Offensive linemen — Jackson Slater, second-year, Sacramento State; Luke Newman, third-year, Holy Cross; Anderson Tomlin, fifth-year, Furman; Caleb Johnson, fifth-year, Incarnate Word; Tyler Brown, fourth-year, Jackson State.

Tight end — Tucker Kraft, fourth-year, South Dakota State.

Wide receivers — Taylor Grimes, fourth-year, Incarnate Word; Darion Chafin, fifth-year, Incarnate Word; Joshua Tomas, fifth-year, Georgetown.

All-purpose player — Devron Harper, fifth-year, Mercer.

Kicker — Richard McCollum, fifth-year, Western Carolina.

Defense

Linemen — Jake Heimlicher, fifth-year, Penn; Dylan Ruiz, second-year, New Hampshire; Truman Jones, fifth-year, Harvard; Brody Grebe, second-year, Montana State.

Linebackers — John Ford II, sixth-year, Tennessee-Martin; Kelechi Anyalebechi, fifth-year, Incarnate Word; Stone Snyder, fourth-year, VMI.

Defensive backs — Kedrick Whitehead, fifth-year, Delaware; Michael Tutsie, sixth-year, North Dakota State; Rassie Littlejohn, fourth-year, Stetson; Benny Sapp III, fifth-year, Northern Iowa; Demetries Ford, fourth-year, Austin Peay.

Punter — Grant Burkett, fourth-year, Missouri State.

## Company holiday parties are back -- but with some restraint

By ALEXANDRA OLSON AP Business Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Say goodbye to virtual wine tastings, and bust out the karaoke. Love them or hate them, company holiday parties are back — in a toned-down kind of way.

After more than two years of working in pajama bottoms and clinking glasses over Zoom, many office workers seem to be yearning for a bit of glamour. The same is true for some front-line workers who saw festivities canceled even as they showed up to work every day during the depths of the COVID-19 pandemic.

"It just always makes me feel special," said Shobha Surya, who missed treating herself to a new dress every year for the dinner and karaoke party thrown by Ajinomoto Health and Nutrition North America, a Japanese-owned company based in the Chicago area. She was so excited the party was back for the first time in two years that she picked out her black-and-white cocktail dress two months in advance.

"Everybody let loose," she said, smiling the Monday after the party, where she accepted a recognition award for 15 years at the company. "It gets you into the holiday season."

More than 57% of companies are planning in-person holiday celebrations this year, according to a survey

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of 252 U.S.-based companies conducted by Challenger, Gray & Christmas, a hiring firm. While that's still notably fewer than the 75% that threw parties in 2019, it's a big leap from 26% in 2021 and 5% in 2020.

Still, not everyone is ready to party like it's 2019.

Many parties will be more intimate, as companies try to accommodate workers that are increasingly remote and far-flung. Some businesses are opting for spas, juggling shows and even private movie theater showings to lure out employees who have relished working from home. And a few are sticking to bonuses or extra time off they have offered instead of parties during the pandemic.

Cari Snavelly's team of 20 opted for an afternoon of pickleball when her Boston-based software company gave them a budget to decide on their own how to celebrate.

It's a far cry from the giant bashes she remembers from her days just a few years ago working at Coke in Atlanta, but Snavelly said it's a better way to break the ice for people who haven't worked together in person much. Besides, she said, many of her teammates wanted the chance to leave work and get home early.

"We really wanted to make sure that as many people as possible could go," said Snavelly, who works in finance. "People have home commitments, kids."

Quickbase has 700 employees but many of them are remote — and as far away as Bulgaria — so it didn't make sense to have a big party at headquarters, said Chief People Officer Sherri Kottmann. Instead, the company left it to individual teams to organize their own fun. Even in Boston, she said only 30% to 40% of employees come to the office in the middle of the week, when it's busiest.

But one thing seems sure: People are fed up with getting on screens for cocktail mixing or secret Santa exchanges. Fewer than 2% of companies are hosting virtual celebrations this year, compared to 7% last year and 17% in 2020, Challenger's survey found.

Jeff Consoletti, founder of Las Angeles event production company JJLA, said he has received zero requests this year for the gift boxes and cheese-and-wine pairing kits that helped keep his business afloat for the past two years. Instead, he has seen a 100% increase in bookings for in-person events, though they are much smaller than the 5,000-person revelries he often staged before the pandemic.

Ksenia Kulynych, director of operations at Monarch Rooftop & Indoor Lounge in New York, said she's seen a 30% increase in small group reservations this year — and often, a drastic undercount or overcount of guests as planners struggle to gauge how deep the enthusiasm for parties goes. Lunches are surprisingly popular, and Fridays are out.

"We will pitch away on Fridays and the response is always, 'no one's in the office. It's too hard to get anyone to come into the office. No one's going to come into the city on a Friday,'" Kulynych said.

Even before the remote work revolution, some people were pushing back at the idea of "forced fun" at work, particularly in corporate cultures where heavy drinking is intertwined with networking.

Shwetha Pai, who works from home in Cincinnati for a small workplace analytics firm, said big holiday parties stir up memories of her early career days in investment banking, when her guard was always up at male-dominated nights out, and she often used her commute home as an excuse to leave early.

"People make bad decisions in those situations. They just do," said Pai, 41, head of operations and marketing at Worklytics. "There is definitely this expectation that you take part in all of it because that's part of 'team bonding.' But in fact, for women, it's really fraught with a lot of challenges and risk."

Bill MacQueen, 46, is far removed from big city nightlife as assistant director of commercialization at Ajinomoto's manufacturing plant in Eddyville, Iowa. And he doesn't drink.

But count him in for bingo.

MacQueen said his heart gave a "leap for joy that we were back to pre-COVID" when he got his bingo card at the entrance of Ajinomoto's dinner party for its plant workers, an event he has cherished since he started working there 28 years ago, two days after graduating high school.

"It was just so nice to hear everyone in that hall talking and laughing, and people teasing each other," MacQueen said. "And sounding cheesy, it was just kind of like a family reunion."



## China won't report asymptomatic COVID cases in further shift

By DAKE KANG Associated Press

BEIJING (AP) — China said Wednesday it would stop reporting asymptomatic COVID-19 cases since they've become "impossible" to track with mass testing no longer required, another step in the country's uncertain exit from some of the world's strictest antivirus policies.

China last week announced its most significant easing yet of antivirus measures and has begun to see what appears to be a rapid increase in new infections, raising concerns that its health system could become overwhelmed as those in other countries did during early COVID waves.

So far, though, many of those newly sick are staying home and there has been little evidence of a surge in patient numbers. But it's difficult to get a clear picture of the virus's spread, and the new reporting rules could make that even harder. Some hospitals have reportedly struggled to remain staffed because of rising infections among their employees.

A notice on the National Health Commission's website on Wednesday said it stopped publishing daily figures on COVID-19 cases where no symptoms are detected since it was "impossible to accurately grasp the actual number of asymptomatic infected persons," which have generally accounted for the vast majority of new infections.

The only numbers they're reporting are confirmed cases detected in public testing facilities where symptoms are displayed. Many people also test at home — and any positive results there would also not be captured.

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.

While many governments have long focused on only the more serious cases, the latest move is part of a sea change for China, which has maintained a "zero COVID" policy that seeks to stamp out all virus transmission.

That included frequent mass testing campaigns, and it used to mean that anyone who tested positive was isolated in a government facility, even if they had no symptoms. Now people can recover at home if they don't need medical care.

While many greeted the relaxing of the rules with relief, the major and rapid shift has also caused some concern — after years during which the Chinese government talked about the virus as a major threat.

"Beijing is really confused right now," said one resident, surnamed Zhu. "They made a complete 180-degree turn without even going through a transitional period."

Zhu, who refused to provide his full name to speak on what could be seen as a sensitive topic in China, said he wasn't able to find a test after developing a sore throat and a fever. Authorities have said they will provide 25 million rapid test kits for Beijing pharmacies.

Despite the easing, the streets of many major Chinese cities have grown eerily quiet — as many people stay home, not because they have to, but because they're worried they'll contract the virus at a time when social media is lighting up with reports of infections.

With a clean bill of health still required to enter restaurants and some other public venues, many Chinese are choosing to forego such pleasures to avoid testing, leaving many establishments shuttered or empty. Several businesses are also having difficulty finding enough staff who haven't gotten infected.

In the usually bustling streets around the ancient imperial palace complex in the heart of Beijing, Huang Hanxin said he was making good use of the lack of crowds.

"If it was a few years ago, there would be a lot of cars and it would be packed with people here," said the 19-year-old tourist from the southern city of Guangzhou, standing in front of one of the gates to the complex formerly known as the Forbidden City. "It's comfortable to walk around and take photos."

By contrast, lines have formed outside fever clinics in Beijing — the number of which has increased from 94 to more than 300 — and at pharmacies, where cold and flu medications and rapid at-home testing kits are harder to find.

Some have taken to ordering from pharmacies in the semi-autonomous city of Hong Kong, which has

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been steadily relaxing its restrictions without the chaos and uncertainty seen on the mainland. Like much of the world, Hong Kong uses mRNA vaccines that are widely considered more effective than the inactivated vaccines mandated by China.

Residents of other major cities such as Guangzhou and Shanghai reached by telephone or messaging app also reported quiet streets. All have modern health infrastructure but lower-tier cities and rural areas are less prepared to respond and are more likely to become overwhelmed.

Despite a push to boost vaccinations among older people, two centers set up in Beijing to administer shots were empty Tuesday except for medical personnel.

But there was little evidence of a surge in people being hospitalized.

At the China-Japan Friendship Hospital's fever clinic in Beijing, a dozen people waited for test results. Nurses in full-body white protective gear checked in patients one by one. Fever clinics are isolated wards where people can receive treatment at a reduced risk of infecting others.

A few kilometers (miles) south, at Chaoyang Hospital, about a dozen people waited in a line of blue tents, deflecting winds amid subzero temperatures. One person in the queue took out a bottle of disinfectant and sprayed it around her as she waited.

Across the street at Gaoji Baikang Pharmacy, around a dozen people waited for cough medication and Chinese herbal remedies. A sign at the front told waiting customers: "Avoid panic and hoarding, we are doing all we can to stock up to fulfill your medicinal needs."

A man coming out had bought two packages of Lianhua Qingwen, a Chinese herbal remedy, saying that each customer was restricted from buying any more than that.

Inquiries to health hotlines have increased six-fold, according to state media.

Without asymptomatic cases being counted, China reported just 2,249 "confirmed" infections Wednesday, bringing the nation's total to 369,918 — more than double the level on Oct. 1. It has recorded 5,235 deaths — compared with 1.1 million in the United States.

Since Tuesday, the U.S. consulates in the northeastern Chinese city of Shenyang and the central city of Wuhan have been offering only emergency services "in response to increased number of COVID-19 cases," the State Department said.

President Xi Jinping's government is still officially committed to stopping virus transmission. 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.

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

Starting Tuesday, China also stopped tracking some travel, though China's international borders remain largely shut.

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 measures grew into calls for Xi and the Communist Party to step down — a level of public dissent not seen in decades.

Experts warn there still is a chance the party might reverse course and reimpose restrictions if a large-scale outbreak ensues.

## UK sends helicopters to small boat in distress in Channel

LONDON (AP) — Helicopters and lifeboats were dispatched to the English Channel off the coast of Kent in southern England to rescue a small boat that capsized in the freezing water, authorities said Wednesday.

Prime Minister Rishi Sunak confirmed in comments before Parliament there was a loss of life but offered no specifics. Home Secretary Suella Braverman was expected to update the House of Commons later Wednesday.

The U.K. Maritime and Coastguard Agency coordinated a rescue operation involving the Royal Navy, border

officers, Kent police and the French navy. The Royal National Lifeboat Institution also dispatched boats. The South East Coast Ambulance Service said it sent help at about 3:40 a.m. local time to help the coast guard.

Thousands of migrants have relied on small boats to cross the Channel in hopes of receiving asylum in the U.K. The British government has been under pressure to stop people from paying smugglers to cross some of the world's busiest shipping lanes in flimsy vessels.

But the number of people who choose to make the dangerous voyage continues to climb. Some 44,000 people made the journey so far this year, compared to 23,000 last year and 8,500 in 2020, according to government figures.

Sunak pledged Tuesday to clear a backlog of asylum-seeker applications and announced new measures aimed at curbing the number of migrants reaching the U.K. by crossing the Channel.

Sunak said he planned to introduce legislation early next year to ensure people who arrive illegally cannot remain in the country.

The prime minister said he was adding hundreds of workers to process asylum claims and to clear the backlog, estimated at more than 143,000 pending applications, by the end of 2023. The extra staff will also focus on the swift removal of Albanian migrants who have arrived via the Channel in increasing numbers, Sunak said.

## Ukraine: Russian strikes thwarted, wreckage hits buildings

By HANNA ARHIROVA and JAMEY KEATEN Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Ukrainian authorities said they thwarted a Russian attack on Kyiv and the surrounding region Wednesday as their air defense system intercepted and destroyed 13 explosive-laden drones, although wreckage from some of them damaged five buildings. No casualties were reported.

The attempted strikes underlined how vulnerable Ukraine's capital remains to the regular Russian attacks that have devastated infrastructure and population centers in recent weeks, mostly in the country's east and south. But they also highlighted Ukraine's claims of increasing efficiency in intercepting weapons — something that Patriot missiles from the U.S. may soon help boost.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, in a brief video statement, said the "terrorists" fired 13 Iranian-made drones, and all were intercepted. Such drones have been part of the firepower, along with rockets, missiles, shelling mortars and artillery, as Russia targets power stations, water facilities and other public utility sites.

The snow-covered capital remained largely calm after the attack, which occurred around daybreak. As the working day began, authorities sounded the all-clear.

The head of the Kyiv city administration, Serhii Popko, wrote on Telegram that the attempted strikes came in two waves. Wreckage from the intercepted drones damaged an administrative building and four residential buildings, he said.

A blast left the three-story tax office building in the central Shevchenkyvskyi district with a gaping hole in the roof and blew out windows in parked cars and in a neighboring building.

Clean-up crews were on site quickly to shovel away the rubble and roll out plastic sheeting to cover the blown-out windows in freezing temperatures. One man, unfazed, pushed his son on a swing set on a nearby playground as the crews did their work.

Anton Rudikov's family was sleeping when they heard the sounds of an explosion nearby and smashing windows. "The children were frightened; the windows flew out," said Rudikov, who has daughters ages 13 and 18. "What else can I say?"

Local residents told Associated Press reporters they saw fragments from a drone which contained the words "For Ryazan." The Kremlin claims Ukraine was responsible for an attack last week on a military base in the Ryazan region of western Russia.

Ukrainian authorities have trumpeted their ability to down Russian weapons. But strikes in some areas

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continue to cause deaths and havoc, particularly in areas close to the front lines in the east and south. In the southern city of Odesa, drone strikes temporarily shut off the power last week. Kyiv has suffered comparatively little damage.

During a previous round of Russian volleys on Dec. 5, more than 60 of 70 strikes were intercepted by air defense systems, including nine out of 10 targeting the capital and the surrounding region, Ukrainian officials have said.

U.S. officials said Tuesday the United States was poised to approve sending a Patriot missile battery to Ukraine, agreeing to an urgent request from Ukrainian leaders desperate for more robust weapons to shoot down incoming Russian missiles.

Zelenskyy pressed Western leaders as recently as Monday to provide more advanced weapons to help his country in its war with Russia. The Patriot would be the most advanced surface-to-air missile system the West has provided to Ukraine to help repel Russian aerial attacks since Russia invaded on Feb. 24.

U.S. officials also said last week that Moscow has looked to Iran to resupply the Russian military with drones and surface-to-surface missiles.

The damage caused by Russian strikes has interrupted electricity, heating and water supplies to many Ukrainians as winter sets in. The U.N. migration agency said that more than 5 million people who were displaced within or outside Ukraine since the Russian invasion started have returned home. The International Organization for Migration said a Nov. 25-Dec. 5 phone survey of 2,002 respondents in Ukraine also found that only 7% were considering leaving their current locations.

The head of Zelenskyy's office, Andriy Yermak, said Wednesday that 64 Ukrainian soldiers and a U.S. national living in Ukraine were released in the latest prisoner swap between Kyiv and Moscow. In a Telegram post, he identified the "U.S. citizen who helped our people" as Suedi Murekezi.

Separately, the International Atomic Energy Agency said that it has agreed with Ukraine to "establish a continuous presence of nuclear safety and security experts" at all of the country's nuclear power plants as part of efforts to prevent a nuclear accident during the conflict.

The U.N. nuclear watchdog already has deployed a permanent expert mission to the Russian-held Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant. The plant, Europe's biggest nuclear power station, has faced repeated shelling and is the biggest cause of concern. There are three other plants in Ukrainian-held territory, as well as the decommissioned Chernobyl plant.

## Ethiopians file lawsuit against Meta over hate speech in war

By CARA ANNA Associated Press

NAIROBI, Kenya (AP) — Two Ethiopians have filed a lawsuit against Facebook's parent company, Meta, over hate speech they say was allowed and even promoted on the social media platform amid heated rhetoric over their country's deadly Tigray conflict.

Former Amnesty International human rights researcher Fisseha Tekle is one petitioner in the case filed Wednesday and the other is the son of university professor Meareg Amare, who was killed weeks after posts on Facebook inciting violence against him.

