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No Aberdeen Paper this morning.

The junior high girls basketball games with Warner and Tiospa Zina have been cancelled.

The Northeast Conference Wrestling Tournament at Webster has been rescheduled for February 11, 2023.

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



“When we share our stories, what it does is, it opens up our hearts for other people to share their stories. And it gives us the sense that we are not alone on this journey.”

Janine Shepherd

Groton Community Calendar

Friday, Dec. 16

NO SCHOOL

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

Postponed: Government Field Trip.

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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Heavy Snow

The city crew hauled the snow off of the downtown district yesterday morning. It took a couple of rounds with the road grader as the snow was very heavy. (Photo by Paul

Kosel)

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Governor Noem Announces State Office Openings and Closures for Friday

PIERRE, S.D. – Today, Gov. Kristi Noem ordered state government offices remain closed across most of the state on Friday, December 16, 2022. Offices will close in Hanson, Hutchinson, and McCook Counties.

Offices will remain open in Bon Homme, Clay, Custer, Fall River, Lincoln, Minnehaha, Turner, Union, and Yankton Counties. Offices will also remain open in the western portion of Pennington County (including Hill City, Keystone, and Rapid City).

While executive branch offices in the rest of the state will be closed, employees will be working remotely.

Officials continue to closely monitor the storm which features continued snow accumulations, high winds, falling temperatures, and blowing & drifting snow making traveling conditions dangerous.

Citizens in these counties are encouraged to stay home Friday if possible. If they must travel, they should check sd511.org or the SD511 mobile app.

Groton Prairie Mixed Bowling League Week #7 Results

Team Standings: Chipmunks – 20, Cheetahs – 15, Jackelopes – 15, Foxes – 13, Coyotes – 11, Shiht-zus – 10

Men's High Games: Lance Frohling – 212, Brad Waage – 194, Randy Stanley – 179

Women's High Games: Nicole Kassube – 225, Darci Spanier – 180, Vicki Walter – 174

Men's High Series: Lance Frohling – 518, Mike Siegler – 501, Randy Stanley – 491

Women's High Series: Nicole Kassube – 519, Darci Spanier – 436, Vicki Walter – 419

South Dakota Community Foundation Announces Beyond Idea Grant Recipients for 2022

PIERRE, SD – Fourteen South Dakota nonprofits will receive grant awards totaling \$1,190,770 from the South Dakota Community Foundation's (SDCF) Beyond Idea Grant (BIG) program. Offered in partnership with the Bush Foundation, the BIG program supports community-based problem-solving efforts in South Dakota. The announcement marks the completion of the inaugural round of the BIG program in 2022.

"The Bush Foundation entrusted the SDCF with awarding \$1.2 million dollars to support problem-solving work in South Dakota each year for six years," says Ginger Niemann, SDCF Senior Program Officer. "We're looking forward to supporting this first round of grant recipients from our BIG program and are looking forward to what we will learn as we move this program into 2023."

SDCF received 133 applications for this initial round of the BIG program. A review committee comprised of individuals from across South Dakota chose to financially support the following projects:

Statewide

• **Dakota Resources: \$200,000**

Funding will support Dakota Resources B.O.L.D. Framework (Building Organizations for Local Development) work to engage local economic development organization board members in quality organizational capacity-building activities to equip those leaders to create a thriving rural community. Funding will support multiple community coaching training activities in communities across the state.

• **South Dakota Afterschool Network: \$99,645**

Funding will support the development and creation of best practice standards for afterschool programs in South Dakota. The South Dakota Afterschool Network will engage partners to build the core elements of a comprehensive quality system for programs. They will develop best practice standards and a program self-assessment tool aligned with the standards. SD is 1 of only 10 U.S. states without quality out-of-school time standards.

• **Early Learner South Dakota: \$58,000**

Funding will support Early Learner South Dakota's work to improve the access to and quality of early learning experiences and environments for children in South Dakota. They will use the National League of Cities Action Guide to focus on four specific areas: community leadership to make early childhood a priority, quality services for all children and families, neighborhoods where families can thrive, and policies that support families.

• **Black Hills Area Habitat for Humanity: \$50,000**

Black Hills Area Habitat for Humanity will look for innovative solutions in the delivery of affordable home ownership in South Dakota. Collaboration between South Dakota Habitat affiliates will assist in determining what can be done to increase the organization's impact given the challenges of inflation and a resource stretched environment.

Eastern South Dakota

• **Northeast South Dakota Community Action Program (Sisseton) - \$100,000**

Northeast South Dakota Community Action Program (NESDCAP) will assist the Sisseton Economic Development Corporation in planning for the sale and development of lots in Sisseton to address housing needs. NESDCAP will work in partnership with several other community groups, businesses, and individuals

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to determine what housing needs exist. This pilot project could be a model for other communities and their housing needs.

• **Mitchell Area Housing Inc. - \$100,000**

Mitchell Area Housing Inc. aims to revitalize the oldest neighborhoods in Mitchell. Funding will support administrative costs and forgivable loans for eligible, low-income homeowners to make needed repairs and improve the quality of housing in Mitchell. Steps to develop this program include policies & procedures, home buyer education, training, marketing, survey's, identification of other communities, and a capital campaign to offer other communities loans for their rehab programs.

• **Avera Behavioral Health (Brookings) - \$100,000**

The Avera Behavioral Health team in Brookings plans to jumpstart an innovative, sustainable care delivery model that removes silos for care through Integrated Behavioral Health. They will conduct planning meetings with partners in the health systems, engage providers in the primary care field on education and training the trainer, integrate two licensed individuals into care model. Once implemented, this model is highly replicable in other communities and primary care settings.

• **Aberdeen Development Corporation - \$26,500**

Aberdeen Development Corporation aims to develop a remote-able workforce through tech training and prepare business owners and entrepreneurs to grow their remote workforce. The project will intentionally train employees and employers in tech skills and remote-able best practices. The project aims to foster a regional tech and remote-able culture across the region. The goal is to create quality work in remote communities and addressing the severe workforce challenge in the counties of McPherson, Edmunds, Faulk, Spink, Marshall, Day and Roberts.

• **Sioux Falls Thrive - \$50,000**

The Housing Action Team from Sioux Falls Thrive will work with community stakeholders, including the city, community foundation, developers, and others to create a community model and address potential sources for the future funding of a Sioux Falls Housing Trust Fund. A housing trust fund will provide a sustainable source of local funding that supports the development and rehabilitation of housing units that are affordable.

• **Lewis & Clark Behavioral Health Services, Inc. (Yankton) - \$100,000**

Lewis & Clark Behavioral Health Services proposes to develop a pilot Rural Mobile Behavioral Health Crisis Response Follow-up program to provide same day and next day crisis care follow-up for individuals in Union County. They plan to hire outreach staff, develop crisis care follow up, create materials, develop a survey, training for health crisis, track referrals and plans for outreach to an additional 4 counties for this pilot project.

• **Beverly Ann Miller Foundation (Sioux Falls) - \$100,000**

The Beverly Ann Miller Foundation plans to develop a multifaceted community building project focused on the Whittier Neighborhood in Sioux Falls. Funding will support the organization's work to strengthen community connections in the neighborhood and support emerging leaders in the neighborhood.

• **Center for the Prevention of Child Maltreatment (Sioux Falls) - \$50,000**

The Center for the Prevention of Child Maltreatment plans to equip community leaders with skills to lead efforts to prevent adverse childhood experiences (ACES) at a local level. The Resilient Community effort seeks to shift the focus on preventing adverse childhood experiences away from individual responsibility and towards community solutions, while leveraging existing strengths and positive childhood experiences inherent in every community.

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Western South Dakota

• **Children's Home Society of South Dakota (Rapid City) - 74,545**

Family Engagement Services (FES), operating under Children's Home Society, has been using in-home services to support families who carry a risk of involvement in the child welfare or juvenile/criminal justice systems. FES has been using in-home visits to promote family stability with education, skill development, and crisis management. Due to the program's success in Pennington County, Children's Home Society plans to expand the opportunity to four more counties in western South Dakota to include Meade, Lawrence, Butte and Fall River.

Central South Dakota

• **Simply Smiles, Inc (LaPlant) - \$82,080**

Simply Smiles will test their idea aimed at transforming foster care in/for Native American communities at their Children's Village in LaPlant. Simply Smiles is committed to their children's villages being led by persons from the communities the villages serve and has demonstrated that commitment on the Cheyenne River Reservation. They partner with the South Dakota Department of Social Services, Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe and Child Protection Services.

A total of \$1.2 million dollars will be available for the SDCF to award in 2023. In 2023, SDCF will open two separate rounds for the BIG program in March and August. Interested organizations can visit SDCommunityFoundation.org/BIG to review the grant guidelines, deadlines and application instructions. In order to qualify, a nonprofit must be IRS Publication 78 verified or have a fiscal sponsor. Any questions regarding the program can be directed to Ginger Niemann by phone at 800.888.1842 or by email gniemann@sdcommunityfoundation.org.

About our Donors

SDCF is a public non-profit organization established in 1987. SDCF, with offices in Pierre, Rapid City, Sioux Falls and Aberdeen administers over 1,100 funds benefiting hundreds of charitable organizations annually. The Foundation distributed nearly \$18 million in grants in 2021 which made a tremendous difference in communities statewide. This would not have been possible without the generosity of our donors. If you have a specific cause you would like to support or would prefer to give for the general good of our state, please visit <https://sdcommunityfoundation.org/giving> to learn more or call 1-800-888-1842.

About the Bush Foundation

The Bush Foundation invests in great ideas and the people who power them. Established in 1953 by 3M Executive Archibald Bush and his wife Edyth, the Foundation encourages individuals and organizations to think bigger and think differently about what is possible in communities across Minnesota, North Dakota, South Dakota and the 23 Native nations that share the same geographic area.

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MSRP
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- High-arc steel chute
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**EXCEPTIONAL FINANCING
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2023 DOG LICENSES due by Dec. 30, 2022

Fines start January 1, 2023

Spayed/Neutered dogs are \$5 per dog, otherwise \$10 per dog

Proof of rabies shot information is **REQUIRED!!**

Email proof to city.kellie@nvc.net,

fax to (605) 397-4498 or bring a copy to City Hall!!

Please contact City Hall as soon as possible if you no longer have a dog(s) that were previously licensed!

Questions call (605) 397-8422



U.S. Senate votes to bar TikTok from government devices as state bans multiply **Noem's action triggers numerous other governors to follow suit**

BY: JACOB FISCHLER - DECEMBER 15, 2022 4:24 PM

The U.S. Senate late Wednesday unanimously passed a bill to ban federal employees from downloading TikTok on their work phones.

Critics of TikTok, a widely popular social media platform, say the app creates national security concerns because of its ability to track users' data — and because the Chinese government can compel that data from the Chinese company that developed and owns TikTok, ByteDance.

"It is essentially an evidence-gathering data, data-gathering machine that runs on your phone," U.S. Sen. Josh Hawley, a Missouri Republican who sponsored the bill, said on the Senate floor Thursday.

The app has access to users' location, calendar, notebooks, and other features on their phones, Hawley said. Chinese law dictates that the ByteDance must hand over that data to the Chinese Communist Party upon request, he added.

Representatives for ByteDance did not respond to a request for comment Thursday.

Marc Berkman, the executive director for consumer watchdog group the Organization for Social Media Safety, said in a Thursday interview that the Chinese ownership of TikTok poses "an ongoing national security concern," in addition to basic safety concerns inherent in all social media platforms.

Governors rush to issue bans

If passed in the House and signed by President Joe Biden, the Hawley bill would have the same effect on federal employees that several Republican governors have put in place for their states' workers.

Florida and Nebraska's governors instated bans on state devices in 2020.

But only those two had any restrictions until Nov. 29, when South Dakota Gov. Kristi Noem announced a ban on the app on state employee devices in the Mount Rushmore State and an avalanche of at least a dozen more states followed.

Gov. Kristi Noem presents her fiscal year 2024 budget proposal to legislators on Dec. 6, 2022, at the Capitol in Pierre. (Makenzie Huber/South Dakota Searchlight)

In a Wall Street Journal column earlier this month, Noem criticized Biden for not advancing a national ban and called on other governors to use her executive order as an example.

"South Dakota is showing the nation how to create a state-led response to threats from communist China," she wrote. "We are taking the lead on preventing Beijing from accessing the private data of our



Sen. Josh Hawley, R-Missouri, speaks during a Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee hearing May 11, 2021, on Capitol Hill in Washington, D.C. (Photo by Tasos Katopodis-Pool/Getty Images)

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citizens and throttling our food supply. South Dakota will continue to defend its citizens. I encourage other states to follow our lead. America's security depends on it."

The states that have announced bans in the past two weeks include Georgia, Idaho, Iowa, Maryland, New Hampshire and Tennessee.

Though the state-level bans have all been enacted by GOP governors, there is a bipartisan effort in Congress to go even further, banning the app in the United States entirely. That measure was introduced Tuesday by Republican U.S. Sen. Marco Rubio of Florida, Republican U.S. Rep. Mike Gallagher of Wisconsin and Democratic U.S. Rep. Raja Krishnamoorthi of Illinois.

"Everyone agrees they're a privacy danger to America, to our national security," Rubio said in a cable news appearance Wednesday night. "We shouldn't have the Communist Party of China having access to a treasure trove of American data that they can use to try to influence and divide us at the same time they collect valuable information."

Next steps

Hawley's bill also passed the Senate in 2020, but the House did not vote on it and it did not become law. In her weekly press conference Thursday, U.S. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi was supportive but noncommittal about that chamber passing the bill in the few days left in this year's session.

Pelosi said she hadn't closely analyzed the bill but understood it did not contain major concerns for U.S. intelligence agencies.

"We're checking with the administration — just in terms of language, not in terms of being opposed to the idea, but just being specific," she said. "It's very, very important."

White House Press Secretary Karine Jean-Pierre declined to comment on the administration's position at her Thursday press briefing, saying the White House would wait for Congress to act.

—Jennifer Shutt contributed to this report.



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.



JENNIFER SHUTT



Jennifer covers the nation's capital as a senior reporter for States Newsroom. Her coverage areas include congressional policy, politics and legal challenges with a focus on health care, unemployment, housing and aid to families.

COMMENTARY

Blizzard therapy: Find solace in reading about storms that were even worse

BRAD JOHNSON

DECEMBER 15, 2022 4:54 PM

What better is there to do during a four-day snowstorm than to think about past snowstorms?

"Blizzard therapy" is what author Carey Goldberg called such behavior after he read Laura Ingalls Wilder's "The Long Winter" during a 2015 snowstorm.

My blizzard therapy caused me to stumble across several little-known historical writings.

One comes from the "History of South Dakota, Vol. 1," written by Doane Robinson in 1904.

Writing about "The Hard Winter of 1880-1881," the author says, "The great blizzard of the middle of October 1880, was the initial performance of a winter unprecedented, and never succeeded in severity, in the history of Dakota, or the northwest."

On Feb. 2, 1881, "a snow storm set in which continued without cessation for nine days."

While there was great hardship, there was little suffering. "The people were as a rule young and healthy, and it is almost universal testimony of the pioneer that they have never gotten more real enjoyment out of a winter than they did from the winter of the big blockade."

We complain when we perceive that the snow plows don't get to our street fast enough.

The 1880-1881 winter still stands as our most severe. Major spring floods follow hard winters. The historic April 1997 Big Sioux River flood was matched by one in 1897 and surpassed only by flooding in the spring of 1881.

A major blizzard in 1897 was detailed in a Jan. 6, 1897, New York Times article. "The greatest snow and windstorm since the settlement of that part of South Dakota round about Huron abated this morning.

"It was fifty hours duration. Two feet of snow fell, and it is piled in immense drifts so solid that several days will elapse before the streets are passable. Snowplows and gangs of shovelers were sent south, north and west this morning by the Chicago and Northwestern Railway to clear the tracks, while a rotary snow plow set about clearing the main track from Tracy to Huron.

"Railroad officials here say there is snow all over the Dakota division from five to twenty feet deep."

On Jan. 10, 1997, just over 100 years later, another deadly blizzard hit.

A deep snowpack whipped by 50 mph winds and temperatures at 12 below zero killed about 100,000



Snow piles up under an interstate bridge during a December 2022 winter storm in South Dakota. (Photo courtesy of SD

Department of Transportation)

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cattle. Snow drifts up to 20 feet deep were reported.

Then there is the Jan. 18, 1888, event that became known as "The Children's Blizzard."

"Despite prior heavy snowfall and brutal winter conditions in December 1887, several accounts from the northern Plains reported that January 12, 1888, started as a surprisingly beautiful, mild day with temperatures well above freezing that melted snow throughout the region," The National Weather Service's Heritage website said.

"However, the warmth didn't last: within a few hours, temperatures plummeted as low as -40 F and icy winds ripped through the air at almost 60 miles per hour. In the whiteout, between 250 and 500 people perished. Nicknamed 'The Children's Blizzard,' this devastating storm resulted in the deaths of many children on their walk home from school."

Then came the blizzard of 1949.

Rapid City Weather Bureau Office Meteorologist-in-Charge Fred H. McNally wrote, "This is rated as the most severe blizzard in Rapid City history, considering wind, snow and temperature factors." Winds roared up to 73 mph at the city's airport and "in excess of 90 mph" at Ellsworth Air Force Base.

Dynamite later would be used to loosen the ice-encrusted snow so a plow on a train could clear the North Western line from Pierre to Rapid City.

And when it comes to modern day snow storms, the current one may be remembered for shutting down Terry Peak Ski Area in the Black Hills.

"Terry Peak will not open today, Dec. 14, 2022," its Facebook page said. "We have received approximately 40-48 inches of snow."

That's probably more than the resort received all of last year.

And more was on the way.

In the meantime, as this storm stretches into four days, blizzard therapy is a good way to stop from going stir crazy.



BRAD JOHNSON

Brad Johnson is a Watertown real estate appraiser and journalist whose previous career was as a Colorado newspaper reporter and editor. He has been writing regularly appearing opinion columns for at least 20 years.

White House keys in on mayors and mayors-elect for D.C. forum on federal funding

BY: JENNIFER SHUTT - DECEMBER 15, 2022 1:41 PM

WASHINGTON — Mayors from throughout the United States will sit down with senior Biden administration officials Friday for a half-day forum on how their cities can access resources within the COVID-19 aid bill, bipartisan infrastructure law and Democrats' signature health care and climate change package known as the Inflation Reduction Act.

The meetings, which will mostly take place at the Eisenhower Executive Office Building next to the White House, are designed to help break down the hundreds of different funding programs in those "behemoth bills" and give mayors a chance to meet face-to-face with



President Joe Biden. (Official White House photo by Adam Schultz)

the administration leaders who can help them funnel the federal money down to their cities, officials said.

"As they're coming into office, we just want to make sure that they know what resources are available to them, that they're connected to our office and Intergovernmental Affairs and to also the agencies that are really leading so much of this important work," said Julie Rodriguez, senior advisor and assistant to the president and director of the White House Office of Intergovernmental Affairs.

During an interview with States Newsroom on Thursday, Rodriguez said that the White House wants to work with mayors in 2023 on implementing their "key legislative achievements."

She also noted some of the Cabinet secretaries attending are former mayors themselves, giving them an in-depth familiarity with the process of getting access to federal resources. Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg, for example, who is expected to attend, is the former mayor of South Bend, Indiana.

The Cabinet secretaries and senior Biden administration officials also want to hear from mayors about what issues their communities are facing and what they want from the Biden administration going forward.

"We know that issues like housing are front and center for them," Rodriguez said. "So, it really was a combination of putting forward what we see as important priorities in our agenda for 2023, but also being responsive to what we know they're dealing with on the front lines of their city, day in and day out."

White House officials at the Friday meeting will include Housing & Urban Development Secretary Marcia Fudge and Labor Secretary Marty Walsh as well as Treasury Department Chief Recovery Officer Jacob Leibenluft, Domestic Policy Advisor Susan Rice, Rodriguez, American Rescue Plan Coordinator Gene Sperling and National Climate Advisor Ali Zaidi.

Fourteen mayors will attend the forum, including Mayor Pamela Goynes-Brown of North Las Vegas, Nevada; Mayor Becky Daggett of Flagstaff, Arizona; Mayor-elect Craig Greenberg of Louisville, Kentucky; Mayor Chris Hoy of Salem, Oregon; Mayor-elect Garnett Johnson of Augusta, Georgia; Mayor-elect Phil-

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lip Jones of Newport News, Virginia; Mayor-elect Harvey Ward of Gainesville, Florida; Mayor-elect Hollies Winston of Brooklyn Park, Minnesota.

Rodriguez said the Biden administration wanted "a strong cross-section" of newly elected majors to attend the meeting and used that to determine which ones to invite.

"It's sort of those that are just coming into office, to make sure they can quickly tap into the opportunities and kind of resources that the federal government is making available," Rodriguez said.

Mayors are especially good partners for the White House, Rodriguez said, because they're "problem solvers."

"They're folks who roll up their sleeves and get things done and deliver for their constituents," Rodriguez said. "There's not a lot of deliberation and a lot of time to try to, you know, contemplate whether or not they're going to fix potholes. They just got to do it."



JENNIFER SHUTT  

Jennifer covers the nation's capital as a senior reporter for States Newsroom. Her coverage areas include congressional policy, politics and legal challenges with a focus on health care, unemployment, housing and aid to families.

White House resumes handing out free COVID-19 rapid test kits

BY: JENNIFER SHUTT - DECEMBER 15, 2022 10:53 AM

WASHINGTON — The Biden administration is once again offering Americans the opportunity to order free at-home COVID-19 rapid tests from the federal government, a program that it had shuttered amid an ongoing stalemate with Congress over additional funding to address the virus.

The program will allow each household to order four free COVID-19 tests as part of the White House's plans to try to tamp down the number of diagnoses this winter amid an increase in coronavirus, flu and RSV.

"While COVID-19 is not the disruptive force it once was, the virus continues to evolve, and cases are on the rise again as families are spending more time indoors and gathering for the holidays," the White House wrote in a fact sheet about its efforts this winter.

The free COVID-19 test kits can be ordered through COVIDTests.gov or by calling 1-800-232-0233 between 8 a.m. and midnight Eastern.

Preparing for winter

The Biden administration's winter preparedness plan focuses predominantly on vaccination, with proposals to hold pop-up clinics and work with governors to increase nursing home vaccination rates. Health officials also are calling on hospitals to offer patients a shot before discharging unvaccinated patients, or those who aren't up-to-date on their boosters.

More than 267 million people, or 80% of the U.S. population, have gotten at least one dose of the COVID-19 vaccination, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

But those numbers decrease over time, with 229 million, or 69% completing the two-dose primary series. And just 42 million people have gotten the updated bivalent COVID-19 vaccine that public health officials approved in September, according to CDC data.

The weekly death total from COVID-19 has remained relatively steady since mid-April, when about 3,000 Americans were dying of the virus weekly. That number dipped a bit over the summer, but has stayed about the same throughout the fall and into winter. For the week of Dec. 7, another 2,981 people died of the virus, according to the CDC.

The Biden administration said its plan for the winter will continue focusing on the highest risk people, including "residents of nursing homes and other congregate care facilities, where we know vaccination rates remain too low."

"This also includes older Americans, individuals who are immunocompromised, disabled individuals, and others who face a higher risk of severe illness and death from COVID-19," the White House wrote in its fact sheet.

The Biden administration plans to send nursing home and long-term-care facility administrators a play-book for this winter. Public health officials also called on those facilities to take "concrete actions to ensure that every resident is educated on and offered an updated COVID-19 shot; that every resident who tests positive for COVID-19 is evaluated and offered treatment; and that every facility is taking steps to improve its indoor air quality."



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Feds recover \$280,000 in back wages and damages from Hibachi Grill

BY: SEARCHLIGHT STAFF - DECEMBER 15, 2022 9:39 AM

The U.S. Department of Labor has recovered \$279,070 from a Sioux Falls buffet restaurant that paid kitchen workers a flat monthly salary and denied them overtime wages for hours over 40 in a workweek, the department announced Thursday in a news release.

An investigation by the department's Wage and Hour Division found Hibachi Grill & Supreme Buffet – operated by H & G Inc. – failed to pay 31 workers overtime wages when required, did not keep accurate records of hours worked or employees' full names and addresses, and failed to post the required poster, all violations of the Fair Labor Standards Act.

H & G Inc. denied 31 kitchen workers their full wages, said Wage and Hour District Director Chad Frasier in Denver.

"The Wage and Hour Division knows violations like these are all too common in the restaurant industry, and we leverage resources – such as working cooperatively with advocacy groups – to bring employers into compliance and ensure workers' rights and benefits are protected under the law," Frasier said in the release.

In addition to paying back wages, H & G agreed to conduct internal bi-annual compliance audits and to provide ongoing training on federal wage laws to managers and workers.

In fiscal year 2021, the Wage and Hour Division recovered more than \$34.7 million for more than 29,000 food service workers, in an industry ranked first among the division's "low wage, high violation" employers.

The department's Quick Service Restaurants Compliance Assistance Toolkit explains wage laws for the industry.

For more information about the FLSA and other laws enforced by the Wage and Hour Division, contact the division's toll-free helpline at 866-4US-WAGE (487-9243). Learn more about the Wage and Hour Division, including a search tool to use if you think you may be owed back wages collected by the division. Download the agency's new Timesheet App for android devices to ensure hours and pay are accurate.

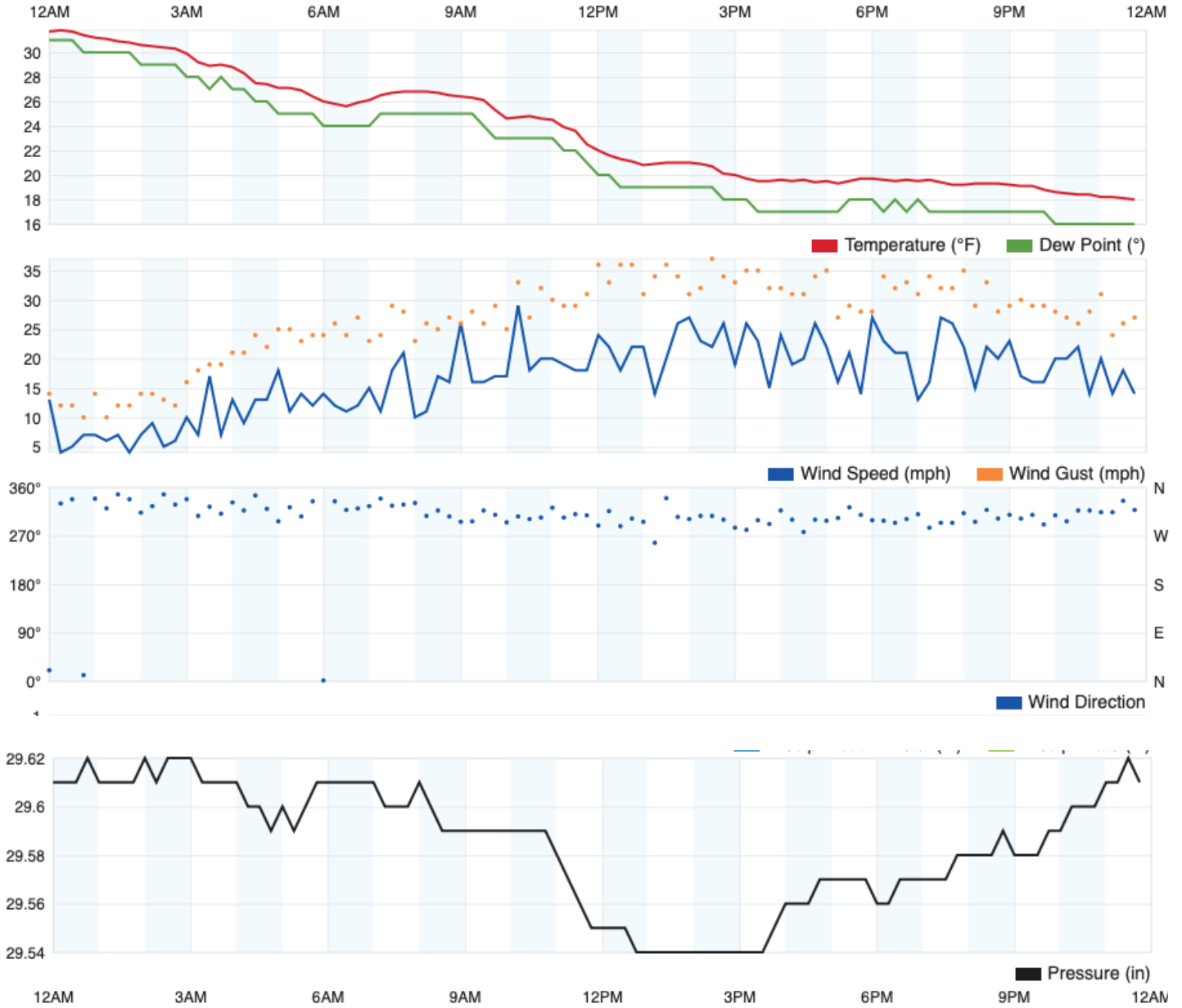


Hibachi Grill and Supreme Buffet in Sioux Falls. (John Hult/South Dakota Searchlight)

Groton Daily Independent

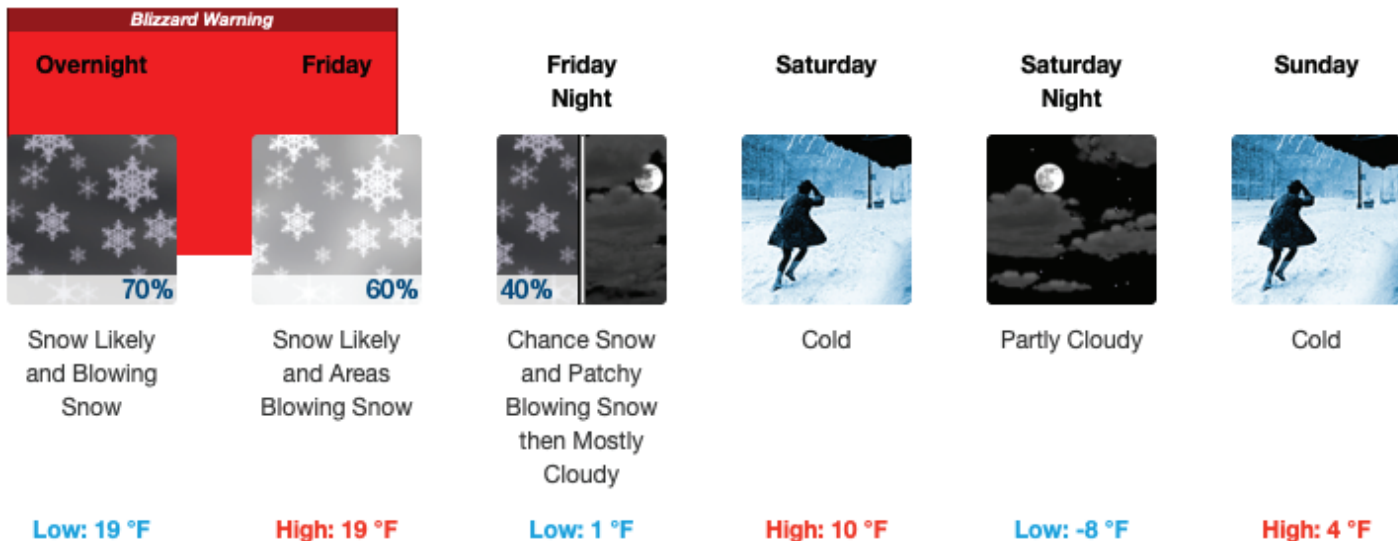
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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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BLIZZARD TODAY

December 15, 2022

Dangerous Conditions Ongoing

Wind gusts of 35 to 55 mph and additional new snowfall into Friday will lead to continued significantly reduced visibilities

Avoid travel! Many roads are closed or impassable



weather.gov/aberdeen

Dangerous conditions are ongoing across all of central and northeastern South Dakota and west central Minnesota. Avoid travel - many roads are closed or impassable. The storm will continue into Friday.

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Snowfall Intensity and Timing

Persistent light snow continues through the afternoon

Probability of Precipitation Forecast

	12/16 Fri									
	3am	6am	9am	12pm	3pm	6pm	9pm	12am	3am	6am
Aberdeen	64	51	50	50	51	35	19	5	2	0
Britton	74	73	73	74	75	51	31	15	6	2
Eagle Butte	79	79	59	39	29	2	2	1	1	0
Eureka	78	55	48	56	57	31	11	2	0	0
Gettysburg	73	60	58	53	58	20	7	1	0	1
Kennebec	68	64	66	55	52	16	9	1	1	0
McIntosh	81	76	62	55	34	6	1	0	0	0
Milbank	57	63	54	57	49	24	10	4	1	1
Miller	63	44	44	42	40	30	20	5	2	0
Mobridge	67	62	56	52	49	17	4	0	0	0
Murdo	75	74	71	59	40	9	2	1	1	0
Pierre	74	62	58	50	43	11	4	1	0	0
Redfield	61	48	47	45	41	26	13	3	2	0
Sisseton	78	83	72	60	58	38	16	9	1	1
Watertown	58	61	53	44	45	28	9	4	0	0
Webster	68	74	64	54	54	38	15	8	3	1
Wheaton	67	64	56	56	49	29	20	10	5	3

Snow Forecast

	12/16 Fri					Total
	6am	12pm	6pm	12am	6am	
Aberdeen	0.2	0.3	0.2	0.0	0.0	0.7
Britton	0.3	0.3	0.3	0.0	0.0	0.9
Eagle Butte	0.2	0.1	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.3
Eureka	0.2	0.2	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.4
Gettysburg	0.3	0.2	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.5
Kennebec	0.5	0.3	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.8
McIntosh	0.3	0.1	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.4
Milbank	0.3	0.3	0.1	0.0	0.0	0.7
Miller	0.4	0.2	0.2	0.0	0.0	0.8
Mobridge	0.3	0.2	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.5
Murdo	0.6	0.3	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.9
Pierre	0.5	0.3	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.8
Redfield	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.0	0.0	0.6
Sisseton	0.5	0.3	0.2	0.0	0.0	1.0
Watertown	0.2	0.2	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.4
Webster	0.3	0.4	0.2	0.0	0.0	0.9
Wheaton	0.4	0.3	0.2	0.0	0.0	0.9

Blizzard Warning

URGENT - WINTER WEATHER MESSAGE

National Weather Service Aberdeen SD

234 AM CST Fri Dec 16 2022

Brown-

Including the city of Aberdeen

234 AM CST Fri Dec 16 2022

...BLIZZARD WARNING NOW IN EFFECT UNTIL 3 PM CST THIS AFTERNOON...

* WHAT...Blizzard conditions. Additional snow accumulations of one to two inches. Winds gusting as high as 50 mph.

* WHERE...Brown County.

* WHEN...Until 3 PM CST this afternoon.

* IMPACTS...Plan on slippery road conditions. Areas of blowing snow could significantly reduce visibility.

The hazardous conditions could impact the morning commute.

PRECAUTIONARY/PREPAREDNESS ACTIONS...

Travel should be restricted to emergencies only. If you must travel, have a winter survival kit with you.

If you get stranded, stay with your vehicle.

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

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Additional Snow Accumulations

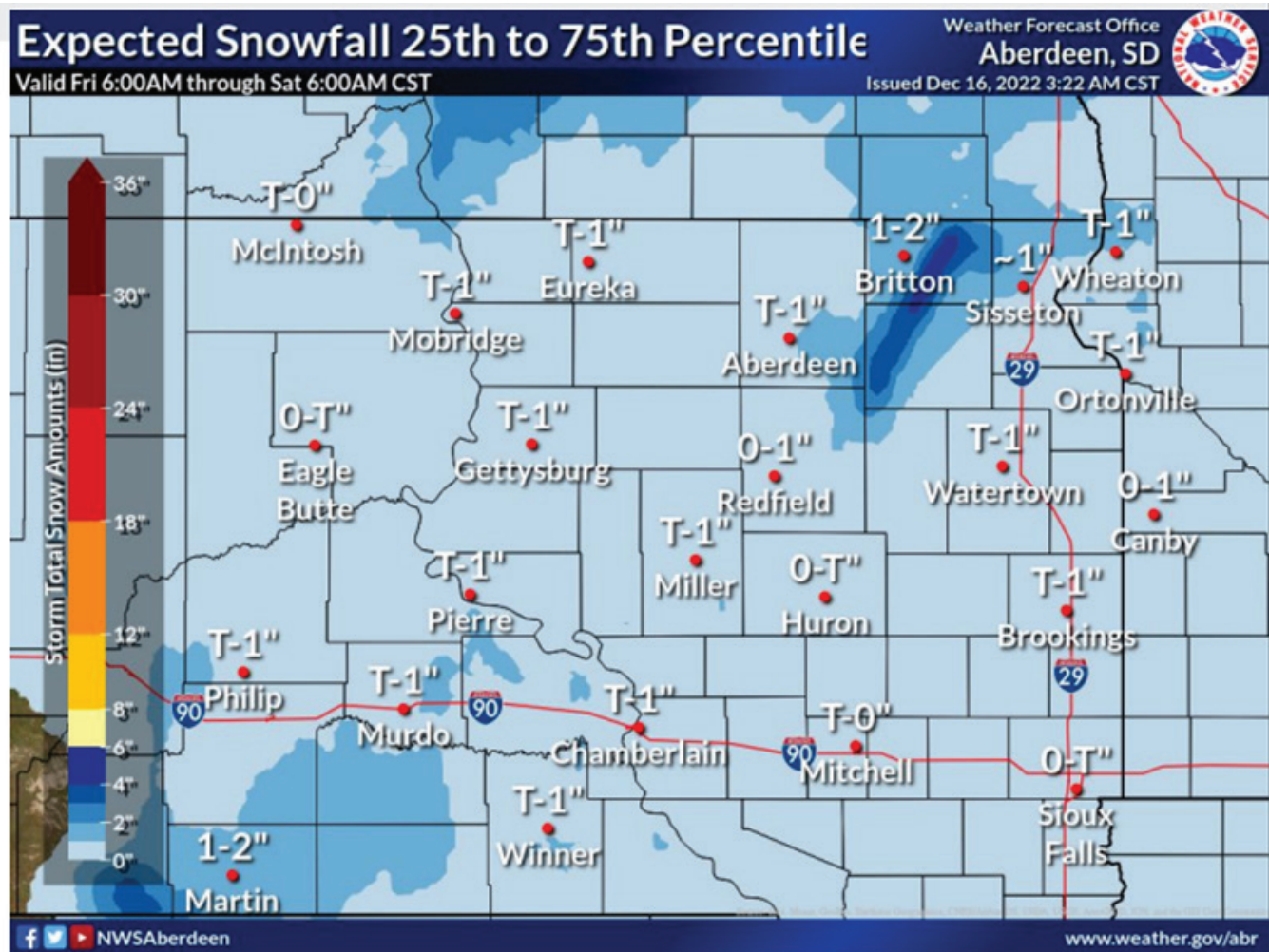
December 16, 2022
4:08 AM

Timing/Trends

- Light snow through the afternoon.
- Sisseton hills region could still see a few inches.

Impacts

- Visibilities will continue to be reduced due to falling & blowing snow.
- No travel advised across South Dakota. Significant drifting from the strong winds will lead to extended clean up times.



Some additional accumulations, generally less than an inch, though maybe a few inches for the favored Sisseton hills/lakes region.

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Wind Gust and Direction Forecast

Dec 16

Key Points

- North to northwest winds of **40 to 50 mph** will continue through mid-day. Winds diminishing through the afternoon.
- Tree and power line damage possible, especially in locations that received significant icing earlier this week.

	12/16 Fri						12/17 Sat		
	6am	9am	12pm	3pm	6pm	9pm	12am	3am	6am
Aberdeen	45	43	39	38	35	33	30	29	23
Britton	44	41	39	39	32	32	28	26	23
Eagle Butte	47	48	48	44	43	37	33	28	26
Eureka	46	44	45	41	38	36	32	31	23
Gettysburg	46	45	44	44	40	37	33	31	24
Kennebec	43	43	45	43	38	33	30	26	22
McIntosh	48	47	45	45	43	38	31	24	18
Milbank	38	38	38	37	33	33	32	32	28
Miller	45	41	40	39	35	33	29	28	23
Mobridge	45	41	41	40	39	35	29	22	20
Murdo	46	45	44	41	40	37	31	29	24
Pierre	40	41	39	39	38	33	25	21	17
Redfield	43	43	40	38	35	33	29	29	24
Sisseton	43	41	40	38	36	36	32	31	29
Watertown	39	38	39	37	35	32	31	31	26
Webster	45	43	43	41	38	37	33	32	29
Wheaton	35	36	36	35	30	30	29	28	25

*Table values in mph

**Created: 3 am CST Fri 12/16/2022

***Values are maximums over the period beginning at the time shown.



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

National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD

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Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 31.8 °F at 12:15 AM

Low Temp: 18 °F at 11:45 PM

Wind: 37 mph at 2:30 PM

Precip: : More snow

Day length: 8 hours, 47 minutes

Today's Info

Record High: 62 in 1962

Record Low: -28 in 1951

Average High: 28°F

Average Low: 8°F

Average Precip in Dec.: 0.31

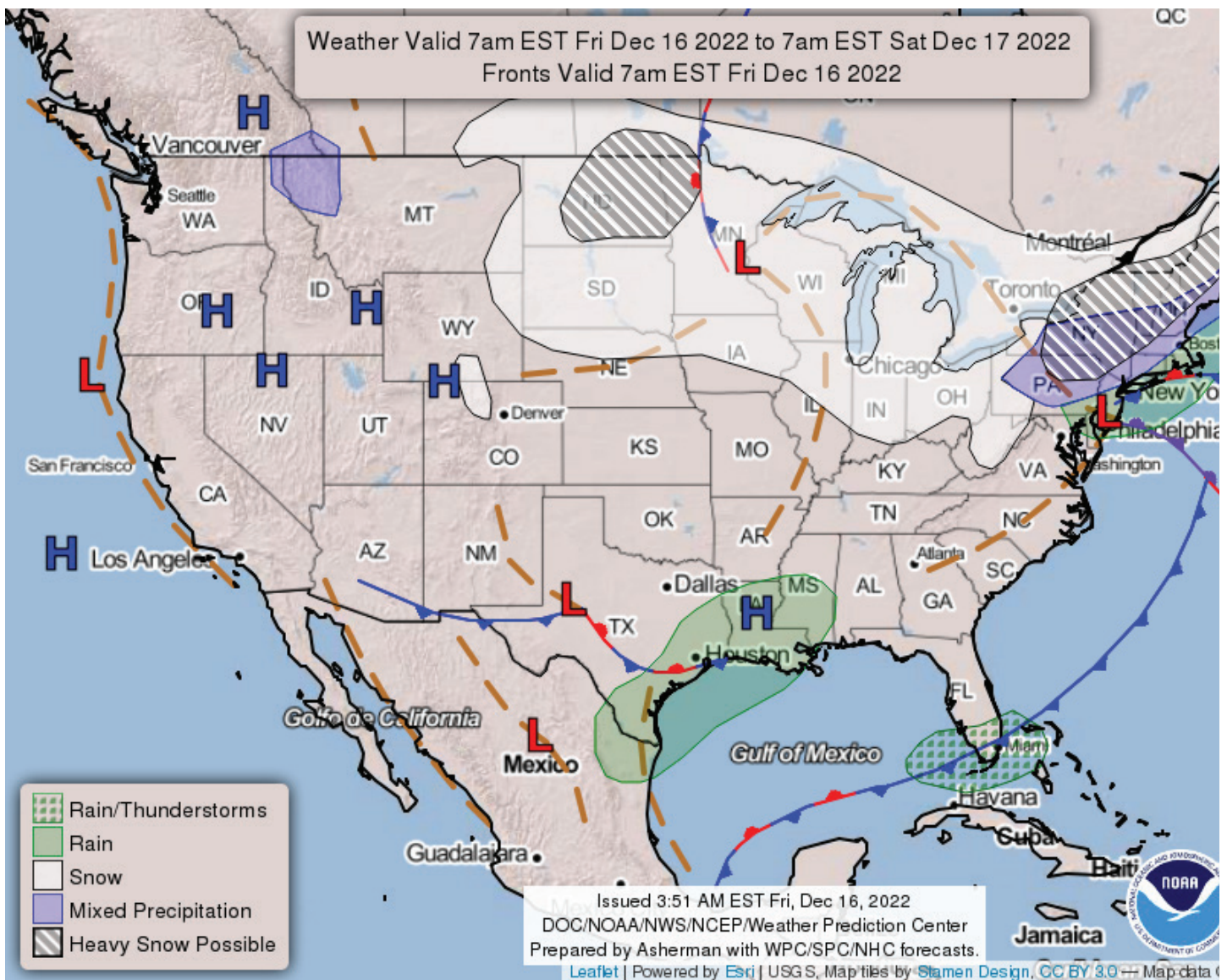
Precip to date in Dec.: 1.00

Average Precip to date: 21.52

Precip Year to Date: 18.50

Sunset Tonight: 4:51:44 PM

Sunrise Tomorrow: 8:05:10 AM



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Today in Weather History

December 16, 1967: With temperatures in the upper 20s, heavy freezing rain fell in west central and southwest Minnesota at night on the 16th, causing widespread ice accumulations on all exposed surfaces, and power and telephone poles and lines went down over a vast region. Some places were without power and phone service for three to four days. This storm was classified as the most severe ice storm in the past 20 years in some areas. Reports were received of turkeys and other poultry dying due to the cold in the countryside. 20 to 30 cars were in the ditch on one slick stretch of road in Rock County. Further west, throughout eastern South Dakota, freezing rain for most of the day formed ice from 3/8 to 3/4 inch on exposed surfaces. Extensive damage was caused to utility lines. All roads became dangerous for traveling, and one death was directly linked to the ice storm. The ice cut off a regular water supply, causing one person to attempt to get water from a cistern. She slipped on the ice into the cistern. Three deaths were indirectly related to the ice storm; two due to automobile accidents, and one due to a heart attack.

December 16, 2000: Northwest winds of 30 to 50 mph, with gusts to 60 mph, combined with newly fallen snow and arctic air to bring widespread blizzard conditions and extreme wind chills as low as 70 below zero to west central Minnesota and much of South Dakota from late on the 15th through the 16th. Events were canceled, travel was shut down, and some motorists were stranded. Both US Highway 12 and Interstate 29 in South Dakota were closed throughout the day. As an indirect result of the low visibility, a semi-truck hit and totaled a pickup truck in the snow just west of Clark.

December 16, 1811: An estimated Magnitude 7.5 earthquake struck the Mississippi Valley near the town of New Madrid in Missouri at 2:15 am local time. People were awakened by the shaking in New York City, Washington D.C., and Charleston, South Carolina. The ground motions were described as most alarming and frightening in places like Nashville, Tennessee, and Louisville, Kentucky. In the epicentral area, the ground surface was described as in great convulsion with sand and water ejected tens of feet into the air.

In 1941, only two women were employed by the Weather Bureau. By 1945, more than 900 women are employed by the Weather Bureau as observers and forecasters, as a result of filling positions of men during World War II. Eleven days after Pearl Harbor, the Army requested that all weather broadcasts be discontinued. The fear was that the enemy would use this information to plan an attack on the United States.

1835 - New England experienced one of their coldest days of record. At noon on that bitterly cold Wednesday the mercury stood at four degrees below at Boston, 15 degrees below at Norfolk CT, and 17 degrees below at Hanover NH. The temperature at Boston was 12 degrees below zero by sunset. Gale force winds accompanied the severe cold, and that night a great New York City fire destroyed much of the financial district. (David Ludlum)

1917 - An ice jam closed the Ohio River between Warsaw, KY, and Rising Sun, IN. The thirty foot high ice jam held for 58 days, and backed up the river a distance of 100 miles. (David Ludlum)

1987 - A Pacific storm battered the coast of California with rain and high winds, and dumped heavy snow on the mountains of California. Winds along the coast gusted to 70 mph at Point Arguello, and winds in the Tehachapi Mountains of southern California gusted to 100 mph at Wheeler Ridge. Snowfall totals ranged up to 24 inches at Mammoth Mountain. Snow fell for two minutes at Malibu Beach, and Disneyland was closed due to the weather for only the second time in twenty-four years. A winter storm which began in the Southern Rockies four days earlier finished its course producing snow and high winds in New England. Snowfall totals ranged up to 19 inches at Blanchard ME. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - Fairbanks, AK, reported freezing rain and record warm temperatures. The afternoon high of 41 degrees was 43 degrees above normal. Snow and high winds continued to plague the mountains of southern California. Mount Wilson CA reported two inches of rain in six hours during the early morning, and a storm total of more than 3.50 inches of rain. (The National Weather Summary)

1989 - Fifty-seven cities from the Southern and Central Plains to the Appalachians reported record low temperatures for the date, including North Platte NE with a reading of 17 degrees below zero. Squalls in the Great Lakes Region produced 18 inches of snow at Syracuse NY, and 30 inches at Carlisle IND. Low pressure brought heavy snow to northern New England, with 18 inches reported at Derby VT and Saint Johnsbury VT. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

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Daily Devotionals

Seeds of Hope

GIFTS

Christmas gifts generate great excitement and interest. After the presents are wrapped and placed under the tree, many people spend countless hours trying to figure out what might be on the inside. Sometimes the gifts are carefully shaken or lifted to see if the weight or size might give an indication about what the contents might be.

But when God gave us the first Christmas gift, its value was obvious. It was a gift of love that could not be measured or found outside of Him. It was a gift of mercy that only He could provide. And, it was a gift of grace that only God could give us through His Son.

God's love is ultimately expressed in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. His love is the source of His mercy and grace, and it is because of His love that we have mercy and grace. It was because of His love for us that He gave His one and only Son so that whoever believes in Him will find His mercy and enjoy His grace and be with Him forever in eternity.

John says something very significant about this love. "If God loved us," he says, "we ought to love one another." His love does not end with our salvation and then begins with our obligation to share His love with others. It begins a pattern of self-sacrificing love that Christians must live by sharing His mercy and grace with others.

Prayer: Lord, we often forget how responsible we are to share Your gifts of love, mercy, and salvation with others. Give us no peace until we share Your gifts. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: 1 John 4:11 Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.



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
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News from the  Associated Press

Thursday's Scores

The Associated Press

GIRLS PREP BASKETBALL=

Lakota Nation Invitational=

He Sapa Bracket=

Oelrichs 47, Wakpala 44

Omaha Nation, Neb. 80, Takini 17

Tiospa Zina Tribal 50, Santee, Neb. 48

Tiospaye Topa 50, Crazy Horse 30

Lakota Nations Invitational=

Makosica Bracket=

Crow Creek 53, McLaughlin 51

Pine Ridge 42, Lower Brule 40

St. Francis Indian 41, Cheyenne-Eagle Butte 34

Todd County 58, Marty Indian 56

Oceti Sakowin Bracket=

Lakota Tech 48, Wall 43

Rapid City Christian 68, Little Wound 39

Red Cloud 56, Dupree 34

White River 46, Custer 44

POSTPONEMENTS AND CANCELLATIONS=

Ponca, Neb. vs. Vermillion, ppd.

BOYS PREP BASKETBALL=

Lakota Nation Invitational=

He Sapa Bracket=

Crazy Horse 72, Dupree 54

Omaha Nation, Neb. 85, Takini 35

Santee, Neb. 112, Tiospaye Topa 72

Wakpala 66, Oelrichs 27

Lakota Nations Invitational=

Makosica Bracket=

Crow Creek 73, Wall 68

Marty Indian 63, Little Wound 42

St. Francis Indian 47, Cheyenne-Eagle Butte 43

Tiospa Zina Tribal 35, McLaughlin 34

Oceti Sakowin Bracket=

Lakota Tech 60, Custer 53

Lower Brule 58, Pine Ridge 47

Rapid City Christian 77, Red Cloud 61

White River 59, Todd County 32

POSTPONEMENTS AND CANCELLATIONS=

Beresford vs. Flandreau, ppd.

Deuel vs. Redfield, ppd.

Gregory vs. Colome, ppd.

Hill City vs. New Underwood, ppd.

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

Cooke leads sluggish No. 1 South Carolina women past SDSU

SIoux FALLS, S.D. (AP) — Zia Cooke scored 13 of her 18 points in the second half, and top-ranked South Carolina overcame a sluggish offensive effort to beat South Dakota State 62-44 at the Sanford Pentagon on Thursday night.

Although officially a neutral-site game, the crowd naturally favored the home-state Jackrabbits for their first game in school history against the nation's top-ranked team. The stands were about 75% full as a blizzard blanketed the area and stranded fans trying to get to the venue.

"This is a gut check win for us," South Carolina coach Dawn Staley said. "To come here, to have the crowd. We're used to playing in front of big crowds. We're not used to playing in front of big crowds on the road. It just prepares us."

The Gamecocks (9-0) shot a season-low 34.3% from the field, far below their season average of 48.2%, while also scoring a season low. South Carolina came in averaging 83 points per game and failed to reach 80 points for just the third time.

Cooke was 1 for 9 from the field in the first half but exploded for 11 points in the final quarter. Aliyah Boston added 12 points and nine rebounds for South Carolina.

Myah Selland scored 12 points for the Jackrabbits (7-5) and Brooklyn Meyer added 10.

Trailing by nine at halftime, South Dakota State got within six midway through the third period after Selland hit a 3-pointer followed by a pair of free throws from Dru Gylten.

"We knew they weren't going to go away," Staley said. "We play this game knowing that we are going to be challenged. They are a really good basketball team. They make you pay. They're patient. They are calculating and intentional defensively as well as offensively."

The Gamecocks responded quickly after the Jackrabbits got within six. After a bucket from Kierra Fletcher, Brea Beal stole the inbounds pass and scored, giving South Carolina a 10-point advantage in a matter of seconds.

"Looking at this team, they're a good competitive team and they play hard," said Beal, who had nine points and career highs in steals (six) and blocks (five). "That's going to be any team we play against. It's another game to turn the page, go to practice, look at how we played and see what we can do better."

RUGGED ROAD

The Gamecocks traveled to South Dakota for a game for the third straight year, a trip Staley relishes.

"This is the kind of environment we want to play in," she said. "It's very similar to playing in the NCAA tournament, but in December. I know there's a blizzard out there, but that's cool too because you never know where the Final Four is going to be, where you're going to have to travel to. So it's always good to play in an environment where you really get something out of it competitively, you get something out of it when it comes to hospitality and that makes you feel really good about being here."

STAT OF THE NIGHT

South Carolina finished with 14 blocked shots, one shy of its season high.

BIG PICTURE

South Carolina: Despite the lethargic offensive output, the Gamecocks remained one of nine unbeaten schools in Division I.

South Dakota State: The Jackrabbits fell to 2-2 against ranked foes. They lost to No. 16 Creighton to open the season but beat Louisville on Nov. 21 and Kansas State on Dec. 10.

UP NEXT

South Carolina: Hosts Charleston Southern on Sunday to begin three straight at home.

South Dakota State: Returns to its home arena in Brookings to host Oral Roberts on Monday.

South cleans up from tornadoes as blizzards advance north

By JAKE BLEIBERG and KEVIN MCGILL Associated Press

KEITHVILLE, La. (AP) — Communities from Texas to Florida began assisting survivors and cleaning up Thursday after tornadoes left scattered destruction and at least three people dead across the South. To the north, blizzards continued to pound the Midwest as more ice and snow headed toward New England.

Three straight days of volatile weather in the South continued as a possible tornado wrecked a building housing a cotton gin in rural Georgia and forecasters issued a stream of tornado warnings across the Florida peninsula.