The case was filed in neighboring Kenya, home to the platform's content moderation operations related to Ethiopia. The lawsuit alleges that Meta hasn't hired enough content moderators there, that it uses an algorithm that prioritizes hateful content and that it acts more slowly to crises in Africa than elsewhere in the world.

The lawsuit, also backed by Kenya-based legal organization the Katiba Institute, seeks the creation of a \$1.6 billion fund for victims of hate speech.

A Facebook spokesman, Ben Walters, told The Associated Press they could not comment on the lawsuit because they haven't received it. He shared a general statement: "We have strict rules which outline what is and isn't allowed on Facebook and Instagram. Hate speech and incitement to violence are against these rules and we invest heavily in teams and technology to help us find and remove this content." Facebook continues to develop its capabilities to catch violating content in Ethiopia's most widely spoken languages,



it said.

Ethiopia's two-year Tigray conflict is thought to have killed hundreds of thousands of people. The warring sides signed a peace deal last month.

"This legal action is a significant step in holding Meta to account for its harmful business model," said Flavia Mwangovya of Amnesty International in a statement pointing out that the Facebook posts targeting its former researcher and the professor were not isolated cases.

The AP and more than a dozen other media outlets last year explored how Facebook had failed to quickly and effectively moderate hate speech in cases around the world, including in Ethiopia. The reports were based on internal documents obtained by whistleblower Frances Haugen.

## Foreign college athletes chase endorsement money outside US

By AARON BEARD AP Basketball Writer

PARADISE ISLAND, Bahamas (AP) — Marta Suarez stepped in front of the white backdrop, rotated the basketball to put the logo forward and propped it against her hip. She looked into the camera and smiled, her head tilting slightly to the right.

Flashes came in quick succession. Music streamed from a nearby Bluetooth speaker. Suarez lifted the ball onto her right shoulder and smiled again, and soon was spinning the ball on her finger from a squat-  
ted pose.

"Get the bruises," she quipped, pointing to a knee exposed by her cutoff jeans.

Only a few hours had passed since the third-year forward from Spain had helped Tennessee win its Battle 4 Atlantis tournament opener. This part of the trip — in a foyer outside the Atlantis resort's Grand Ballroom — was for herself, available only because the Lady Vols were in the Bahamas.

College athletes from foreign countries have been left out of the rush for endorsement deals because student visa rules largely prohibit off-campus work while in the U.S. But a growing number are using a loophole when they leave the country, doing the legwork needed — but not allowed on U.S. soil — to eventually profit from the use of their name, image and likeness (NIL).

At holiday tournaments in the Bahamas this fall, startup company Influxer worked with about three dozen international athletes to create photos, videos and introductory podcasts that could be used for potential deals.

Founder and chief executive Tyler Jaynes said the sessions are something Influxer wants "to repeat over and over." There's no guarantee they will lead to deals for international athletes, but it's an avenue for them to find what might be out there.

"Having fun?" Jaynes asked Suarez during a pause in her shoot.

"Yeah," she said, nodding back to the speaker. "The music."

"Yes," Jaynes said, "we've thought of everything."

That's the hope for international athletes hoping to cash in on their fame like their American teammates.

"I'm just glad right now we at least get a chance to do something, even if it's just outside the U.S.," said DePaul's Brendan Favre, a graduate student guard from Switzerland. "It's still nice to be able to do something."

There are more than 100,000 international athletes in Division I alone, according to NCAA data. The obstacle for them to make NIL money is federal immigration law, not NCAA rules.

The NCAA largely cleared the way in July 2021 for athletes to earn NIL money and deals worth millions have been struck across the country. But the majority of international athletes are on F-1 student visas prohibiting off-campus work except in rare exceptions such as internships or work-study programs. Violations could lead to the visa's termination, and deportation.

Blake Lawrence, co-founder/CEO of athlete-marketing platform Opendorse, said it is unclear exactly how much international athletes are missing out. But with their presence in men's and women's basketball, two of the most marketable and compensated sports, he said it takes merely "deductive reasoning" to know there is an impact.

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Now the market is evolving to address it.

"Administrators and coaches are trying to solve this problem, and it will be solved," Lawrence said. "It will not be as convenient as driving down the street and signing autographs. But international student-athletes that are having an impact from their community will benefit from NIL. They just might have to take a flight or a longer drive."

Influxer launched late last year to connect athletes with companies, with a goal of becoming a full-service NIL company with merchandising and consulting. It's led by people familiar with college sports, including Jaynes, a former Baylor football player.

Jaynes said Influxer has spent months talking with school compliance staffers and immigration attorneys to ensure nothing jeopardizes athlete visas. They've also studied state NIL laws.

"We understand it's a very sensitive subject with a lot of potential ramifications if not done the right way," Jaynes said.

Influxer paid athletes the same, unspecified amount for their time at the Bahamas sessions, Jaynes said. After creating the marketing materials, Influxer can sell them to brands for use in a brokered endorsement deal. Athletes could then receive royalties as permissible "passive" income, meaning it came through signing a licensing agreement for existing materials as opposed to a work activity such as making a commercial.

Influxer's first offshore shoot came in August when Kentucky big man Oscar Tshiebwe — last season's Associated Press men's college basketball player of the year, from the Democratic Republic of the Congo — visited the Bahamas for the Wildcats' exhibition tour.

The company replicated that on a broader scale last month as teams arrived for the Battle 4 Atlantis men's and women's tournaments as well as games at the Baha Mar resort in Nassau. Players came and went between meals, shootarounds and games.

Suarez and Australian teammate Jessie Rennie arrived carrying their jerseys. Favre and Canadian teammate Nick Ongenda soon followed from Baha Mar, carrying their own DePaul jerseys. Influxer staffers briefly introduced themselves, then the athletes got to work.

Rennie sat down for a podcast focused on her background. Suarez headed to a director's chair for a stylist to freshen her makeup and hair ahead of her photo shoot.

Ongenda and Favre were soon joking and mugging together at the photo set before breaking off for their own sessions.

"I love being in front of the camera on and off the court," Ongenda said. "It's a great experience. I'm glad they reached out and let us know about this opportunity."

That includes collecting photos with an eye toward versatility. With Favre, for example, some included him holding his empty hand palm up — ready for an item to be added later via photo editing software to accommodate a specific branding deal.

"That's great, you can put so many different things there," Jaynes said, swiping through the shots on an iPad.

Rennie, sidelined this year with a knee injury, has been happy to see teammates get deals. Like Suarez, she couldn't help but feel disappointed at being unable to do the same. Still, she didn't commit to Influxer's shoot until having enough conversations to feel it was OK.

"We do Tennessee photo shoots all the time," Rennie said, "but it was nice to do something that was more about me and who I am and it's going to be for my benefit, if that makes sense."

Influxer returned three days later before the men's Atlantis tournament, with Southern California's Australian big man, Harrison Hornery, visiting as the day's final appointment.

"It's been frustrating at USC and being such a high-profile school, and all those NIL opportunities that everyone is getting," Hornery said. "We have people come to practice and pitch us stuff all the time, and I'm just like, 'Man, I can't do it.'"

"I'm not saying I need X amount of dollars to make me happy," he added. "Just being here and getting the opportunity to do a cool shoot and then do a podcast with those guys over there — and whatever happens, happens."

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Influxer ultimately worked with roughly 35 international athletes through the Thanksgiving holiday week, the final session coming in a Nassau studio.

Ask Jaynes about what's next for Influxer, and he mentions events beyond basketball such as college golf tournaments in Mexico and elsewhere in the Bahamas. Director of business development Steve McLean even imagines a large-scale media day for international athletes, complete with corporate sponsorship.

"There's going to be a lot of trial and error," McLean said of future events, "and we're open to all of it."

## Lawmakers announce 'framework' on bill to keep gov't open

KEVIN FREKING Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Lawmakers leading the negotiations on a bill to fund the federal government for the current fiscal year announced late Tuesday they've reached agreement on a "framework" that should allow them to complete work on the bill over the next week and avoid a government shutdown.

Congress faces a midnight Friday deadline to pass a spending bill to prevent a partial government shutdown. The two chambers are expected to pass another short-term measure before then to keep the government running through Dec. 23, which will allow negotiators time to complete work on the full-year bill.

"Now, the House and Senate Appropriations Committees will work around the clock to negotiate the details of final 2023 spending bills that can be supported by the House and Senate and receive President Biden's signature," said Rep. Rosa DeLauro of Connecticut, the Democratic chair of the House Appropriations Committee.

Earlier in the day, Senate leaders said lawmakers from the two parties were nearing an agreement, but Republicans warned Democrats that lawmakers would need to complete their work by Dec. 22 or they would only support a short-term extension into early next year. That would give House Republicans more leverage over what's in the legislation, since they will be in the majority then.

"We intend to be on the road going home on the 23rd. We intend not to be back here between Christmas and New Year's, and if we can't meet that deadline, we would be happy to pass a short-term (resolution) into early next year," said Sen. Mitch McConnell of Kentucky, the Republican leader in the Senate.

McConnell voiced confidence Republicans would be able to meet their priorities of increasing spending on defense without "having to pay a bonus above what President Biden asked for" on non-defense priorities. He said Democrats were willing to accept that because they had previously passed two bills on a party-line basis that allow for more government spending on various domestic priorities.

Sen. Richard Shelby, R-Ala., said last week that the two parties were about \$25 billion apart in what is expected to be about a \$1.65 trillion package, not including mandatory spending on programs such as Social Security and Medicare. However, Democrats in their statements did not indicate what topline spending number had been reached in the framework announced Tuesday.

## UK inflation eases but little relief at near 40-year high

By DANICA KIRKA Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — U.K. inflation has eased but is still stuck near a 40-year high, piling pressure on employers to boost wages as the nation faces a wave of strikes and the Bank of England to approve a ninth consecutive interest rate increase.

While annual consumer price inflation dipped to 10.7% in November from 11.1% the previous month, it is at levels last seen in the 1970s and early 1980s, the Office for National Statistics said Wednesday.

The figures offer little relief for consumers as the high cost of food and energy erodes spending power. Food prices accelerated for a 16th straight month in November, rising 16.5% from a year earlier, the ONS said.

The inflation report came on a day when people across Britain struggled to get to work and mail wasn't delivered due to strikes by rail and postal workers demanding higher pay. Nurses in England, Wales and Northern Ireland are set to hold the first of two one-day strikes Thursday, with ambulance crews and

border officials scheduled to strike later this month.

Inflation is stubbornly high across Europe, which has been hard hit by a jump in the price of natural gas — used to generate electricity, heat homes and fuel industry — following Russia's invasion of Ukraine. While inflation slowed in the 19 countries that use the euro last month, it was still a painful 10%.

That contrasts with the U.S., where the inflation rate dropped to 7.1% in November from a recent peak of 9.1% in June.

British officials said it was too soon to say whether inflation had peaked in the U.K., where the economy has contracted.

"Some may be calling this a peak; it is, I think, too early," Grant Fitzner, chief economist for the ONS told the BBC. "We've only seen one fall from a 40-year high, so let's wait a few months."

The figures will be watched closely by Bank of England policymakers, who are meeting Thursday.

Economists expect the bank to raise its key interest rate by half a percentage point, to 3.5%. That would be the ninth consecutive rate increase since December of last year, when the rate stood at 0.1%.

The central bank last month forecast that inflation would peak at around 11% this year before beginning to slow early next year. The bank expects inflation to drop below its 2% target within two years.

But the bank also cautioned that those projections were uncertain, primarily due to volatility in energy prices.

Helen Dickinson, chief executive of the British Retail Consortium, said there is little sign inflation will ease significantly soon.

"It will undoubtedly be a challenging Christmas period for many households across the UK. Not only are the costs of food and gifts up on last year, but (energy) bills are up 27% too," she said in a statement.

## Morocco faces France in politically charged WCup semifinal

TARIK EL BARAKAH and BARBARA SURK Associated Press

RABAT, Morocco (AP) — Hind Sabouni bristles with pride as she recalls her country's history-making World Cup run as it eliminated one European soccer powerhouse and former colonial power after another — Belgium, Spain and Cristiano Ronaldo's Portugal — to become the first African and Arab nation to reach the semifinals.

For the 26-year-old English teacher in Morocco's capital, and many of her countrymen both inside the North African nation and throughout the diaspora, it's about to get more complicated. Next up is France: The defending champion and Morocco's former colonial ruler for much of the first half of the 20th century.

Wednesday's match has political and emotional resonance for both nations. It dredges up everything that's complex about the relationship in which France still wields considerable economic, political and cultural influence.

"This game is one of a kind," Sabouni said. "Especially since France is next to beat."

"We can show the rest of the world that Morocco is no longer France's backyard."

For the former protectorate, the match against the defending champion is an opportunity to show that Morocco is a formidable foe — on the soccer pitch at least — even though immigration between the two countries has blurred the lines for many in France and Morocco about who to support Wednesday in Qatar.

Over the past decade, Morocco's relationship with France has changed. Sabouni said her generation of Moroccans is tired of France's dominance. Young Moroccans, she said, "speak English instead of French, they buy more American products than French ones and even those who want to seek a better life abroad try to avoid France."

"Even though this is just a football game, some people view it as an opportunity for revenge," Sabouni said.

But not everyone.

Kenza Bartali, a communications professional in Rabat, sees no political overtones to the match. She obtained her master's degree in France, and lived for two years in Paris and the southern cities of Nice and Toulon between 2016 and 2018. She made "wonderful friends" who are still her friends today. "Most



Moroccan students were treated with respect," the 26-year-old said.

Still, there is no doubt which team she's supporting.

"I sincerely hope that Morocco advances to the final," Bartali said. "I am aware that it will be difficult because France is a very good team, but we are hoping for the best."

Sabouni's sentiments resonate with Moroccans and other North Africans in France. Although the younger generation of immigrants and their descendants appear to be more at ease with multiple identities and languages in France, they still face institutional discrimination, racial and ethnic prejudice in public life, economic hardship and lack of job opportunities.

As in previous World Cups, France once again has turned to their national soccer team made up of players from diverse backgrounds as evidence that the country has indeed become a melting pot despite lurking prejudice, stoked against immigrants by elected right-wing politicians.

"Cultural changes and changes in life on the ground do have an effect and the team represents that," said Laurent Dubois, a professor at University of Virginia in Charlottesville who has authored two books on French and international soccer.

"The way the players inhabit being French and don't seem to have an issue with also being African or anything else at the same time is an antidote to the immigrant resentment on the right."

In Morocco, people have embraced the team's foreign-born players as their native sons. They welcome the experience and professionalism they bring from Europe's top clubs and are proud they chose Morocco as their national team when they could have played for the countries of their births, from Spain to Canada to Belgium and beyond.

The Morocco national team depends heavily on the diaspora, with 14 of the squad's 26 players born abroad, including their French-born coach, Walid Regragui, the highest proportion for any team at the World Cup.

Like Morocco's supporters at home and an estimated 5 million scattered around Europe and beyond, many players grapple with family tales of colonial history, the challenges of immigration and questions of national loyalty. They want desperately to detach from the burdens of the past and win a place in the World Cup final — whether home for them is in France or Morocco, or Belgium, Canada, Tunisia, Algeria or elsewhere.

"Most of the Moroccan players who were born abroad chose Morocco as their national team because they feel they play for more than just to win a football match," said Maher Mezahi, a Marseille-based Algerian journalist covering African football. "They play to elevate national pride and to make their family proud."

For Regragui, his and his player's dual identities are meaningless in the biggest match the squad has faced.

"I'm a dual national, and that's an honor and a pleasure," the Moroccan coach said. "And it's an honor and a pleasure to face France. But I'm the Morocco coach and we're going to be playing the best team in the world. The most important thing is to get through to the final."

"When we play for the Moroccan national team, we are Moroccans," Regragui said.

## Argentina erupts in joy after team reaches World Cup final

By DANIEL POLITI Associated Press

BUENOS AIRES, Argentina (AP) — The streets of Argentina turned into a party Tuesday as the national team beat Croatia by a comfortable 3-0 and earned this soccer-crazed South American country a spot in the World Cup final.

Fans poured onto the streets of the capital of Buenos Aires as soon as the match ended, with people waving Argentina flags out of their cars while others jumped and sang in joy amid a sea of wearing the national team's jersey.

Earlier, Buenos Aires had come to a standstill on what was a scorching summer afternoon as fans packed cafes, restaurants and public plazas, where giant screens followed the exploits of the Lionel Messi-led team.

"I'm in complete ecstasy," said Emiliano Adam, 31, who works at an advertising agency and was celebrating in the streets of Buenos Aires while wearing the country's flag as a cape. "This is the first match that

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didn't make me suffer, the first time I could enjoy a match from beginning to end."

Argentina will now play the last match of the World Cup against either France or Morocco, who are facing off Wednesday.

With that final match still days away, Tuesday turned into a day of joy as thousands of people descended on the capital's iconic Obelisk.

The agonizing start of the tournament for Argentina was followed by a string of victories that have brought some much-needed joy to a country stuck in an economic standstill with one of the world's highest inflation rates, closing in on almost 100% per year, and where close to four of every 10 people live in poverty.

"We're all super excited, it's been so long since we've lived a happiness like this. It's beautiful, I mean look at this," said Laila Desmery, a 27-year-old actress, as she pointed to people dancing and celebrating on the street. "It's really unexplainable the joy that we're going to be living through in the next few days."

The sky-high hopes for the Argentina team only increased here after the quarter-final against the Netherlands, an agonizing match that ended in a penalty shootout and led to a collective feeling the team that had shocked the world by losing its opening match against Saudi Arabia had finally found its groove.