The same storm front spawned twisters as it marched from central Texas across Louisiana, where all three storm deaths were confirmed, before destroying farm buildings in Mississippi and tearing roofs off other buildings in Alabama.

In Union Parish, Louisiana, near the Arkansas line, volunteers stocked a gymnasium with donated clothing and other supplies for dozens whose homes were badly damaged or destroyed.

"It shows that people love you," said Patsy Andrews, who survived the storm hunkered in a bathtub with her three children. "It shows that people care."

Andrews teared up as she recounted how winds blew open her front door early Wednesday in the Union County community of Farmerville as tornado alerts sounded. Windows started breaking with a popping noise like gunfire, she said, as the family crawled into the bathroom.

"The only thing we know to do was just crying, we was screaming, just calling on Jesus," Andrews said. She added: "We all grabbed each other, we jumped in the tub. All we could do was just pray. It was very devastating."

A few others caught in the storm's path weren't so fortunate.

An 8-year-old boy and his mother were killed in rural Keithville, Louisiana, when their mobile home was swept away Tuesday. Authorities found a third victim outside a home in St. Charles Parish, west of New Orleans, after a possible tornado struck the opposite corner of the state Wednesday.

The National Weather Service can take days to confirm whether destructive winds were in fact tornadoes. Data compiled by the Southern Regional Climate Center at Texas A&M University showed nearly 50 tornadoes reported across six states since Tuesday — the vast majority of them in Louisiana and Mississippi.

In Mississippi, a suspected tornado destroyed four large chicken houses, one containing 5,000 roosters, Rankin County Sheriff Bryan Bailey said. In Summerville, Alabama, Fire Chief Michael Aaron said storm winds tore away roofing and downed power lines.

State emergency managers said four people were also injured in storms. Three of those were in the Mississippi Delta's Sharkey County, where storms hit a mobile home park in Anguilla on Wednesday. One person was injured in Hinds County, home to the capital city of Jackson.

Before the storm front started moving offshore, police in rural Doerun, Georgia, reported that a suspected tornado struck a large building housing a cotton gin, leaving a sagging heap of bent metal. No injuries were reported, the police department said in a Facebook post.

Further to the north, the National Weather Service issued blizzard warnings Thursday in the Dakotas as well as portions of Montana, Wyoming and Nebraska. As the storm moves eastward, interior parts of the Northeast could accumulate as much as one foot (30 centimeters) of snow, said Zach Taylor, a weather service meteorologist in College Park, Maryland.

"It really, truly has been a coast-to-coast winter storm that has affected a large portion of the country, and that doesn't begin to even mention the severe weather in the South," Taylor said.

Roger Hainy, who owns a farm near Wessington Springs in central South Dakota, said he was shut in after blowing snow formed drifts that made the roads impassable. Hainy's farm lost power earlier in the week when freezing rain hit the area.

"Back when I was a kid we used to have three-day blizzards, but this one is going to be four days," Hainy said. "It's been a long time since we've had one like this."

In Bismarck, North Dakota, an additional four inches (10 centimeters) of snow were expected Thursday

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to top a foot that has already accumulated. Wind gusts of 60 miles per hour (96 kph) prompted a no-travel advisory for major highways.

"The wind and ice — it's miserable, and a lot of people are in the ditches," said Dean Cota, manager of the Starnart Travel Center, where the parking lot was full of truckers waiting out the storm. "Everything's just slick and it's blowing vehicles right off the road."

Blizzard conditions pelted Minnesota, leaving thousands without power and blanketing roads with ice and snow.

Brianna Vatalaro, 21, in northern Minnesota said she lost power and heat in her home for more than six hours Thursday morning and watched 50-foot trees fall on powerlines, creating blue and green sparks outside her house.

She thought about "all the things that could possibly go wrong," like not being able to charge or use her phone in an emergency, or needing to help her stepmom who uses a breathing machine that requires power.

Vatalaro tried driving to her job at Home Depot but gave up within five blocks, she said, after seeing trucks spin out on the highway and hopping out of her car to help push a man's vehicle out of ice and snow. "It's been chaotic," she said.

In New York, Gov. Kathy Hochul said the state is well prepared for several inches of snow expected in some areas over the coming days. During a briefing in Albany, Hochul said there's also a chance that strong winds could topple power lines.

"We have utility crews all set, already on the ground, ready to respond as quickly as possible," she said.

Forecasters expect more blizzard conditions in places across the Upper Midwest, and ice and snow from the central Appalachians into the Northeast. The National Weather Service issued an ice storm warning Thursday in parts of four states and a winter storm warning through Friday night from Pennsylvania to Maine. The weather service said heavy snowfall is expected across portions of interior New York and New England through the weekend with storm totals expected to reach one to two feet.

Couple who traveled to South Dakota with dead girl arrested

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — Police in Mitchell, South Dakota said Thursday they were investigating a couple who traveled from Washington state with the body of a dead eight-year-old girl.

The police department said in a statement the couple had driven a U-haul trailer with a coffin containing the body of the girl, who had been adopted by the woman arrested. The couple had informed the Davison County Coroner that they were traveling from Washington state to Pine Ridge, according to the Mitchell Police Department.

The department said the man and woman had told investigators that the girl died earlier in the fall, but gave different dates, South Dakota Public Broadcasting reported. The man arrested told investigators that they had not told authorities about the death because they wanted to spend more time with the girl and were concerned they would "get in trouble."

The Mitchell Police Department said both were charged with failing to notify law enforcement of the death of a child and the investigation is ongoing.

The Davison County Jail confirmed that the man and woman were being held. It was not clear whether they had legal representation.

Pick Six: Poential NFL draft picks across the FCS

By HANK KURZ Jr. AP Sports Writer

Most of the attention leading up to the NFL draft centers on the top players, the ones who can change the fortunes of a franchise, help it climb up from the bottom.

They become household names. Peyton and Eli Manning. Josh Allen. Patrick Mahomes.

Far less attention is generally paid to the players in the Championship Subdivision and below, players who probably could have followed the trend of looking to transfer up when it became evident that they had the skills, but opted to stay where they started.

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Two of them from last year's draft, No. 34 overall pick Christian Watson, a wide receiver from North Dakota State selected by the Green Bay Packers, and cornerback Tariq Woolen, the No. 153 pick by the Seattle Seahawks from UTSA, have excelled and likely are in the running for rookie of the year accolades.

This year's draft will be no different, and as teams set their draft boards, here are six FCS players who might warrant extra attention from each team's talent evaluators:

CODY MAUCH, OL, 6-foot-6, 303 pounds, North Dakota State

Massive linemen have become a habit for the Bison, winners of nine of the last 11 FCS titles, and Mauch is this year's best prospect from the FCS "by a considerable margin," according to Jim Nagy, executive director of the Senior Bowl.

Mauch "makes it look easy at that level. Really easy at that level. You want small-school players to be dominant players. They should rarely look stressed to get the job done at their respective positions, and that's Cody," Nagy said. "He's extremely efficient. Like if you look at just his win rate on blocks. ... He's a nasty finisher. He's a high-end athlete."

While a left tackle for the Bison, Mauch projects more as a guard in the NFL because his arms aren't long enough to meet the reach the threshold NFL teams have for tackles.

Mauch and the Bison face Incarnate Word in the semifinals on Friday night.

HUNTER LUEPKE, FB, 6-1, 236, North Dakota State

Luepke was invited to the Senior Bowl, but won't play because of a left shoulder injury that will require surgery, but he's the best fullback at any level in the draft, Nagy said.

"I don't think he would have gotten out of the fourth round. I mean, he had a chance to maybe go in the late third," Nagy said. "I think the standard bearer, the bar-setter at that position right now in the league is Kyle Juszczyk, who played in the senior bowl years ago out of Harvard, and Hunter is the closest thing to Juszczyk that I've seen."

Juszczyk plays for the NFL's San Francisco 49ers.

When the Bison lost 31-28 to Arizona early this season, Luepke rushed for 115 yards and two touchdowns on 18 carries and caught three passes for 65 yards and another TD.

TUCKER KRAFT, TE, 6-5, 255, South Dakota State

He's only a junior and still has at least one more game Saturday when the top-seeded Jackrabbits face Montana State in the national semifinals, but some project him as high as a top 50 pick. A solid blocker with good hands, he caught 65 passes for 780 yards and six touchdowns last season with at least two receptions in every game. He's missed more than half of this season with an ankle injury, but has 21 catches for 249 yards and two TDs, including his longest career reception of 57 yards against Northern Iowa.

McCLENDON CURTIS, OL, 6-6, 328, Chattanooga

There must be something about the Mocs and the offensive line, A year ago, Cole Strange was drafted in the first round by the New England Patriots, and here comes Curtis.

"Big man. Big body. Looks the part," Nagy said. "Every NFL scout that went through Chattanooga this year that I talked to says, 'That's a pro.'"

The Mocs allowed only 14 sacks in 11 games.

ANDREI IOSIVAS, WR, 6-3, 200, Princeton

Iosivas is a speedy wide receiver and two-sport star who finished fourth at the 2022 NCAA Indoor Championships in the heptathlon and set an event record with a 6.71-second clocking in the 60.

On the football field, he caught 66 passes for 943 yards and seven TDs for the Tigers this year and finished his career with 125 catches for 1,909 yards and 17 TDs in just three seasons. The Ivy League did not play in the 2020 season because of the pandemic.

"Really good body control, fluid athlete, strong hands," Nagy said. "Just at that level, I mean, he's just plays at a different speed than everyone else in the Ivy. It's pretty obvious when you put on the tape that one guy is an NFL player."

AUBREY MILLER Jr., LB, 6-2, 225, Jackson State

Miller led the Southwestern Athletic Conference in tackles last season with 109, including 11.5 for a loss

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and 6.5 sacks. He'll finish near the top again for the Tigers (12-0), taking 106 stops into Saturday's Celebration Bowl against North Carolina Central.

"Teams love his play style. He's a run-and-hit linebacker, instinctive. He just flies around and hits whatever's in his path.," Nagy said, calling Miller a likely late-round selection. "You feel good about him making your club because of special teams. Hard to find guys that are that reckless and that can run like that and are that reckless."

Landslide at Malaysia campground kills 18, leaves 15 missing

BATANG KALI, Malaysia (AP) — A thunderous crush of soil and debris killed 18 people at a campground in Malaysia on Friday, and rescuers dug through the dirt for another 15 who were feared buried in the landslide.

Two of the dead were found locked in an embrace, according to the state fire department chief.

More than 90 people were sleeping on an organic farm when the soil tumbled from a road about 30 meters (100 feet) above the site and covered about 1 hectare (3 acres). Authorities told local media that the landowners did not have a license to run a campground. At least seven people were hospitalized and dozens more were rescued unharmed, said district police chief Suffian Abdullah.

Leong Jim Meng told the New Straits Times English-language daily that he and his family were awakened by a loud bang and felt the earth move at the campsite in Batang Kali, around 50 kilometers (30 miles) north of the capital of Kuala Lumpur.

"My family and I were trapped as soil covered our tent. We managed to escape to a carpark area and heard a second landslide happening," the 57-year-old was quoted as saying. He said it was surprising because there was no heavy rain in recent days, only light drizzles.

It is currently the season for monsoon rains in Malaysia, and the country's government development minister, Nga Kor Ming, said all campsites nationwide that are near rivers, waterfalls and hillsides would be closed for a week to assess their safety.

The Selangor state fire department posted photos of rescuers with flashlights digging through soil and rubble with an excavator and shovels in the early hours of the morning. More than 400 people as well as tracking dogs were involved in the search-and-rescue efforts.

Fire chief Norazam Khamis was cited by the Free Malaysia Today news portal as saying that two of the bodies found so far were "hugging each other" and believed to be mother and daughter.

Suffian, the district police chief, said the victims entered the area, a popular recreational site for locals to pitch or rent tents from the farm, on Wednesday. The campsite is not far from the Genting Highlands hill resort, a popular tourist destination with theme parks and Malaysia's only casino.

Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim is expected to visit the site late Friday.

Nga told local media that the campsite has been operating illegally for the past two years. The operator has government approval to run an organic farm but has no license for camping activities, he said. If found guilty, Nga warned the camp operator could face up to three years in prison and a fine.

Some families with young children who were rescued took refuge at a nearby police station. Access to roads leading to the area have been blocked.

Drivers are stuck in limbo as world's oil supply reshuffles

By CATHY BUSSEWITZ and DAVID MCHUGH Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — At a gas station outside New York City, retired probation officer Karen Stowe was faced with a pump price she didn't want to pay. She bought groceries from the convenience store instead, planning to buy cheaper gas elsewhere.

"The price is so high, people have to think very hard about where they're driving to," said Stowe, who had just been volunteering at a food pantry. "People are in trouble, and that's the truth."

Though drivers in the U.S., Europe and elsewhere are getting a break from the sky-high gasoline prices they endured over the summer, the cost is still difficult for many who have been struggling with relentless

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inflation. The U.S. average was \$3.19 per gallon, down from a record \$5 in June, while European Union pump prices have dropped the equivalent of 55 cents, to \$6.41 per gallon, since October.

Drivers now hope the situation doesn't get worse after a series of cutbacks tied to Russia's war in Ukraine, accidents and the slowing global economy have strained the world's oil supply. While oil and gasoline prices have dropped despite a recent supply crunch, those threats could end up pushing costs higher this winter.

What's the world facing?

— An EU ban on imports of most Russian oil took effect last week.

— At the same time, the Group of Seven leading democracies and 27-nation EU capped the price of Russian crude for other countries at \$60 per barrel.

— There was a major leak along the Keystone pipeline in the U.S., which halted oil shipments along a major corridor.

— Dozens of oil tankers were stuck in Turkey for days.

— The OPEC+ coalition of oil producers has cut back production.

"The global system can withstand probably a few more days of these outages, but if they persist, they're going to play a major role in price hikes," said Claudio Galimberti, senior vice president of analysis at Rystad Energy.

A key reason restrictions on oil supply have not sent prices higher: Traders think there will be less demand for oil in the future, due to fears that the global economy is headed into recession, which would mean less driving and manufacturing. And some investors worry China's looser COVID-19 restrictions could backfire for the nation's economy.

"It can quickly turn into a major COVID wave which engulfs the hospitals and then is going to have a worse effect on demand than COVID policy," Galimberti said.

The restrictions on Russian exports are likely to have a bigger impact on oil prices next month. Although Western nations have banned Russian oil, customers in India and China are buying it, so there's enough oil on the market for those who need it. More than 97% of Russia's seaborne crude exports went to China and India last month, according to Refinitiv, a financial market data provider.

"We do not ask our companies to buy Russian oil. We ask them to buy oil," Indian External Affairs Minister Subrahmanyam Jaishankar said in Parliament last week. "But it is a sensible policy to go where we get the best deal in the interest of Indian people, and that's exactly what we are trying to do."

In February, global oil supply could get more limited, because European nations won't be able to buy Russian refined products such as gasoline and diesel, so Russia could cut back on producing oil.

"So far, there hasn't been a major decline in Russian production. But once Russia cannot export products to Europe, they will need to decrease production, and that will result in a supply shortage, which will be reflected in the prices most likely," Galimberti said.

Russia also could decide not to produce oil due to the G-7 price cap. Its oil is selling for less than that now. But if the price goes up and approaches the cap, Russia could decide to take oil off the market, analysts said.

"There's another shoe to drop on that front," said Kevin Book, managing director at Clearview Energy Partners.

The price cap will lock in a discount on Russian oil, especially in light of the \$100 per barrel Russia earned just a few months ago, White House press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre said.

"We are focused on limiting Putin's ability to profit from rising prices to fund his illegal war, while promoting stable global energy markets," Jean-Pierre said. "This is not about Russian oil off the market. This is about the cap — the cap at this level maintains clear incentives for Russia to continue exporting, and we believe that it should."

International standard Brent crude oil was selling for about \$80 a barrel Friday. That's likely to grow to \$92 per barrel on average next year, according to projections by the U.S. Energy Information Administration. That is still below \$125 seen this summer.

When it comes to prices at the pump, they're lower than they were last year, but Americans have paid

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\$2 to \$3 per gallon for most of the last decade, according to AAA data.

In the EU, where taxes account for a larger share of the cost of gasoline, prices fell to 1.65 euros per liter (\$6.41 per gallon) as of Dec. 12 from 1.80 euros per liter (\$6.96 per gallon) at the end of October, according to figures from the bloc's executive Commission.

The recent price drop coupled with freezing weather has kept Aria Razdar, 28, behind the wheel of his BMW hatchback in Frankfurt, Germany. During the summer price spike, he would ride a Vespa scooter to work and school, but gasoline prices fell and so did the temperature.

"Right now, prices are a little more reasonable — actually they're still high, but in comparison," Razdar, a child care worker studying to be a teacher, said as he finished pumping fuel in an icy wind.

He spent a bit under 30 euros (\$32) to fill up for the week, a cost he said he could manage for the convenience of driving 12 minutes to work instead of spending 45 minutes on public transit.

Others also wished prices were lower.

Gary Schwuchow, a retired maintenance supervisor, said he's taking fewer road trips and saving money because he lives off his pension and Social Security payments.

"I used to be able to fill the tank up for \$40 or \$42, and now it's almost \$60," he lamented as he gassed up his Nissan Sentra at a station in Yonkers, New York, where a gallon of regular gas was selling for \$3.79. "I don't fill it anymore. I put in \$25 at a time."

Huge Berlin aquarium bursts, releases flood of fish

By FRANK JORDANS and EMILY SCHULTHEIS Associated Press

BERLIN (AP) — A huge aquarium in Berlin burst Friday, causing glass, water and hundreds of tropical fish to spill out of the Sea Life tourist attraction in the heart of the German capital.

A wave of debris swept out of the building, which also contains a hotel, cafes and a chocolate store, as 1 million liters (264,000 gallons) of water poured from the aquarium shortly before 6 a.m. (0500GMT), police said.

Berlin's fire service said two people were slightly injured. Rescue dogs were searching the building for anyone who might be trapped under debris, they said.

The operators of Sea Life say the 25 meters tall (82 feet tall) AquaDom was the biggest cylindrical tank in the world and held more than a thousand tropical fish before the incident. Among the 80 types of fish it housed were blue tang and clownfish, the species known from the popular animated movie "Finding Nemo."

"We have not yet been able to walk the first floor completely, which is probably where these fish will be," fire service spokesman Adrian Wentzel said. "But the thing is that the water has completely leaked out and these about 1,400 fish that were in this aquarium could not be saved either."

There was speculation freezing temperatures that got down to minus 10 degrees Celsius (14 degrees Fahrenheit) overnight caused a crack in the tank, which then exploded under the weight of the water. Police said there was no evidence the incident resulted from an attack.

About 300 guests and employees had to be evacuated from the hotel surrounding the aquarium, police said.

Sandra Weeser, a German lawmaker who was staying in the hotel, said she was awoken up by a large bang and thought there might have been an earthquake.

"There are shards (of glass) everywhere. The furniture, everything has been flooded with water," she said. "It looks a bit like a war zone."

The aquarium, which was last modernized in 2020, is a major tourist magnet in Berlin. The 10-minute elevator ride through the tropical tank was one of the highlights of the attraction.

Russia launches another major missile attack on Ukraine

By HANNA ARHIROVA and JAMEY KEATEN Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Russian forces launched at least 60 missile strikes across Ukraine on Friday, officials said, reporting explosions in at least four cities. At least two people were killed when a residential building

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was hit in central Ukraine, while electricity and water services were interrupted in the two largest cities, Kyiv and Kharkiv. Thousands rushed to subway stations to seek shelter deep underground.

Thudding blasts and gunfire from air-defense systems echoed across the country as authorities on social media reported explosions and missile strikes in Kyiv, the capital, southern Kryvyi Rih, southeastern Zaporizhzhia and northeastern Kharkiv. Air raid alarms sounded across the country, warning of a new barrage of the Russian strikes that have occurred intermittently since mid-October.

Ukrainian Air Force spokesman Yuriy Ihnat told Ukrainian TV that more than 60 missiles had been fired, but it wasn't immediately clear how many missiles the Ukrainian army managed to intercept. Some officials reported success in downing some incoming projectiles.

Ihnat said Russian forces had fired cruise missiles from positions in the Black Sea, and used bomber aircraft as part of an effort to "massively distract the attention of the anti-aircraft defense, keeping it in tension."

A day earlier, Russia's Foreign Ministry warned that if the United States delivers sophisticated Patriot air defense systems to Ukraine, such systems and any crews that accompany them would also be a legitimate target for the Russian military. Washington rejected that threat.

Analysts have said Russian strikes targeting energy infrastructure have been part of a new strategy to try to freeze Ukrainians into submission after recent battlefield losses by Russian forces. Officials and experts say that has only strengthened the resolve of Ukrainians to face up to Russia's invasion, while Moscow tries to buy time for a possible offensive in coming months after the current battlefield stalemate.

In Kryvyi Rih in central Ukraine, President Volodymyr Zelenskyy's hometown, a Russian missile slammed into a residential building and destroyed its entrance. Two people were killed, and at least five others were injured — including two children — and rushed to hospitals, said regional Gov. Valentyn Reznichenko.

The southeastern city of Zaporizhzhia was struck by about 15 Russian missiles, regional Gov. Oleksandr Starukh said. He did not specify the exact location of the strikes, but said infrastructure had been damaged.

Kharkiv Mayor Ihor Terekhov said on the Telegram social media app that the city is without electricity. Kharkiv regional governor Oleh Syniehubov reported three strikes on the city's critical infrastructure.

Kyrylo Tymoshenko, a top official in President Volodymyr Zelenskyy's office, reported a strike on a residential building in Kryvyi Rih, warning on Telegram: "There may be people under the rubble." Emergency services were on site, he said.

Kyiv Mayor Vitali Klitschko reported explosions in at least four districts, urging residents to go to shelters. "The attack on the capital continues," he wrote on Telegram. Subway services in the capital were suspended, he said, as city residents flocked inside its tunnels to seek shelter.

Ukrzaliznytsia, the national railway operator, said power was out in a number of stations in the eastern and central Kharkiv, Kirovohrad, Donetsk and Dnipropetrovsk regions, due to damage to the energy infrastructure. But trains continued to run by switching from electric power to steam-engine power, which had been readied as a backup.

In neighboring Moldova, the state-owned energy company Moldelectrica reported disruptions to its electricity network as a result of Russia's strikes on Ukraine, and warned of a "high risk" of power outages.

Moldova — whose Soviet-era systems remain interconnected with Ukraine's — has already suffered two massive blackouts in recent months as Russia attacked Ukraine's energy grid.

The previous such round of massive Russian air strikes across the country took place on Dec. 5. Ukrainian authorities have reported some successes in intercepting and downing incoming missiles, rockets and armed drones.

Africa has peaceful polls in 2022 but hit by coups, droughts

By FARAI MUTSAKA Associated Press

HARARE, Zimbabwe (AP) — Elections, coups, disease outbreaks and extreme weather are some of the main events that occurred across Africa in 2022.

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Problems brewed thousands of miles away — climate change and the war in Ukraine — have been devastating to the continent, say experts.

The climate crisis is hitting Africa “first and hardest,” said Kevin Mugenya, a senior resilience and food security advisor for Africa at Mercy Corps, an international charity.

The continent of 54 countries and 1.3 billion people is facing “a catastrophic global food crisis” that “will worsen if actors do not act quickly,” Mugenya told The Associated Press.

With less than 1% of arable land equipped for irrigation in a continent that suffers one-third of global droughts, African farmers are exposed to erratic rainfall, rising temperatures and droughts, according to an International Monetary Fund policy paper.

The deadly effects of extreme weather conditions are amplified in the Horn of Africa. The worst drought in decades that has seen a fifth failed rainy season in Kenya, Somalia, and Ethiopia is affecting about 40 million people, according to the United Nations.

In Nigeria, 1 million acres of farmland were submerged following the worst flooding in a decade that displaced more than 1.3 million people and destroyed crops that were already faltering in some areas due to prolonged conflict, said Mercy Corps.

Humanitarian support to Africa has dwindled as the war in Ukraine distracts key donors, according to aid agencies.

Donors reacted in “a timely and generous fashion — to Ukraine especially,” said the U.N. refugee agency, in a September report. Half of the agency’s 12 “most important operations” that are struggling to get funding are in Africa, said the report.

Rising food prices due to the Ukraine war harshly affected sub-Saharan Africa, which imported 44% of its wheat from Russia and Ukraine between 2018 and 2020, according to U.N. figures.

On the political front, peaceful elections in Angola, Kenya, Lesotho and Senegal, were bright spots for Africa.

But armed conflict loomed large across the continent. Jihadi insurgencies plagued Somalia, Nigeria, Mozambique, Burkina Faso and Mali. The extremist violence threatened to spread to even more countries, especially in West Africa’s Sahel region.

Eastern Congo suffered violence by several armed militia, especially the M23 group. As insecurity worsened and the M23 rebels advanced to take some territory, including a major town in August, Congo and neighboring Rwanda threatened to go to war as each side accused the other of supporting armed groups in the mineral-rich region.

In Ethiopia, the continued presence in Eritrea of government-allied forces who are accused of some of the worst abuses in the two-year war between Ethiopian and regional Tigray forces, threatens a November peace deal to end a conflict that has been far deadlier than the one in Ukraine.

Burkina Faso’s two coups — the first in January and another in September — brought Russia’s involvement in the West African country under scrutiny. Within hours of the second coup, the head of Russia’s shadowy mercenary outfit, the Wagner Group, was among the first to congratulate the new junta leader.

Protesters waving Russian flags attacked the French Embassy and the French Institute in the capital, Ouagadougou. Many said they believed that Wagner mercenaries are better equipped to stop Burkina Faso’s jihadi violence than Western allies like France.

Wagner Group mercenaries already have established footholds for Russia in at least half a dozen African countries. These include the Central African Republic, Sudan and Mali, which is battling an insurgency similar to the one in Burkina Faso that has killed thousands and displaced some 2 million people. The Wagner Group has been accused of committing human rights abuses in Mali.

The deepening instability caused by Islamic extremist rebels in the Sahel has caused “massive population displacement” across Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger, according to the U.N.’s World Food Program. The insurgencies and coups have also heightened fears that democracy is backsliding in West Africa, say analysts.

The threat of the COVID-19 pandemic receded across the continent but not before exposing global inequalities in the distribution of vaccines.

After the outbreak of the Ebola virus in Uganda in September, the World Health Organization appealed

for about \$88 million to fight the re-emerging disease. But by November, the WHO said it had only received 20% of the amount.

An outbreak of mpox — formerly known as monkeypox — spread around the world. Vaccinations were available in rich, Western countries for the first time, but despite recording many deaths, poorer Africa was starved of the vaccines.

Africa's improved capacity to fight disease outbreaks — largely built on the experience of battling COVID-19 — is providing some optimism ahead of 2023.

Matshidiso Moeti, the World Health Organization's Africa regional director, said at an online briefing on Dec. 11 that "the future, however difficult the past couple of years have been, will find us in a much better situation in terms of our strategies, our investments, and our capacities to confront public health threats."

As sports betting grows in Africa, many see a real scourge

By RODNEY MUHUMUZA and FARAI MUTSAKA Associated Press

KAMPALA, Uganda (AP) — The Ugandan health official was so sure Argentina would win its World Cup soccer match against Saudi Arabia that he gambled \$1,800 advanced to him by authorities as allowances for 243 people who had participated in a polio immunization campaign.

Argentina lost, and the official was in trouble. Later he was chased by an angry crowd, locked himself indoors for days, and now faces consequences that include the possible loss of his job, according to his supervisor.

In at least five African countries, gamblers and experts said that many see the growing sports betting industry as a source of regular income, and a possible path out of poverty. Critics warn that sports betting in Africa is underpinned by widespread poverty, unemployment and poor or non-existent regulation.

In Uganda, an East African country where annual income per capita was \$840 in 2020, sports gamblers range from students to politicians, night watchmen to civil servants like the hapless health official who now is being asked to refund money he doesn't have.

"First he said he had taken a loan and the money had been intercepted. But I knew he was lying and kept asking him to tell me what exactly had happened. He broke down and said, 'Doctor, I have to tell you the truth. I bet the money on Argentina,'" said Mark Bramali, the top health officer in the district of Zombo.