"This was the antithesis of the last match, we won easily, with ample advantage and without moments of so much tension and stress," said Valentina González, 31, a social media manager.

Mariano Balestrasse said he was particularly proud of how the national team "has improved significantly every day and in every match you could see an improvement."

In that sense, the shocking loss against Saudi Arabia "helped consolidate the team," the 28-year-old architect said.

"This team connected a lot with the people, you can tell they're very united and they transmit that," said Abe Pérez, a 52-year-old civil servant.

In a traditional café in the Buenos Aires neighborhood of Palermo, those who had been nervously staring at the television screen exploded in jubilation when Messi scored a penalty kick, ending what had been an agonizing goalless 33 minutes.

"Messi, Messi, Messi," the crowd started chanting as they moved their arms in a worshipping ovation.

It was only five minutes later, before the crowd had even had a chance to cool down that Julián Álvarez scored an impressive goal, taking the score to 2-0.

By the second half, the crowd was ecstatic and when Álvarez, with an assist from Messi, scored a third goal, the joy overflowed with people jumping on chairs, kissing and hugging.

"Holding Messi by the hand, we're going to go all the way," the crowd chanted.

Tuesday's victory and reaching the World Cup final was even sweeter due to the initial difficulties that the team faced in the tournament, González said.

"It seems that it always has to be difficult to get there, but we get there and we win. It's as if there is no winning without suffering," the 27-year-old said.

The initial stumble gives more "mysticism" to the country now reaching the final, Desmery said.

"Many people say that we like to suffer because if we don't suffer it's as if nothing is happening, and well, this is a little like that," Desmery said. "As Argentines, we like to feel a lot and then the celebration is three, four times as large."

## Alex Ovechkin reaches 800 career goals with hat trick

By JAY COHEN AP Sports Writer

CHICAGO (AP) — Soaked with beer and still wearing his No. 8 jersey, Alex Ovechkin held three pucks in his right hand as he posed for a picture with the rest of the jubilant Washington Capitals in the visiting locker room at the United Center.

Three pucks that added up to 800.

Ovechkin became the third NHL player to reach 800 career goals when he scored three times Tuesday night, touching off a wild celebration for his team and an appreciative Chicago crowd.

"Soon as it happened, kind of relief," Ovechkin said after Washington's 7-3 win over the Blackhawks.

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"Kind of happiness in general."

Ovechkin scored on his first two shots, beating Blackhawks goaltender Petr Mrazek 24 seconds into the game before stuffing one home on a power play with 11:46 left in the first period. The 37-year-old winger then completed his 29th career hat trick when he knocked Anthony Mantha's pass over a sprawled Mrazek 6:34 into the third.

"When he got the first goal today, I was like, 'This is the night,'" teammate Evgeny Kuznetsov said.

The rest of the Capitals jumped off the bench to celebrate after the milestone goal, and hats rained down on the ice from the crowd of 16,181. Fans in Chicago then chanted "Ovi! Ovi!" — drawing a wave from Ovechkin.

The star forward moved within one goal of Gordie Howe for second all-time. Wayne Gretzky holds the record with 894 goals.

"It's a big number," Ovechkin said. "It's the best company (you can) ever imagine since you started playing hockey."

Ovechkin also praised the crowd for its response.

"Even in the warmup, I was feeling that energy right away," he said. "The fans watch me and the fans want to see that historical moment."

When it was over, Ovechkin jumped onto the ice one last time to salute the cheering fans. He then gave his stick to a boy wearing a Capitals jersey above the tunnel to the visiting locker room.

Shortly after he got to the back, he was showered with beer by his chanting teammates. Goaded into making a speech, Ovechkin said it was special to accomplish the feat with the team.

"It was awesome," Washington coach Peter Laviolette said. "It was just awesome to be on the bench and be a part of it, a part of history."

Ovechkin has seven goals in his last four games and a team-high 20 on the season. His previous four goals were all empty-netters.

The Capitals play seven of their next nine at home.

"I think once he's going to be No. 1 he can have a sense of relief," Mantha said. "Until then, I think he's on the hunt, and that's what we love about him."

Ovechkin has been one of the NHL's most dangerous scorers practically since he got two goals in his debut with Washington on Oct. 5, 2005, against Columbus.

The 12-time All-Star has nine seasons with at least 50 goals, including a career-high 65 during the 2007-08 season. The three-time MVP, who won the Stanley Cup in 2018, had 50 goals and 40 assists in 77 games last season.

"It's mind blowing," Chicago captain Jonathan Toews said. "How many guys can score goals at his rate in the season, let alone year after year after year? He's one of a kind, for sure."

## Australian police investigate extremist views of cop killers

BRISBANE, Australia (AP) — Australian police are investigating the extremist views of three people who shot and killed two officers and a neighbor at a rural property before they were killed hours later by police in a gunfight.

Investigators will look at the possible extremist links of the killers after a series of posts under the name of Gareth Train, one of the killers identified in the wake of Monday's deadly shootout, were found on conspiracy theory forums, Queensland Police Commissioner Katarina Carroll said late Tuesday. The posts include references to anti-vaccine sentiments and claims that other high-profile shootings were hoaxes or false-flag operations.

"It's very difficult at the moment for us to reason with what has happened, there are no obvious reasons," Carroll told the Australian Broadcasting Corp. But she added she had no doubt that over the coming days and weeks, police would come back with some insight into the tragic events that unfolded.

Research and surveys show belief in conspiracy theories is common and widespread. Believers are more likely to get their information from social media than professional news organizations. The rise and fall



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of particular conspiracy theories are often linked to real-world events and social, economic or technological change.

Carroll said every possible motive for the killings was being examined, including whether it was a premeditated attack on the officers.

"Some of the stuff that's online from these people, we will investigate what they have been doing not only in recent weeks but in recent years, who they've been interacting with," she said.

Four officers arrived at the property in the town of Wieambilla, in Queensland state, to investigate reports of a missing person. They walked into a hail of gunfire, Carroll said, and it was a miracle that two officers managed to escape and raise the alarm.

Those killed were Constables Matthew Arnold, 26, and Rachel McCrow, 29, along with 58-year-old neighbor Alan Dare.

One of the officers that escaped, Constable Randall Kirk, 28, was recovering at a hospital Wednesday from shrapnel wounds. He said he and his wife wanted to thank everybody "from the Prime Minister down" for their messages of support.

"I'm feeling fine, just a little sore. My main thoughts are with the other police families at this awful time," Kirk said in a statement released by the police union. "It means a lot to know the community cares for us all."

Prime Minister Anthony Albanese earlier told reporters in Sydney that the country mourned with those affected.

"This is, indeed, a devastating day for everyone who loved these Australians, and our hearts go out to those in the grip of terrible grief," he said. "We know that this news has fallen hard on a close-knit and caring Queensland community. As well as, of course, the community to which all police officers belong."

He said officers across the nation know the risks they face, yet do their duty.

"And today and every day I pay tribute to each and every one of the police officers who serve their local communities and who serve their nation," Albanese said. "This is not a price that anyone who puts on the uniform should ever pay."

In all, six people died in the violence Monday in Queensland state. The killers have been identified as former school principal Nathaniel Train, 47, his brother Gareth, 46, and sister-in-law Stacey, 45.

## Fed set to extend inflation fight with 7th rate hike of 2022

By CHRISTOPHER RUGABER AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — After four straight three-quarter-point interest rate hikes, the Federal Reserve is set to announce a smaller half-point increase in its key rate Wednesday, a first step toward dialing back its efforts to combat inflation.

At the same time, the Fed is expected to signal that it plans more hikes next year than it had previously forecast to try to conquer the worst inflation bout in four decades. And most economists think Chair Jerome Powell will stress that the Fed will likely keep its benchmark rate at its high point through next year, even after the hikes have ended.

The Fed's decision Wednesday will follow a government report Tuesday that provided hopeful signs that inflation is finally easing from chronically high levels. Gas prices fell, the cost of used cars, furniture and toys declined, and the costs of services from hotels to airfares to car rentals dropped.

The six rate hikes the Fed has already imposed this year have raised its key short-term rate to a range of 3.75% to 4%, its highest level in 15 years. Cumulatively, the hikes have led to much costlier borrowing rates for consumers as well as companies, ranging from mortgages to auto and business loans. Worries have grown that the Fed is raising rates so much in its drive to curb inflation that it will trigger a recession next year.

Yet with price increases still uncomfortably high — inflation was 7.1% in November compared with a year earlier — Powell and other Fed officials have underscored that they expect to keep rates at their peak for an extended period.

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With inflation pressures now easing, though, most economists think the Fed will further slow its hikes and raise its key rate by just a quarter-point at its next meeting early next year.

"The data (Tuesday) kind of fits with our idea that the Fed will downshift further in February," said Matthew Luzzetti, an economist at Deutsche Bank and a former research analyst at the Fed. "Downshifting helps to maximize their prospects of a soft landing," in which the Fed's rate hikes would slow growth and tame inflation but not tip the economy into a recession.

On Wednesday, members of the Fed's rate-setting committee will also update their projections for interest rates and other economic barometers for 2023 and beyond. Most analysts have forecast that they will pencil in a peak range of at least 4.75% to 5%, or even 5% to 5.25%, up from their September forecast of 4.5% to 4.75%.

Despite Powell's recent hard-line remarks — he said late last month that "we have not seen clear progress on slowing inflation" — he and other Fed officials have made clear that they're ready to dial down the pace of rate hikes. In doing so, they will have time to assess the impact of the increases they've already imposed. Those hikes have sent home sales plummeting and are starting to reduce rents on new apartments, a leading source of high inflation.

Fed officials have also said they want rates to reach "restrictive" levels that slow growth and hiring and bring inflation down to the their annual target of 2%.

"What policy rate is sufficiently restrictive we will only learn over time by watching how the economy evolves," said Lisa Cook, one of seven members of the Fed's Board of Governors. "Given the tightening already in the pipeline, I am mindful that monetary policy works with long lags."

Fed officials have stressed that more important than how fast they raise rates is how long they keep them at or near their peak. In September, the Fed forecast it would do so through 2023. Yet Wall Street investors are now betting that the Fed will reverse course and start cutting rates before the end of next year.

In remarks late last month, Powell said he was 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 his speech, Powell noted that there had been some progress in easing inflation in goods and housing but not so in most services. Some of those trends extended into last month's data, with goods prices, excluding food and energy, falling 0.5% from October to November, the second straight monthly drop.

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.

As a result, Powell's biggest focus has been on services, which he said are likely to stay persistently high. 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.

How the Fed will slow a robust labor market to help bring down 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.

## Biden signs gay marriage law, calls it 'a blow against hate'

By CHRIS MEGERIAN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — A celebratory crowd of thousands bundled up on a chilly Tuesday afternoon to watch President Joe Biden sign gay marriage legislation into law, a joyful ceremony that was tempered by the backdrop of an ongoing conservative backlash over gender issues.

"This law and the love it defends strike a blow against hate in all its forms," Biden said on the South Lawn of the White House. "And that's why this law matters to every single American."

Singers Sam Smith and Cyndi Lauper performed. Vice President Kamala Harris recalled officiating at a lesbian wedding in San Francisco. And the White House played a recording of Biden's television interview from a decade ago, when he caused a political furor by unexpectedly disclosing his support for gay marriage. Biden was vice president at the time, and President Barack Obama had not yet endorsed the idea.

"I got in trouble," Biden joked of that moment. Three days later, Obama himself publicly endorsed gay marriage.

Lawmakers from both parties attended Tuesday's ceremony, reflecting the growing acceptance of same-sex unions, once among the country's most contentious issues.

Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., wore the same purple tie to the ceremony that he wore to his daughter Alison's wedding. She and her wife are expecting their first child in the spring.

"Thanks to the millions out there who spent years pushing for change, and thanks to the dogged work of my colleagues, my grandchild will get to live in a world that respects and honors their mothers' marriage," he said.

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi told the crowd that "inside maneuvering only takes us so far," and she thanked activists adding impetus with "your impatience, your persistence and your patriotism."

Despite Tuesday's excitement, there was concern about the nationwide proliferation of conservative policies on gender issues at the state level.

Biden criticized the "callous, cynical laws introduced in the states targeting transgender children, terrifying families and criminalizing doctors who give children the care they need."

"Racism, antisemitism, homophobia, transphobia, they're all connected," Biden said. "But the antidote to hate is love."

Among the attendees were 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.

"It's not lost on me that our struggle for freedom hasn't been achieved," said Kelley Robinson, president of the Human Rights Campaign. "But this is a huge step forward, and we have to celebrate the victories we achieve and use that to fuel the future of the fight."

Robinson attended the ceremony with her wife and 1-year-old child.

"Our kids are watching this moment," she said. "It's very special to have them here and show them that we're on the right side of history."

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.

The signing marks 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 rights could be imperiled by the court's conservative majority. Thomas did not reference interracial marriage with the other cases he said should be reconsidered.

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 would not be required to issue marriage licenses to same-sex couples if the court overturns its 2015 ruling. 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.

Tuesday's ceremony marks another chapter in Biden's legacy on gay rights, which includes his surprise endorsement of marriage equality in 2012.

"What this is all about is a simple proposition: Who do you love?" Biden said then on NBC's "Meet the Press." "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."

A Gallup poll showed only 27% of U.S. adults supported same-sex unions in 1996, when President Bill Clinton signed the Defense of Marriage Act, which said the federal government would only recognize heterosexual marriages. Biden voted for the legislation.

By the time of Biden's 2012 interview, gay marriage remained controversial, but support had expanded to roughly half of U.S. adults, according to Gallup. Earlier this year, 71% said same-sex unions should be recognized by law.

Biden has pushed to expand LGBT rights since taking office. He 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.

## Oregon governor commutes all 17 of state's death sentences

By ANDREW SELSKY Associated Press

SALEM, Ore. (AP) — Oregon Gov. Kate Brown announced Tuesday that she is commuting the sentences of all of the state's 17 inmates awaiting execution, saying their death sentences will be changed to life in prison without the possibility of parole.

Brown, a Democrat with less than a month remaining in office, said she was using her executive clemency powers to commute the sentences and that her order will take effect on Wednesday.

"I have long believed that justice is not advanced by taking a life, and the state should not be in the business of executing people — even if a terrible crime placed them in prison," Brown said in a statement.

Rep. Vikki Breese-Iverson, leader of the minority Republicans in the Oregon House of Representatives, accused Brown of "a lack of responsible judgment."

"Gov. Brown has once again taken executive action with zero input from Oregonians and the Legislature," Breese-Iverson said in a statement. "Her decisions do not consider the impact the victims and families will suffer in the months and years to come. Democrats have consistently chosen criminals over victims."

In her announcement, Brown said victims experience "pain and uncertainty" as they wait for decades while individuals sit on death row.

"My hope is that this commutation will bring us a significant step closer to finality in these cases," she said.

Oregon has not executed a prisoner since 1997. In Brown's first news conference after becoming governor in 2015, she announced she would continue the death penalty moratorium imposed by her predecessor, former Gov. John Kitzhaber.

So far, 17 people have been executed in the U.S. in 2022, all by lethal injection and all in Texas, Oklahoma, Arizona, Missouri and Alabama, according to the Death Penalty Information Center.

Like Oregon, some other states are moving away from the death penalty.

In California, Democratic Gov. Gavin Newsom imposed a moratorium on executions in 2019 and shut down the state's execution chamber at San Quentin. A year ago, he moved to dismantle America's largest death row by moving all condemned inmates to other prisons within two years.

In Oregon, Brown is known for exercising her authority to grant clemency.

During the coronavirus pandemic, Brown granted clemency to nearly 1,000 people convicted of crimes.

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Two district attorneys, along with family members of crime victims, sued the governor and other state officials to stop the clemency actions. But the Oregon Court of Appeals ruled in August that she acted within her authority.

The prosecutors, in particular, objected to Brown's decision to allow 73 people convicted of murder, assault, rape and manslaughter while they were younger than 18 to apply for early release.

Brown noted that previously she granted commutations "to individuals who have demonstrated extraordinary growth and rehabilitation" but said that assessment didn't apply in her latest decision.

"This commutation is not based on any rehabilitative efforts by the individuals on death row," Brown said. "Instead, it reflects the recognition that the death penalty is immoral. It is an irreversible punishment that does not allow for correction."

The Oregon Department of Corrections announced in May 2020 it was phasing out its death row and reassigning those inmates to other special housing units or general population units at the state penitentiary in Salem and other state prisons.

Oregon voters reinstated the death penalty by popular vote in 1978, 14 years after they abolished it. The Oregon Supreme Court declared it unconstitutional in 1981 and Oregon voters reinstated it in 1984, according to the Death Penalty Information Center.

A list of inmates with death sentences provided by the governor's office had 17 names.

But the state Department of Corrections' website lists 21 names. One of those prisoners, however, had his death sentence overturned by the Oregon Supreme Court in 2021 because the crime he committed was no longer eligible for the death penalty under a 2019 law.

Officials in the governor's office and the corrections department did not immediately respond to an attempt to reconcile the lists.

## **EXPLAINER: Why fusion could be a clean-energy breakthrough**

By DOUG GLASS and MICHAEL PHILLIS Associated Press

The major advance in fusion research announced in Washington on Tuesday was decades in coming, with scientists for the first time able to engineer a reaction that produced more power than was used to ignite it.

Using powerful lasers to focus enormous energy on a miniature capsule half the size of a BB, scientists at the Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory in California started a reaction that produced about 1.5 times more energy than was contained in the light used to produce it.

There are decades more to wait before fusion could one day — maybe — be used to produce electricity in the real world. But the promise of fusion is enticing. If harnessed, it could produce nearly limitless, carbon-free energy to supply humanity's electricity needs without raising global temperatures and worsening climate change.

At the press conference in Washington, the scientists celebrated.

"So, this is pretty cool," said Marvin "Marv" Adams, the National Nuclear Security Administration deputy administrator for defense programs.

"Fusion fuel in the capsule got squeezed, fusion reactions started. This had all happened before — 100 times before — but last week for the first time they designed this experiment so that the fusion fuel stayed hot enough, dense enough and round enough for long enough that it ignited," said Adams. "And it produced more energy than the lasers had deposited."

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 hope 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.

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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 COULD 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.

Crossing the line of net energy gain marks a major achievement, said Carolyn Kuranz, a University of Michigan professor and experimental plasma physicist.

“Of course, now people are thinking, well, how do we go to 10 times more or 100 times more? There’s always some next step,” Kuranz said. “But I think that’s a clear line of, yes, we have achieved ignition in the laboratory.”

## HOW ARE SCIENTISTS TRYING TO DO THIS?

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

## WHY IS FUSION SO HARD?

It takes more than extreme heat and pressure. It also takes precision. The energy from the lasers must be applied precisely to counteract the outward force of the fusion fuel, according to Stephanie Diem, an engineering physics professor at the University of Wisconsin–Madison.

And that’s just to prove net energy gain is possible. It’s even harder to produce electricity in a power plant.

For example, the lab’s lasers can only fire a few times a day. To viably produce energy, they would need to fire rapidly and capsules would need to be inserted multiple times a minute, or even faster, Kuranz said.

Another challenge is to increase efficiency, said Jeremy Chittenden, a professor at Imperial College in London specializing in plasma physics. The lasers used at Livermore require a lot of electrical energy, and researchers need to figure out a way to reproduce their results in a much more cost-effective way, he said.

## US poised to approve Patriot missile battery for Ukraine

By LOLITA C. BALDOR and MATTHEW LEE Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The U.S. is poised to approve sending a Patriot missile battery to Ukraine, finally agreeing to an urgent request from Ukrainian leaders desperate for more robust weapons to shoot down incoming Russian missiles, U.S. officials said Tuesday.

The approval is likely to come later this week and could be announced as early as Thursday, said three officials, who spoke on condition of anonymity because the decision is not final and has not been made public. Two of the officials said the Patriot will come from Pentagon stocks and be moved from another country overseas.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy pressed Western leaders as recently as Monday to provide more advanced weapons to help his country in its war with Russia. The Patriot would be the most advanced surface-to-air missile system the West has provided to Ukraine to help repel Russian aerial attacks.

During a video conference on Monday, Zelenskyy told host Germany and other leaders of the Group of

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Seven industrial powers that his country needed long-range missiles, modern tanks, artillery, 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." And he said 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."

White House and Pentagon leaders have said consistently that providing Ukraine with additional air defenses is a priority, and Patriot missiles have been under consideration for some time. Officials said that as the winter closed in and the Russian bombardment of civilian infrastructure escalated, that consideration took on increased priority.

Pentagon and State Department officials at briefings on Tuesday would not confirm the plan to provide Patriots to Ukraine, repeatedly saying they had nothing to announce.

U.S. officials had balked at providing the weapons to Ukraine because they could be considered an escalation that would trigger a response from Moscow. The Patriot also requires significant training and there were concerns that U.S. troops would have been required to operate it. Biden has flatly rejected sending any U.S. combat troops to Ukraine.

Asked about training, Brig. Gen. Patrick Ryder, the Pentagon press secretary, said that in general the U.S. takes those needs into consideration when providing complicated weapons systems to Ukraine, such as the High Mobility Artillery Rocket Systems, known as HIMARS. Currently U.S. forces are training Ukrainian troops on a number of systems, including the HIMARS, in other European countries, such as Germany.

The administration's potential approval of a Patriot battery was first reported by CNN.

According to officials, the U.S. plan would be to send one Patriot battery. A truck-mounter Patriot battery includes up to eight launchers, each of which can hold four missiles.

The entire system, which includes a phased array radar, a control station, computers and generators, typically requires about 90 soldiers to operate and maintain, however only three soldiers are needed to actually fire it, according to the Army.

Patriot missile systems and other similar sophisticated surface-to-air weapons are in major demand among U.S. allies, including eastern European nations worried that they could be Russia's next targets. The U.S. has a limited number of the systems, and has deployed them across the the Middle East and Europe in recent years to help allies protect against the threat of incoming ballistic missiles from countries such as Iran.

## LA racism scandal prompts new round of city council protests

By MICHAEL R. BLOOD AP Political Writer

LOS ANGELES (AP) — The City Council was disrupted Tuesday by another round of boisterous, foul-mouthed protests after a councilman facing widespread calls to resign for his involvement in a racism scandal defiantly returned to the chamber and took his seat.

Councilman Kevin de Leon's appearance prompted some council members to walk out amid shouting and chanting from rival groups in the audience, while council President Paul Krekorian ordered a recess amid the outburst.

The turmoil represented a reprise of a Friday meeting where de Leon appeared in the ornate chamber for the first time since mid-October. He is the only council member involved in the scandal still resisting calls from President Joe Biden to step down, while continuing to collect his annual salary of nearly \$229,000 — among the most lucrative paydays for city council members in the nation.

Protesters were shouting and waving signs in the audience throughout the meeting. During a public comment period, most of those who spoke denounced de Leon as a racist and called on the councilman to resign, but some supporters defended him and lauded his work in his district, which includes downtown Los Angeles and the heavily Latino Boyle Heights neighborhood.

The continuing disruptions turned the meeting at times into a veritable Theater of the Absurd, with



protesters screaming profanities, city staffers pleading for calm and police evicting some protesters who refused repeated orders to settle down.

When de Leon appeared about midway through the meeting, more shouting ensued, some council members immediately left the room and Council President Paul Krekorian quickly called a recess. The council later resumed business, enacting Mayor Karen Bass' signature proposal declaring a state of emergency for homelessness that she promised to propose on her first day in office.

"This is a monumental day for the city," Bass said in a statement after the vote. "This declaration will enable us to move faster and unlock every tool possible" to take on the crisis, with over 40,000 unhoused people living in tent encampments or rusty RVs that have spread into virtually every neighborhood.

The scandal was triggered by a leaked recording of crude, racist comments from a year-old meeting involving de Leon, then-council President Nury Martinez, labor leader Ron Herrera and then-Councilman Gil Cedillo — all Latino Democrats — in which they plotted to expand their political power at the expense of Black voters during a realignment of council district boundaries.

Martinez and Herrera resigned within days of the disclosure of the recording, and Cedillo vanished from public sight. Cedillo's term ended Monday after he lost a reelection bid earlier this year, leaving de Leon as the only person involved in the scandal still holding his job.

It remains unknown who made the recording that was posted on a website, or why.

De Leon has apologized repeatedly but said he will not resign. He argues that he wants to continue working on homelessness, fallout from the pandemic and the threat of renter evictions in his district.

There is no legal avenue for his colleagues to remove him — the council can only suspend a member when criminal charges are pending.

Stripped of his ability to participate on council committees, facing widespread pressure to resign and after an extended absence from council meetings, de Leon has been maneuvering to return to the public sphere, despite being reviled by colleagues who say they cannot work with him.

Last week, he scuffled with an activist who heckled him at a holiday toy giveaway.

## **FTX founder charged in scheme to defraud crypto investors**

By KEN SWEET and FATIMA HUSSEIN AP Business Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — The U.S. government charged Samuel Bankman-Fried, the founder and former CEO of cryptocurrency exchange FTX, with a host of financial crimes on Tuesday, alleging he intentionally deceived customers and investors to enrich himself and others, while playing a central role in the company's multibillion-dollar collapse.

Federal prosecutors said Bankman-Fried devised "a scheme and artifice to defraud" FTX's customers and investors beginning in 2019, the year it was founded. He illegally diverted their money to cover expenses, debts and risky trades at the crypto hedge fund he started in 2017, Alameda Research, and to make lavish real estate purchases and large political donations, prosecutors said in a 13-page indictment.

Bankman-Fried, 30, was arrested Monday in the Bahamas at the request of the U.S. government, and remains in custody after being denied bail.

He has been charged with eight criminal violations, ranging from wire fraud to money laundering to conspiracy to commit fraud. If convicted of all the charges, Bankman-Fried — referred to by crypto enthusiasts as "SBF" — could face decades in jail.

At a news conference on Tuesday, U.S. Attorney Damian Williams in New York called it "one of the biggest frauds in American history," and said the investigation is ongoing and fast-moving.

Bankman-Fried has fallen hard and fast from the top of the cryptocurrency industry he helped to evangelize. FTX filed for bankruptcy on Nov. 11, when it ran out of money after the cryptocurrency equivalent of a bank run.

Before the bankruptcy, he was considered by many in Washington and on Wall Street as a wunderkind of digital currencies, someone who could help take them mainstream, in part by working with policymakers to bring more oversight and trust to the industry.

Bankman-Fried had been worth tens of billions of dollars — at least on paper — and was able to attract

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celebrities like Tom Brady or former politicians like Tony Blair and Bill Clinton to his conferences at luxury resorts in the Bahamas. One prominent Silicon Valley firm, Sequoia Capital, invested hundreds of millions of dollars in FTX.

Sporting shorts and t-shirts to contrast himself with the buttoned-down world of Wall Street, he was the subject of fawning media profiles, a vocal advocate for a type of charitable giving known as "effective altruism," and garnered millions of Twitter followers.

But since FTX's implosion, Bankman-Fried and his company have been likened to other disgraced financiers and companies, such as Bernie Madoff and Enron.

The criminal indictment against Bankman-Fried and "others" at FTX is on top of civil charges announced Tuesday by the Securities and Exchange Commission and the Commodity Futures Trading Commission. The SEC alleges Bankman-Fried defrauded FTX customers by making loans to himself and other FTX executives, and illegally using investors' money to buy real estate for himself and his family.

No other FTX executives were named in the indictment, nor was the CEO of Alameda Research, Caroline Ellison. Also not named in the indictment: Bankman-Fried's father, Joseph Bankman, a Stanford University law professor who was considered an adviser to his son.

U.S. authorities said they will try to claw back any of Bankman-Fried's financial gains from the alleged scheme.

A lawyer for Bankman-Fried, Mark S. Cohen, said Tuesday he is "reviewing the charges with his legal team and considering all of his legal options."

At a congressional hearing Tuesday that was scheduled before Bankman-Fried's arrest, the new CEO brought in to steer FTX through its bankruptcy proceedings leveled harsh criticism. He said there was scant oversight of customers' money and "very few rules" about how their funds could be used.

John Ray III told members of the House Financial Services Committee that the collapse of FTX, resulting in the loss of more than \$7 billion, was the culmination of months, or even years, of bad decisions and poor financial controls.

"This is not something that happened overnight or in a context of a week," he said.

He added: "This is just plain, old-fashioned embezzlement, taking money from others and using it for your own purposes."

Before his arrest, Bankman-Fried had been holed up in his luxury compound in the Bahamas. U.S. authorities are expected to request his extradition to the U.S.

Bankman-Fried was denied bail at a court hearing in the Bahamas on Tuesday after prosecutors argued he was a flight risk, according to Our News, a broadcast news company based there. He will remain in custody at the Bahamas department of corrections until Feb. 8, Our News reported.

Bankman-Fried's was previously one of the world's wealthiest people on paper; at one point his net worth reached \$26.5 billion, according to Forbes. He was a prominent personality in Washington, donating millions of dollars to Democrats and Republicans. U.S. Attorney Williams said Tuesday that Bankman-Fried made "tens of millions of dollars" in illegal campaign donations.

His wealth unraveled quickly last month, when reports called into question the strength of FTX's balance sheet. As customers sought to withdraw billions of dollars, FTX could not satisfy the requests: their money was gone.

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

Instead, the complaint says, Bankman-Fried diverted customers' funds to Alameda Research without telling them.

"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.

In the weeks after FTX's collapse, but before his arrest, Bankman-Fried gave interviews to several news

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organizations in which he grasped for ways to explain what happened.

For example, Bankman-Fried said he did not “knowingly” misuse customers’ funds, and that he believes angry customers will eventually get their money back.

At Tuesday’s congressional hearing, the new FTX CEO bluntly disputed those assertions: “We will never get all these assets back,” Ray said.

Jack Sharman, an attorney at Lightfoot, Franklin & White, said Bankman-Fried’s recent comments to the media could be damaging, admissible evidence in court. “Those statements in that speaking tour were in no way helpful to his cause,” Sharman said.

In its complaint, the SEC challenged Bankman-Fried’s recent statements that FTX and its customers were victims of a sudden market collapse that overwhelmed safeguards that had been in place.

“FTX operated behind a veneer of legitimacy,” said Gurbir Grewal, director of the SEC’s enforcement division. “That veneer wasn’t just thin, it was fraudulent.”

The collapse of FTX — which followed other cryptocurrency debacles earlier this year — is adding urgency to efforts to regulate the industry.

Yesha Yadav, a law professor at Vanderbilt University who specializes in financial and securities regulation, said U.S. lawmakers and regulators have been too slow to act, but that is likely to change.

“Lawmakers are clearly under pressure to do something, given that so many people have lost their money,” she said.

## AP’s top albums 2022: ‘Renaissance,’ ‘Motomami,’ Bad Bunny

By The Associated Press undefined

Ten of the best albums of the year, as selected by The Associated Press entertainment journalists.

BEYONCÉ, “RENAISSANCE”

Few would be shocked that Beyoncé’s “Renaissance” would make our top albums list, but just because it’s low hanging fruit doesn’t negate how delicious it is. Dropping her first album in six years, Queen Bey once again proved why she’s worth the wait. Led by the multi-format dance track “Break My Soul” and the TikTok-crazed “Cuff It” which both reached No. 1 on various Billboard Charts including “Soul” reaching the top of the Hot 100, “Renaissance” boasted plenty of fan favorites including “Cozy,” “Alien Superstar,” “Church Girl,” “Plastic Off the Sofa” and “Virgo’s Groove.” But beyond the two-stepping and body-rolling was the messaging within the music, championing Black women and reminding the LGBTQ community they have an ally in her. Whether meticulously planned or purely coincidental her highness released the album as the coronavirus pandemic moves behind us, if her goal was to get us out of our houses and out dancing again, then mission accomplished. — Gary Gerard Hamilton

THE WEEKND, “DAWN FM”

Making a low-key entry last January, “Dawn FM” is a concept album that The Weeknd likened to listening to a radio station in purgatory, hence its mix of styles and effects from the ‘70s, ‘80s and ‘90s mixed in with modern production. Much of it is downright weird: The fake British accent, a spoken-word interlude by Quincy Jones, the funny radio ads, narration by Jim Carrey and the singer digitally aged on the cover. It is also brilliant, a dance record with lyrics of hopelessness, with nods to Michael Jackson, New Wave, neo-soul, Prince and Jimmy Jam and Terry Lewis. If this is what purgatory sounds like, heaven is overrated. — Mark Kennedy

ROSALÍA, “MOTOMAMI”

Spanish singer Rosalía turned three years of anguish and home sickness into mega successful third studio album “Motomami” (“biker chick”). It was perhaps impossible not to make lemonade out of lemons for such a bold artist whose ease in playing with genres and words are her greatest strengths. Described as an alternative reggaeton record, the hefty 16-track “Motomami” delivers something for everyone and every mood. From “Candy’s” stripped down reggaeton, to “Chicken Teriyaki”’s playfulness and “Diablo”’s experimental sound, “Hentai’s” piano power ballad, or “La Fama’s” classic Latin beats, Rosalía shows her prowess as a singer. Her four Latin Grammys for the album were just the beginning. Next stop: the world.

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— Cristina Jaleru

## ZACH BRYAN, "AMERICAN HEARTBREAK"

In the age of streaming, the musical floodgates are wide open as artists release multiple projects in a single year: EPs, double albums, deluxe albums and on and on. Country artist Zach Bryan upped the ante by dropping the 34-song album "American Heartbreak" as his major label debut in 2022. The Navy veteran's stories span the vast landscape of his Oklahoma upbringing with coming-of-age ragers like "Heavy Eyes," the wanderlust on "Highway Boys" and odes to the towns he's outgrown like "Oklahoma City." His stripped down production and confessional, narrative lyrics have earned him comparisons to Jason Isbell and Taylor Swift alike (He's a Swiftie). But he's at his best when he's describing the colors of those Western vistas in the standout track, "Something in the Orange," as he dwells in the loneliness of heartbreak. Bryan has proved he's providing both quality and quantity. — Kristin M. Hall

## LARRY JUNE, "SPACESHIP ON THE BLADE"

Drake. Kendrick Lamar. Nas. These hip-hop heavyweights released some of the best albums of the year. Some might even think Earl Sweatshirt's "Sick" was just as top notch. But the musician who has stood above them was rapper Larry June through "Spaceships on the Blade." It's the San Francisco-based rapper's 10th solo studio album and most impressive body of work since his 2018 debut. With his laid-back demeanor and infectious ad lib "Aye, Aye, Aye," June thrives throughout on songs such as "Extra of Um" featuring Babyface Ray, "Don't Check Me," "Another Day, Pt. 2" and "Breakfast in Monaco." On well-produced tracks, he takes listeners on a journey of a successful hustler who makes driving luxury cars, living in high-rise condominiums and spending \$50,000 during vacation seem like an easy feat. But he also shows a deeper side of his rap persona. On "Appreciate It All," he talks about grinding hard for his son, learning how to love from his mother and acquiring real estate in hopes of achieving generational wealth. Throughout "Spaceships," June is a force to be reckoned with. — Jonathan Landrum Jr.