Continent-wide data on sports betting is not readily available, but snapshots from different countries show its growing popularity. Online gaming platforms have enjoyed recent growth, driven by widening adoption of mobile payments and pandemic-era demand for digital entertainment. Much of the betting focuses on soccer games in Europe.

A South African government survey from 2017, the most recent on gambling, found that sports betting grew 14% per year from 2008 to 2016, even as the number of South Africans who gambled fell from 57% to a third of the country's adult population.

Today, online sports betting makes up 45% of the South African gambling market, "a starkly different picture to just 10 years ago when casinos held 80% of market share," said the National Gambling Board.

Sibongile Simelane-Quntana, executive director of the South African Responsible Gambling Foundation, said that her group has seen "significant growth" in online sports betting in the aftermath of pandemic-related lockdowns. Funding for her group, which comes from gambling houses, "has increased by 50% from where it was before the lockdown," she said.

In Uganda's capital, Kampala, one Fortebet shop is often full of gamblers, including some who spend the whole day sitting with pen and paper, ticking off the games that go their way. A World Cup promotion encourages punters to bet at least \$0.8 every day until the day of the final in order to earn a share of online "betting points," manager David Mugisa said.

"With each day the sales are going up," especially during the World Cup, fueled by demand from students, casual laborers and others of the urban poor, he said.

Argentina's loss to Saudi Arabia was so unexpected that gamblers came in to collect winnings without checking the results, Mugisa said. "That game caused havoc," he said.

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In Zimbabwe, where most people in formal employment don't make more than \$100 a month, sports betting "has become a major income earner even for those who are in formal employment," said Japhet Moyo, secretary-general of the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions. "The problem is that it becomes addictive and some lose their salaries to betting."

There, as elsewhere in Africa, shock results at the World Cup have proved hurtful. In one betting house in the Zimbabwean capital, Harare, many customers looked glum after England beat Senegal for a spot in the finals Dec. 4, trashing their tickets and leaving in apparent anger.

African gamblers often count on winnings to fund daily needs. Philo Ragada, an unemployed schoolteacher in Harare, sat on edge as Senegal played England for a spot in the quarterfinals. The Zimbabwean was supported the African team but said he wanted England to win because "that's where my money is." His winnings, he said, would be "enough for tomorrow's bread and tomatoes."

"In Nigeria of today you just have to find a means of surviving," said Wale Babalola, a college graduate in the Nigerian city of Lagos who owns eight betting shops after once struggling to find a job. "If not for betting, I wonder how some people will survive in this country."

Moses Ssali, a regular gambler in Kampala, said World Cup losses haven't dented his faith in betting as one way to support himself. He's putting up a modest three-bedroom house that he said he's built "small, small" from winnings over the years, once putting a deposit on cement and, another day, sand. He's now looking beyond the World Cup for a major win that will pay for roofing sheets.

Concern about the industry is also growing. The growth of sports betting in Africa "threatens to push young men and women into its fatal depths," said Reagan Wamajji, a researcher and analyst with the Uganda-based Center for Policy Analysis.

"There has to be deliberate campaigns against gambling, sports betting in particular, similar to what is happening in the tobacco industry," he said. "However, it is such a lucrative business that meaningful reforms might be hard to push."

Nigerian lawmaker Akin Alabi, who chairs a committee overseeing betting and is the founder of prominent betting platform Nairabet, said the problem is a minority of exploitative "charlatans."

"We can only have problems when it is not well regulated," Alabi said of sports betting.

A Ugandan parliamentary committee earlier this year suggested banning day-time betting.

Neighboring Kenya has reported declines in gambling since 2019, when the country imposed taxes on all bets, win or lose, and revoked the licenses of several major gambling companies after accusing the country's largest sports betting platform of tax evasion. A government survey found that respondents who saw gambling as a good source of income fell by half from 2019 to 2021, from 22.7% to 11.2%.

For regular gamblers, especially those who stake money that isn't theirs, this World Cup has been punishing,

Gideon Matua, a night watchman in Kampala who bets regularly said two friends recently lost their jobs after losing other people's money. One, sent to make a bank deposit on his employer's account, lost the sum in a betting shop, and the other diverted money meant to pay for electricity at home. Both men have since lost their jobs as guards, he said.

"I've seen very many people here crying," he said. "Someone comes here and puts a big amount on one team. If the team loses, they just go home. Some of them have been chased away from their jobs."

Ssali, in Kampala, sounded stoic.

"They beat me, and I am feeling cold," he said of bets on World Cup matches. "But I know that if you don't put in, you can't get out anything. Even when you romance a woman you have to spend money, but she can disappoint you, not so? You can start a shop and it fails."

At World Cup, women fans shrug off worries over dress codes

By HELENA ALVES and LUJAIN JO Associated Press

DOHA, Qatar (AP) — Coming from Brazil for the World Cup in Qatar, Daniela Crawford had been worried about conservative dress codes. But like many women attending the tournament, she said she found no

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problems.

"In Brazil people are used to it, but we came here and decided to show how we are," said Crawford — wearing shorts — as she took pictures with a Brazilian flag with her husband and two sons outside Doha's Education City Stadium before the Brazil-Croatia quarterfinal match last week.

This is the first World Cup held in an Arab and Muslim nation. In the lead-up, the Qatari government, world soccer body FIFA and national governments advised people attending from around the world to respect local customs, on everything from women's dress to drinking.

Many women fans speaking to The Associated Press said that despite worries, they've encountered no troubles and only had to make minor adjustments in how they dress. Some welcomed Qatar's tight restrictions on alcohol, saying it made them feel safer. Qatar, meanwhile, is presenting the tournament as an opportunity to overcome stereotypes about women's role here.

Qatar is a conservative nation, and most Qatari women in public wear the headscarf and loose-fitting robes. But it's also home to an international population of more than 2 million foreign workers, far outnumbering the around 300,000 citizens — so it's hardly unused to foreign women.

Bemie Ragay, a Filipina woman who has worked in Qatar for eight years, said she has always felt safe, "safer than my country." Attire is not an issue as long as you know the boundaries, she said, pointing out that she was wearing a crop top.

"You can't just walk here in the street in a backless (outfit). You have to respect their culture," she said.

Isabeli Monteiro, a 32-year-old Brazil supporter, said she was wearing longer skirts instead of shorts and has had no difficulty. "Nobody looks at us in any way, especially because we are within a World Cup with different cultures from all over the world."

Women played an integral role in organizing the World Cup, including several in high positions in the Supreme Committee, the body in charge of the tournament, said Fatma Al Nuaimi, the SC spokesperson.

She said she hoped one legacy of the tournament would be to change attitudes about women in the region.

"A lot of people actually have a misperception, especially when it comes to the role of women in Qatar or in the region," she said. Fans coming to Qatar see that "women do have rights and women are actually being empowered," she said.

Qatar has said improving the situation of women in the tiny Gulf nation is one of its priorities. Women hold a number of prominent government and academic positions, including three ministers in the Cabinet. The mother of its ruling emir, Sheikha Moza bint Nasser al-Missned, is one of the most famous women in the Arab world, known for advocating for social causes.

Qatar also has one of the strongest rates of women's education in the Arab world. The number of Qatari women in university is twice the number of Qatari men, and nearly all Qatari children — boys and girls — attend primary school.

Still, the country has for years sat near the bottom of the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Report, which tracks gaps between women and men in employment, education, health and politics.

Rights groups have pointed in particular to laws that require a male guardian's permission for a woman to travel or marry, and they say women often need the same permission to work or for some forms of reproductive health care, including pap smears.

Around 37% of Qatari women work, high for the region, but it has remained level in recent years, according to government statistics. By comparison, Saudi Arabia has seen a more aggressive growth, with the percentage of Saudi women with jobs rising from 14% in 2019, one of the lowest in the region, to nearly 27% this year.

Mead El-Amadi, director of the FIFA Fan Festival in Doha, said women involved in organizing the tournament will be role models for other women who want to go into the business of soccer or sports in general.

"Globally football is a male-dominated sport," she said. But she said women organizers had support of their male colleagues "to make this happen and to make the world look at us today, delivering this huge event."

In Dallas suburbs, Friday Night Lights make way for cricket

By TERRY TANG and MIKE SCHNEIDER Associated Press

FRISCO, Texas (AP) — With the ornate spires of the Karya Siddhi Hanuman Temple anchoring the skyline behind them, a cricket batsman and bowler eyed each other across a brown grass field. Amid gusty winds, players waiting to bat watched intently from nearby bleachers.

No, this is not a scene in India, where cricket became a national obsession after arriving on the wings of British colonialism. Try North Texas, where Friday Night Lights have made way for weekend afternoons on the pitch.

Welcome to the new Lone Star State, where cricket matches, a Hindu temple and Indian grocery stores co-exist with Christian churches, cattle ranches and Jerry Jones' Dallas Cowboys empire. More than a decade of expansion has given the Dallas-Fort Worth Metroplex the largest Asian growth rate of any major U.S. metro area, in the nation's fastest growing state. According to U.S. Census Bureau figures, Indians account for more than half the region's Asian population boom, with the Dallas suburb of Frisco alone experiencing growth to rival Seattle and Chicago.

While some Texans still bleed football, these days a growing number bleed cricket.

"In '98, I came to the U.S. Then I stopped playing cricket because I didn't have any availability here. Down the road four or five years later, I saw somebody playing cricket in Plano," said Kalyan "K.J." Jarajapu, a temple volunteer watching the Frisco-sponsored cricket league match. "I never imagined that there would be cricket for sure or there would be a cricket world like I saw back home in India here in (metro) Dallas."

The share of Asians among the foreign-born in the U.S. has risen recently, from 30.1% during the 2012-to-2016 period to 31.2% in the 2017-to-2021 period, as the share of immigrants from Latin America and Europe has fallen, according to the American Community Survey.

Immigrants from South Asia believe they've found the best of East meets West in Frisco and other Dallas suburbs. They're living a new and improved American dream, with access to their preferred houses of worship, authentic food and a community radio station. But the dream also comes with painful realities about racism, pressure to balance two cultures and the mental health challenges of finding your way in an unfamiliar world.

Named in 1904 after the St. Louis-San Francisco Railway, Frisco, 30 miles (50 kilometers) north of downtown Dallas, started as a train stop and an agricultural hub. Today, it's a global technology force. Companies including Toyota, FedEx and Goldman Sachs have drawn job seekers from afar, including a pipeline of IT workers from the tech hub of Hyderabad, India.

Combine good jobs with reputable schools, affordable housing and warm weather, and the formula for growth is set.

Texas-based disciples of Sri Ganapathy Sachchidananda Swamiji came together in 2008 to purchase a 10-acre (4-hectare) plot in Frisco and build a modest Hindu temple. Within three years, it was hosting hundreds of worshippers.

Jayesh Thakker, a temple trustee and joint treasurer for the India Association of North Texas, said they raised enough money to build a 33,000-square-foot (3,065-square-meter) temple in 2015. Nearly 30 artisan workers came on special visas to ensure every detail honored Indian Hindu architecture.

"They built it first as an American structure and then they 'Indianized' it," Thakker said.

New housing and schools soon followed. Laxmi Tummala, trustee and temple secretary, is also a realtor. Many of her clients settle for less just to live nearby.

"All that other stuff I wanted, it doesn't matter if it's going to put me 25 minutes or 30 minutes away. I want my kids to have this exposure," Tummala said.

Immigrants aren't the only newcomers. Between 2015 and 2019, more than 17,000 people flocked to Frisco and surrounding Collin County from Dallas County and more than 8,000 from nearby Denton County, according to the Census Bureau.

Outside Texas, the biggest sources of new Collin County residents were Los Angeles and Orange coun-

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ties in California, with 1,600 residents and 1,000 residents respectively.

But almost 6,000 new residents in the area came from Asia.

The Islamic Center of Frisco has benefited, too. Its board is planning to more than double the size of the 18,000-square-foot (1,672-square-meter) mosque by 2024. With more than 3,500 people attending prayers and 460 children attending Sunday School, the board moved to acquire more space in 2019.

Azfar Saeed, the center's president, remembers that nearly two decades ago only 15 people came to pray in a 400-square-foot (37-square-meter) shopping center suite on any given day.

"At that time, nobody knew Frisco. People were like, 'Where are you going?'" said Saeed, who was born in Pakistan. By 2010, "people just started moving right and left here."

The pandemic brought another shift. Suddenly, people from California or Chicago were able to work remotely but live elsewhere. Houston saw a tremendous influx of Asians in the last decade, with the second-highest growth rate after Dallas among major U.S. metros.

"The moment people went remote it felt like people were like, 'OK, I have a tiny house in California for \$800,000 and I can buy a mansion here in Texas. Let's go,'" Saeed said, chuckling.

Where there is a large Asian population in the U.S., anti-Asian hate seems inevitable. In August, a woman's racist rant against four Indian American women in Plano was caught on video. The unprovoked attack escalated as she hit and threatened to shoot them. She was later arrested.

The incident caught the attention of people in India thanks to social media. South Asian groups here attended meetings with local law enforcement.

"It was very sad and it was surprising," said Tummala, the temple's secretary. "But we definitely don't take that and say 'OK, everybody in Texas is like that.'"

Some have found outlets for talking about their struggles, including on the region's only South Asian radio station.

The app-based Radio Azad, in Irving, was started by Azad Khan in 2011, five years after he immigrated from Pakistan. The station broadcasts music and current affairs. Multiple languages are represented, including Urdu, Hindi, Arabic, Farsi and Telugu.

As the area population has grown, so has Radio Azad's listenership, which numbers in the hundreds of thousands.

The anonymity of call-in radio shows on Azad — which means freedom in Hindi and Urdu — has allowed for difficult questions. Nearly three years ago, CEO Ayesha Shafi started monthly mental health segments, and listeners embraced them. They've tackled assimilation, bipolar disorder and domestic abuse.

"You can talk about issues that you're facing and actually hear somebody who's like you, who understands where you're coming from and will actually listen," Shafi said.

Depression rose to the forefront after the murder-suicide of a Bangladeshi family in April 2021 in Allen, roughly 10 miles (16 kilometers) east of Frisco. Two adult brothers fatally shot their parents, sister and grandmother before taking their own lives. One brother had written on Instagram of dealing with depression since 2016.

"As parents, we find that anxiety has become so common and it's not happening to just anybody's kids," Shafi said. "As we created awareness, as we shared our shows ... they would realize, 'Omigod, this is happening to our kids.'"

Reena Yalamanchili dealt with the feeling of not belonging as a child, despite being born in the U.S. The 17-year-old, whose family lives in nearby Coppell and attends the Frisco temple, remembers kids making fun of the lunch her mother made.

"It kind of made me feel embarrassed about my mom's cooking, or like Indian food or my culture in general," Yalamanchili said. "Obviously, I don't feel like that anymore."

She thinks most children grow out of those attitudes, and there is strength in numbers.

"There's a lot of people in the same boat as me," she said. "There's a lot of shared traditions."

Everywhere you look, South Asian cultures are merging into the Texas zeitgeist. The movie theater in Frisco shows films in Telegu, Tamil and Hindi, while at Tikka Taco in Irving, diners can get tacos stuffed

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with tandoori chicken, lamb or paneer tikka.

Sometimes Indian politics spill into the Dallas suburbs. Scores of people joined protests this week outside Frisco's City Hall on behalf of Christians in India who claim a Frisco-based group supports Hindu nationalists threatening their churches.

On a more festive front, Hanuman Temple now collaborates with the City of Frisco for Holi, an annual Hindu festival also known as the Festival of Colors. Celebrants daub each other with vividly colored powders. The temple also organizes food donations, health fairs and other community services.

"We don't want to just be here and be isolated," Tummala said.

You can find a Diwali celebration in several Dallas suburbs around October or November. The biggest holiday of the year in India, the commemoration of light over darkness was celebrated by more than 15,000 people in Southlake's town square. Police even wrote a script for officers doing security to explain its significance if anyone asked.

"Five years ago, they wouldn't have known what it was at all," Shafi said.

Southlake Mayor John Huffman, who spoke at the event dressed in traditional Indian clothing, believes close to a fifth of the crowd were non-Asians. He credits its success to the Southlake Foundation, a non-profit started in 2019 by Kush Rao, who immigrated from India. The organization oversees cultural events and community service activities such as trash clean-up and free lunches for city staff.

"I feel like they're setting the bar in a lot of ways and saying, 'We're going to give back to the Public Works Department not because we're getting anything in return but because we appreciate what they do for the city,'" Huffman said. "They have been very intentional about telling their fellow South Asians to get out and engage in the community."

Back in Frisco during Diwali, blocks of homes near Hanuman Temple twinkled with lights through the pouring rain. Hanuman Temple's majestic pyramidal gateway glowed red. And dozens of families didn't let the wet weather stop them from worshipping and chanting mantras to deities.

Cricket fan Jarajapu, directing cars in the water-logged parking lot, wasn't surprised so many came.

"I have seen the transformation of Frisco city," Jarajapu said. "It has become very vibrant with diversity, culture and especially a lot of Asians. I'm very proud to be living in Frisco."

Russians find asylum lifeline to US, but at a high price

By ELLIOT SPAGAT Associated Press

CHULA VISTA, Calif. (AP) — Phil Metzger promises to arrange entry to the United States for Russian-speaking asylum-seekers through unmatched connections with U.S. border officials and people in Mexico who can guarantee safety while traveling. Though seeking asylum is free, the pastor of Calvary San Diego said his services are "not cheap."

In an interview with a Russian-language YouTube channel, he touted director computer access to U.S. Customs and Border Protection to enroll migrants and was vague about "opportunists" in Mexico who ensure customers' safety after they fly there on tourist visas and while they wait in Tijuana to cross.

"I just know there's a lot of power on that side that I just don't control," the evangelical Christian pastor said. "But I do have one control. I control who goes across. So I have to negotiate. To keep those people safe, I have to negotiate with those in power (in Mexico)."

Asylum is supposed to be free and for those most in need; many have been unable to even ask for protection under COVID-19 restrictions that are set to expire Wednesday.

Yet Metzger's service, as described in the 25-minute interview last month at his church in the San Diego suburb of Chula Vista, is a private money-generating enterprise that uses its government connections to bypass those restrictions. It's part of an opaque, bewildering patchwork of exemptions CBP has developed. Immigration advocates select who gets in, though CBP has final say.

Asked about an outside group charging money, the Department of Homeland Security said there is no fee related to exemptions from asylum restrictions and that it will "look into any allegation of abuse."

"DHS takes any allegations of fraud or abuse of our immigration systems very seriously," it said in a

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written response to questions about the service.

The pastor did not respond to text, email and phone messages left over a week and his office was closed when a reporter went there on a recent weekday afternoon.

This story is part of an ongoing Associated Press series, "Migration Inc.," which investigates individuals and companies that profit from the movement of people who flee violence and civil strife in their homelands.

Migrants have been denied rights to seek asylum more than 2.5 million times since March 2020 on grounds of preventing the spread of COVID-19 under Trump-era restrictions known as Title 42.

Exemptions are supposed to be for migrants deemed most vulnerable in Mexico — perhaps for gender identity or sexual orientation, or for being specifically threatened with violence — but some partners say CBP doesn't question choices and that migrants selected often face no unusual danger. The agency doesn't publicly identify its partners or how many slots are made available to each, leaving migrants guessing who they are and which ones are best connected to U.S. authorities.

In El Paso, Texas, CBP gives out 70 slots daily, half for the government of Mexico's Chihuahua state and the rest for attorneys and advocacy groups, said Nicolas Palazzo, an attorney for Las Americas Immigrant Advocacy Center, which participates in the arrangement. He said some attorneys unaffiliated with his organization charge migrants for the service.

In Piedras Negras, Mexico, across from Eagle Pass, Texas, the city government chooses who escapes the reach of Title 42, according to a report last month from the University of Texas at Austin Strauss Center for International Security and Law. In Reynosa, across from McAllen, Texas, a migrant shelter picks who crosses, while in Laredo, Texas, there are no exemptions, the report says.

In San Diego, CBP exempts about 200 people daily, including 40 slots that are set aside for Russian speakers working through Calvary San Diego, said Enrique Lucero, the city of Tijuana's director of migrant affairs, who regularly communicates with U.S. officials.

Other slots in San Diego are for advocacy groups Al Otro Lado, which operates an online registration list, and Border Angels, which leans on migrant shelter directors to select who gets to cross, and the U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants, a refugee resettlement organization.

CBP is allowing more Russians to enter the United States with Title 42 exemptions, with about 3 in 4 coming through California border crossings with Mexico. In October, it exempted 3,879 Russians, more than triple the same period a year earlier. It exempted 21,626 Russians in the fiscal year that ended Sept. 30, more than five times the previous year.

In the YouTube interview last month with Alex Moore, Metzger said his call center fields more than 1,000 inquiries a day. CBP tells him how many people can cross and "I control who crosses."

"Honestly, we think it was God opening a door for us," said Metzger, who grew up in Southern California but spent much of his adult life in Eastern Europe.

Metzger is unclear on who he pays to greet customers in Mexico and bring them to the border, saying he doesn't know them.

Through a Telegram account called Most V USA, the cost for single adults paying cash was 1,800 (presumably U.S. dollars) Monday — a "price reduction." For married couples paying cash, the cost was \$3,500. Online payments were \$300 less for individuals and \$500 less for couples. Children were free.

"You pay not for the crossing, but for the consultation on the crossing," Most V USA says on its website. "We use the only legal way available to our organization — making an appointment with a CBP officer at the border."

The price includes crossing to the United States safely in groups from Tijuana to San Diego, with a bag containing water and protein bars.

Metzger opened his large church to Ukrainian refugees after Russia's invasion this year, working with volunteers on a smooth-running operation that deployed a mobile app used to track church attendance. Ukrainians who flew to Tijuana were told to report to a San Diego border crossing as their numbers approached, a system organizers likened to waiting for a restaurant table.

Metzger touts connections with CBP developed during that time and warns about falling for scammers who use his Most V USA brand.

"No, it's not cheap. No, it's not easy but we will make sure that it is safe and that you will get into the States," he said.

Louisiana officers charged in Black motorist's deadly arrest

By JIM MUSTIAN and JAKE BLEIBERG Associated Press

FARMERVILLE, La. (AP) — Five Louisiana law enforcement officers were charged Thursday with state crimes ranging from negligent homicide to malfeasance in the deadly 2019 arrest of Ronald Greene, a death authorities initially blamed on a car crash before long suppressed body-camera video showed white officers beating, stunning and dragging the Black motorist as he wailed, "I'm scared!"

These are the first criminal charges of any kind to emerge from Greene's bloody death on a roadside in rural northeast Louisiana, a case that got little attention until an Associated Press investigation exposed a cover-up and prompted scrutiny of top Louisiana State Police brass, a sweeping U.S. Justice Department review of the agency and a legislative inquiry looking at what Gov. John Bel Edwards knew and when he knew it.

"We're all excited for the indictments but are they actually going to pay for it?" said Greene's mother, Mona Hardin, who for more than three years has kept the pressure on state and federal investigators and vowed not to bury the cremated remains of her "Ronnie" until she gets justice. "As happy as we are, we want something to stick."

Facing the most serious charges from a state grand jury was Master Trooper Kory York, who was seen on the body-camera footage dragging Greene by his ankle shackles, putting his foot on his back to force him down and leaving the heavyset man face down in the dirt for more than nine minutes. Use-of-force experts say these actions could have dangerously restricted Greene's breathing, and the state police's own force instructor called the troopers' actions "torture and murder." York was charged with negligent homicide and 10 counts of malfeasance in office.

The others who faced various counts of malfeasance and obstruction included a trooper who denied the existence of his body-camera footage, another who exaggerated Greene's resistance on the scene, a regional state police commander who detectives say pressured them not to make an arrest in the case and a Union Parish sheriff's deputy heard on the video taunting Greene with the words "s--- hurts, doesn't it?"

"These actions are inexcusable and have no place in professional public safety services," the head of the state police, Col. Lamar Davis, said after the indictments, adding that his agency has in recent years made improvements aimed at "rebuilding of trust within the communities we serve."

Union Parish District Attorney John Belton submitted arrest warrants for all five of the officers, praising the racially mixed grand jury for hearing the evidence and saying the people had spoken.

Belton had long held off on pursuing state charges at the request of the U.S. Justice Department, which is conducting a separate criminal investigation. But as years passed and federal prosecutors grew increasingly skeptical they could prove the officers acted "willfully" — a key component of the civil rights charges they've been considering — they gave Belton the go-ahead this spring to convene a state grand jury.

That panel since last month considered detailed evidence and testimony related to the troopers' use of force and their decision to leave the handcuffed Greene prone for several minutes before rendering aid. And for the first time in the case, a medical expert deemed Greene's death a homicide.

The federal grand jury investigation, which expanded last year to examine whether state police brass obstructed justice to protect the troopers, remains open, and prosecutors have been tight-lipped about when the panel could make a decision on charges.

Greene's May 10, 2019, death was shrouded in secrecy from the beginning, when authorities told grieving relatives that the 49-year-old died in a car crash at the end of a high-speed chase near Monroe — an account questioned by both his family and even an emergency room doctor who noted Greene's battered body. Still, a coroner's report listed Greene's cause of death as a motor vehicle accident, a state police

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crash report omitted any mention of troopers using force and 462 days would pass before state police began an internal probe.

All the while, the body-camera video remained so secret it was withheld from Greene's initial autopsy and officials from Edwards on down declined repeated requests to release it, citing ongoing investigations.

But then last year, the AP obtained and published the footage, which showed what really happened: Troopers swarming Greene's car, stunning him repeatedly, punching him in the head, dragging him by the shackles and leaving him prone on the ground for more than nine minutes. At times, Greene could be heard pleading for mercy and wailing, "I'm your brother! I'm scared! I'm scared!"

At one point, York orders Greene to "lay on your f----- belly like I told you to!" Union Parish Sheriff's Deputy Christopher Harpin can be heard taunting, "Yeah, yeah, that s--- hurts, doesn't it?"

Attorneys for York and Harpin said both expect to be found not guilty at trial if the charges aren't dismissed first. Reached by phone, former Trooper Dakota DeMoss, whose body-camera captured much of the arrest, declined to comment, saying "you guys always get it wrong." Lt. John Clary's attorney did not respond to a request for comment in the courthouse. Former state police Capt. John Peters declined to comment.

Fallout brought federal scrutiny not just to the troopers but to whether top brass obstructed justice to protect them.

Investigators have focused on a meeting in which detectives say that state police commanders pressured them to hold off on arresting a trooper seen on body-camera video striking Greene in the head and later boasting, "I beat the ever-living f--- out of him." That trooper, Chris Hollingsworth, was widely seen as the most culpable of the half-dozen officers involved, but he died in a high-speed, single-vehicle crash in 2020 just hours after he was informed he would be fired over his role in Greene's arrest.

The AP later found that Greene's arrest was among at least a dozen cases over the past decade in which state police troopers or their bosses ignored or concealed evidence of beatings of mostly Black men, deflected blame and impeded efforts to root out misconduct. Dozens of current and former troopers said the beatings were countenanced by a culture of impunity, nepotism and, in some cases, racism.

Such reports were cited by the U.S. Justice Department this year in launching a sweeping civil rights investigation into the Louisiana State Police, the first "pattern or practice" probe of a statewide law enforcement agency in more than two decades.

Scrutiny has also turned to the actions of the Democratic governor, who oversees the state police.

A legislative panel launched an "all-levels" investigation into the state's handling of the Greene case this year after AP reported that Edwards had been informed within hours that the troopers arresting Greene engaged in a "violent, lengthy struggle," yet stayed mostly silent for two years as police continued to press the car crash theory.

Another AP report found Edwards privately watched a key body-camera video of Greene's deadly arrest six months before state prosecutors say they knew it even existed, and neither the governor, his staff nor the state police acted urgently to get the footage into the hands of those with the power to bring charges.

Edwards has repeatedly said he did nothing to influence or hinder the Greene investigation and has described the troopers' actions as both criminal and racist. But he has yet to testify before the legislative panel, saying he was unable to appear at a hearing last month, instead attending a groundbreaking ceremony for an infrastructure project.

"Today's decision is a long overdue first step toward justice for Ronald Greene's family and accountability for a broken police system," said Alanah Odoms, executive director of the ACLU of Louisiana. "Ronald Greene should be alive today."

Twitter suspends journalists who wrote about owner Elon Musk

By MATT O'BRIEN AP Technology Writer

Twitter on Thursday suspended the accounts of journalists who cover the social media platform and its new owner Elon Musk, among them reporters working for The New York Times, Washington Post, CNN,

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Voice of America and other publications.

The company hasn't explained to the journalists why it took down the accounts and made their profiles and past tweets disappear. But Musk took to Twitter on Thursday night to accuse journalists of sharing private information about his whereabouts that he described as "basically assassination coordinates." He provided no evidence for that claim.

The sudden suspension of news reporters followed Musk's decision Wednesday to permanently ban an account that automatically tracked the flights of his private jet using publicly available data. That also led Twitter to change its rules for all users to prohibit the sharing of another person's current location without their consent.

Several of the reporters suspended Thursday night had been writing about that new policy and Musk's rationale for imposing it, which involved his allegations about a stalking incident he said affected his family on Tuesday night in Los Angeles.

"Same doxxing rules apply to 'journalists' as to everyone else," Musk tweeted Thursday. He later added: "Criticizing me all day long is totally fine, but doxxing my real-time location and endangering my family is not."

"Doxxing" refers to disclosing online someone's identity, address, or other personal details.

The Washington Post's executive editor, Sally Buzbee, called for technology reporter Drew Harwell's Twitter account to be reinstated immediately. The suspension "directly undermines Elon Musk's claim that he intends to run Twitter as a platform dedicated to free speech," Buzbee wrote. "Harwell was banished without warning, process or explanation, following the publication of his accurate reporting about Musk."

CNN said in a statement that "the impulsive and unjustified suspension of a number of reporters, including CNN's Donie O'Sullivan, is concerning but not surprising."

"Twitter's increasing instability and volatility should be of incredible concern for everyone who uses Twitter," CNN's statement added. "We have asked Twitter for an explanation, and we will reevaluate our relationship based on that response."

Another suspended journalist, Matt Binder of the technology news outlet Mashable, said he was banned Thursday night immediately after sharing a screenshot that O'Sullivan had posted before the CNN reporter's suspension.

The screenshot showed a statement from the Los Angeles Police Department sent earlier Thursday to multiple media outlets, including The Associated Press, about how it was in touch with Musk's representatives about the alleged stalking incident, but that no crime report had yet been filed.

"I did not share any location data, as per Twitter's new terms. Nor did I share any links to ElonJet or other location tracking accounts," Binder said in an email. "I have been highly critical of Musk but never broke any of Twitter's listed policies."

Binder said a message he received while trying to access his Twitter account showed that his suspension was permanent. But Musk later suggested the penalty would last a week in response to a question about his suspension of former ESPN and MSNBC host Keith Olbermann.

Late Thursday, Musk briefly joined a Twitter Spaces conference chat hosted by journalist Kate Notopoulos of BuzzFeed. He reiterated his claims that the journalists Twitter banned were "doxxing" him when they were reporting on the jet tracking accounts being banned.

"There is not special treatment for journalists," Musk said, after being asked by the Post's Drew Harwell if he had a connection between the stalking incident and posting of real-time information.

"You dox, you get suspended, end of story," he added, before abruptly signing out. The Spaces ended abruptly shortly after 9 p.m. Pacific time.

"Sorry it appears the Space cut out, screen went suddenly blank on my end and everyone got booted," host Notopoulos tweeted at 9:14 p.m. Pacific.

Another suspended reporter, Steve Herman of Voice of America, said he assumes he was banned "because I was tweeting about other journalists being suspended for tweeting about accounts being booted that had linked to the Elon Jet feed."

The suspensions come as Musk makes major changes to content moderation on Twitter. He has tried, through the release of selected company documents dubbed as "The Twitter Files," to claim the platform suppressed right-wing voices under its previous leaders.

He has promised to let free speech reign and has reinstated high-profile accounts that previously broke Twitter's rules against hateful conduct or harmful misinformation, but also has said he would suppress negativity and hate by depriving some accounts of "freedom of reach."

The nonprofit Committee to Protect Journalists, which defends journalists around the world, said Thursday night it was concerned about the suspensions.

"If confirmed as retaliation for their work, this would be a serious violation of journalists' right to report the news without fear of reprisal," the group said.

Report: Executions continued decline but many 'botched'

By JUAN A. LOZANO Associated Press

HOUSTON (AP) — Public support and use of the death penalty in 2022 continued its more than two-decade decline in the U.S., and many of the executions that were carried out during the year were "botched" or highly problematic, an annual report on capital punishment says.

There were 18 executions in the U.S. in 2022, the fewest in any pre-pandemic year since 1991. There were 11 executions last year. Outside of the pandemic years, the 20 death sentences handed out in 2022 were the fewest in any year in the U.S. in a half-century, according to the report by the Washington, D.C.-based Death Penalty Information Center.

"All the indicators point to the continuing decline in capital punishment and the movement away from the death penalty is durable," said Robert Dunham, executive director of the nonprofit, which takes no position on capital punishment but has criticized the way states carry out executions.

In the U.S., 37 states have abolished the death penalty or not carried out an execution in more than a decade. On Tuesday, Oregon Gov. Kate Brown commuted the sentences of all 17 of the state's death row inmates to life in prison without parole. Oregon last executed a prisoner in 1997. There have been no federal executions since January 2021 following a historic use of capital punishment by the Trump administration. In July 2021, the Justice Department imposed a moratorium on federal executions.

The report called 2022 the "Year of the Botched Execution" as seven of the 20 execution attempts in the U.S. were visibly problematic or took an inordinate amount of time. That prompted some states to put them on hold so processes and protocols could be reviewed.

Significant problems were reported with all three of Arizona's executions as corrections officers struggled to find suitable veins for IV lines to deliver the lethal injection.

In Alabama, Gov. Kay Ivey ordered a "top-to-bottom" review of the state's capital punishment system last month after three failed lethal injections, including two in 2022 involving problems with intravenous lines used to administer the drugs.

Other concerns with executions included a South Carolina judge's ruling in September that called unconstitutional the state's newly created execution firing squad, as well as its use of the electric chair. The state's Supreme Court is set to hear arguments on the issue next month.

In April, Tennessee Gov. Bill Lee halted lethal injections in his state because the drugs used in executions hadn't been tested. The oversight had forced Lee to abruptly halt plans to execute inmate Oscar Smith, an hour before he was to die last April.

Dunham said he believes ongoing issues with botched executions or reviews of execution protocols by states is helping to erode public support of capital punishment. Gallup polling shows public support of the death penalty has steadily dropped in the last 28 years, falling from 80% in 1994 to 55% this year.

"There are very few states that are trying to carry out the death penalty. But they are acting in ways that ... their conduct is undermining public confidence that states can be trusted with the death penalty," Dunham said.

While five of the 18 executions that took place in 2022 were in Texas, that is well below what the na-

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tion's busiest capital punishment state has seen historically. In 2000, Texas executions reached a high of 40, according to this year's annual report by the Texas Coalition to Abolish the Death Penalty.

Kristin Houlé Cuellar, the coalition's executive director, said she believes Texas' "era of excessive use of the death penalty is gone" as prosecutors will continue to instead use lengthy prison sentences to hold people accountable.

Deborah Denno, a law professor at Fordham University in New York, said she's not surprised by the declining use and public support of capital punishment. She cites as reasons: more people learning about the various problems in carrying out executions, doubts about whether it deters crime and a growing number of exonerations of inmates.

"Any sort of prediction about the future would suggest the death penalty is going to be limited to a few states. With time, there will be growing pressure in those states to abolish the death penalty," Denno said.

Dunham said he believes the number of botched executions has contributed significantly to the movement among lawmakers, particularly conservatives, to express doubts about the death penalty.

In Oklahoma, GOP state Rep. Kevin McDugle, a self-described death-penalty supporter, became one of the strongest advocates for death row inmate Richard Glossip after concerns were raised about lost or destroyed evidence and police bias. Glossip's execution was delayed last month.

In Texas, GOP state Rep. Jeff Leach helped lead a bipartisan group of lawmakers who believe new evidence shows death row inmate Melissa Lucio didn't fatally beat her daughter. Leach and some of the lawmakers visited Lucio on death row before her execution was delayed in April.

In an interview with The Associated Press earlier this year, Leach said he hopes lawmakers can work to make sure "there's no chance that we're executing an innocent Texan."

"To say I'm wrestling with the very existence of the death penalty in Texas would be a dramatic understatement," Leach said.

Michael Benza, a law professor at Case Western Reserve University in Cleveland, said the shifting political environment around the death penalty has made it easier for policymakers to have meaningful discussions about capital punishment.

"And they have trouble with it when they really do look at what is happening. I think politicians are wondering whether or not this is in fact the right thing to be doing," Benza said.

Asian shares decline after retreats on Wall Street, Europe

By ELAINE KURTENBACH AP Business Writer

BANGKOK (AP) — Asian shares followed Wall Street and Europe lower on Friday, with markets jittery over the risk that the Federal Reserve and other central banks may end up bringing on recessions to get inflation under control.

Oil prices and U.S. futures edged higher.

China's move to relax COVID restrictions has raised hopes for an end to massive disruptions from lockdowns and other strict measures to prevent infections. But signs of sharply rising case numbers have raised uncertainty, with some alarmed over the possibility that the pandemic will continue to drag on the economy.

Hong Kong's Hang Seng was flat, at 19,369.65 while the Shanghai Composite index shed 0.3% to 3,160.67.

Tokyo's Nikkei 225 lost 1.7% to 27,569.56 after a survey of manufacturers showed a further contraction in output.

The Kospi in Seoul edged 0.2% lower to 2,357.97, while Australia's S&P/ASX 200 declined 0.3% to 7,180.50.

Shares in Taiwan fell 1.2% and the SET in Bangkok lost 0.2%. Mumbai dropped 1.4%.

On Thursday, the S&P 500 fell 2.5% to 3,895.75, erasing its gains from early in the week. The tech-heavy Nasdaq composite lost 3.2% to 10,810.53 and the Dow gave back 2.2% to 33,202.22.

The wave of selling came as central banks in Europe raised interest rates a day after the U.S. Federal Reserve hiked its key rate again, emphasizing that interest rates will need to go higher than previously expected in order to tame inflation.

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European stocks fell sharply, with Germany's DAX dropping 3.3%.

Like the Fed, central bank officials in Europe said inflation is not yet corralled and that more rate hikes are coming.

"We are in for a long game," European Central Bank President Christine Lagarde said at a news conference.

Small company stocks also fell. The Russell 2000 index slid 2.5% to close at 1,774.61.

The Fed raised its short-term interest rate by half a percentage point on Wednesday, its seventh increase this year. Central banks in Europe followed along Thursday, with the European Central Bank, Bank of England and Swiss National Bank each raising their main lending rate by a half-point Thursday.

Although the Fed is slowing the pace of its rate increases, the central bank signaled it expects rates to be higher over the coming few years than it had previously anticipated. That disappointed investors who hoped recent signs that inflation is easing somewhat would persuade the Fed to take some pressure off the brakes it's applying to the U.S. economy.

The federal funds rate stands at a range of 4.25% to 4.5%, the highest level in 15 years. Fed policy-makers forecast that the central bank's rate will reach a range of 5% to 5.25% by the end of 2023. Their forecast doesn't call for a rate cut before 2024.

The yield on the two-year Treasury, which closely tracks expectations for Fed moves, rose to 4.24% from 4.21% late Wednesday. The yield on the 10-year Treasury, which influences mortgage rates, slipped to 3.45% from 3.48%.

The three-month Treasury yield slipped to 4.31%, but remains above that of the 10-year Treasury. That's known as an inversion and considered a strong warning that the economy could be headed for a recession.

The central bank has been fighting to lower inflation at the same time that pockets of the economy, including employment and consumer spending, remain strong. That has made it more difficult to rein in high prices on everything from food to clothing.

On Thursday, the government reported that the number of Americans applying for unemployment benefits fell last week, a sign that the labor market remains strong. Meanwhile, another report showed that retail sales fell in November. That pullback followed a sharp rise in spending in October.

In other trading Friday, benchmark U.S. crude oil gained 38 cents to \$76.49 a barrel in electronic trading on the New York Mercantile Exchange. It lost \$1.17 on Thursday to \$76.11 per barrel.

Brent crude, the pricing basis for international trading, added 49 cents to \$81.70 per barrel.

The dollar fell to 137.25 Japanese yen from 137.81 yen late Thursday. The euro rose to \$1.0651 from \$1.0627.

US recession a growing fear as Fed plans to keep rates high

By PAUL WISEMAN and STAN CHOE AP Business Writers

WASHINGTON (AP) — After scaling 40-year highs, inflation in the United States has been slowly easing since summer. Yet the Federal Reserve seems decidedly unimpressed — and unconvinced that its fight against accelerating prices is anywhere near over.

On Thursday, stock markets buckled on the growing realization that the Fed may be willing to let the economy slide into recession if it decides that's what's needed to drive inflation back down to its 2% annual target.

The S&P 500 stock index lost roughly 100 points — 2.5% — in its worst day since early November. The losses came a day after the Fed raised its benchmark interest rate for the seventh time this year. The half-point hike the Fed announced — to a range of 4.25% to 4.5% — had been widely expected.

What spooked investors was Wall Street's growing understanding of how much further the Fed seems willing to go to defeat high inflation. In updated projections they issued Wednesday, the Fed's policymakers forecast that they will ratchet up their key rate by an additional three-quarters of a point — to a hefty 5% to 5.25% — and keep it there through 2023. Some Fed watchers had expected only an additional half-point in rate hikes.

Those higher rates will mean costlier borrowing costs for consumers and companies, ranging from mort-

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gages to auto and business loans.

The policymakers also downgraded their outlook for economic growth in 2023 from the 1.2% they had forecast in September to a puny 0.5% — as near to a recession forecast as they were likely to make. What's more, they raised their expectation for the unemployment rate next year to 4.6% from 3.7% now.

All of which suggested that the officials expect — or at least would accept — an economic downturn as the price of taming inflation.

The message the Fed was sending, said Ryan Sweet, chief U.S. economist at Oxford Economics, was blunt: "We're going to break something. We're going to break inflation or we're going to break the economy."

Many investors had convinced themselves that with inflation pressures gradually easing, the Fed might soon declare some progress in their fight and perhaps even reverse course and cut rates sometime in 2023.

There was seemingly reason for optimism: Consumer prices rose 7.1% last month from a year earlier, down from 9.1% in June and the fifth straight drop. Even more encouragingly, on a month to month basis, prices inched up just 0.1%. And core inflation, which excludes volatile food and energy costs and which the Fed tracks closely, rose just 0.2% from October to November, the mildest rise since August 2021.

A slowing economy has eased pressure on supply chains, which had previously been overwhelmed with customer orders, causing shortages, delays and higher prices. Oil prices, too, have plunged, easing prices at the pump. A gallon of unleaded gasoline cost an average \$3.19 on Thursday, down from \$5.02 in mid-June, according to AAA.

Yet Fed Chair Jerome Powell, who had been slow to recognize the inflation threat when it emerged in the spring of 2021, was in no mood to celebrate. Powell essentially shrugged off the signs of incremental progress.

"Two good monthly reports are very welcome," he told reporters Wednesday. "But we need to be honest with ourselves... 12-month core inflation is 6%" — three times the Fed's target. "It's good to see progress but let's just understand we have a long ways to go to get back to price stability."

Powell seemed to bat down hopes that the Fed might end up cutting rates by late next year — a move that typically acts like steroids for markets and the economy — unless inflation had dropped significantly by then, which he does not appear to expect.

The policymakers increased their inflation forecast for next year above what they were expecting back in September. It suggested that they feel their anti-inflation fight isn't having as much impact as they had hoped.

Many economists were caught off-guard by that change. For next year, the Fed is projecting more rate hikes, a slower economy and higher unemployment than it did three months ago.

All those things typically help tame inflation. Yet the Fed's officials predict that their preferred inflation gauge will be 3.1% at the end of 2023, up from their 2.8% forecast in September. That's above their 2% target and likely too high for them to feel they can cut rates.

The Fed wasn't the only source of rising recession fears Thursday. The European Central Bank, which is waging its own aggressive war against inflation, signaled that it, too, might send rates higher than markets expected, thereby raising the likelihood of a downturn in Europe.

On Thursday, the U.S. government reported that Americans slashed their spending at retailers in November. That was disconcerting news in the midst of the holiday shopping season. And the Federal Reserve Banks of New York and Philadelphia issued downbeat reports on manufacturing in their regions. Yields on long-term Treasuries fell, a sign that bond investors are growing more concerned about a possible recession.

Even the goods news out Thursday — a drop in the number of Americans seeking unemployment benefits — had a downside: It reinforced the Fed's concern that a strong and resilient job market is putting upward pressure on wages and overall inflation.

The Fed is especially worried that a worker shortage in the labor-intensive services sector — everything from restaurants and hotels to airlines and entertainment venues — could keep pay growth high and make inflation more intractable.

Sweet of Oxford Economics said he suspects that "the Fed is overstating how strong inflation might be."

But he said he sympathized with its predicament: Powell and the other policymakers fear that a failure

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to curb high inflation — even if it means a recession next year — would lead to a central bank’s nightmare scenario: “stagflation.” That’s a worst-of-all-worlds combination of weak growth, high unemployment and persistent inflation.

It’s a problem with no clear solution.

“Faced with that choice,” Sweet said, “they’ll do everything they can to prevent it.”

California approves roadmap for carbon neutrality by 2045

By SOPHIE AUSTIN Associated Press/Report for America

SACRAMENTO, Calif. (AP) — California air regulators voted unanimously Thursday to approve an ambitious plan to drastically cut reliance on fossil fuels by changing practices in the energy, transportation and agriculture sectors, but critics say it doesn’t go far enough to combat climate change.

The plan sets out to achieve so-called carbon neutrality by 2045, meaning the state will remove as many carbon emissions from the atmosphere as it emits. It aims to do so in part by reducing fossil fuel demand by 86% within that time frame.

California had previously set this carbon neutrality target, but Gov. Gavin Newsom signed legislation making it a mandate earlier this year. The Democrat has said drastic changes are needed to position California as a global climate leader.

“We are making history here in California,” Newsom said in a statement Thursday.

But the plan’s road to approval by the California Air Resources Board was not without criticism. Capturing large amounts of carbon and storing it underground is one of the most controversial elements of the proposal. Critics say it gives the state’s biggest emitters reason to not do enough on their part to mitigate climate change.

In a meeting that lasted several hours, activists, residents and experts used their last chance to weigh in on the plan ahead of the board’s vote. Many said the latest version, while not perfect, was an improvement from earlier drafts, committing the state to do more to curb planet-warming emissions.

Davina Hurt, a board member, said she was proud California is moving closer to its carbon neutrality goal. “I’m glad that this plan is bold and aggressive,” Hurt said.

The plan does not commit the state to taking any particular actions but sets out a broad roadmap for how California can achieve its goals. Here are the highlights:

RENEWABLE POWER

The implementation of the plan hinges on the state’s ability to transition away from fossil fuels and rely more on renewable resources for energy. It calls for the state to cut liquid petroleum fuel demand by 94% by 2045, and quadruple solar and wind capacity along that same timeframe.

Another goal would mean new residential and commercial buildings will be powered by electric appliances before the next decade.

The calls for dramatically lowering reliance on oil and gas come as public officials continue to grapple with how to avoid blackouts when record-breaking heat waves push Californians to crank up their air conditioning.

And the Western States Petroleum Association took issue with the plan’s timeline.

“CARB’s latest draft of the Scoping Plan has acknowledged what dozens of studies have confirmed — that a complete phase-out of oil and gas is unrealistic,” said Catherine Reheis-Boyd, the group’s president, in a statement. “A plan that isn’t realistic isn’t really a plan at all.”

At the beginning of Thursday’s meeting, California Air Resources Board Chair Liane Randolph touted the latest version of the plan as the most ambitious to date. It underwent changes after public comments earlier this year.

“Ultimately, achieving carbon neutrality requires deploying all tools available to us to reduce emissions and store carbon,” Randolph said.

TRANSPORTATION

Officials hope a move away from gas-powered cars and trucks reduces greenhouse gas emissions while limiting the public health impact of chemicals these vehicles release.

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In a July letter to the air board, Newsom requested that the agency approve aggressive cuts to emissions from planes. This would accompany other reductions in the transportation sector as the state transitions to all zero-emission vehicle sales by 2035.

The plan's targets include having 20% of aviation fuel demand come from electric or hydrogen sources by 2045 and ensuring all medium-duty vehicles sold are zero-emission by 2040. The board has already passed a policy to ban the sale of new cars powered solely by gasoline in the state starting in 2035.

CARBON CAPTURE

The plan refers to carbon capture as a "necessary tool" to implement in the state alongside other strategies to mitigate climate change. It calls for the state to capture 100 million metric tons of carbon dioxide equivalent and store it underground by 2045.

Connie Cho, an attorney for environmental justice group Communities for a Better Environment, called the plan "a huge step forward" to mitigate climate change and protect public health.

"Our communities have been suffering from chronic disease and dying at disproportionate rates for far too long because of the legacy of environmental racism in this country," Cho said.

But Cho criticized its carbon capture targets, arguing they give a pathway for refineries to continue polluting as the state cuts emissions in other areas.

AGRICULTURE

One of the goals is to achieve a 66% reduction in methane emissions from the agriculture sector by 2045. Cattle are a significant source for releasing methane — a potent, planet-warming gas.

The plan's implementation would also mean less reliance by the agriculture sector on fossil fuels as an energy source.

Oregon judge halts voter-approved high-capacity magazine ban

By GILLIAN FLACCUS Associated Press

PORTLAND, Ore. (AP) — An Oregon judge handed guns rights advocates a victory Thursday and placed a new, voter-approved ban on high-capacity magazines that was intended to curtail mass shootings on hold until questions about its constitutionality can be decided.

Harney County Judge Robert Raschio released the written ruling after a lengthy court hearing earlier this week in which attorneys for gun rights groups sought a preliminary injunction to stop the narrowly passed ban on magazines of more than 10 rounds.

"That the large capacity magazine bans promote public safety is mere speculation," Raschio wrote. "The court cannot sustain restraint on a constitutional right on mere speculation that the restriction could promote public safety."

With the injunction in place, all provisions of the law are effectively on hold a little more than a month after voters narrowly passed it in midterm elections. Earlier this week, Raschio extended his order blocking the law's permit-to-purchase provision, as well as a part of Measure 114 that would prevent a gun sale until the results of a background check come back. Under current federal law, a gun sale can proceed by default if the background check takes longer than three business days — the so-called Charleston loophole, because it allowed the assailant to purchase the gun used in a 2015 South Carolina mass shooting.

The lawsuit in Harney County, filed by Gun Owners of America Inc., the Gun Owners Foundation and several individual gun owners, seeks to have the entire law placed on hold while its constitutionality is decided. The state lawsuit specifically makes the claims under the Oregon Constitution, not the U.S. Constitution. Burns, the town where the lawsuit was filed, is more than 280 miles (450 kilometers) southeast of Portland in a rural and sparsely populated corner of the state.

Gun rights advocates, including those who were unable to stop the high-capacity magazine ban in a separate federal lawsuit last week, cheered the news.

"For now, your standard capacity magazines are safe," the Oregon Firearms Federation wrote to its members in a statement.

Mark Knutson, chairman of the interfaith Lift Every Voice Oregon campaign and pastor at Portland's

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Augustana Lutheran Church, said the ruling was a “bump in the road.”

“It was passed by voters and it’s going to save lives,” he said. “We expect it to be fully implemented. There are bans on large-capacity magazines in 12 states plus (Washington), D.C. already.”

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

Raschio said in his 25-page ruling that he would wait until the state told him it had a process in place for issuing the permits before holding a hearing on a motion for a preliminary injunction on that element of the law. Oregon has already paused enforcement of the permit provision until Feb. 8 as it finds enough certified firearms trainers for the hands-on classes. A hearing on the background check provisions is set for Dec. 23.

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

Gun rights groups, local sheriffs and gun store owners have filed at least four lawsuits, almost all in federal court, saying the law violates Americans’ constitutional right to bear arms. The Harney County lawsuit is the only one filed in state court, gun rights advocates said.

A federal judge in Portland hearing a different challenge to the law under the U.S. Constitution on Dec. 6 delivered an initial victory to proponents of the sweeping gun-control measure that passed in the Nov. 8 midterms.

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

Raschio’s subsequent ruling the same day threw the law into limbo: Because that lawsuit challenged Measure 114 under the Oregon Constitution, it held precedence in the state, legal experts said.

The law’s fate is being carefully watched by both gun rights advocates and those who want stricter limits on gun ownership. It would be one of the first to take effect since a U.S. Supreme Court ruling in June struck down a New York law that placed limits on carrying guns outside the home.

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

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

The legal focus in Oregon’s state court this week highlighted the historical context of when Oregon’s constitution was enacted, and on the firearms landscape at that time. The Oregon Constitution was enacted in 1859, nearly 70 years after the Second Amendment of the U.S. Constitution was ratified.

Expert witnesses for the plaintiffs and the state gave conflicting opinions about whether “multi-shot” firearms were commercially available and widely known during that era.

Raschio wrote that the plaintiffs had proven to his satisfaction that such large-capacity magazine guns existed at the time and that modern guns are “the direct descendants from the firearms at the time of statehood.”

He also wrote that defendants’ assertions that high-capacity magazines lead to more mass shootings was “mere speculation.”

“The court finds that there is less than a 1 in 1,000,000 chance of a person being a fatality in a mass shooting in Oregon, and even less with an offender who is using a large capacity magazine,” he wrote.

State laws requiring a permit to purchase a firearm were associated with 60% lower odds of having a public mass shooting, according to a study published in 2020. Limits on large-capacity magazines, meanwhile, were linked with 38% fewer people killed in mass shootings.

Defendants noted in their legal filings that every mass shooting since 2004 that resulted in 14 or more deaths involved gun magazines with 10 or more rounds.

Texas officer convicted in killing of Atatiana Jefferson

By JAMIE STENGLE and JAKE BLEIBERG Associated Press

A former Texas police officer was convicted of manslaughter Thursday for fatally shooting Atatiana Jefferson through a rear window of her home in 2019, a rare conviction of an officer for killing someone who was also armed with a gun.

Jurors also considered a murder charge against Aaron Dean but instead convicted him of manslaughter. The conviction comes more than three years after the white Fort Worth officer shot the 28-year-old Black woman while responding to a call about an open front door.

Dean, 38, faces up to 20 years in prison, with the sentencing phase of his trial set to begin Friday. He had faced up to life in prison if convicted of murder. Dean, who had been free on bond, was booked into the Tarrant County jail following the verdict.

Jurors deliberated for more than 13 hours over two days before finding him guilty of manslaughter. The primary dispute during the six days of testimony and arguments was whether Dean knew Jefferson was armed when he shot her. Dean testified that he saw her weapon; prosecutors alleged the evidence showed otherwise.

Lesa Pamplin, an attorney and friend of the Jefferson family, said she was glad that jurors took their time.

"These folks gave a good, hard look at the evidence and they didn't rush it. And I'm happy, not pleased, but I'm happy that they got the manslaughter," Pamplin said.

Another friend of the Jefferson family, Cliff Sparks, told The Dallas Morning News that he thinks the verdict will give other officers the message that they "can shoot and kill somebody in his own backyard and get the lesser charge."

"It's not right," Sparks said. "None of this is right."

Family members of both Jefferson and Dean left the courtroom without commenting.