## JACKSON WANG, "MAGIC MAN"

Former pop idol Jackson Wang turned solo artist turned "Magic Man" on his sophomore album. With an incisive, cohesive sound that harks back to '90s rock mixed with '80s synths, Wang's record shows he's ready for a leading role; the character he plays in "Magic Man" is a debonair, seductive stranger who likes the pleasures of life. The singer rises up to the challenge of delivering some sultry vocals off the back of classic guitar riffs in "Blow," "Cruel" and "Champagne Cool." But where it all takes off is the pop ditty "Drive It Like You Stole It," which lights up the discoball section of the amygdala. Some magic stuff indeed. — Cristina Jaleru

## SOCCER MOMMY, "SOMETIMES, FOREVER"

Sophie Allison and her band Soccer Mommy's third album is a wonderfully varied mix, from the industrial harshness of "Unholy Affliction" to the eerie "Following Eyes" to the airy "With U." The title "Sometimes, Forever," suggests a push-and-pull of light and dark, happiness and sadness, both jumping from song to song but also within songs. One connection with another album on this list is its avant-garde producer Oneohtrix Point Never, who helped shape The Weeknd's "Dawn FM." He gave Soccer Mommy a layered, dark-synth gloom. One highlight is "Shotgun," a song of devotion, with the lyric "Cold beer and ice cream is all we keep/The only things we really need." — Mark Kennedy

## BLXST, "BEFORE YOU GO"

Blxst is considered as the preeminent voice of Los Angeles R&B after the release of his mixtape album "No Love Lost" in 2020. But the singer-rapper expanded his reach with his impeccable album "Before You Go" along with his recent Grammy nominations for his feature work on Kendrick Lamar's single "Die Hard." On "Before You Go," he delivers an assortment of catchy hooks and smooth melodies that earned praise from critics and fans alike. He cleverly works through the matters of handling relationships on "About You" and "Still Omw," a fan favorite. He talks about experiencing the ocean views and driving down the Pacific Coast Highway while escaping the fake element of his hometown in "Fake Love in LA," featuring Arin Ray. He mentions him carrying the torch of delivering quality music after the loss of Nipsey Hussle, thinking big and being blessed with a strong support system on "Couldn't Wait for It" with Rick Ross. In all, Blxst



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put together a full collection of infectious songs from start to finish. — Jonathan Landrum Jr.

CHARLEY CROCKETT, "THE MAN FROM WACO"

Americana standout Charley Crockett sets the scene in his cinematic "The Man From Waco," an album that interlinks Western filmmaking, the mythmaking of cowboy culture and the R&B and soul of the Gulf states. The Texas-born singer is a prolific independent musician with a strong hustle formed in his early street musician years. The album's title track centers on a lonesome gunman who accidentally kills his lover in a jealous rage, with a beautiful horn section over the loping acoustic guitar. Crockett punches deep in the Stax-inspired '70s groove on "I'm Just a Clown," and a swinging piano and trumpet winds along in "Trinity River." Crockett even takes a shot at completing an unfinished Bob Dylan track from outtakes of songs written for the "Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid" soundtrack, which Crockett transformed into "Tom Turkey." Crockett's old soul isn't just a nostalgic trick, as this post-modern troubadour is creating new ties to classic themes. — Kristin M. Hall

BAD BUNNY, "UN VERANO SIN TI"

Bad Bunny is a bonafide global superstar, and if you weren't aware previously, "Un Verano Sin Ti" snapped you into reality. Spending 13 weeks at No. 1 on the Billboard 200, the Puerto Rican artist expertly blended reggaeton, pop and EDM, effortlessly transporting you to a beach on his home island for a temporary break from real world stressors. Party-ready songs such as "Tití Me Preguntó" and "Me Porto Bonito" featuring Chencho Corleone have each racked up half a billion views on YouTube, and he headlined arguably the biggest tour of the year. Despite ascending to the realm of one of the world's biggest artists, he also used his music to criticize issues on the island such as gentrification and repeated power outages. Did it matter to me that "Un Verano Sin Ti" is mainly in Spanish? Not at all. While dancing, his music motivates you be curious and learn more, and that's what great art does. — Gary Gerard Hamilton

## Review: 'Avatar: The Way of Water' is a big screen blast

By LINDSEY BAHR AP Film Writer

It is impossible to talk about "Avatar: The Way of Water" without sounding hyperbolic. But James Cameron's sequel is a truly dazzling cinematic experience that will have you floating on a blockbuster high.

No matter if you've spent a second of your life in the past 13 years thinking about what's happening on Pandora or how Jake Sully (Sam Worthington) and Neytiri (Zoe Saldana) are getting on, assuming you remember their characters' names. "The Way of Water" will make awe-struck believers out of even "Avatar" agnostics like me, at least for three hours and 12 minutes. The film isn't just visually compelling, either, it's spiritually rich as well — a simple but penetrating story about family and the natural world that is galaxies better than the first.

About that run time: Three hours and 12 minutes sounds excessive, but there is something decidedly decadent about really committing that much time to a movie in a theater. When the filmmaker is purposeful with that time, as Cameron is and many others have been before him, it's a uniquely rewarding experience. In other words, it's not a big ask. And you'll forget all about checking the time from the first shot of Pandora and Jake's earnest exposition about what's been going on in the past decade.

He and Neytiri have three kids now, Neteyam (Jamie Flatters), Lo'ak (Britain Dalton), Tuk (Trinity Jo-Li Bliss) and an adopted teenage daughter, Kiri (Sigourney Weaver), and they're happy living in the forest. "Happiness is simple," he says. "Who ever thought that a jughead like me could crack the code?" So, of course, it can't last. The humans are on the hunt for Jake, with a familiar antagonist leading the charge. And soon his family is on the run, taking up home in another part of Pandora, on the water with a new tribe led by Ronal (Kate Winslet) and Tonowari (Cliff Curtis) who reluctantly grant them refuge and try to teach them how to live on the water.

It's worth noting that Cameron has not stuffed the film with mind-numbing, wall-to-wall action and needlessly complicated plot. There are long stretches of movie where we're simply exploring the environment with the characters, delighting in the intricacies of a reef or basking in the beauty of giant sea creatures. Sometimes we're just sitting in the water with Kiri who is also sitting in the water. It is not advancing

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the action in any obvious way. It is not even really developing characters. It just is, and it's serene. You imagine that anyone without his clout would have a hard time justifying something similar.

The action is there, too, of course, and it's exciting because you've become invested in the family and worried about the kids who are never where they're supposed to be and are often in danger because of it. And though we know there are more sequels coming, and one already wrapped, this is not the kind of franchise where anyone is guaranteed to get a fake superhero death. Sure there is some "Avatar" silliness, including the fact that the word "bro" is uttered about 8,000 times, but there is something admirable about the straightforward dialogue and emotions at play, too. No one is snarking their way through this ordeal.

"Never doubt James Cameron" has become a bit of a rallying cry lately, at least among those left on Twitter. It's all the more extraordinary as the once-mythical sequels had become a kind of joke in the years since the first movie. Even as "The Way of Water" release date actually approached the "who cares?" chorus intensified. Had anyone really thought twice about "Avatar"? But Cameron knows his way around a thrilling sequel, and the water for that matter (and references his own greatest hits in this film, too).

But then people saw it and the tune changed. There is something comforting about the fact that we are capable of intense, collective cultural whiplash. That "who cares?" can turn to uncynical amazement in an instant. Is that the magic of the movies? Of continuing to push the bounds of the big screen experience? Of betting big on weird-sounding stories about giant blue environmentalists instead of superheroes every so often? Maybe it's just the magic of James Cameron.

"Avatar: The Way of Water," a 20th Century Studios release in theaters Thursday, is rated PG-13 by the Motion Picture Association for "partial nudity, intense action, sequences of strong violence, some strong language." Running time: 192 minutes. Three and a half stars out of four.

## Messi, Argentina beat Croatia 3-0 to reach World Cup final

By STEVE DOUGLAS AP Sports Writer

LUSAIL, Qatar (AP) — Lionel Messi bent over, clutched his left hamstring and appeared to grimace, immediately spreading panic through the soccer world but especially among all Argentines.

Was their superstar — their idol — injured? Was he going to have to come off early in the World Cup semifinals?

No such luck for Croatia.

Before long, Messi was producing perhaps the best performance of his record-tying 25 appearances at the World Cup, leading Argentina to a 3-0 victory over Croatia on Tuesday that set up a meeting with either France or Morocco in Sunday's final.

Messi is back in soccer's biggest match on his mission to win the game's greatest prize for the first time. At 35, he could hardly be playing any better.

Messi converted a penalty and played a part in the other two goals by Julián Álvarez — one with an outrageous piece of skill that brought roars of approval from Argentina's huge following — to turn an initially tense occasion into a procession.

"A lot is going through my head — it's very emotional seeing all of this," Messi said in a post-match interview on the field as he looked up at Argentina's celebrating, scarf-waving supporters. "To see the fans — 'the family' — during the whole tournament was so incredible. We're going to the final, which is what we wanted."

It will be Messi's second World Cup final — Argentina lost the other one to Germany in 2014 — in what might be his last appearance at the tournament.

The stage is set for a player widely regarded as one of the game's best, if not the absolute best, to go out on the ultimate high.

He is thrilling his legion of fans along the way.

His swivel and driving run to set up the third goal for Álvarez in the 69th minute left Josko Gvardiol — one of the best defenders at the World Cup — grasping at thin air and epitomized Messi's confidence and swagger.

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He is embracing the responsibility of leading Argentina to its third World Cup title, scoring in five of his six games in Qatar.

He even had a penalty saved in the one game in which he didn't score.

"I am honored to train him and see him play," said Argentina coach Lionel Scaloni, who was in tears in the post-match celebrations. "Every time you see him play, it's a huge source of motivation for his teammates, fans and the whole world."

Croatia failed in its bid to reach a second straight World Cup final after conceding two goals in a five-minute span from the 34th, just when the team was looking comfortable at Lusail Stadium and Messi was raising concerns by rubbing his hamstring.

Maybe it was a ruse. Messi was soon toying with his opponents in a way only he can and put Argentina ahead by lifting his penalty into the top corner after Alvarez was taken out by Dominik Livakovic after clipping the ball past the Croatia goalkeeper.

Alvarez scored himself in the 39th after a surging run from halfway, which started after he collected Messi's short pass. Then came the crowning moment, Alvarez's second goal, after Messi took Gvardiol for a ride in the right corner.

It was one game too far for Croatia, which had beaten Japan and Brazil on penalties in the knockout stage, and star midfielder Luka Modric, who — at 37 — has likely played his final World Cup match.

Summing up a frustrating game for the little midfield magician, he was substituted in the 81st minute and had a bright red nose after the ball slammed into his face moments earlier.

"The first goal took the match in a different direction," Croatia coach Zlatko Dalić said. "It's the true Messi we all expected to see."

Argentina maintained its record of never having lost in the World Cup semifinals and has reached the final for the sixth time.

Those dark days after losing to Saudi Arabia in its opening group match seem so long ago now for Argentina, which will be hard to stop in the final with Messi playing this well.

"Even though we lost our first match, we were confident that this group was going to push forward," Messi said. "We know what we are, and we called on the fans to believe in us."

## MESSI RECORDS

Messi became Argentina's record scorer at World Cups with his third penalty of the tournament taking him to 11 goals in total — one more than Gabriel Batistuta. He also tied the record for most appearances at the World Cup by playing for the 25th time, the same number as Lothar Matthäus of Germany.

## ALVAREZ

The 22-year-old Álvarez didn't start the tournament as Argentina's striker. He only took the place of Lautaro Martinez in the third group game and now has four goals, one behind Messi and Mbappé. He is the youngest player to score twice in a World Cup semifinal match since a 17-year-old Pele scored a hat trick in 1958.

## The AP Interview: Hutchinson says Trump worst choice for GOP

By ANDREW DeMILLO Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Arkansas Gov. Asa Hutchinson, who is considering running for president, on Tuesday called a third Donald Trump White House bid the "worst scenario" for Republicans and said his call for terminating parts of the Constitution hurts the country.

In an interview with The Associated Press, Hutchinson said he planned to make a decision early next year on whether to seek the Republican presidential nomination. Hutchinson, 72, leaves office in January after serving eight years as Arkansas' governor.

He's part of a growing cohort of Republicans eyeing a White House run at a challenging moment for the party, which fell short of its hopes for sweeping victories in last month's midterm elections. Trump, who has already announced another run for the presidency, has faced blame from some Republicans for contributing to the GOP's lackluster performance by elevating candidates and issues that didn't resonate

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with voters during the general election.

Hutchinson has previously said he wouldn't support Trump's candidacy in 2024, but on Tuesday, he didn't rule out backing Trump if he becomes the Republican nominee.

"That's really the worst scenario," Hutchinson said of another matchup between Trump and Biden. "That's almost the scenario that Biden wishes for. And that's probably how he got elected the first time. It became, you know, a binary choice for the American people between the challenges that we saw in the Trump presidency, particularly the closing days, versus Biden, who he made it that choice."

Hutchinson also derided Trump's recent statement calling for terminating parts of the Constitution to overturn the 2020 election as "so out of line and out of step with America that it almost does not deserve a response."

"It hurts our country," he said. "I mean, any leader, former president that says suspend the Constitution is tearing at the fabric of our democracy. And so we want to make sure that the people know that it's Republicans that support the rule of law."

Hutchinson said he's measuring how much financial support he'd have for mounting a presidential bid, but said he's also testing to see what kind of response his message is getting as he weighs a run. Hutchinson, who's been a regular presence on Sunday news talk shows, said he's been reaching out to other governors, members of Congress and evangelical leaders for advice on a possible run.

"The midterm elections made it clear to me that the GOP needs a bold agenda, but also new voices that's articulating what our party stands for, the direction we want to take our country," Hutchinson said.

Hutchinson said he didn't view the midterms as a rejection of Republicans overall as much as of specific candidates.

"We're very disappointed that because of poor candidates, poor messaging, looking back instead of looking forward, we didn't do as well as we should have in the midterm election," he said.

Hutchinson is among several Republican candidates who are weighing a presidential run. Others include former Vice President Mike Pence, Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis, and former Secretary of State Mike Pompeo. Another Arkansan, Sen. Tom Cotton, announced he wasn't seeking the Republican nomination.

Despite the potentially crowded field, Hutchinson said he doesn't expect a repeat of 2016 when GOP rivals hoping to block Trump's candidacy instead split the vote. Hutchinson said he thinks the early primary and caucus states will winnow the number of rivals to Trump very quickly.

"I think it will be much more methodical this cycle than what we've seen in previous years," he said. "And I think that competition is good and it's healthy."

Though he's offering himself up as a new voice, Hutchinson has been a fixture in Arkansas politics going back to the 1980s when the state was predominantly Democratic. Hutchinson is a former congressman who served in former President George W. Bush's administration as the head of the Drug Enforcement Administration and an undersecretary of the Department of Homeland Security.

Hutchinson has ramped up his criticism of Trump in recent months, including a speech at the Reagan Library where he recounted his experience as a U.S. attorney who prosecuted white supremacists in Arkansas in the 1980s. Hutchinson contrasted that background with Trump having dinner with a Holocaust-denying white nationalist and a rapper who has spewed antisemitic conspiracies.

Hutchinson said that contrast is one of the reasons he thinks his voice may be needed in the presidential race. Republicans need figures who speak the truth and are not worried "whether you're satisfying somebody down in Mar-a-Lago or not," he said.

Hutchinson earned the ire of Trump last year when the governor vetoed legislation that would ban gender-affirming care for minors. GOP lawmakers overrode Hutchinson's veto and enacted the ban, which has been blocked by a federal judge.

Trump called Hutchinson a RINO — Republican in Name Only — for vetoing the ban. The governor's successor, former White House press secretary Sarah Huckabee Sanders, has said she would have signed the ban into law.

Hutchinson, who has said he would have signed the measure if it was limited to gender-affirming surgery,



called Arkansas' legislation "one of the most extreme in the country."

A vocal opponent of abortion who has signed other restrictions on transgender youth into law, Hutchinson said Republicans need to tread carefully on culture wars issues.

"The key thing is for Republicans and conservatives is to think about let's not instinctively say, well, let's use the power of government to accomplish our social agenda or our cultural agenda," he said. "You know, our first response is a strength in the home, the strength and the families and the communities and our churches and synagogues strengthen those because that's the greatest impact on our culture."

Nearing the end of his eight years as governor, Hutchinson is touting his work on tax cuts and on expanding computer science courses as his top accomplishments. Hutchinson, who wrapped up his one-year term as National Governors Association chairman in July, is term limited and could not seek reelection. He said he thinks it's important to have a governor running for the office.

"I'm known for having a steady hand in leadership, but also a bold agenda," he said. "And I think that's a good combination for a leader of the country."

## **EXPLAINER: How Elon Musk is changing what you see on Twitter**

By MATT O'BRIEN, BARBARA ORTUTAY and DAVID KLEPPER The Associated Press

What you're seeing in your feed on Twitter is changing. But how?