Dean shot Jefferson on Oct. 12, 2019, after a neighbor called a nonemergency police line to report that the front door to Jefferson's Fort Worth home was open. She had been playing video games that night with her nephew and it emerged at trial that they left the doors open to vent smoke from hamburgers the boy burned.

The case was unusual for the relative speed with which, amid public outrage, the Fort Worth Police Department released video of the shooting and arrested Dean. He'd completed the police academy the year before and quit the force without speaking to investigators.

Since then, the case had been repeatedly postponed amid lawyerly wrangling, the terminal illness of Dean's lead attorney and the COVID-19 pandemic.

Body camera footage showed that Dean and a second officer who responded to the call didn't identify themselves as police at the house. Dean and Officer Carol Darch testified that they thought the house might have been burglarized and quietly moved into the fenced-off backyard looking for signs of forced entry.

There, Dean, whose gun was drawn, fired a single shot through the window a split-second after shouting at Jefferson, who was inside, to show her hands.

Dean testified that he had no choice but to shoot when he saw Jefferson pointing the barrel of a gun directly at him. But under questioning from prosecutors he acknowledged numerous errors, repeatedly conceding that actions he took before and after the shooting were "more bad police work."

Darch's back was to the window when Dean shot, but she testified that he never mentioned seeing a gun before he pulled the trigger and didn't say anything about the weapon as they rushed in to search the house.

Dean acknowledged on the witness stand that he only said something about the gun after seeing it on the floor inside the house and that he never gave Jefferson first aid.

Jefferson's 8-year-old nephew, Zion Carr, was in the room with his aunt when she was shot. Zion testified

that Jefferson took out her gun believing there was an intruder in the backyard, but he offered contradictory accounts of whether she pointed the pistol out the window.

On the trial's opening day, the now-11-year-old Zion testified that Jefferson always had the gun pointed down, but in an interview that was recorded soon after the shooting and played in court, he said she had pointed the weapon at the window.

Lengthy prison terms for 3 who aided Whitmer kidnap plotter

By JOEY CAPPELLETTI and ED WHITE Associated Press

JACKSON, Mich. (AP) — A judge on Thursday handed down the longest prison terms so far in the plot to kidnap Michigan's governor, sentencing three men who forged an early alliance with a leader of the scheme before the FBI broke it up in 2020.

Joe Morrison, Pete Musico and Paul Bellar were not charged with having a direct role in the conspiracy. But they were members of a paramilitary group that trained with Adam Fox, who separately faces a possible life sentence on Dec. 27 for his federal conviction.

The trio was convicted in October of providing material support for a terrorist act, which carries a maximum term of 20 years, and two other crimes.

Musico was sentenced to a minimum of 12 years in prison, followed by his son-in-law Morrison at 10 years and Bellar at seven. They will be eligible for release after serving those terms, but any decision will rest with the Michigan parole board.

Speaking in a recorded video, Gov. Gretchen Whitmer urged Judge Thomas Wilson to "impose a sentence that meets the gravity of the damage they have done to our democracy."

"A conspiracy to kidnap and kill a sitting governor of the state of Michigan is a threat to democracy itself," said Whitmer, who added that she now scans crowds for risks and worries "about the fate of everyone near me."

Wilson presided over the first batch of convictions in state court, following the high-profile conspiracy convictions of four others in federal court. Fox and Barry Croft Jr. were described as captains of an incredible plan to snatch Whitmer from her vacation home, seeking to inspire a U.S. civil war known as the "boogaloo."

Whitmer, a Democrat recently elected to a second term, was never physically harmed. Undercover FBI agents and informants were inside Fox's group for months, and the scheme was broken up with 14 arrests in October 2020.

For Musico and Morrison, the judge took the unusual step of ordering consecutive sentences for all three crimes, which will extend their minimum prison stays. Besides supporting terrorism, the three men were also convicted of a gun crime and for being members of a gang.

Musico, Morrison and Bellar belonged to the Wolverine Watchmen. The three held gun training with Fox and shared his disgust for Whitmer, police and public officials, especially after COVID-19 restrictions disrupted the economy and triggered armed Capitol protests and anti-government belligerence.

They were running a "terrorism training camp in Jackson County," Assistant Attorney General Sunita Doddamani told the judge.

The men expressed remorse, moments after Whitmer in her video said they had failed to take responsibility.

Musico, 45, cried while acknowledging a "lack of judgment." Morrison, 28, said he was "renouncing, disavowing and detesting" anti-government ideologies. Bellar, 24, was the last to speak, publicly apologizing for abhorrent remarks about the governor.

"I was caught up highly in the moment," Bellar said. "I felt I had lost a lot of camaraderie after being discharged from the Army. That was the reason I joined the Wolverine Watchmen in the first place."

Defense lawyers still plan vigorous appeals. They argued at trial that the men had cut ties with Fox before the Whitmer plot came into focus by late summer of 2020; Bellar had moved to South Carolina in July.

They also didn't travel with Fox to look for the governor's second home or participate in a key training

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session inside a "shoot house" in Luther, Michigan.

"If Mr. Bellar wanted to be part of the kidnapping of the governor, he would have stayed here. ... He could have held on like a rock, like a tick in that apartment," defense attorney Andrew Kirkpatrick said.

A jury, however, quickly returned guilty verdicts in October after hearing nine days of testimony, mostly evidence offered by federal agents and a pivotal FBI informant, Dan Chappel, who secretly recorded conversations.

"The Wolverine Watchmen misappropriated the word 'patriot' all the time for a really unpatriotic objective, you know, killing fellow Americans. ... Dan is what really a patriot is," Doddamani said Thursday.

Separately, in federal court in Grand Rapids, Fox and Croft face possible life sentences this month. Two men who pleaded guilty received substantial breaks: Ty Garbin is free after a 2 1/2-year prison term while Kaleb Franks was given a four-year sentence. Brandon Caserta and Daniel Harris were acquitted by a jury.

"Croft wanted to do more than kidnap the governor of Michigan or even kill her," Assistant U.S. Attorney Nils Kessler said in a new court filing. "He said, 'I can't wait for war to come to this land,' and meant it. Only a life sentence can adequately address Croft's crimes and deter him and others from pursuing such apocalyptic visions for our country."

When the plot was foiled, Whitmer blamed then-President Donald Trump, saying he had given "comfort to those who spread fear and hatred and division." In August, after 19 months out of office, Trump said the kidnapping plan was a "fake deal."

Biden pumps up Africa relations, will visit next year

By AAMER MADHANI and COLLEEN LONG Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden said Thursday he will visit sub-Saharan Africa next year, the first U.S. president to travel there in a decade. He announced the trip — still unscheduled — as he wrapped up a U.S.-Africa Leaders Summit by stressing he's serious about increasing U.S. attention to the growing continent.

His promise of a personal visit came as Biden declared to the 49 leaders gathered for the summit that "Africa belongs at the table" in every conversation of global consequence.

"I'm looking forward to seeing you in your home countries," Biden said near the end of the three-day summit that the administration billed as primarily a listening session with the continent's leaders.

The Biden administration used the summit — a follow-up to one held in 2014 by Barack Obama — as the latest part of a charm offensive with leaders of African nations. The administration is looking to strengthen relations with those nations as China has surpassed the U.S. in trade with Africa and is aiming to grow its military presence.

The continent is crucial to global powers because of its rapidly growing population, significant natural resources and sizable voting bloc in the United Nations. Some leaders who took part in summit made clear they want the Biden administration to steer away from forcing them to choose between the U.S. and its global competitors when it comes to trade matters.

"These are economic opportunities," Niger President Mohamed Bazoum told The Associated Press. "Companies from Turkey and China come and invest in Niger in a win-win type of relationship. It is something that American investors can do as well."

Biden on Thursday formally announced that he supports the African Union becoming a permanent member of the Group of 20 nations. He also announced plans to spend \$2 billion to help bolster food security on the continent and \$165 million to help African nations carry out peaceful and transparent elections next year.

Those announcements came after Biden this week detailed his administration's commitment to spend \$55 billion on government programming in Africa over the next three years, over and above the billions that American private companies would invest.

"Our eyes are fixed squarely on the future," Biden said.

The elections-funding announcement came after Biden met on Wednesday with a small group of leaders whose countries have big votes in the new year.

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Those leaders: Democratic Republic of the Congo President Felix Tshisekedi, Gabon President Ali Bongo Ondimba, Liberia President George Manneh Weah, Madagascar President Andry Nirina Rajoelina, Nigeria President Muhammadu Buhari and Sierra Leone President Julius Maada Bio.

The White House said in a statement that Biden, in his meeting with the leaders, reflected on the state of democracy in his own country after last year's Jan. 6 attack on the U.S. Capitol. That's when supporters of then-President Donald Trump violently sought to stop Congress from certifying the results of the 2020 election, which Trump lost to Biden.

Biden also spoke about the recent U.S. midterm elections, when voters rejected a number of 2020-results-denying candidates, with the president making his case that "the strength and resilience of American democracy was reaffirmed in the process."

Thousands of Trump supporters descended on the U.S. Capitol on Jan. 6, 2021, in a violent insurrection, breaking through police barricades and smashing windows in the building, crying out to hang the vice president.

Trump and his allies also launched roughly 50 lawsuits aimed at overturning vote counts in battleground states. They lost almost every legal battle they waged and Biden was declared the winner.

The upcoming elections in African nations are seen as important indicators of the strength of democracy across the continent.

Nigeria, Africa's most populous country with more than 210 million people, is already confronted with violent attacks relating to its election, to be held in February.

Congo is battling an upsurge of rebel violence in its east, which will complicate efforts to hold elections. Tshisekedi won power in tumultuous elections in that country in 2019, and the upcoming elections, scheduled for next December, will be crucial to solidify his rule.

West Africa has had several coups in recent year, and Burkina Faso and Mali are currently ruled by military juntas. With this in mind, the elections in Gabon and Sierra Leone will be key markers. Sierra Leone had anti-government demonstrations this year over high inflation and displeasure with President Bio, who was elected in 2018.

In Madagascar, with a history marked by coups and disputed elections. President Rajoelina was elected in 2019, replacing rule by a military-backed junta. Rajoelina will be striving to consolidate his rule and the country's democracy in the elections.

The United States has already provided nearly \$50 million in support of civil society and the electoral commissions in Nigeria and Congo.

Senegalese President Macky Sall, the African Union chairman, in remarks at Thursday's session thanked Biden for his commitment to Africa. But he also said Africa's countries face steep challenges - from rising food insecurity to badly needed infrastructure improvements to fend off the scourge of climate change.

Sall criticized pending U.S. legislation that he said unfairly "targeted" Africa, an apparent reference to a measure titled "Countering Malign Russian Activities in Africa." Lawmakers sponsoring the bill say the legislation is intended to prevent Moscow from using Africa to bypass U.S. sanctions imposed after the invasion of Ukraine.

Sall also raised concerns about years-long U.S. sanctions against Zimbabwe for corruption and human rights violations, saying that it was time to lift the penalties so the nation could "fight against poverty and underdevelopment."

Earlier this week, the U.S. Treasury Department announced it was hitting four Zimbabwean people, including the adult son of President Emmerson Mnangagwa, and two companies with new sanctions, accusing them of roles in undermining democracy and facilitating high-level graft.

Africa has been disproportionately harmed by the rise of global food prices sparked by Russia's war on Ukraine. Sall said it was critical to take heed of the "lessons" of the crises of the pandemic and war.

"The time is right to take vigorous action in the field of agriculture and food security," Sall said.

Biden concurred at a closing summit session focused on food security. He said, "If a parent can't feed their child, nothing else really matters."

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Sall also said the African Union expects a "strong commitment and support" from the United States on countering terrorism.

"We wish for the fight against terrorism to be an integral part of the world struggle against this blight," he said.

Biden's visit to Africa will include stops in multiple countries, according to a U.S. official who was not authorized to comment by name and spoke on the condition of anonymity. The White House has not released any details about where or when Biden will be travelling.

He made a brief stop in November in Egypt, which spans across the northeast corner of Africa and southwest corner of Asia, for an international climate summit.

In the first two years of his presidency, Biden's international travel has focused on Asia and Europe, as he has sought to recalibrate his foreign policy to put greater focus on the Indo-Pacific. He has also had to deal with the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

Biden's Republican predecessor, Trump, did not make it to Africa during his COVID-19 shadowed presidency in which he made no foreign visits during his final 11 months. Trump was the first president since Ronald Reagan not to visit the continent during his presidency

Russia: US air defense systems could be targets in Ukraine

By JAMEY KEATEN Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Russia's Foreign Ministry warned Thursday that if the U.S. delivers sophisticated air defense systems to Ukraine, those systems and any crews that accompany them would be a "legitimate target" for the Russian military, a blunt threat that was quickly rejected by Washington.

The exchange of statements reflected soaring Russia-U.S. tensions amid the fighting in Ukraine, which is now in its 10th month.

Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova said the U.S. had "effectively become a party" to the war by providing Ukraine with weapons and training its troops. She added that if reports about U.S. intentions to provide Kyiv with Patriot surface-to-air missile system prove true, it would become "another provocative move by the U.S." and broaden its involvement in the hostilities, "entailing possible consequences."

"Any weapons systems supplied to Ukraine, including the Patriot, along with the personnel servicing them, have been and will remain legitimate priority targets for the Russian armed forces," Zakharova declared.

Asked about the Russian warning, Pentagon spokesman Air Force Gen. Pat Ryder responded that the U.S. was "not going to allow comments from Russia to dictate the security assistance that we provide to Ukraine."

"I find it ironic and very telling that officials from a country that brutally attacked its neighbor — in an illegal and unprovoked invasion, through a campaign that is deliberately targeting and killing innocent civilians and destroying civilian infrastructure — that they would choose to use words like 'provocative' to describe defensive systems that are meant to save lives and protect civilians," Ryder said.

U.S. officials said Tuesday that Washington was 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 that have crippled much of the country's vital infrastructure. An official announcement is expected soon.

Operating and maintaining a Patriot battery requires as many as 90 troops, and for months the U.S. has been reluctant to provide the complex systems because sending American forces into Ukraine to run them is a nonstarter for President Joe Biden's administration.

Even without the presence of U.S. service members to train Ukrainians on use of the system, concerns remain that deployment of the missiles could provoke Russia or risk that a fired projectile could hit inside Russia and further escalate the conflict.

Russia has repeatedly claimed that its forces struck Western-supplied weapons in Ukraine, but those statements have been impossible to verify.

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Ukraine has so far been cautious in reacting to the reports.

Hanna Maliar, Ukraine's deputy defense minister, told reporters Thursday in Kyiv that the delivery of such weaponry remains "sensitive not only for Ukraine, but for our partners," and that only President Volodymyr Zelenskyy or Defense Minister Oleksiy Reznikov would make any official announcement on such an agreement.

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. As the winter closed in and the Russian bombardment of civilian infrastructure escalated, officials said, the idea became a higher priority.

Until now, the U.S. and other NATO allies have provided Ukraine with short- and medium-range air defense systems that can down Russian aircraft and drones but not ballistic and cruise missiles.

Ukraine's electricity provider said Thursday that the country's energy system had a "significant deficit of electricity," and that emergency shutdowns had been applied in some areas as temperatures hover around or below freezing.

The state-owned grid operator Ukrenergo warned in a statement on Facebook that damage caused to energy infrastructure by Russian attacks is being compounded by harsh weather, including snow, ice and strong winds.

The southern Ukrainian city of Kherson was left completely without power following Russian shelling, according to Kyrylo Tymoshenko, deputy head of the Ukrainian president's office, who wrote on Telegram. He added that two people were killed in the attacks.

Heavy shelling of the city's Korabelny district was still underway in the afternoon, and Russian shells hit 100 meters (yards) from the regional administration building, he said.

Amid the infrastructure attacks and power outages across the country, seven civilians were killed and 19 wounded on Wednesday and Thursday, according to a report issued by the Ukrainian president's office.

The head of Ukraine's eastern Donetsk province, Pavlo Kyrylenko, reported that Russian strikes the previous day had killed two civilians and wounded seven.

Kremlin-backed authorities in the region, which was illegally annexed by Moscow in September, announced that Russia had taken control of 80% of the city of Marinka, seen as critical to Ukrainian hopes of retaking the Russian-held regional capital, Donetsk.

The Moscow-installed mayor of Donetsk, Aleksei Kulemzin, said Thursday that the city center had been hit by "the most massive strike" since the area came under the control of Russian-backed separatists in 2014.

Writing on Telegram, Kulemzin said 40 Ukrainian rockets struck Donetsk on Thursday morning, noting that multistory residential buildings were hit and that fires broke out at a hospital and university campus.

Elsewhere, Ukrainian forces shelled Russia's western Kursk province, according to regional Gov. Roman Starovoyt. Six shells reportedly struck a farm in the province's Belovsky district, which borders Ukraine's Sumy province. There were no casualties, Starovoyt wrote on Telegram.

In other developments Thursday:

— The European Union said it approved a new package of sanctions aimed at ramping up pressure on Russia for the war. The package was approved after days of deliberations during a meeting of the 27-nation bloc's ambassadors.

— Russia continued to build up its military presence in Belarus, a senior Ukrainian military official said. According to Brig. Gen. Oleksiy Hromov, Russian units "are undergoing training and combat coordination" in Belarus, with the Kremlin using Belarusian officers and training grounds to improve the combat capability of existing units, as well as to train newly created units.

Speaking at a press briefing, Hromov said the probability of a Russian offensive from Belarus "remains low," but he highlighted that the transfer of Russian weapons to Belarus is ongoing, including three hypersonic missile-carrying aircraft, a set of tanks and a long-range radar-detection aircraft.

— Russia's Foreign Ministry said the Vatican has apologized for a statement Pope Francis made in a recent interview in which he singled out two Russian ethnic minorities — the Chechens and the Buryats

— as being “the most cruel” participants in the war in Ukraine.

At a briefing, Zakharova quoted from what she said was a message from the Vatican that “apologizes to the Russian side” for the pope’s comments. Zakharova praised the message, saying that it showed the Vatican’s “ability to conduct dialogue and listen to interlocutors.” A Vatican spokesman would say only that there had been diplomatic contacts on the matter.

Claudine Gay to be Harvard’s 1st Black president, 2nd woman

By MICHAEL CASEY Associated Press

BOSTON (AP) — Harvard University announced Thursday that Claudine Gay will become its 30th president, making her the first Black person and the second woman to lead the Ivy League school.

Gay, who is currently a dean at the university and a democracy scholar, will become president July 1. She replaces Lawrence Bacow, who is stepping down and has said he wanted to spend more time with family.

“This is crazy, right?” a beaming Gay said as she was introduced to applause at the Smith campus center. She currently serves as the Edgerley Family Dean of Harvard’s Faculty of Arts and Sciences.

“I am absolutely humbled by the confidence that the governing board has placed in me,” she said. “I am also incredibly humbled by the prospect of succeeding President Bacow and leading this incredible institution.”

A child of Haitian immigrants, Gay is regarded as a leading voice on the issue of American political participation. Among the issues she has explored is how a range of social and economic factors shape political views and voting. She also is the founding chair Harvard’s Inequality in America Initiative, which studies issues like the effects of child poverty and deprivation on educational opportunity and American inequality from a global perspective.

“Claudine is a remarkable leader who is profoundly devoted to sustaining and enhancing Harvard’s academic excellence, to championing both the value and the values of higher education and research, to expanding opportunity, and to strengthening Harvard as a fount of ideas and a force for good in the world,” Penny Pritzker, senior fellow of the Harvard Corporation and chair of Harvard’s presidential search committee, said in a statement.

In her speech, Gay called for greater collaboration among schools at Harvard and said there was an urgency for the university be more engaged with the world and to “bring bold, brave and pioneering thinking to our greatest challenges.”

“The idea of the ‘ivory tower’ — that is the past not the future of academia. We don’t exist outside of society, but as part of it,” she said. “That means that Harvard has a duty to lean in, engage and to be of service to the world.”

With Gay’s appointment, women will outnumber men as chiefs of the eight Ivy League schools. Dartmouth and the University of Pennsylvania appointed women earlier this year, joining Brown and Cornell. Columbia, Princeton and Yale are led by men. Drew Faust was the first woman to be president at Harvard. A noted historian of the American South and the Civil War, she stepped down in 2018 after 11 years.

Gay will be the only Black president currently in the Ivy League and the second Black woman ever, following Ruth Simmons, who led Brown University from 2001 to 2012.

Gay’s appointment is remarkable in part because relatively few U.S. universities are led by Black presidents, said Eddie R. Cole, a historian of college presidents and race at the University of California, Los Angeles. Harvard wields outsized influence in higher education, he said, and other universities are bound to take notice.

“At a time when everyone continues to look at Harvard, this presidential hire will arguably be one of the most significant in American higher education for years to come,” Cole said.

As president of Harvard, Gay will shape decisions that can have impact at the local, state and federal level, Cole said. That includes racial issues that the campus has confronted in recent years, including affirmative action and the school’s own history with slavery.

Bacow, who took over as president in 2018, expanded and updated the university’s teaching and re-

search missions and fostered cooperation across disciplines to address issues including climate change and inequality.

Under his leadership, Harvard joined the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in a legal challenge to the Trump administration's decision to make international students leave the country if they planned on taking classes entirely online in fall 2020 at the height of the pandemic. He criticized the policy for its "cruelty" and "recklessness."

Harvard also faced challenges during his tenure. The university survived a legal challenge to its admissions policies in U.S. District Court, a case now being weighed by the Supreme Court.

It was also disclosed that disgraced financier Jeffrey Epstein visited Harvard's campus more than 40 times after his 2008 sex crimes conviction — long before Bacow's tenure — and was even given his own office.

Gay's early challenges could include fallout from the Supreme Court's review of the use of race in admissions. The court is weighing challenges to processes at Harvard and the University of North Carolina, which consider race among many factors when choosing students.

Lower courts have upheld practices at both universities, rejecting claims that they discriminated against Asian American applicants. But in oral arguments this year, the high court's six conservative justices expressed doubts about the practice, which has been upheld under Supreme Court decisions reaching back to 1978.

Lawmakers quick to unload FTX founder's contributions

By FATIMA HUSSEIN and SEUNG MIN KIM The Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — A writer's workshop in Alaska. Food banks in California. A charity that fights diabetes.

Lawmakers who accepted piles of cash from onetime wunderkind Samuel Bankman-Fried now can't move fast enough to offload their contributions from the disgraced crypto mogul to anywhere else but their own campaign coffers.

Before his arrest in the Bahamas this week, Bankman-Fried, the former CEO of cryptocurrency exchange FTX, was a prolific political donor to individual candidates — from local campaigns all the way up to President Joe Biden — as well as super PACs that can wield outsized influence in campaigns. But in a matter of days, Bankman-Fried — a proponent of "effective altruism" — became a pariah facing allegations of massive financial fraud and potentially decades in prison.

The Associated Press contacted more than four dozen current and incoming lawmakers who received campaign contributions from Bankman-Fried this election cycle — a group that included members of both political parties and chambers of Congress, but predominantly House Democrats. Many of the recipients of Bankman-Fried's cash were quick to respond, stressing that they had already donated or plan to send the money to charity. Several also stressed that the lawmakers did not solicit the contributions from Bankman-Fried.

Recipients of Bankman-Fried's campaign largesse included lawmakers at the most senior levels of House and Senate Democratic leadership. Rep. Hakeem Jeffries, D-N.Y., the incoming leader of House Democrats, donated the contribution to the American Diabetes Association. Rep. Pete Aguilar, D-Calif., who will be the third-ranking House Democrat next year, donated his contributions from Bankman-Fried to local charities last month.

In the Senate, Majority Whip Dick Durbin of Illinois, the No. 2 Democrat in the chamber, will donate his contribution to an "appropriate charity," a spokeswoman said. Sen. Patty Murray, D-Wash., who will be third in line to the presidency next year, will donate her cash to a local Washington state charity.

Sen. Tina Smith, D-Minn., donated Bankman-Fried's contributions to Planned Parenthood North Central States. Sen. Alex Padilla, D-Calif., sent his cash to food banks across California. Sen. Lisa Murkowski, R-Alaska, donated her contribution to Storyknife Writers Retreat in Homer, Alaska.

Democratic Rep. Ruben Gallego of Arizona, who is strongly hinting he'll challenge Democrat-turned-independent Kyrsten Sinema for the Senate, gave the \$5,800 he received from Bankman-Fried to incoming

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Democratic Rep. Andrea Salinas of Oregon. In her Democratic primary, Salinas defeated a rival backed by millions of spending from Bankman-Fried.

"Congress must take immediate action to regulate the crypto industry, implement strict oversight standards and shield consumers from schemes like this in the future," said Rep. Angie Craig, D-Minn., who added she will donate her Bankman-Fried contribution to a bankruptcy fund to compensate FTX customers.

Sens. Cory Booker, D-N.J., John Boozman, R-Ark., Bill Cassidy, R-La., Susan Collins, R-Maine, John Hoeven, R-N.D., Joe Manchin, D-W.Va., Debbie Stabenow, D-Mich., Sen.-elect Peter Welch, D-Vt., and Reps. Josh Gottheimer, D-N.J., Salud Carbajal, D-Calif., Joe Neguse, D-Colo., Josh Harder, D-Calif., Kim Schrier, D-Wash., Ritchie Torres, D-N.Y., all donated their Bankman-Fried donations to various charities or plan to, according to their aides.

The main campaign committees dedicated to electing congressional Democrats also received tens of thousands from Bankman-Fried, while House Majority PAC, a deep-pocketed outside group backing House Democrats, got a \$6 million contribution, according to FEC records. Officials at HMP, the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee and the Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee did not return requests for comment on what the groups planned to do with Bankman-Fried's contributions.

The White House has also been mum on the multimillion-dollar boost his presidential bid received. Press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre referred inquiries to the Democratic National Committee, which declined to comment.

Then there were the millions given to more obscure political action committees: The Protect Our Future PAC, financed by Bankman-Fried, spent up to \$2 million in ads in support of Lucy McBath, who ran a successful campaign in Georgia's 7th Congressional District against incumbent Rep. Carolyn Bordeaux. Bankman-Fried wired at least \$27 million to the PAC in 2022, according to the FEC website.

In an interview with the Associated Press, Bordeaux said the dilemma surrounding Bankman-Fried's campaign spending isn't as simple as returning individual donations. In some cases, the money already has been used to affect elections.

"The larger issue at play is the super PACs," Bordeaux said. "That's not something they can refund. Here is an example of a billionaire using money he stole and diverted into political contributions — it's an egregious example of the corruption in our political system."

"This is a good opportunity to reopen the conversation about campaign finance reform," she said.

Brett Kappel, a longtime campaign finance attorney who has worked for both Republicans and Democrats, said it would be "prudent" for members of Congress who received donations from Bankman Fried or other FTX officials to set the money aside "given the high likelihood the bankruptcy receiver will be seeking their return."

That's because, in bankruptcy cases, courts have often sided with those looking to recoup money that they unfairly lost. Lawmakers who gave donations from company officials to charity could still find themselves on the hook to return the money they received -- or face the perilous optics of stiffing constituents who lost investments when the company melted down.

Still, the lawmakers face no liability themselves "unless they knew the contributions were illegal at the time they received them," Kappel said.

The U.S. government charged 30-year-old Bankman-Fried with a host of financial crimes this week, alleging he intentionally deceived customers and investors to enrich himself and others, while playing a central role in the company's multibillion-dollar collapse.

Among the counts listed in his indictment is conspiracy to defraud the United States and violating campaign finance laws enforced by the Federal Election Commission. At a press conference on Tuesday, U.S. Attorney Damian Williams said Bankman-Fried made "tens of millions of dollars" in illegal campaign donations.

The Securities and Exchange Commission complaint alleges that Bankman-Fried raised more than \$1.8 billion from investors since May 2019 by promoting FTX as a safe, responsible platform for trading crypto assets but instead diverted customers' funds to a privately held crypto hedge fund called Alameda Research LLC without telling them.

The SEC says Bankman-Fried then used those customer funds to make undisclosed venture invest-

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ments, lavish real estate purchases and large political donations. He contributed funds to both political parties, Bankman-Fried said in an interview last month, adding that "all my Republican donations were dark," meaning undisclosed.

On the Republican side, Ryan Salame, the co-CEO of FTX Digital Markets, one of FTX's affiliates, contributed millions to Republicans on behalf of Bankman-Fried, including to Rep. Steve Scalise in Louisiana, Rep. Greg Pence in Indiana and others.

Bankman-Fried also sent campaign cash to a slew of incoming House Democrats, including Reps.-elect Becca Balint, D-Vt., Nikki Budzinski, D-Ill., Robert Garcia, D-Calif., Sydney Kamlager, D-Calif., Morgan McGarvey, D-Ky., and Brittany Pettersen, D-Colo., who all donated their contributions to local charities. Tweeting that he rejects not just corporate PAC cash but also "stolen money," Rep.-elect Maxwell Frost, D-Fla., said he donated his contribution to the Zebra Coalition, a group that aids LGBT youth.

"The situation with FTX is both distressing and unsettling," said Rep.-elect Valerie Foushee, D-N.C. She said she donated her contribution to a non-profit in Chapel Hill.

Massachusetts Gov. Charlie Baker to be next NCAA president

By RALPH D. RUSSO AP College Sports Writer

Massachusetts Gov. Charlie Baker will be the next president of the NCAA, stepping in to lead an organization with diminished power amid sweeping change across college sports.

The NCAA announced Thursday that Baker will replace Mark Emmert as the head of the largest college sports governing body in the country, with some 500,000 athletes at more than 1,100 schools.

Baker, a Republican, has been governor of Massachusetts since 2015. He announced a year ago he would not seek re-election. His second term ends in January and he will start his new job in March.

He has never worked in college sports.

"I must say that when I was first approached about this, my initial reaction was that I was not exactly what you would call a traditional candidate," Baker said on a video conference call with reporters.

Some of the traits that have made Baker a successful governor -- including his ability to negotiate with a Democrat-controlled Legislature and his more moderate stand on many social issues -- have been seen as closing off a pursuit of higher office in GOP that has turned sharply to the right.

Baker said his time in state government, building consensus among various constituencies, coalitions and factions, should help in leading a diverse association with a wide range of priorities.

"I certainly think the challenges here are significant," Baker said.

He said he was approached by the NCAA's search firm about two months ago.

"When you consider the priorities that we have right now in the NCAA, it's hard to imagine a better fit than Governor Baker," said Baylor President Lind Livingston, who is the chairwoman of the NCAA Board of Governors. "As a public servant, he showed a talent for working across party lines, convening Bay Staters of all types to do big things together."

The NCAA emphasized Baker's high approval ratings as the Republican governor of a blue state in announcing the hire. He will now become the face of an increasingly unpopular entity that has been viewed as an impediment to athletes getting a fair share of the billions of dollars generated by big-time college sports.

Emmert announced he would step down earlier this year after 12 years of leading the NCAA through a tumultuous time. Battered by losses in court and attacks by politicians, the NCAA is going through a sweeping reform, trying to decentralize the way college sports is run.

College sports leaders, including Emmert, have repeatedly asked for help from Congress to regulate name, image and likeness compensation (NIL) since the NCAA lifted its ban in 2021 on athletes being able to earn endorsement money.

Now the association will be led by a politician for the first time.

Baker mostly side-stepped specifics when asked about whether college sports needed government intervention and if a model could include athletes being paid, something schools have long opposed while arguing that it would upend the amateur sports model that is the foundation of college athletics.

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"I'm going to wait until I actually have the job and I've had some conversations before I get into the details of several of these questions," Baker said. "But to me the jewel of college sports is the opportunity and the access that it provides to so many people and the experiences and the learning that comes with that."

Baker was born in upstate New York, went to high school in Massachusetts and graduated from Harvard, where he played basketball. He also had two sons who played college football and his wife, Lauren, was a gymnast in college.

That's the extent of his experience in college sports.

The last two NCAA presidents, Emmert and the late Myles Brand, moved into the job after being university presidents. Before that the job had typically been held by former college sports administrators.

With the NCAA moving into a new phase and college sports becoming more professionalized, it was clear the role of the president of the association was also changing.

Emmert and other college sports leaders have been spending ample time in recent years in Washington, hoping for a federal law to manage NIL and a narrow antitrust exemption for the NCAA.

The NCAA has been leaning on broad bylaws that outlaw recruiting inducements and pay-for-play to deal with NIL compensation, but detailed, uniform rules have been lacking. More than 30 states have passed their own NIL laws and it has resulted in a patchwork of regulations and hard-to-enforce rules.

Some federal lawmakers has expressed a desire to dig into college sports beyond NIL, with long-term health care and revenue sharing for athletes potential issues.

NCAA revenues have surpassed \$1 billion in recent years, most of that coming from its media rights deal for the men's Division I basketball tournament. The majority of the NCAA's revenue is distributed back to the schools through their conferences.

There are also billions flowing into the major conferences that play big-time college football. The top-tier of Division I football (known as FBS) operates mostly outside the NCAA. That includes College Football Playoff, which is on the verge of expanding from four teams to 12.

Amy Privette Perko, the CEO of the Knight Commission on Intercollegiate Athletics, said the biggest challenge Baker will face is trying to figure out how and if major college football can continue to exist under the NCAA's umbrella.

"The NCAA receives zero dollars from the CFP, but it remains liable for the legal and health costs of FBS football," Perko said. "The explosion of revenues, just for FBS football, is at the heart of much of the controversy about the future of all of college sports."

During Emmert's tenure, the NCAA increasingly found itself tangled in political debates. The NCAA pulled its championship events out of states over official use of the Confederate flag and made a similar move when state lawmakers moved to pull back protections for members of the LGBTQ community.

The NCAA became a target for some conservatives over its policies that allow transgender athletes to compete for national championships.

Baker will step to the front of an organization that is in the process of determining how it wants to govern and lead. Meanwhile, college sports themselves have never been more popular.

"That in some ways, I think, is an enormous asset," he said, "when you're trying to have a discussion about what the best way to ensure that what we have is not lost going forward."

White House reveals winter COVID-19 plans, more free tests

By ZEKE MILLER AP White House Correspondent

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Biden administration is once more making some free COVID-19 tests available to all U.S. households as it releases its contingency plans with coronavirus cases ticking upward this winter.

After a three-month hiatus, the administration is making four rapid virus tests available per household through covidtests.gov starting Thursday. COVID-19 cases have shown a marked increase after the Thanksgiving holiday, and further increases are projected from indoor gathering and travel around Christmas and New Year's.

Cases are up across 90% of the country, White House COVID-19 coordinator Dr. Ashish Jha said Thursday

during a briefing. Deaths and hospitalizations are also on the rise, with nearly 3,000 deaths reported last week. Most of those have been concentrated in people age 65 and older, Jha said.

"We don't want this winter to look like last winter or the winter before," Jha said.

As cases begin to rise again, much of the United States is also dealing with other respiratory viruses heading into this winter with an influx of flu and RSV, or respiratory syncytial virus. Jha told reporters he is confident that the worst of RSV -- which hit young children particularly hard -- is over, but that flu cases are only just spiking.

The administration is putting personnel and equipment on standby should they be needed to help overwhelmed hospitals and nursing homes, as was necessary in earlier waves of the coronavirus. So far, there have been no requests for assistance, but surge teams, ventilators and personal protective equipment are ready, the White House said.

The administration is also urging states and local governments to do more to encourage people to get the updated bivalent COVID-19 vaccines, which scientists say are more effective at protecting against serious illness and death from the currently circulating variants. The administration is reiterating best practices to nursing homes and long-term care facilities for virus prevention and treatment and is urging administrators as well as governments to encourage vulnerable populations to get the new shots. Less than half of all nursing home residents have received the latest booster shot, Jha said.

The planning comes as the administration has struggled to persuade most Americans to get the updated boosters as cases and deaths have declined from pandemic highs and most people have embraced a return to most of their pre-pandemic activities. Less than 14% of people in the U.S. older than have gotten the most recent booster.

The White House said the new tests would come from the national stockpile, which still has reserves even after the administration shut off the at-home testing program in September, citing a lack of money from Congress. The administration is still asking Congress for billions more dollars for the virus response.

The pause on free at-home testing program this summer allowed the administration to save some free at-home tests for the surge in cases this winter, Jha said.

Messi carries the weight of Argentina into World Cup final

By JAMES ROBSON AP Soccer Writer

DOHA, Qatar (AP) — As Lionel Messi approaches his second and likely last World Cup final, the stakes could hardly be higher.

The same goes for Argentina after more than 30 years of disappointment since it last won soccer's ultimate prize.

For Messi, victory against France at Lusail Stadium on Sunday is a chance to finally get his hands on the one major trophy that has eluded him in his storied career.

In doing so, he would push ahead of Cristiano Ronaldo, who has also never won a World Cup, in the long-running rivalry between the two greatest players of their generation.

While 37-year-old Ronaldo exited the tournament at the quarterfinals stage, benched by Portugal and in tears in the likely recognition that his last chance had passed, Messi is summoning some of his finest moments in an Argentina shirt to inspire his country's run to the final.

"Each time we see him play, he makes us and the players feel something special," Argentina coach Lionel Scaloni said. "There's something about him that people like, not only Argentines.

"We feel lucky and privileged to have him wear our shirt."

Messi's place alongside Diego Maradona as one of Argentina's two most iconic soccer stars has been secure for some time now. But he is yet to emulate Maradona's greatest achievement by leading his national team to a World Cup title.

Maradona did that in Mexico in 1986 and Messi has lived with the expectation of repeating the feat since he emerged as a prodigy at Barcelona nearly 20 years ago.

There have been numerous false hopes during that time.

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There was the potential "dream team" of Maradona as coach and Messi as star player in South Africa in 2010. But Argentina went out in the quarterfinals after being beaten 4-0 by Germany.

In 2014, with Messi approaching his peak years, Argentina reached the final in Brazil.

Again it faced Germany. Again Messi was on the losing side, beaten 1-0 through extra time.

At the age of 35, he knew this was probably his last shot at the World Cup and he has risen to the occasion as the tournament's co-leading scorer with France forward Kylian Mbappé with five goals.

Perhaps more notable have been his assists, such as the disguised pass for Nahuel Molina's goal against the Netherlands in the quarterfinals.

Then there was his mesmerizing run, turning Croatia defender Joško Gvardiol inside out, before setting up Julián Álvarez for Argentina's third in the semis.

"It's at least something I can talk (about) with my kids one day that I guarded this great, great player," Gvardiol said Thursday.

Those assists have been indicative of the fact that Messi can no longer do it on his own. The emergence of Álvarez, with four goals, has been vital to Argentina's progress.

Messi doesn't dominate for an entire 90 minutes anymore. Instead, he decides matches with key moments.

He isn't as dynamic as he was in his younger years, but he has been more influential than at any of his previous four World Cups.

While Messi is aiming to complete his personal collection of trophies, having won four Champions League titles and seven Ballon d'Or awards for the best player in the world, Argentina is looking to end its long wait for a third World Cup.

It won the tournament for the first time when hosting in 1978 and then again eight years later thanks to Maradona.

Messi was supposed to emulate that feat long before now.

If he retires without ever winning the World Cup, then how much longer will Argentina have to wait?

No wonder each moment of Messi magic and every win is greeted with such an outpouring of emotion.

The sense of anticipation is growing among Argentina fans, who have lit up the tournament in a sea of blue and white, marching through the streets of Qatar.

Messi is feeding the belief that this could be their time again.

If this is his farewell tour, he has given his supporters a wild ride along the way.

And with or without a World Cup, Scaloni has no doubt about Messi's status as the greatest of all time.

"It seems like we say that just because we're Argentinians and we fall into the trap of being selfish because it is very Argentinian to say that," he said. "But I think there are no doubts."

No fuel, no mast, no water: Rescued sailors describe ordeal

NEW YORK (AP) — Two sailors who drifted hundreds of miles in the Atlantic Ocean for 10 days after a storm hit their sailboat off North Carolina thanked the crew of the tanker that rescued them and said they were lucky to have survived.

Kevin Hyde and Joe DiTomasso, freshly ashore in New York City Tuesday night after their ordeal, described rolling in mountainous waves after the wind dismantled their boat, then running out of water as currents pulled them further and further into the frigid North Atlantic.

"Youse don't know what 40-foot waves look like," said DiTomasso, who is 76. "How high's this building? How high's the roof?"

The desperate sailors cut their broken mast free, allowing the boat with its weighted keel to ride the swells without being dragged over. "That boat rode so good. That boat could take it, but guess what? We couldn't. We were beat," said DiTomasso.

The nightmare began for the two sailors midway through a planned journey from New Jersey's Cape May to the warmth of the Florida Keys.

After departing on Nov. 27, with a pet dog, they had made it safely as North Carolina. The storm came up after they sailed from the Oregon Inlet off the Outer Banks on Dec. 3.

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Hyde, 65, said the pair were "sailing along, having a good time" and nearing Cape Hatteras when the bad weather came in and began blowing them off course — and then blew the mast off their boat, the *Atrevida II*.

The boat also lost power and fuel. "So by that time, we were just being pushed out to sea farther and farther," Hyde said.

The men had little food and ran out of water.

"We didn't have water for two days," DiTomasso said. "And I bought these beans. And the best part about the beans, they had water in them. They were soaked in water. And we're taking sips at a time."

The U.S. Coast Guard was notified that the sailors were overdue on Sunday and began a search that spanned the waters from northern Florida to New Jersey.

But it was the crew of the *Silver Muna*, a tanker headed from the Netherlands to New York, that spotted the *Atrevida II* some 214 miles (344 kilometers) east of Delaware on Tuesday.

Hyde, 65, said he had been running a flashing light as they drifted, hoping they might be seen by other marine traffic. "By some bizarre chance" he said, a member of the tanker's crew spotted something and sounded the alarm. The tanker's captain launched a search.

"If you look at the size of his ship and the size of the ocean and just compare it to this toothpick that I'm floating around in — just to be able to spot that, because of the diligence of his crew," the thankful Hyde said. "Their training paid off and they found us."

The tanker's crew then maneuvered alongside the relatively tiny sailboat, in ocean swells, to pluck the two lost sailors from the deck and get them to safety.

They were exhausted after arriving in New York, but expected to make a full recovery.

Asked by a reporter if they would do it again, DiTomasso smiled and said "No."

"I'm staying closer to shore because I have a boat too. And I'm staying in sight of land."

'New Year's Rockin' Eve' to feature Duran Duran, New Edition

By MARK KENNEDY AP Entertainment Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Ryan Seacrest will usher in 2023 on "New Year's Rockin' Eve" from Times Square, with iconic bands from the 1980s and 1990s as well as a member of BTS and a TikTok sensation.

Duran Duran, fresh off an induction into the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame, will play from a catalogue that includes hits like "Hungry Like the Wolf," "The Reflex" and "Rio." R&B and pop group New Edition will celebrate their 40th anniversary by performing a medley of chart-toppers and solo hits like "Rub You The Right Way," "My Prerogative," "Poison," "If It Isn't Love," and "Cool It Now."

J-hope, South Korean songwriter and member of BTS, will play a medley of his "=(Equal Sign)," "Chicken Noodle Soup" and the band's "Butter." And Tik-Tok star Jax will sing pop hits "Victoria's Secret" and "90s Kids." Singer and rapper Farruko will perform from Puerto Rico.

Actress and producer Liza Koshy will return as co-host alongside Seacrest, actor-singer Roselyn Sanchez will co-host from Puerto Rico and Billy Porter will be back in New Orleans for the Central Time Zone countdown.

There will be pre-taped performances in Disneyland from Aly & AJ, Bailey Zimmerman, Ben Platt, Ciara, Fitz & The Tantrums, Halle Bailey, Lauren Spencer Smith, Maddie & Tae, Shaggy and TXT. And from Los Angeles, there will be performances by Armani White, Betty Who, Dove Cameron, Finneas, Nicky Youre and Wiz Khalifa.

Seacrest, inheritor of ABC's legendary "New Year's Rockin' Eve" from Dick Clark, reached 19.6 million viewers between 11:30 p.m. and 12:30 a.m., last New Year's Eve, according to Nielsen. During the 15-minute interval where the ball dropped in New York's Times Square, his audience jumped to 24.2 million people.

"New Year's Rockin' Eve" will air Dec. 31 on ABC.

House approves referendum to 'decolonize' Puerto Rico

By FARNOUSH AMIRI and DÁNICA COTO Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The U.S. House passed a bill Thursday that would allow Puerto Rico to hold the first-ever binding referendum on whether to become a state or gain some sort of independence, in a last-ditch effort that stands little chance of passing the Senate.

The bill, which passed 233-191 with some Republican support, would offer voters in the U.S. territory three options: statehood, independence or independence with free association.

"It is crucial to me that any proposal in Congress to decolonize Puerto Rico be informed and led by Puerto Ricans," said Rep. Raúl Grijalva, D-Ariz., chairman of the House Natural Resources Committee, which oversees affairs in U.S. territories.

The proposal would commit Congress to accept Puerto Rico into the United States as the 51st state if voters on the island approved it. Voters also could choose outright independence or independence with free association, whose terms would be defined following negotiations over foreign affairs, U.S. citizenship and use of the U.S. dollar.

Majority Leader Steny Hoyer, who has worked on the issue throughout his career, said it was "a long and torturous path" to get the proposal to the House floor.

"For far too long, the people of Puerto Rico have been excluded from the full promise of American democracy and self-determination that our nation has always championed," the Maryland Democrat said.

After passing the Democrat-controlled House, the bill now goes to a split Senate where it faces a ticking clock before the end of the year and Republican lawmakers who have long opposed statehood.

Puerto Rico Gov. Pedro Pierluisi, of the pro-statehood New Progressive Party, traveled to Washington for the vote. He called it a historic day and said the 3.2 million U.S. citizens who live on the island lack equality, do not have fair representation in the federal government and cannot vote in general elections.

"This has not been an easy fight. We still have work to do," he said. "Our quest to decolonize Puerto Rico is a civil rights issue."

Members of his party, including Puerto Rico Resident Commissioner Jenniffer González, cheered the approval of the bill, although reaction in the U.S. territory was largely muted and tinged with frustration since it is expected to be voted down in the Senate.

The proposal of a binding referendum has exasperated many on an island that already has held seven nonbinding referendums on its political status, with no overwhelming majority emerging. The last referendum was held in November 2020, with 53% of votes for statehood and 47% against, with only a little more than half of registered voters participating.

The proposed binding referendum would be the first time that Puerto Rico's current status as a U.S. commonwealth is not included as an option, a blow to the main opposition Popular Democratic Party, which upholds the status quo.

Pablo José Hernández Rivera, an attorney in Puerto Rico, said approval of the bill by the House would be "inconsequential" like the approval of previous bills in 1998 and 2010.

"We Puerto Ricans are tired of the fact that the New Progressive Party has spent 28 years in Washington spending resources on sterile and undemocratic status projects," he said.

González, Puerto Rico's representative in Congress, praised the bill and said it would provide the island with the self-determination it deserves.

"Many of us are not in agreement about how that future should be, but we all accept that the decision should belong to the people of Puerto Rico," she said.

Eagles belt holiday hits on 'Philly Special Christmas' album

By DAN GELSTON AP Sports Writer

PHILADELPHIA (AP) — The burly, bearded men belting out holiday classics have made the night before Christmas more than just a time this year to watch the Philadelphia Eagles try and slay the competition.

Lane Johnson, Jason Kelce and Jordan Mailata -- with a little assist from some melodic teammates -- have

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made a season already pretty jolly in Philly a bit more sweet-sounding with the release of their Christmas album, "A Philly Special Christmas."

Yes, the album title is an ode to Old Saint Nick, in this case former QB Nick Foles and the trick play that helped the Eagles win their only Super Bowl in the 2017 season.

The trio of Eagles offensive linemen can sing about as well as they can pass protect -- Johnson might not even let Santa Claus down the chimney as he holds the record for most consecutive games without allowing a sack -- and an All-Star cast of musicians was assembled to record the album.

Leading the charge was Charlie Hall, drummer for the Grammy-winning band War on Drugs.

"If we're going to do this, let's make it meaningful. Let's make it awesome," Hall said. "It's not a goof."

While the tone is light, this is no novelty record.

"Oh, football players making a record, it's like 'Super Bowl Shuffle,'" Hall said with a laugh. "But no, this was born out of sincerity and a deep love and appreciation of music."

The cover art features Johnson, Kelce and Mailata sketched in an homage to the Peanuts characters on the "A Charlie Brown Christmas" album and the songs are standards found on Christmas playlists.

"I did not think it was going to get to this level of quality," Kelce said.

The guys in green sing "White Christmas," "Blue Christmas," "Silent Night" and Eagles radio announcer Merrill Reese narrates "The Night Before Christmas."

On the field, the Eagles play the Dallas Cowboys Dec. 24.

There's a philanthropical slant to the album as well, with proceeds going to the Children's Crisis Treatment Center in Philadelphia. More than \$100,000 has already been raised.

Good luck buying the album, though.

Well, at least a vinyl copy, as previous pressings have quickly sold out. The last batch sold out in 120 seconds -- some albums are going for \$4,000 on eBay -- and there's one final order available on Friday. "A Philly Special Christmas" is of course available on streaming services and one song a week has been dropped each Friday leading to the full record's release on Dec. 23.

The idea for an album was kicked around last year by Kelce and friends around last Christmas and former Eagle Connor Barwin used his music connections - War on Drugs have headlined the former defensive end's charity show - to get the ball rolling. The album was recorded over several days at various Philadelphia-area studios this past summer.

"It's 98 degrees and we're recording a Christmas album," Kelce said, wearing a Christmas sweater, Eagles Santa hat and holding a beer, in a making-of video.

Barwin served as an executive producer. The seven-song LP from Vera Y Records also features musicians from The Hooters, Dr. Dog and 98-year-old saxophone player Marshall Allen of Sun Ra Arkestra.

The recording team brought in a vocal coach to assist the Eagles as they made the transition from the huddle to the studio.

"That was the lesson in all this, just being game for something," Hall said. "They're like, 'yeah, show me what to do. Show me how to be better and I'll do it.' Just totally coachable."

Kelce, who dressed as a Mummer during the Super Bowl parade and sang the national anthem at a 76ers game last season, channeled his inner Bruce Springsteen for the classic "Santa Claus is Coming to Town."

Kelce bursts into laughter when the 25-year-old Mailata hits all the high notes of falsetto on the "I-I-I am dreaming of a white Christmas" doo-wop part popularized by The Drifters.

"What Jordan did, you could call singing," Kelce said. "What Lane did, you could call singing. I don't know if you could call what I did singing. I'm very much just a yeller in certain tones."

Mailata has the best pipes of the bunch and even competed on the Fox reality show "The Masked Singer."

"Jordan could straight up quit football and be a singer if he wanted to," Hall said. "But they're all great. Their voices are like a reflection of their personalities. Lane has this incredibly soulful voice. If they were to get out of this line of business, Jordan would have no trouble finding a gig singing."

Hall already felt the holiday spirit with the War on Drugs set to play three-sold out "Drugcember To Remember" charity shows next week at the Philly rock venue Johnny Brenda's. The money raised goes toward The Fund for the School District of Philadelphia, a nonprofit that raises and coordinates investments

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into the Philadelphia public schools.

War on Drugs had just won a Grammy and were on tour in Australia in February 2018 when the Eagles beat the New England Patriots in the Super Bowl.

"It was like 10 in the morning and we all crammed into a hotel room and were screaming and throwing chairs out of excitement," Hall said.

Now they're building Christmas traditions together.

"It's sort of a beautiful reminder that we're all just connected through life and music and friendship," Hall said.

EXPLAINER: Will immigration surge as asylum rule ends?

By REBECCA SANTANA Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Since the pandemic began, the United States has been using a public health rule designed to limit the spread of disease to expel asylum-seekers on the southern border.

Title 42, as it's called, has been used more than 2.5 million times to expel migrants since March 2020, although that number includes people who repeatedly attempted to cross the border.

But because of a judge's ruling, starting next Wednesday immigration authorities can no longer use Title 42 to quickly expel prospective asylum-seekers. The change comes as surging numbers of people are seeking to enter the country through the southern border, and with Republicans intent on making immigration a key issue when they take control of the House in January.

A look at Title 42 and the potential impact of the ruling:

HOW IT STARTED

In March 2020, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention issued an order limiting migration across the southern and northern borders, saying it was necessary to reduce the spread of the coronavirus. The virus was ravaging the U.S., schools were shutting down and hospitals filling up, and President Donald Trump was trying numerous ways to limit migration, his signature political issue.

The order authorized Customs and Border Protection to immediately remove migrants, including people seeking asylum, to prevent the spread of the virus. The order said areas where migrants were held often weren't designed to quarantine people or allow for social distancing and could put border personnel and others at risk.

"The public health risks of inaction are stark," it said.

The Biden administration continued the policy. While many Democrats pushed President Joe Biden to overturn Trump's anti-immigration measures, some — especially in border states — have advocated to keep Title 42, saying the U.S. is unprepared for an increase in asylum-seekers. When the CDC moved to lift it earlier this year, moderate Democrats, including Sens. Mark Kelly of Arizona and Raphael Warnock of Georgia, wanted it to stay.

THE COURT FIGHT

In 2021, a group representing immigrants who were denied the right to seek asylum sued to end the use of Title 42.

As that case made its way through the courts, the CDC announced last April that the rule was no longer needed because vaccines and treatments were becoming much more widespread.

That sparked Republican-leaning states to file their own lawsuit aimed at keeping Title 42 in place. The states argued that ending the rule would lead to a surge in migrants to their states that would in turn take a toll on their services. That argument found favor with a Trump-appointed judge in Louisiana who ordered keeping the restrictions in place. The judge found Biden's administration failed to follow administrative procedures requiring public notice and time to gather public comment on the plan to end the restrictions.

But that ruling was effectively blocked by another federal judge in a separate lawsuit in Washington. That judge, appointed by Democratic President Bill Clinton, ruled on Nov. 15 that the Biden administration must lift the asylum restrictions by Dec. 21. That ruling, addressing broader questions about Title 42, took precedence over the Texas ruling, cheering immigration advocates. In a key development, the federal

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government did not appeal to keep the public health restrictions in place.

“The court was correct to find that banning migrants, while allowing the rest of the country to open up, is unlawfully arbitrary, causes grave harm to desperate asylum-seekers, and overrides the United States’ legal commitments to provide a safe haven for those fleeing persecution,” said Lee Gelernt, a lawyer for the American Civil Liberties Union.

But a group of conservative states is asking the courts to keep Title 42 in place. The appeal argues that the cancellation of Title 42 “will cause an enormous disaster at the border” and the additional migrants will increase the states’ costs for law enforcement, education and health care. A decision could come as early as Friday.

DOES TITLE 42 AFFECT ALL ASYLUM-SEEKERS?

Not really. The Biden administration has not used it with children traveling alone, only single adults or families. And the ban has been unevenly enforced by nationality, falling largely on migrants from Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador — in addition to Mexicans — because Mexico allows them to be returned from the United States. Last month, Mexico began accepting Venezuelans who are expelled from the United States under Title 42, causing a sharp drop in Venezuelans seeking asylum at the U.S. border.

Some other nationalities are less likely to be subject to Title 42 because costs or frayed relations with their home countries, Cuba for example, make it difficult for the U.S. to send them back. People from these countries have become a growing presence at the border, confident they will be released in the United States to pursue their immigration cases. In October, Cubans were the second-largest nationality at the border after Mexicans, followed by Venezuelans and Nicaraguans.

WHAT HAPPENS IF TITLE 42 ENDS?

If it goes away, asylum-seekers will be interviewed by asylum officers who will determine if they have a “credible fear” of being persecuted in their home countries. If they’re found to face a credible threat, they can stay in the U.S. until a final determination is made.

That can take years. While some are detained while their asylum process plays out, the vast majority are freed into the United States with notices to appear in immigration court or report to immigration authorities.