The social media platform's new owner, Elon Musk, has been trying to prove through giving selected journalists access to some of the company's internal communications dubbed "The Twitter Files" that officials from the previous leadership team allegedly suppressed right-wing voices.

This week, Musk disbanded a key advisory group, the Trust and Safety Council, made up of dozens of independent civil, human rights and other organizations. The company formed the council in 2016 to address hate speech, harassment, child exploitation, suicide, self-harm and other problems on the platform.

What do the developments mean for what shows up in your feed every day? For one, the moves show that Musk is prioritizing improving Twitter's perception on the U.S. political right. He's not promising unfettered free speech as much as a shift in what messages get amplified or hidden.

### **WHAT ARE THE TWITTER FILES?**

Musk bought Twitter for \$44 billion in late October and since then has partnered with a group of handpicked journalists including former Rolling Stone writer Matt Taibbi and opinion columnist Bari Weiss. Earlier this month, they began publishing — in the form of a series of tweets — about actions that Twitter previously took against accounts thought to have violated its content rules. They've included screenshots of emails and messaging board comments reflecting internal conversations within Twitter about those decisions.

Weiss wrote on Dec. 8 that the "authors have broad and expanding access to Twitter's files. The only condition we agreed to was that the material would first be published on Twitter."

Weiss published the fifth and most recent installment Monday about the conversations leading up to Twitter's Jan. 8, 2021 decision to permanently suspend then-President Donald Trump's account "due to the risk of further incitement of violence" following the deadly U.S. Capitol insurrection two days earlier. The internal communications show at least one unnamed staffer doubting that one of the tweets was an incitement of violence; it also reveals executives' reaction to an advocacy campaign from some employees pushing for tougher action on Trump.

### **WHAT'S MISSING?**

Musk's Twitter Files reveal some of the internal decision-making process affecting mostly right-wing Twitter accounts that the company decided broke its rules against hateful conduct, as well as those that violated the platform's rules against spreading harmful misinformation about COVID-19.

But the reports are largely based on anecdotes about a handful of high-profile accounts and the tweets don't reveal numbers about the scale of suspensions and which views were more likely to be affected. The journalists appear to have unfettered access to the company's Slack messaging board — visible to all employees — but have relied on Twitter executives to deliver other documents.

### **THE TWITTER FILES MENTION SHADOWBANNING. WHAT'S THAT?**

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In 2018, after then-CEO Jack Dorsey said Twitter would focus on the “health” of conversations on the platform, the company outlined a new approach intended to reduce the impact of disruptive users, or trolls, by reading “behavioral signals” that tend to indicate when users are more interested in blowing up conversations than in contributing.

Twitter has long said it used a technique described internally as “visibility filtering” to reduce the reach of some accounts that might violate its rules but don’t rise to the level of being suspended. But it rejected allegations it was secretly “shadowbanning” conservative viewpoints.

Screenshots showing an employee’s view of prominent user accounts disclosed through the Twitter Files show how that filtering works in practice. It’s also led Musk to call for changes to make that more transparent.

“Twitter is working on a software update that will show your true account status, so you know clearly if you’ve been shadowbanned, the reason why and how to appeal,” he tweeted.

## WHO’S MONITORING POSTS ON TWITTER NOW?

Musk laid off about half of Twitter’s staff after he bought the platform and later eliminated an unknown number of contract workers who had focused on content moderation. Some workers who were kept on soon quit, including Yoel Roth, Twitter’s former head of trust and safety.

The departure of so many employees raised questions about how the platform could enforce its policies against harmful misinformation, hate speech and threats of violence, both within the U.S. and across the globe. Automated tools can help detect spam and some suspicious accounts, but others take more careful human review.

It’s likely the reductions will force Twitter to concentrate content moderation efforts on regions with stronger regulations governing social media platforms like Europe, where tech companies could face big fines under the new Digital Services Act if they don’t make an effort to combat misinformation and hate speech, according to Bhaskar Chakravorti, dean of global business at the Fletcher School at Tufts University.

“The staff has been decimated,” Chakravorti said. “The few content moderators left are going to be focused on Europe, because Europe is the squeakiest wheel.”

## HAS THERE BEEN AN IMPACT?

Since Musk bought Twitter a number of researchers and advocacy groups have pointed to an increase in posts containing racial epithets or attacks on Jewish people, gays, lesbians and transgender people.

In many cases, the posts were written by users who said they were trying to test Twitter’s new boundaries.

According to Musk, Twitter acted quickly to reduce the overall visibility of the posts, and that overall engagement with hate speech is down since he purchased the company, a finding disputed by researchers.

The most obvious sign of change at Twitter are the formerly banned users whose accounts have been reinstated, a list that includes Trump, satire site The Babylon Bee, the comedian Kathy Griffin, Canadian psychologist Jordan Peterson and, before he was kicked off again, Ye. Twitter has also reinstated accounts of neo-Nazis white supremacists including Andrew Anglin, the creator of the white supremacist website Daily Stormer -- along with QAnon supporters whom Twitter’s old guard had been removing in masses to prevent hate and misinformation from spreading on the platform.

In addition, some high-profile tweeters like Republican Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene who were previously banned for spreading misinformation about COVID-19 have resumed posting misleading claims about vaccine safety and sham cures.

Musk, who has spread false claims about COVID-19 himself, returned to the topic this with a tweet this week that mocked transgender pronouns while calling for criminal charges against Dr. Anthony Fauci, the nation’s top infectious disease expert and one of the leaders of the country’s COVID response.

Calling himself a “free-speech absolutist,” Musk has said he wants to allow all content that’s legally permissible on Twitter but also that he wants to downgrade negative and hateful posts. Instead of removing toxic content, Musk’s call for “freedom of speech, not freedom of reach” suggests Twitter may leave such content up without recommending it or amplifying it to other users.

But after cutting out most of Twitter’s policy-making executives and outside advisers, Musk often appears to be the arbiter of what crosses the line. Last month, Musk himself announced that he was booting

Ye after the rapper formerly known as Kanye West posted an image of a swastika merged with a Star of David, a post that was not illegal but deeply offensive. The move led to questions about what rules govern what can and can't be posted on the platform.

## **Fusion breakthrough is a milestone for climate, clean energy**

By MATTHEW DALY, MICHAEL PHILLIS, JENNIFER McDERMOTT and MADDIE BURAKOFF Associated Press WASHINGTON (AP) — Scientists announced Tuesday that they have for the first time produced more energy in a fusion reaction than was used to ignite it — a major breakthrough in the decades-long quest to harness the process that powers the sun.

Researchers at the Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory in California achieved the result last week, the Energy Department said. Known as a net energy gain, the goal has been elusive because fusion happens at such high temperatures and pressures that it is incredibly difficult to control.

The breakthrough will pave the way for advancements in national defense and the future of clean power, Energy Secretary Jennifer Granholm and other officials said.

"Ignition allows us to replicate for the first time certain conditions that are found only in the stars and the sun," Granholm told a news conference in Washington. "This milestone moves us one significant step closer" to having zero-carbon fusion energy "powering our society."

Fusion ignition is "one of the most impressive scientific feats of the 21st century," Granholm said, adding that the breakthrough "will go down in the history books."

Appearing with Granholm, White House science adviser Arati Prabhakar called the fusion ignition achieved Dec. 5 "a tremendous example of what perseverance really can achieve" and "an engineering marvel beyond belief."

Proponents of fusion hope it could one day displace fossil fuels and other traditional energy sources. Producing carbon-free energy that powers homes and businesses from fusion is still decades away. But researchers said the announcement marked a significant leap forward.

"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."

Kim Budil, director of the Livermore Lab, said there are "very significant hurdles" to commercial use of fusion technology, but advances in recent years mean the technology is likely to be widely used in "a few decades" rather than 50 or 60 years as previously expected.

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.

President Joe Biden called the breakthrough a good example of the need to continue to invest in research and development. "Look what's going on from the Department of Energy on the nuclear front. There's a lot of good news on the horizon," he said at the White House.

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 focused an enormous amount of heat on a miniature spherical capsule, said Marvin Adams, deputy administrator of the National Nuclear Security Administration, an Energy Department agency. The result was a superheated plasma environment where a reaction generated about 1.5 times more energy than was contained in the light used to produce it.

Riccardo Betti, a professor at the University of Rochester and expert in laser fusion, said there's a long road ahead before the net energy gain leads to 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.

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"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 periods.

Budil said people sometimes joke that the Livermore lab, known as LLNL, "stands for 'Lasers, Lasers, Nothing but Lasers.'" But she said the lab's motto "sums up our approach nicely: Science and technology on a mission."

It is incredibly difficult to control the physics of stars. Whyte said 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 a challenge, he said.

Results from the California lab exceeded expectations, said Jeremy Chittenden, a professor at Imperial College in London specializing in plasma physics.

Although there's a long way to go to turn fusion into a usable power source, Chittenden said, the lab's achievement makes him optimistic that it may someday be "the ideal power source that we thought it would be" — one that emits no carbon and runs on an abundant form of hydrogen that can be extracted from seawater.

One approach to fusion 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 on two continents announced significant advancements in the vital magnets needed for their work.

Carolyn Kuranz, a University of Michigan professor and experimental plasma physicist, hoped the result would help bring "increased interest and vigor" to fusion research — including from private industry, which she and others said will be needed to get fusion energy to the grid.

"If we want to prevent further climate change, we are going to need diverse options of energy production to deploy," Kuranz said. "And nuclear energy — both fission and fusion — really must be a part of that equation. We're not going to get there with renewables alone."

## AP Top Songs of 2022: 'Bad Habit,' 'Unholy,' 'Cuff It'

By The Associated Press undefined

Ten of the best songs of the year, as selected by Associated Press entertainment journalists.

STEVE LACY, "BAD HABIT"

It took nearly three months, but Steve Lacy's "Bad Habit" topped the Billboard Hot 100 chart and has continued to thrive. The multi-genre song, a single from his album "Gemini Rights," became the first record to ever top the Hot R&B/Hip-Hop, Hot R&B, Hot Rock and and Alternative songs chart simultaneously. It became popular over the summer after many on social media including celebrities Hailey Bieber and Charlie D'Amelio used the song while promoting their brands. With a funky bassline, Lacy shows some regret after missing an opportunity to approach a love interest. — Jonathan Landrum Jr.

HARRY STYLES, "AS IT WAS"

Harry Styles was everywhere in 2022 pop culture, from his much-anticipated new album "Harry's House," to his massive tour and most notably being in the middle of the behind-the-scenes chaos surrounding the film "Don't Worry Darling." Styles could take some advice from the lyrics to his chart-topper "As It Was," a bittersweet and brightly packaged pop: "Nothing to say/when everything gets in the way." The song is deceptively upbeat with a jingly synth-pop beat and a little kid's voice as the intro and wedding bells at the end. But the lyrics are self-referentially melancholic as he accepts the reality of change that even he is not quite ready for. Thank you to the year's leading man for giving everyone a lot to talk and sing about. — Kristin M. Hall

BEYONCÉ, "CUFF IT"



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If you scroll through social media, you won't have to wait long before you see viral videos of groups from young to old performing choreographed routines to Beyoncé's "Cuff It." The feel good, dance track captures the spirit of fun, romance and infatuation all in nearly four minutes of music, and while that's longer than most radio hits these days, the song leaves you wishing Queen Bey would've extended the track even more. If you feel like falling in love or need a flirty boost, keep this track on repeat. — Gary Gerard Hamilton

TAYLOR SWIFT, "ANTI-HERO"

Self-loathing never sounded so good as on Taylor Swift's "Anti-Hero," which went to the top of the Billboard singles chart for weeks and only relented its grasp under pressure from a bubbly Mariah Carey before Christmas. It is peak Swift: Confessional to the point of self-horror, depressing in its inevitable tears. "I'm the problem," she sings. "It's me." The rest of the lyrics are dense and pregnant with meaning — there's a scene with a will reading? Who is a sexy baby? Is she really a monster on the hill? — all driven by a moody, propulsive electro beat. "This song really is a real guided tour throughout all the things I tend to hate about myself," she has written about it. And yet it is something to adore. — Mark Kennedy

KENDRICK LAMAR, "DIE HARD" FEATURING BLXST AND AMANDA REIFER

Kendrick Lamar has several standout tracks off his Grammy-nominated album "Mr. Morale & the Big Steppers." But one of the most vibrantly enjoyable songs from his masterful project is "Die Hard" featuring singer-rapper Blxst and Barbadian singer Amanda Reifer. The three music artists collectively blend their voices on the hit song — which delves into trust and battling demons. Lamar raps about overcoming his insecurities in hopes of becoming better for a future relationship. — Jonathan Landrum Jr.

LIZZO, "ABOUT DAMN TIME"

She's got the moves, she's got the grooves and she's used them to great effect on unsuspecting ears and minds as they were emerging from a literal and mental winter. Lizzo's infectious bop "About Damn Time" hit the indoor-dazed populace right in the solar plexus and shattered the dancefloors. Between lyrics like "Is everybody back up in the buildin'? It's been a minute, tell me how you're healin'" and "I'm way too fine to be this stressed, yeah/ Oh, I'm not the girl I was or used to be/ Uh,..., I might be better" and her up-tempo flute, Lizzo says it's OK to claw back a little happiness after our collective trauma with the help of some pop music. — Cristina Jaleru

THE 1975, "PART OF THE BAND"

"Part of the Band" is the off-kilter jewel in The 1975's excellent album, "Being Funny In A Foreign Language." It refuses to follow a tempo pattern as it caroms from cellos to lounge ballad to sax solo, with dense, funny lyrics. "Am I ironically woke? The butt of my joke? Or am I just some post-coke, average, skinny bloke calling his ego imagination?" frontman and lyricist Matty Healy sings. It is a song that makes you stop and listen. "So many cringes in the heroin binges/I was coming off the hinges, living on the fringes," go the lyrics. — Mark Kennedy

SAM SMITH AND KIM PETRAS, "UNHOLY"

If there was one good song to start the cold season, it's the sensuous, risqué "Unholy" — leaning on Sam Smith's translucent vocals and Kim Petras' petulant energy. The club anthem that slinks up on you with its throbbing bass wrapped in Eastern influences kicks off right out the gate with a heavenly choir. The electro-hook is set to catch, stun and haunt. A startling departure from Smith's weepy ballads, this slow but electrifying tune got its general stripes first on TikTok with the singers' dance challenge and the admiral ones on the airwaves and the dancefloor. One of the most well-matched collaborations of the year, "Unholy" has been certified Platinum with the speed of saying a "Hail Mary." — Cristina Jaleru

YEAH YEAH YEAHS AND PERFUME GENIUS, "SPITTING OFF THE EDGE OF THE WORLD"

Post-punk rockers Yeah Yeah Yeahs returned with a new album this year, their first since 2013, and the opening dark synths of their first single "Spitting Off the Edge of the World" delivered the kind of fist-pumping energy that Karen O and company are known for. Karen O's distinctive vocals on the opening line, "Towards, here's the sun, so bow your heads," are aptly matched with Perfume Genius' delicate and glamorous voice. The song peaks with the banging drums in the chorus inviting a defiance on the precipice of chaos. It's a great return to form for a band that has always pushed the boundaries. — Kristin M. Hall

BEYONCÉ, "BREAK MY SOUL"

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It would be easy — and possibly understandable — to only include one Beyoncé song on our list. But why punish the Queen for creating phenomenal music? “Break My Soul” was her majesty’s royal anthem welcoming her back to her rightful place on the throne after a six-year-hiatus between albums. The house track spanned genres, dominating airplay on R&B, pop and dance formats. Reaching No. 1 on Billboard’s Hot 100 chart, the song delivered a variety of DJ versions and remixes, including the “The Queens Remix” with Madonna. “Break My Soul” also reached No. 1 on the R&B/Hip-Hop Airplay chart, and along with “Cuff It,” marked the first time since 2003 that the icon had multiple No. 1s on the chart in the same year. — Gary Gerard Hamilton

## A slowdown in US inflation eases some pressure on households

By CHRISTOPHER RUGABER AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — Inflation in the United States slowed again last month in the latest sign that price increases are cooling despite the pressures they continue to inflict on American households.

Consumer prices rose 7.1% in November from a year ago, the government said Tuesday. That was down sharply from 7.7% in October and a recent peak of 9.1% in June. It was the fifth straight decline.

Measured from month to month, which gives a more up-to-date snapshot, the consumer price index inched up just 0.1%. And so-called core inflation, which excludes volatile food and energy costs and which the Federal Reserve tracks closely, slowed to 6% compared with a year earlier. From October to November, core prices rose 0.2% — the mildest increase since August 2021.

All told, the latest figures provided the strongest evidence to date that inflation in the United States is steadily slowing from the price acceleration that first struck about 18 months ago and reached a four-decade high earlier this year.

Gas prices have tumbled from their summer peak. The costs of used cars, health care, airline fares and hotel rooms also dropped in November. So did furniture and electricity prices. Housing costs jumped, though much of that data doesn’t yet reflect real-time measures that show declines in home prices and apartment rents.

Grocery prices remain a trouble spot. They surged 0.5% from October to November and are up 12% compared with a year ago.

Those price spikes have left many Americans struggling to afford food. In Phoenix, there are long lines at St. Mary’s Food Bank, which provided Thanksgiving meals to a record 19,000 families across Arizona last month.

“They’re eating snacks and granola all day long,” Rosa Davila, an unemployed single mother, said of her three teenagers while waiting in line for a package Tuesday. “The food bank really resolves things for us.”

Alma Quintera, also waiting in her car, said that even with her husband working full time as a house painter, they have to visit the food bank two or three times a month to adequately feed their three school-age children.

“The high prices have really affected us — the rent, the bills and especially the food,” she said.

Jerry Brown, a spokesman for St. Mary’s, said the food bank’s main Phoenix location last week distributed packages to 4,717 families, up 63% from the same week a year ago.

Economists say the latest inflation figures, though, suggest the likelihood of some relief in the coming months.

“Inflation was terrible in 2022, but the outlook for 2023 is much better,” said Bill Adams, chief economist for Comerica Bank. “Supply chains are working better, business inventories are higher, ending most of the shortages that fueled inflation in 2020.”

President Joe Biden called the inflation report “welcome news for families across the country” and noted that lower auto and toy prices should benefit holiday shoppers. Still, Biden acknowledged that inflation might not return to “normal levels” until the end of next year.

One sign of progress in November’s figures was that prices for new cars didn’t budge from October. On average, new cars are still 7.2% costlier than they were a year ago. But that’s down from a 13.2% year-

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over-year jump in April, which was the highest on records dating to 1953.

The decline in new-car prices helps illustrate how supply chain snarls, which have unwound for most goods, are also easing for semiconductors and other key automotive parts. Economists say this should enable automakers to boost production and give buyers an expanded supply of vehicles.

It also suggests that the Fed's aggressive interest rate hikes, which have made it more expensive to borrow for homes, cars and on credit cards, have begun to slow demand and limit the ability of auto dealers to charge more.

Wall Street welcomed the better-than-expected inflation data as providing further support for the Fed to slow and potentially pause its rate hikes by early next year.

On Wednesday, the Fed is widely expected to raise its benchmark rate by a half-point, its seventh hike this year. The move would follow four three-quarter-point hikes in a row. A half-point increase would put the Fed's key short-term rate in a range of 4.25% to 4.5%, the highest in 15 years.

The increase will further raise loan rates for consumers and businesses. Economists have warned that in continuing to tighten credit to fight inflation, the Fed is likely to cause a recession next year.

"There's growing evidence that the worst of the inflation scare may be in the rearview mirror," said Jim Baird, an economist at Plante Moran Financial Advisers. "On the horizon is the potential for a recession — the next hazard in the road that policymakers will need to navigate the economy around or potentially through."

Fed Chair Jerome Powell has said he is tracking price trends in three separate 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. Some of those trends extended into last month's data, with goods prices, excluding food and energy, falling 0.5% from October to November, the second straight monthly drop.

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.

As a result, Powell's biggest focus has been on services, which he said are likely to stay persistently high. 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.

Prices for many services kept rising in November. Dental care jumped 1.1% just from October and is 6.4% costlier than it was a year ago. Restaurant prices rose 0.5%. They're 8.5% higher than a year earlier.

Auto insurance prices jumped 0.9% in November and are 13.4% more expensive than a year earlier. The average cost of an auto repair rose 1.3% last month and 11.7% over the past year.

Yet even in services, excluding housing, there were some signs of cooling prices. The cost of car rentals, airline fares and hotel prices, for example, all dropped in November.

Overall, a measure that approximates services excluding rent was unchanged in November, after having dipped 0.1% in October. That measure had soared 1.1% in both April and June this year.

## **Inflation is slowing, but still high. What you need to know**

By CORA LEWIS Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — After reaching 40-year highs over the summer, price increases in the U.S. are now

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steadily easing.

Consumer inflation slowed to 7.1% in November from a year earlier and to 0.1% from October, the government said Tuesday. Stripping out volatile food and energy prices, so-called core inflation rose 6% over the past 12 months and 0.2% from October.

Though inflation is slowing, prices remain steep, especially for food and many services.

Here's what you need to know:

## WHAT'S GOING ON WITH INFLATION?

In recent months, there's been a shift in inflation from goods to services.

In general, that means prices for goods and gas are rising more slowly than prices for things like dining out, travel, health care, financial services and hospitality. Prices for used cars, furniture, and appliances have moderated.

Food prices are an exception, driven by more expensive eggs, vegetables, and chicken.

Kathy Bostjancic, chief economist at Nationwide, noted that core goods prices — once you exclude food and energy — have been slowing dramatically. But services prices, excluding energy, have stayed near a 40-year high.

## WHAT IS CONTRIBUTING TO THE SLOWING OF INFLATION?

Average gas prices have tumbled from \$5 a gallon in June to as low as \$3.26 a gallon, according to AAA, below their average a year ago.

Supply chain snarls are also coming to an end. Ports have cleared ship backlogs. And the cost of shipping a cargo container from Asia has returned to its pre-pandemic price.

The Federal Reserve's series of aggressive interest rate hikes have also created downward pressure on prices by making borrowing steadily more expensive.

## WHY ARE SERVICES PRICES RISING MORE THAN GOODS PRICES?

Some of it is the ongoing shift from the pandemic era, when millions of Americans stayed away from restaurants, postponed vacations and stopped going to concerts or movie theaters. Now, as COVID-19 fades, people are making up for lost time by traveling and dining out again.

At the same time, spending on goods like exercise bikes, furniture, and cars spiked during the pandemic but is now declining.

Some economists point to rising wages as a primary cause of increasing service costs, as employers pass on the higher cost of labor to consumers.

Others say companies have seen that consumers are willing to absorb increasingly higher prices in recent months. As costs for things like shipping have eased, corporations have not always passed those savings on to consumers.

"If companies don't feel the pressure and need to discount, they won't," Bostjancic said. "They've achieved some pricing power, and it's been good for the bottom line. They've profited quite nicely, and they want to hold on to that pricing power as long as possible. As long as the consumer withstands those prices, they won't change that."

## WHAT DOES ALL THIS MEAN FOR INTEREST RATES?

In some ways, the Fed is better suited to combat goods inflation than services inflation. When people buy expensive items like appliances, cars, or furniture, they often borrow money to do so. A high interest rate increases the cost of borrowing, thereby slowing those purchases. The Fed has a less clear pathway to affecting the price of services.

So while inflation in the goods sector is slowing, inflation in the services sector could prove more stubborn. As people spend down savings they built up during the pandemic, demand may slow. But until those savings are meaningfully depleted, or debt reaches unmanageable levels, spending may continue.

That said, the Fed's benchmark short-term rate affects loan rates throughout the economy. The central bank has already weakened the housing market significantly with its tightened monetary policy.

Chair Jerome Powell has made clear that the Fed will raise its key rate by a smaller increment when it meets Wednesday. Investors foresee a half-point Fed hike, after four straight three-quarter-point increases.

## WHERE DOES INFLATION GO FROM HERE?



Powell has suggested that housing costs, which have been a major driver of inflation, should start to slow next year — including rent.

And Gregory Daco, chief economist at EY-Parthenon, suggested that the momentum behind inflation will continue to ease in 2023.

"We expect to see ongoing downward pressure on the goods front and energy-prices front in the next 12 months," Daco said. "On the services side, we expect to see some abating pressures, with less demand for travel and leisure over time."

Daco predicted there will be downward pressure on housing costs, too.

**SO HOW LOW COULD INFLATION GO?**

The Fed sets a target to keep annual inflation averaging around 2 percent. Before the pandemic struck, inflation was so persistently low that the central bank struggled to even raise it to 2%. (Too-low inflation can slow economic growth by causing people to delay purchases if they think they can buy a product for a lower price later.)

Some economists are now suggesting that the Fed won't be able to get inflation down to 2% again anytime soon — and might conclude instead that a somewhat higher inflation target is more realistic.

**IF INFLATION IS SLOWING, WHY DOES IT STILL FEEL PAINFUL?**

Wages haven't kept up with prices, and lower-income households, which spend disproportionately more on housing, fuel and food, have been hit hardest.

"We're not equal in the face of inflation," Daco said. "If anything, inflation tends to exacerbate inequalities."

These factors can lead to a "K-shaped" recovery, in which the performance of different parts of the economy diverges like the arms of the letter "K." In this scenario, some parts of the economy may experience strong growth while others continue to decline.

"There's a wealth effect," said Nationwide's Bostjancic. "Upper- and middle-income households have more pandemic-related savings. They always have more of a buffer to withstand downturns than other income groups."

Low- and middle-income households may have already exhausted their reserves, Bostjancic noted, and now lack the savings to cope with both higher prices and higher borrowing rates.

"Even though they've seen wage gains, it's lagged behind inflation," she said. "So we've seen more people turning to credit. We're not seeing outright delinquencies, but people are falling behind on payments, which indicates there's stress on the consumer."

**IS THERE STILL RISK OF A RECESSION?**

Daco indicated that a recession is not looming large on the near horizon.

"We've seen resilience both on the part of the U.S. consumer and business executives," he said. "Companies haven't proceeded with broad-based layoffs. As of now, we're not in a recession, but we're seeing more hesitance and discretion when it comes to hiring and buying decisions."

## **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 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."

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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 a vehicle carrying Jin moved into the camp without him getting out. The BTS official Twitter account later posted photos showing Jin with other members, likely at the camp, with a message saying: "Our bro!! Have a safe service!! Love you."

One image showed smiling members touching Jin's shaved head.

"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. Strict safety steps were expected as South Korea is still reeling from the devastating Halloween crush in October in Seoul that killed 158 people.

Jin — whose real name is Kim Seok-jin — wrote on the online fan platform Weverse earlier Tuesday that "It's time for a curtain call." He posted a photo of himself Sunday with a military buzz cut 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.

Jin had faced an impending enlistment because the law disallows most men from further delaying their military service after they turn 30.

"Those in the pop culture sector experience little bit of disadvantages and unfairness, compared with those in the pure art sector or athletes," Jung Duk-hyun, a pop culture commentator, said. "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 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.

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 Music, 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 solo 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." Jung agreed, saying that other K-pop groups like BLACKPINK, Stray Kids and aespa could rise further.

## Supreme Court will review conviction in murder-for-hire case

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Supreme Court on Tuesday agreed to hear an appeal arising from a murder-for-hire ordered by the onetime leader of a violent international crime ring.

The justices said they will review the case of Adam Samia, who is serving a life sentence for killing a real estate broker in the Philippines. Samia acted at the behest of Paul LeRoux, a South African who led the crime organization and cooperated with federal authorities after his arrest in 2012, prosecutors said.

LeRoux ordered the killing of the broker, Catherine Lee, because he believed Lee had stolen money from him.

Samia's lawyers are challenging prosecutors' use of a confession made by another man, a co-defendant in his murder trial, that they say implicated Samia in violation of his constitutional rights. The co-defendant did not testify in his own defense so there was no opportunity for Samia's lawyers to question the co-defendant.

The Supreme Court has previously imposed limits on the use of a confession in these circumstances, including that the defendant's name has to be removed.

But Samia's lawyers argue that, even with the redactions, the confession still pointed unmistakably and unfairly at their client.

Samia has denied any involvement in the killing and his lawyers say no physical evidence links him to the crime. Samia was one of three men convicted in Lee's murder.

The appeal was among three new cases the court agreed to hear in early spring. The others involve a lawsuit against the work-chatting service Slack over its direct listing on the New York Stock Exchange in 2019 and a criminal case against a fisherman who lower courts concluded was tried in the wrong state for the theft of trade secrets. Slack was purchased by the business software company Salesforce.com in 2020.

## 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 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.

"Twitter's Trust and Safety Council was a group of volunteers who over many years gave up their time

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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.

## Soccer craze, pride grip Croatia before Argentina semifinal

By SABINA NIKSIC Associated Press

ZAGREB, Croatia (AP) — Forget Croatia's forthcoming historic change of currency, or joining European Union's travel-free zone. The World Cup semifinal against Argentina is all that most Croats are thinking about.

With hours left before Tuesday's decisive match in Qatar, workers removed Christmas and New Year decorations from a central square in the capital, Zagreb, to make space for a more pressing festivity — the live broadcast of the soccer match to thousands of expected fans.

The small Balkan state of about 4 million, known for its stunning Adriatic Sea coastline and resort islands, is on a roll: as of Jan. 1 Croatia is adopting the EU's common currency, the euro, and joining the so-called Schengen zone — the 27-nation bloc's borderless free-travel area — which prompted the prime minister to say that 2022 will be remembered as one of Croatia's most successful years.

Adopting the euro offers economic benefits stemming from deeper financial ties with the currency bloc's other members and the European Central Bank. More tangibly, it means that any of the current eurozone's 340 million inhabitants who visit Croatia will no longer need to exchange their euros for Croatian kuna and can cross the borders without stopping at border controls.

But all that is temporarily overshadowed by Tuesday's soccer game in distant Qatar.

Thousands are expected to gather in Zagreb's Bana Jelacica square and watch the match against Argentina on big screens, despite freezing weather. Fans are hoping Croatia will get through to the final like it did in the 2018 World Cup, in a stunning achievement for the small country — even though it lost then to France, which plays Morocco in the other semifinal Wednesday.

"We are advancing, no doubt about it," a Zagreb student who gave only his first name, Luka, said. "I would



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love it if we got to play against France, so we can pay them back for what happened just four years ago.”

The soccer craze that has gripped the nation is visible everywhere — people wear the national team’s distinctive white and red checkered jerseys, while the semifinal is on everyone’s lips and dominates the media. In one Zagreb bakery, employees donned Croatia jerseys for work.

“All of Croatia is with our national team,” said Prime Minister Andrej Plenkovic. “Already, what they have given us is a fascinating success by a brilliant generation.”

Plenkovic said the soccer distinction will prove a major boost for Croatia’s global branding.

“Everyone’s trying, we are all trying to promote Croatia, but this today is such a mega publicity that we can never forget,” he said.

For Croats, the national team’s exploit is a source of pride in a country that only gained independence in 1991 from the former Yugoslavia, and which fought a bloody war until 1995 to assert its statehood.

In six World Cup appearances, the country has reached the semifinals three times, and winded up second in the world to France in 2018.

While hopeful from the start of the championship, fans were cautious in getting their expectations too high until now. In the previous, quarterfinal match, Croatia faced powerhouse Brazil.

But after ousting Brazil in a penalty shootout, Croatia fans say everything is possible against yet another South American favorite, Argentina.

“I am an optimist, Croatia is full of confidence,” said state HRT radio commentator Srdjan Fabijanac. “What Croatia has done is already fantastic, twice in a row in the semifinals, that’s something even stronger soccer nations could not achieve.”

Croatia built its team from scratch after the war. While players and soccer experts had experience and knowledge stemming from the era of the former Yugoslavia, it took years of patience and work before any success was in sight.

In the postwar period, Croatia also struggled to move forward economically and rebuild, before it joined the EU in 2013.

For many, the national soccer team captain Luka Modric, who himself lost his home and his grandfather in the war, has become a symbol of persistence and effort following the conflict that cost more than 10,000 lives.

Fans say that even if Argentina prevails in Qatar, Croatia’s success so far is already so big as to leave no room for disappointment, only gratitude.

“This (game tonight) will remain in history for generations to come,” Prime Minister Plenkovic said.

## Cornered in Ukraine, Putin ditches annual news conference

By The Associated Press undefined

President Vladimir Putin has ditched his annual marathon news conference following a series of battle-field setbacks in Ukraine — a tacit acknowledgment that the Russian leader’s war has gone badly wrong.

Putin typically uses the year-end ritual to polish his image, answering a wide range of questions on domestic and foreign policy to demonstrate his grip on details and give the semblance of openness even though the event is tightly stage-managed.

But this year, with his troops on the back foot in Ukraine, it could be impossible to avoid uncomfortable questions about the Russian military’s blunders even at a highly choreographed event. Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov confirmed Monday that Putin wouldn’t hold the news conference this month without explaining why.

“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,” the U.K. Defense Ministry wrote in a commentary on Twitter.

“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,’” it said, using Moscow’s term for the war.

Some of his previous performances lasted for more than 4 1/2 hours, during which he has sometimes

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faced some pointed questions, but used them to mock the West or denigrate his domestic opponents.

Putin also has canceled another annual fixture this year, a televised call-in show in which he takes questions from the public to nurture his father-of-the-nation image.

And he has so far failed to deliver the annual televised state-of-the-nation address to parliament, a constitutional obligation. No date has been set for Putin's address.

The Kremlin has muzzled any criticism of its invasion of Ukraine from the liberal anti-war camp, shutting independent media outlets and criminalizing the spread of any information that differs from the official view — including calling the campaign a war. 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.

Political analyst Abbas Gallyamov said in a video commentary that the decision not to hold the news conference was likely because Putin "has nothing to say from the point of view of strategy."

Putin ordered the invasion of Ukraine on Feb. 24, claiming Moscow was forced to "demilitarize" the country in the face of 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 — bolstered by Western weapons — 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 war in Ukraine is taking longer than he anticipated, Putin acknowledged that wrapping up the campaign could be a "lengthy process." At the same time, he continued to claim that it was going according to plan and would achieve its goals.

Sergei Markov, a pro-Kremlin political expert, noted that Putin's decision to ditch the news conference and his failure so far to deliver the state-of-the-nation address reflected his hesitancy about the future course of action.

"Shall we forge ahead and defeat the enemy?" he wrote, reflecting hardliners' calls for ramping up missile strikes on Ukraine. "Or on the contrary, shall we prepare for a difficult but necessary compromise?"

## Fans wrestle with a (largely) beer-free World Cup in Qatar

By LEE KEATH Associated Press

DOHA, Qatar (AP) — Let's be clear: They definitely wanted beer.

So a group of guys from Nottinghamshire, England — veterans of boozy soccer matches back home — fumed when they discovered no beer would be sold until halftime of the Brazil-Croatia game at the main Doha fan zone, one of the few places where World Cup fans can have alcohol.

But while outrage was a given, there was also cultural introspection.

"It's weird!" roared Mark Walker, a giant of a rugby player, though he first used a far riper adjective.

One of his friends suggested the absence of alcohol made it possible for local women and children to attend the matches.

"You're watching the match, you have a beer. It's what you do," Walker insisted.

Another friend, James Vernon, countered, "At home you have people who are only there to drink and fight. This way it's only people who are really interested in the game."

Qatar has presented its World Cup — the first ever in an Arab, Muslim nation — as a chance for different cultures to come side by side and get along. And few cultures are further apart than one where alcohol

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is largely forbidden and one where drinking a cold one at a match is sacred.

Everyone has adjusted, not that they had a choice. Fans who want to can pre-game at a hotel bar, though drinks are expensive. Others are happy with the alcohol-free experience, saying the absence of rowdy, drunken fans at the stadium or in the streets makes the World Cup safer and easier to enjoy — with less harassment of women.

Alcohol sales are heavily restricted in Qatar, allowed only at a few hotel bars and restaurants meant for foreigners. For the World Cup, Qatar has set up fan zones around Doha where fans can watch the games on massive screens, and where beer is served. But even there, the beer is sold in separate concession stands away from other food and drink, and not before half-time of each game. In a last-minute decision just before the tournament started, Qatar banned beer sales at stadiums.

Souq Waqif, Doha's renovated historic market, has emerged as the World Cup's alcohol-free party center. A pedestrian area of small alleys lined with shops and restaurants — almost none of which serve alcohol — it's one of the few public spaces in the Qatari capital, a city of highways, skyscrapers and residential compounds.

Every night, tens of thousands crowd into it, and fans course through, singing and waving flags.

"There's no alcohol here but it's still a great time," said Sarah Moore, an England fan.

Lana Halaseh, a Jordanian woman who brought her three kids to the World Cup, said the atmosphere is family friendly.

"The fact that there's no alcohol maybe makes it smoother for the kids. There won't be any problems," she said.

The cultural exchange is firmly on Qatar's terms.

Its approach of isolating alcohol at the World Cup mirrors the way Qatar has dealt with its furious expansion the past decades: It compartmentalizes society to keep each sector in its place and smooths rough edges with its massive petrodollar wealth.

It's visible in Doha's physical layout, where the small Qatari population of around 300,000 lives in compounds of large villas, separate from the professional foreign population in newly built neighborhoods. The around 2 million migrant workers, largely from South Asia, Africa and the Philippines, live mainly out of sight on the outskirts of the city in company housing and labor camps, where rights groups have long pressed for better conditions.

Even with alcohol cordoned off, Qataris have had a little culture shock of their own.

Mohammed Al-Kuwari, a 28-year-old Qatari engineer, said the strangest thing was smelling beer at the fan zones. "You never smell beer in Qatar in public," he said with a laugh. "It's impossible, it can never happen."

He said he was grateful he could bring his wife and children to the stadium without drunken rowdiness.

"Why do you need beer during the game, anyway?" said his friend, Abdullah Laangawi, at Lusail Stadium for the Argentina-Netherlands match. "You're here for the sports. If you need to drink, do it before at a bar."

That's heresy for some international fans.

"It's a big problem — for freedom! We need freedom! It's a lack of respect for football," Mauro Rama, an Argentinian, said — joking-not-joking — at Lusail Stadium. He had just bought a Pepsi from the concession stand. He was having nothing to do with the alcohol-free Budweiser Zero on offer.

"We need beer to relax. There's a lot of tension at these games," said his friend, Matias Falcone.

At the fan zone, before the start of the Brazil-Croatia game, a few people lingered around the still unopened beer concession stand, wrestling with the reality that they had half a game to wait before they could reach the illuminated row of more than 50 red refrigerators stocked with Budweiser.

A group of 10 cousins from India who had come to Doha together for the World Cup planned to have beer at the fan zone during the day's first match before heading to the stadium for the second.

They milled around the unopened concession stand, going through the stages of beerlessness. First, denial — "This can't be right, there must be somewhere else that sells now," one said. Then, grief. Finally, empathy.

The alcohol restrictions do give a more family atmosphere, they conceded.

"You realize that the traditional way of enjoying the game doesn't have to be the only way," said Dileep Nayathil, an IT worker from Bangalore.

## The Jordan Trophy: NBA rebrands, redesigns its MVP award

By TIM REYNOLDS AP Basketball Writer

Michael Jordan was moments away from hoisting his third of what would become five NBA Most Valuable Player awards, and then-Commissioner David Stern greeted him at the midcourt ceremony with words that were both simple and profound.

"You are simply the standard," Stern said that night in 1992, "by which basketball excellence is measured."

That's never been more true.

The NBA MVP award has been renamed The Michael Jordan Trophy, the league announced Tuesday. Jordan is a five-time MVP so he has five trophies named for Maurice Podoloff — the league's first commissioner. But after six decades of the award bearing Podoloff's name, the NBA decided the time was right to rebrand.

The Jordan trophy will stand 23.6 inches tall and weigh 23.6 pounds -- nods to his jersey number and six NBA titles with the Chicago Bulls -- but is not a depiction of him. The chairman of the Charlotte Hornets approved the design, one that symbolizes someone reaching for excellence, but did not want the statue to be of himself. He also declined a request for comment through the NBA.

"Anybody should be able to see this and see themselves in it," said Mark Smith, a longtime designer at Jordan Brand and the person who oversaw the trophy's design. "They should feel the excellence of Michael Jordan and his pursuit. It's got his name on it, but it isn't him. It's everybody. It could be a shipbuilder or it could be a teacher or a lawyer or a writer who looks at it and says, 'That's what I'm trying to do.'"

The league has rebranded almost all its trophies in the last two seasons, even adding some new ones. As part of Tuesday's announcement, the league revealed that The Jerry West Award is being introduced and will be given to the NBA Clutch Player of the Year — which, like almost all other league awards, will be voted on by a media panel. NBA coaches will nominate players for the clutch award.

Also, the Defensive Player of the Year will now receive The Hakeem Olajuwon Trophy; the Rookie of the Year will receive The Wilt Chamberlain Trophy; the Sixth Man of the Year will now receive The John Havlicek Trophy; and the NBA's Most Improved Player will receive The George Mikan Trophy.

"Our new collection of trophies celebrates some of the greatest and most impactful players in the history of the NBA," NBA Commissioner Adam Silver said. "As we recognize the league's top performers each season, we also pay tribute to the legends who embody these prestigious awards."

It became evident last week that something was changing about the MVP trophy when the NBA said Podoloff's name was going onto a new prize -- a trophy that will go to the team with the best regular season record.

The MVP trophy has many levels of numerical significance related to Jordan, besides its height and weight. It has a five-sided base, a tribute to his five MVP awards. The name badge is six-sided, one for each of his championships. The base is shaped at a 15-degree angle; he played 15 NBA seasons.

"I'm always going to numbers and symbiology as key root DNA to make something specific and authentic for that person," Smith said. "When you start putting all these things together, there's only one person and it becomes very unique. Not different, but very unique."

Jordan was involved at every step of the design process, Smith said. The final product was a bronze trophy depicting a player "breaking out of a rock to reach for the ultimate rock — a crystal basketball," the league said. The trophy becomes more refined closer to the top, meant to show how hard work leads to something more polished and finally something great.

Smith said he fully expects to be emotional when he sees the new trophy awarded for the first time this spring.

"This is actually the highest achievement for a single player ... and it's mind-blowing," Smith said. "It'll be a mind-blower."



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Other trophies renamed or reimagined in the last year or so include ones named for Joe Dumars (sportsmanship), Red Auerbach (coach of the year), the Kobe Bryant All-Star MVP award — along with the Larry O'Brien Trophy for the NBA champions and the Bill Russell NBA Finals MVP trophy.

New Eastern Conference and Western Conference championship trophies named for Bob Cousy and Oscar Robertson respectively were added, along with the Larry Bird Trophy for East finals MVP and the Magic Johnson Trophy for West finals MVP. The league also began issuing divisional championship trophies, naming them for Nat "Sweetwater" Clifton (Atlantic Division), Wayne Embry (Central), Earl Lloyd (Southeast), Willis Reed (Southwest), Sam Jones (Northwest) and Chuck Cooper (Pacific).

## Students turn to TikTok to fill gaps in school lessons

By CHEYANNE MUMPHREY AP Education Writer

PHOENIX (AP) — Mecca Patterson-Guridy wants to learn, but for some subjects, she isn't always comfortable asking her teachers. So she has been turning to TikTok.

Online, the 17-year-old high school junior in Philadelphia has found videos on social media platforms about protests over police shootings, civic engagement and Black and Latino history in the U.S. The accounts she checks regularly feature segments including "Fast Black History" and "Black Girl Magic Minute."

The videos, Mecca said, address "things that get overlooked in the classroom."

Scrutiny from conservatives around teaching about race, gender and sexuality has made many teachers reluctant to discuss issues that touch on cultural divides. To fill in gaps, some students are looking to social media, where online personalities, nonprofit organizations and teachers are experimenting with ways to connect with them outside the confines of school.

The platform has opened new opportunities for educators looking to expand students' worldviews.

Isis Spann, for one, said she turned to developing digital content after officials in a South Carolina school system discouraged her from sharing stories about some civil rights movement figures with her kindergarten students during Black History Month. She also recalls being told by the principal's office to remove earrings that said "Strong Black Queen" because they were deemed inappropriate.

"It didn't sit right with me. I couldn't help but think that if I weren't a Black teacher I would be having a different experience," she said.

Spann left the classroom and now runs a company, "FUNdamentals of Learning," which provides educational materials for use in-person and online. She said she is grateful to be able to share her ideas independently from the rules of any school or administrator.

"There is no gatekeeper of sorts for social media content," she said.

In the "Black Girl Magic Minute" videos, 19-year-old Taylor Cassidy, a host on Sirius XM's TikTok Radio Channel, highlights the stories of women who have inspired her and shares news about Black culture.

Others who are finding audiences online for their takes on history and current events include Atlanta-based personality Lynae Bogues, who hosts a segment called "Parking Lot Pimpin'" on social and political topics in the Black community. Kahlil Greene, who in 2019 became the first Black student body president at Yale University, calls himself the "Gen Z Historian" on social media. He shares stories of Black history and culture.

TikTok has encouraged more educational content on its platform. In May 2020, when most American students were still learning remotely because of COVID-19, the company announced it was investing millions of dollars and teaming with experts, public figures and educational institutions to post more learning material under the hashtag #LearnOnTikTok.

Not everything posted online is educational, to say the least.

A key to help students sort reliable, educational material from everything else — including frivolity, misinformation and conspiracy theories — is teaching them digital literacy, experts say. They need to be able to identify sources and find corroborating information.

Parents and educators should take time to learn more about TikTok in particular to understand the platform and how to reach kids where they are, said Vanessa Dennen, a professor at Florida State University.

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TikTok alone has about 80 million users in the U.S., and they trend young.

"Look, the thing is kids are on TikTok because the parents and adults aren't," Dennen said.

The videos made by good-faith actors that do pique students' interest can be as educational as anything else they come across in a library or a lecture — as long as they have the background knowledge to put them in context, Dennen said.

Meanwhile, new laws passed in more than a dozen states over the last two years have put a chill on classroom discussion of topics that touch on racism and sexism.

The debates have extended to what books kids are reading. The American Library Association, which keeps track of book bans in the U.S., documented 729 challenges targeting 1,597 titles in 2021 across library, school, and university materials. That's the highest recorded number of challenges since tracking began in 2000.

Kennedy McCollum, 18, said she learned a lot about history from TikTok videos while growing up in Phoenix. She still turns regularly to social media for news, to learn more about social movements and develop her personal finance skills.

"In high school, teachers didn't really talk about current problems that are happening, especially when it comes to police brutality. That's not talked about at all," said McCollum, who now attends Hampton University, a historically Black institution in Virginia.

Before high school, Mecca Patterson-Guridy attended Sankofa Freedom Academy Charter School, which emphasizes pride in students' African heritage. As a student now at the Philadelphia High School for Creative & Performing Arts, where she has more white teachers, she said she senses not all are comfortable with questions related to race.

There have been discussions on Black history, she said, but they felt incomplete and based in Black trauma, so she went on social media to find more positive representations.

"A lot of times Black history, Latino history, Asian history, Indigenous history gets overlooked. Let's talk about women's rights, sex education and abortion as well," she said. "I think we should talk more about the things that are directly impacting us."

## Today in History: December 14, U.S. COVID vaccinations begin

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Wednesday, Dec. 14, the 348th day of 2022. There are 17 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On Dec. 14, 2020, the Electoral College decisively confirmed Joe Biden as the nation's next president, ratifying his November victory in a state-by-state repudiation of President Donald Trump's refusal to concede he had lost; electors gave Biden 306 votes to Trump's 232. Speaking from Delaware, Biden accused Trump of threatening core principles of democracy, but told Americans that their form of self-government had "prevailed."

On this date:

In 1799, the first president of the United States, George Washington, died at his Mount Vernon, Virginia, home at age 67.

In 1819, Alabama joined the Union as the 22nd state.

In 1861, Prince Albert, husband of Queen Victoria, died at Windsor Castle at age 42.

In 1911, Norwegian explorer Roald Amundsen (ROH'-ahl AH'-mun-suhn) and his team became the first men to reach the South Pole, beating out a British expedition led by Robert F. Scott.

In 1939, the Soviet Union was expelled from the League of Nations for invading Finland.

In 1961, a school bus was hit by a passenger train at a crossing near Greeley, Colorado, killing 20 students.

In 1964, the U.S. Supreme Court, in Heart of Atlanta Motel v. United States, ruled that Congress was within its authority to enforce the Civil Rights Act of 1964 against racial discrimination by private businesses (in this case, a motel that refused to cater to Blacks).

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In 1981, Israel annexed the Golan Heights, which it had seized from Syria in 1967.

In 1985, former New York Yankees outfielder Roger Maris, who'd hit 61 home runs during the 1961 season, died in Houston at age 51.

In 1986, the experimental aircraft Voyager, piloted by Dick Rutan and Jeana Yeager, took off from Edwards Air Force Base in California on the first non-stop, non-refueled flight around the world.

In 2006, a British police inquiry concluded that the deaths of Princess Diana and her boyfriend, Dodi Fayed, in a 1997 Paris car crash were a "tragic accident," and that allegations of a murder conspiracy were unfounded. Atlantic Records founder Ahmet Ertegun died in New York at age 83.

In 2020, the largest vaccination campaign in U.S. history began with health workers getting shots on the same day the nation's COVID-19 death toll hit 300,000.

Ten years ago: A gunman with a semi-automatic rifle killed 20 first-graders and six educators at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Connecticut, then took his own life as police arrived; the 20-year-old had also fatally shot his mother at their home before carrying out the attack on the school.

Five years ago: The Federal Communications Commission voted to repeal the Obama-era "net neutrality" rules, a move that gave internet service providers a free hand to slow or block specific websites and apps as they see fit, or charge more for faster speeds. The most serious charge against James Alex Fields, accused of driving into a crowd protesting a white nationalist rally in Charlottesville, Virginia, in August, was upgraded to first-degree murder; a 32-year-old woman, Heather Heyer, died and dozens were injured.

One year ago: The House voted to hold former White House chief of staff Mark Meadows in contempt of Congress after he ceased to cooperate with the Jan. 6 committee investigating the Capitol insurrection. (The Justice Department would decline to prosecute.) A federal judge dismissed a lawsuit that was brought by former President Donald Trump in his attempt to block congressional lawmakers from obtaining his tax returns. The U.S. death toll from COVID-19 topped 800,000, according to the count kept by Johns Hopkins University. Stephen Curry set a new NBA career 3-point record; the Golden State Warriors' guard hit his 2,974th 3-point shot against the New York Knicks at Madison Square Garden. Authorities in South Carolina said an autopsy found unusually severe brain disease in the frontal lobe of Phillip Adams, a former NFL player accused of fatally shooting six people in South Carolina before killing himself in April.

Today's Birthdays: Singer-actor Abbe Lane is 91. Actor Hal Williams is 88. Actor-singer Jane Birkin is 76. Pop singer Joyce Vincent Wilson (Tony Orlando and Dawn) is 76. Entertainment executive Michael Ovitz is 76. Actor Dee Wallace is 74. R&B singer Ronnie McNeir (The Four Tops) is 73. Rock musician Cliff Williams is 73. Actor-comedian T.K. Carter is 66. Rock singer-musician Mike Scott (The Waterboys) is 64. Singer-musician Peter "Spider" Stacy (The Pogues) is 64. Actor Cynthia Gibb is 59. Actor Nancy Valen is 57. Actor Archie Kao is 53. Actor Natascha McElhone is 53. Actor-comedian Michaela Watkins is 51. Actor-comedian Miranda Hart is 50. R&B singer Brian Dalrymple (Soul For Real) is 47. Actor KaDee Strickland is 47. Actor Tammy Blanchard is 46. Actor Sophie Monk is 43. Actor-singer-musician Jackson Rathbone is 38. Actor Vanessa Hudgens is 34. Rock/R&B singer Tori Kelly is 30.