The Department of Homeland Security said in a memo this week that the current system is not designed “to handle the current volume of migration nor the increased volume we expect over the coming weeks and months.”

It said it is preparing for a possible surge by cracking down on smuggling networks, speeding removal of those found to have little basis to stay in the U.S., and working with international partners to stem migration. It said it’s also seeking more money from Congress.

Republicans, who will control the House come January, are expected to make immigration a major issue. Already there have been calls to impeach the Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas.

Some Democrats have also voiced concern about what happens when Title 42 goes away. In a letter to Biden this week, Sen. Joe Manchin of West Virginia and Rep. Henry Cuellar of Texas joined two Texas Republicans — Sen. John Cornyn and Rep. Tony Gonzales — in asking Biden to keep Title 42 in place, saying there was a crisis at the southern border and that DHS hadn’t presented a plan to maintain control there.

How the Fed’s rate hikes could affect your finances

By CORA LEWIS Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — The Federal Reserve’s move Wednesday to raise its key rate by a half-point brought it to a range of 4.25% to 4.5%, the highest level in 14 years.

The Fed’s latest increase — its seventh rate hike this year — will make it even costlier for consumers and businesses to borrow for homes, autos and other purchases. If, on the other hand, you have money to save, you’ll earn a bit more interest on it.

Wednesday’s rate hike, part of the Fed’s drive to curb high inflation, was smaller than its previous four straight three-quarter-point increases. The downshift reflects, in part, the easing of inflation and the cooling of the economy.

As interest rates increase, many economists say they fear that a recession remains inevitable — and

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with it, job losses that could cause hardship for households already badly hurt by inflation.

Here's what to know:

WHAT'S PROMPTING THE RATE INCREASES?

The short answer: Inflation. Over the past year, consumer inflation in the United States has clocked in at 7.1% — the fifth straight monthly drop but still a painfully high level.

The Fed's goal is to slow consumer spending, thereby reducing demand for homes, cars and other goods and services, eventually cooling the economy and lowering prices.

Fed Chair Jerome Powell has acknowledged that aggressively raising interest rates would bring "some pain" for households but that doing so is necessary to crush high inflation.

WHICH CONSUMERS ARE MOST AFFECTED?

Anyone borrowing money to make a large purchase, such as a home, car or large appliance, will take a hit, according to Scott Hoyt, an analyst with Moody's Analytics.

"The new rate pretty dramatically increases your monthly payments and your cost," he said. "It also affects consumers who have a lot of credit card debt — that will hit right away."

That said, Hoyt noted that household debt payments, as a proportion of income, remain relatively low, though they have risen lately. So even as borrowing rates steadily rise, many households might not feel a much heavier debt burden immediately.

"I'm not sure interest rates are top of mind for most consumers right now," Hoyt said. "They seem more worried about groceries and what's going on at the gas pump. Rates can be something tricky for consumers to wrap their minds around."

HOW WILL THIS AFFECT CREDIT CARD RATES?

Even before the Fed's latest move, credit card borrowing rates had reached their highest level since 1996, according to Bankrate.com, and these will likely continue to rise.

And with prices still surging, there are signs that Americans are increasingly relying on credit cards to help maintain their spending. Total credit card balances have topped \$900 billion, according to the Fed, a record high, though that amount isn't adjusted for inflation.

John Leer, chief economist at Morning Consult, a survey research firm, said its polling suggests that more Americans are spending down the savings they accumulated during the pandemic and are using credit instead. Eventually, rising rates could make it harder for those households to pay off their debts.

Those who don't qualify for low-rate credit cards because of weak credit scores are already paying significantly higher interest on their balances, and they'll continue to.

As rates have risen, zero percent loans marketed as "Buy Now, Pay Later" have also become popular with consumers. But longer-term loans of more than four payments that these companies offer are subject to the same increased borrowing rates as credit cards.

For people who have home equity lines of credit or other variable-interest debt, rates will increase by roughly the same amount as the Fed hike, usually within one or two billing cycles. That's because those rates are based in part on banks' prime rate, which follows the Fed's.

HOW ARE SAVERS AFFECTED?

The rising returns on high-yield savings accounts and certificates of deposit (CDs) have put them at levels not seen since 2009, which means that households may want to boost savings if possible. You can also now earn more on bonds and other fixed-income investments.

Though savings, CDs, and money market accounts don't typically track the Fed's changes, online banks and others that offer high-yield savings accounts can be exceptions. These institutions typically compete aggressively for depositors. (The catch: They sometimes require significantly high deposits.)

In general, banks tend to capitalize on a higher-rate environment to boost their profits by imposing higher rates on borrowers, without necessarily offering juicier rates to savers.

WILL THIS AFFECT HOME OWNERSHIP?

Last week, mortgage buyer Freddie Mac reported that the average rate on the benchmark 30-year mortgage dipped to 6.33%. That means the rate on a typical home loan is still about twice as expensive as it was a year ago.

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Mortgage rates don't always move in tandem with the Fed's benchmark rate. They instead tend to track the yield on the 10-year Treasury note.

Sales of existing homes have declined for nine straight months as borrowing costs have become too high a hurdle for many Americans who are already paying much more for food, gas and other necessities.

WILL IT BE EASIER TO FIND A HOUSE IF I'M STILL LOOKING TO BUY?

If you're financially able to proceed with a home purchase, you're likely to have more options than at any time in the past year.

WHAT IF I WANT TO BUY A CAR?

Since the Fed began increasing rates in March, the average new vehicle loan has jumped more than 2 percentage points, from 4.5% to 6.6% in November, according to the Edmunds.com auto site. Used vehicle loans are up 2.1 percentage points to 10.2%. Loan durations for new vehicles average just under 70 months, and they've passed 70 months for used vehicles.

Most important, though, is the monthly payment, on which most people base their auto purchases. Edmunds says that since March, it's up by an average of \$61 to \$718 for new vehicles. The average payment for used vehicles is up \$22 per month to \$565.

Ivan Drury, Edmunds' director of insights, says financing the average new vehicle with a price of \$47,000 now costs \$8,436 in interest. That's enough to chase many out of the auto market.

"I think we're actually starting to see that these interest rates, they're doing what the Fed wants," Drury said. "They're taking away the buying power so that you can't buy a vehicle anymore. There's going to be fewer people that can afford it."

Any rate increase by the Fed will likely be passed through to auto borrowers, though it will be slightly offset by subsidized rates from manufacturers. Drury predicts that new-vehicle prices will start to ease next year as demand wanes a little.

HOW HAVE THE RATE HIKES INFLUENCED CRYPTO?

Cryptocurrencies like bitcoin have dropped in value since the Fed began raising rates. So have many previously high-valued technology stocks.

Higher rates mean that safe assets like Treasuries have become more attractive to investors because their yields have increased. That makes risky assets like technology stocks and cryptocurrencies less attractive.

Still, bitcoin continues to suffer from problems separate from economic policy. Three major crypto firms have failed, most recently the high-profile FTX exchange, shaking the confidence of crypto investors.

WHAT ABOUT MY JOB?

Some economists argue that layoffs could be necessary to slow rising prices. One argument is that a tight labor market fuels wage growth and higher inflation. But the nation's employers kept hiring briskly in November.

"Job openings continue to exceed job hires, indicating employers are still struggling to fill vacancies," said Odeta Kushi, an economist with First American.

WILL THIS AFFECT STUDENT LOANS?

Borrowers who take out new private student loans should prepare to pay more as rates increase. The current range for federal loans is between about 5% and 7.5%.

That said, payments on federal student loans are suspended with zero interest until summer 2023 as part of an emergency measure put in place early in the pandemic. President Joe Biden has also announced some loan forgiveness, of up to \$10,000 for most borrowers, and up to \$20,000 for Pell Grant recipients — a policy that's now being challenged in the courts.

IS THERE A CHANCE THE RATE HIKES WILL BE REVERSED?

It looks increasingly unlikely that rates will come down anytime soon. On Wednesday, the Fed signaled that it will raise its rate as high as roughly 5.1% early next year — and keep it there for the rest of 2023.

CES 2023: Tech world to gather and show off gadgets

By HALELUYA HADERO AP Business Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — CES, the annual tech industry event formerly known as the Consumer Electronics Show, is returning to Las Vegas this January with the hope that it looks more like it did before the coronavirus pandemic.

The show changed its name to CES to better reflect the changing industry and the event, which had expanded beyond audio and video to include automotive, digital health, smart phones, wearables and other technologies.

Companies and startups will showcase innovations in virtual reality, robotics and consumer tech items to the media and others in the tech industry during next month's gadget show and organizers say their goal is to draw 100,000 attendees.

That would be a marked contrast with the look and feel of the past two shows — the last of which saw a 70% drop in in-person attendance amid the spread of the Omicron variant. The one before that was held virtually, replacing in-person displays and meet and greets with video streams and chats.

Even if organizers reach their goal for next month's event, which runs from Jan. 5-8, it would still represent a 41% dip in attendance compared to the in-person show held in early 2020, before the pandemic consumed much of everyday life.

Kinsey Fabrizio, senior vice president at the trade group Consumer Technology Association, said more than 2,800 companies have signed up to attend CES 2023.

Exhibitors include many startups and routine visitors like Amazon and Facebook parent Meta, both of which have recently cut jobs and implemented hiring freezes after beefing up their staff during the pandemic. Other tech companies have also been tightening their belts and laying off workers amid concerns about the economic environment.

The Associated Press spoke with Fabrizio about CES and what consumers should expect at the show. The conversation has been edited for clarity and length.

Q: The tech industry has been going through a rough time in the past few months. How do you expect that to impact the show?

A: Yeah, for the last two years, the tech industry was booming. We're seeing a recalibration now and as part of the recalibration, there are layoffs. But in terms of CES, the companies are coming big. And they're going to be showcasing some of these solutions that were critical during the pandemic, and a lot of the solutions that have continued to change the way consumers live and behave. The momentum and excitement we're seeing for the show hasn't been impacted.

Q: Are most of the exhibitors startups?

A: We have a lot of startups and new companies. Over 1,000 new exhibitors for CES this year, which is on par with prior years. There will be some repeat customers in Eureka Park, where our startups are primarily stationed. They can be there for up to two years. But we will also have a lot of companies who've been at CES for a while.

Q: The theme for the show is human security. How did you land on that?

A: We were approached by The World Academy of Art and Science, which has been working with the United Nations for a long time on human security. You can think of it as basic human rights — access to food, health care, etc. And they wanted CES to really use this theme because our exhibitors are showcasing how they're solving some of these big global challenges with technology.

Q: Historically, CES has been more focused on convenience and personal tech. So this is going to be a shift.

A: This is the shift. We've talked about how tech solves challenges in the world. But we've never had a theme at CES before. It's always been about innovation and great products for the consumer. But for this show, you will be able to see the theme on the show floor and other places. For example, John Deere is showcasing some of their agricultural technology that really contributes to sustainability and access to food. Another company created a secure voting technology on the blockchain, which aligns with the U.N.

theme of political security.

Q: The metaverse is going to be another big topic. A lot of companies are investing in it. What can visitors expect to see at the show?

A: The metaverse is a key theme. We'll have a dedicated part of the show floor for Web3 technology. There's also going to be shared and immersive virtual experiences. Automaker Stellantis and Microsoft have a partnership to create a showroom in the metaverse. There's a company called OVR that has created a solution where you can smell in the metaverse. People are talking about unique ways to reach their customers, and different experiences people can have there. So that will be a big theme among both big and small exhibitors.

World Cup history beckons for France, Mbappé, Deschamps

By GRAHAM DUNBAR AP Sports Writer

DOHA, Qatar (AP) — World Cup history is beckoning for France, star player Kylian Mbappé and coach Didier Deschamps.

When France walks on the field Sunday for the tournament final against Argentina and Lionel Messi, soccer lore is waiting to be written for the team.

Les Bleus could be the first winner of back-to-back titles for 60 years since Brazil did it 1958 and 1962.

The 23-year-old Mbappé would become the youngest player with two World Cup wins since Pelé accomplished that feat at age 21.

Deschamps would be the first man to coach two world champion teams since Vittorio Pozzo did it with Italy in 1934 and 1938.

"As for me, I'm not the most important person. It's the French team," said Deschamps, who is worthy of his own chapter in World Cup history.

He lifted the trophy in Paris as the team's captain when France first won the World Cup in 1998. He won it as coach in 2018, and now he is on the brink of getting a third.

"Obviously, I'm proud. I know, everyone knows, we have the chance to win another title," Deschamps said Thursday after beating Morocco in the semifinals.

France is playing in a fourth final in a span of seven tournaments — including the 2006 final lost to Italy in a penalty shootout after Zinedine Zidane was sent off. It's a dynastic era not seen since Brazil's two decades at the top through 1970.

That team typified by Pelé's brilliance won all three finals it reached starting in 1958, and also played in the decisive last match of the 1950 tournament, which was lost against Uruguay in Rio de Janeiro.

Morocco's coach was quick to anoint France and Mbappé after they ended his team's historic run as the first African team in a semifinal.

"Over the past 20 years you can say France is the top footballing country in the world," said Walid Regragui, who is French-born and played most of his career there.

"If he won the World Cup again," Regragui said admiringly of Mbappé, "he would be emulating Pelé."

Both players made stunning World Cup debuts as teenagers, truly coming to life in the knockout rounds.

All six goals for a 17-year-old Pelé in 1958 in Sweden were scored after the group stage, including a semifinals hat-trick to help eliminate France as he wore the No. 10 jersey that he has made iconic.

Mbappé announced his World Cup arrival at age 19 scoring twice against Argentina and Messi in a 4-3 epic in the round of 16. Anything like a repeat of that game in Russia would be a dream final Sunday.

Mbappé has five goals so far in Qatar, tied as the leading scorer at the tournament with Messi. The Frenchman scored four times in 2018.

It took Pelé until his fourth World Cup in 1970 to score his ninth career goal, though in fewer games than Mbappé. The French No. 10 has a stage set Sunday to be a key player for a second straight final, which takes place two days before he turns 24.

What makes France and Deschamps even more impressive this time is adapting to a litany of injuries with new talent that never even played in a World Cup qualifying game last year.

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Midfielders Paul Pogba and N'Golo Kante, starters in the 2018 final against Croatia, were lost to injuries before the tournament, and left-back Lucas Hernandez lasted just nine minutes in Qatar before suffering a season-ending knee injury.

After the 26-man squad was picked in November, starting center-back Presnel Kimpembe and forwards Karim Benzema and Christopher Nkunku were lost to injury.

To replace them, Deschamps promoted a wave of players in their early 20s who have excelled and smoothed the transition to a next generation.

Center-back Ibrahima Konaté was immense against Morocco and forward Randal Kolo Muani scored with his first touch as a substitute to seal the 2-0 win.

"Sure, they don't have much international experience," Deschamps said of his unlikely midfield pairing, Aurélien Tchouaméni and Youssouf Fofana. "But potentially they have everything."

The youngsters players have veteran teammates to help guide them, including Antoine Griezmann, the goal-scoring winger reinvented as all-around midfielder. The 31-year-old Griezmann should be a lock for selection to any team of the tournament.

"They need to be surrounded by players with a bit more experience. It's just a matter of playing with freedom," the coach said, making his France project sound so simple.

Deschamps' decade in charge of France looks sure to continue with another contract extension pending, and another trophy waiting Sunday.

AP Breakthrough Entertainer: Tobe Nwigwe lives with purpose

By GARY GERARD HAMILTON Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Tobe Nwigwe didn't expect to be nominated for best new artist after he submitted his music to the Grammys, but he's learned to embrace the unexpected.

"I felt like it was going to add to our underdog story," explained the Houston emcee. But bringing his index finger and thumb closely together, he added, "That underdog story's about that small now."

Nwigwe has become one of music's most buzz-worthy rappers despite no major label, booking agent or marketing machine. He has already performed at the BET Awards, headed an NPR Tiny Desk concert with more than 4 million views, was featured on the "Black Panther: Wakanda Forever" soundtrack, and whose "I'm Dope" song earned a spot on Michelle Obama's 2020 workout playlist.

The first-generation Nigerian American, whose latest release is the EP "moMINTs," is a breath of fresh air to hip-hop, welcomed by celebrity admirers like Beyoncé, Dave Chappelle, Erykah Badu and Jill Scott, who called him a "genius."

"My purpose specifically is to be a conduit to the realization of purpose in other people's lives, in whatever vehicle God would have in me," he says. He adds he could be an Uber driver and still be on top. "The what I do ain't as important as who I am."

Nwigwe has been named among The Associated Press' Breakthrough Entertainers of 2022, joining other honorees like Iman Vellani, Tenoch Huerta, Stephanie Hsu, Danielle Deadwyler and others.

Lauded for his creative rhyming styles, Nwigwe built his following through social media with virtually no radio play. His #getTWISTEDsundays campaign gained attention by delivering stunning visual content, including music videos with gorgeous cinematography and syncopated choreography.

Songs like "FYE FYE" featuring his wife, Fat, and "Been Broke" featuring Fat, 2 Chainz and Chamillionaire, showcase his high-energy swag, while records like "Try Jesus" and "Make It Home" highlight his soulful artistry. "I Need You To (Breonna Taylor)," his 44-second song calling for the arrest of police officers who shot and killed the 26-year-old Black woman while executing a drug search warrant, went viral, gaining the attention of celebrities like LeBron James and Sean "Love" Combs.

Fans have fallen in love with his family-first approach. It's not uncommon to hear Fat, a portrait artist with no previous music aspirations, featured on his songs or see their children in music videos. (Fat is currently pregnant with their fourth child.) Hardly using profanity, his Christian faith is often infused in his rhymes, though he's far from being labeled as a gospel rapper, intentionally aiming his message toward

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as wide a base as possible.

Nwigwe cites an eclectic group of artists as influences, including Nigerian icon Fela Kuti, Lauryn Hill, Andre 3000, The Notorious B.I.G. and '70s soul. Hometown heroes such as Fat Pat, Lil' Keke and the Color Changin' Click, the popular underground group led by Chamillionaire and Paul Wall in their early years, also make up his musical DNA.

Nwigwe's original dream wasn't to rock the mic, but to rock quarterbacks. A standout middle linebacker at the University of North Texas, a foot injury ended his NFL dreams. With no back up plan, he eventually founded a entertainment-centered youth nonprofit organization in his Houston neighborhood. However, his career path detoured after connecting with motivational speaker Eric Thomas, known as "the Hip Hop Preacher," when Thomas and business partner Carlas Quinney recognized a special talent in the "edutainer" and convinced him to pursue music.

These days, it's not just major music labels who are courting Nwigwe, but Hollywood, too. Thanks to a real-life friendship with comedian and fellow Houstonian Mo Amer, he co-starred in Amer's critically acclaimed Netflix series "Mo," and he landed a role in the upcoming blockbuster film, "Transformers: Rise of the Beasts" — his first acting job. Director Steven Caple Jr. reached out and "he did not care that I didn't have no acting experience. I was like, 'This is insane!'"

Nwigwe is gearing up for his Houston homecoming show at the end of the month. In January, he'll perform at the inaugural Black Star Line Festival in Ghana created by Chance the Rapper and Vic Mensa.

As Nwigwe garners more attention, some may wonder how much longer his small, close-knit team can handle the incoming demand. But he isn't worried, saying they've never been allergic to hard work.

"I tell people all the time, just die empty. Just don't leave no potential on the table. Just do everything that you can do with every single day that you got," he said. "Tomorrow's not promised — live like it."

Working at 76: Inflation forces hard choice for older adults

By ANITA SNOW Associated Press

PHOENIX (AP) — Lenore Angey never imagined she'd have to go back to work at age 76.

With an ailing husband and the highest prices she can remember for everything from milk to gasoline, the retired school lunch worker from Cleveland, Ohio, now works part time as a salesperson at a local department store to cover the costs of food and medicine.

"The holidays are going to be tough, and it's not just for seniors," said Angey, who said she was happy to get an extra 10 hours a week during the busy shopping season. "Luckily my daughter-in-law did all the cooking for Thanksgiving and I brought a few dishes. But the Christmas celebration will definitely be more modest."

Inflationary pressures may be starting to ease, but higher prices throughout much of 2022 are still taking a toll on older adults, with a larger share of people like Angey saying they felt their finances were worse off than a year before. Consumer inflation in November was still up 7.1% from a year earlier.

While people of all ages are struggling, those over 65 often have an even harder time because they usually live on a fixed income, unable to increase their paychecks with overtime or bonuses.

The problem will become more widespread in the coming years as more baby boomers, who began turning 65 in 2011, join the ranks of the retired. In 2050, the U.S. population ages 65 and over will be 83.9 million, nearly double what it was (43.1 million) in 2012, the Census Bureau projects.

Angey gets less than \$1,000 monthly with her small pension from a school district and Social Security. She said her husband earns a bit more.

Angey was among participants in an AARP report released last month that showed more than a third of people 65 and older described their financial situation at midyear as worse than it was 12 months before. It was a huge jump from the 13% of adults 65 and older who said the same thing in January.

The older adults were among 4,817 adults aged 30 and over who participated in a semiannual survey fielded in July across all 50 states and the District of Columbia by the independent social research organization NORC at the University of Chicago on behalf of AARP. The margin of error was plus or minus 2.57%.

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While a large share of people in all age groups described difficult financial struggles this year, a breakdown by age showed that older people are much more pessimistic about their own economic futures. While nearly half of adults ages 30-49 said they thought their finances would improve over 12 months, only a little more than a quarter of people 50 and older thought the same thing.

The financial insecurity that inflation has caused this year has forced many older adults to make difficult decisions, said Dana Kennedy, AARP director for Arizona.

"Many people are living on a fixed income and have cut back, or are even delaying retirement," said Kennedy.

Survey participant Frank Hiller, 62, of Eastampton, New Jersey, said the higher prices have caused him to rethink when to retire, and whether he and his wife will remain in their four-bedroom house in retirement.

"I used to think it would be 65, but now I'm thinking 67," said Hiller who works as an auto technician at a car dealership. "And we had thought we'd stay in our house, but we'll probably downsize. It's a lot of space and costs a lot to keep up."

Although Hiller's family hasn't had to make drastic changes to keep up with inflation, they have been re-examining their internet and cable TV package, wondering if they should finally drop the internet phone line.

Kennedy, of AARP Arizona, said spiraling apartment prices in her state have squeezed a lot of older adults out of the rental market.

Kasey Dungan, 73, said she feels fortunate to be with her 11-year-old mixed dachshund Sandy in a subsidized Phoenix apartment for older adults after falling into homelessness early this year.

Still, costs for food and other bills mean her entire Social Security check is gone by month's end.

"I don't have money to go to the show or anything," said Dungan, a widow who does her own shopping and cooking even though she sometimes uses a rolling walker.

She said she's looking forward to next month, when millions of Social Security recipients will get an 8.7% boost in their benefits that will be eaten up in part by rising costs.

The average recipient will receive over \$140 more monthly in the largest cost-of living adjustment in more than 40 years. About 70 million people, including retirees, disabled people and children, receive Social Security benefits.

"I'm hoping it will help me to buy more groceries, especially with inflation the way it is," said Dungan, who counts on a monthly food box for older adults through a federal program to get enough to eat.

Phoenix resident Lois Nyman, who just turned 85, said she's lucky to have her health and able to augment her Social Security payments with a part-time job as an adjunct community college instructor coordinating clinical experience for future nurses at local hospitals.

Still, she said, inflation has made things a bit tighter this year, which means she and her neighbor go out to dinner about once a month now rather than every week.

"For Thanksgiving I just bought a couple of turkey legs instead of a whole turkey," said Nyman, who lives with a son in his 60s. "I can't believe how much more things now cost at the grocery store. I try to go when things are on sale, down to the same prices as a year ago."

Tennis legend Becker freed from prison, returns to Germany

LONDON (AP) — German tennis legend Boris Becker has returned to Germany after serving eight months in prison in Britain, his lawyer said Thursday.

The 55-year-old German, who has lived in Britain since 2012, was released on Thursday morning and traveled back to Germany shortly thereafter.

Becker "has thus served his sentence and is not subject to any penal restrictions in Germany," his lawyer, Christian-Oliver Moser, said in a statement. He did not give additional details about Becker's location in Germany.

The three-time Wimbledon champion had been sentenced to 30 months in prison in April for illicitly transferring large amounts of money and hiding assets after he was declared bankrupt. He would normally have had to serve half of his sentence before being eligible for release, but was released early under a

fast-track deportation program for foreign nationals.

He had been convicted by London's Southwark Crown Court on four charges under the Insolvency Act, including removal of property, concealing debt and two counts of failing to disclose estate.

Becker rose to stardom in 1985 at the age of 17 when he became the first unseeded player to win the Wimbledon singles title.

The former world number one was declared bankrupt in June 2017.

Harry, Meghan vent grievances in final Netflix episodes

By SYLVIA HUI and DANICA KIRKA Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — Prince Harry and his wife, Meghan, vent their grievances against the British monarchy in the second half of their Netflix documentary series released Thursday, which includes Harry describing how his older brother shouted at him during a meeting and Meghan talking about wanting to end her life as she struggled to cope with toxic press coverage.

The couple have detailed their experiences leading to their decision to step away from royal duties and make a new start in the United States in "Harry & Meghan," a six-part series. The first three installments, released last week, focused on the British media's coverage of the couple and the way it was influenced by racism.

The final three episodes see Harry, 38, directing more of his ire at Prince William, now heir to the throne, and speaking in more detail about how his relationship with the royal household broke down.

He recounted how William lashed out at him during a royal summit at Sandringham Castle in January 2020 to talk about Harry and Meghan's plan to step down as senior royals and move away.

"It was terrifying to have my brother scream and shout at me and my father say things that just simply weren't true, and my grandmother quietly sit there and sort of take it all in," Harry said.

The royal said he and Meghan's plan to stay "half in, half out" of royal life was swiftly rejected.

Elsewhere in the series, Meghan, 41, says she thought about killing herself before she and Harry decided to move to America. "It was like 'All of this will stop if I am not here,'" she said.

Harry added that he believed the Mail on Sunday's publication of a letter Meghan wrote her estranged father, Thomas Markle, contributed to her having a miscarriage. Meghan later sued the Mail's publisher and won.

"I believe my wife suffered a miscarriage because of what the Mail did," Harry said. "Bearing in mind the stress that caused, the lack of sleep and the timing of the pregnancy ... that miscarriage was created by what they were trying to do to her."

Harry stressed it was ultimately his decision, not Meghan's, to leave the U.K. "I said that we need to get out of here," he said.

Palace officials have not commented on the series.

The production is Harry and Meghan's latest effort to tell their own story after the couple stepped back from royal life in early 2020 and moved to the wealthy Southern California enclave of Montecito. Lucrative contracts with Netflix and Spotify have helped finance their life on an estate overlooking the Pacific Ocean.

The Netflix series has come out at a crucial moment for Britain's monarchy. King Charles III, Harry's father, is trying to show that the institution remains relevant after the death of Queen Elizabeth II, whose personal popularity damped criticism of the crown during her 70-year reign.

Harry's 2018 marriage to the former Meghan Markle, a biracial American actress, was once seen as a public relations coup for the royal family, boosting the monarchy's effort to move into the 21st century by making it more representative of a multicultural nation.

But the fairytale, punctuated with a horse-drawn carriage ride and lavish wedding at Windsor Castle, soon unraveled amid relentless media attention, including allegations that Meghan was self-centered and bullied her staff.

A look at some other allegations Harry and Meghan make in the second half of their series:

ON THE ROYAL PRESS MACHINE:

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Describing royal press operations as a "dirty game," Harry said there was "leaking" and "planting of stories," and that the palace "comms team" would seek to deflect negative coverage of one royal by issuing a story about another royal.

He talks about being sidelined, citing the example of a joint statement palace officials issued on behalf of him and William to "squash" a story about William bullying the couple out of the family. He said it was issued without his consent.

"I couldn't believe it. No one had asked me permission to put my name to a statement like that," Harry said. "They were happy to lie to protect my brother and yet for three years, they were never willing to tell the truth to protect us."

"I mean, the saddest part of it was this wedge created between me and my brother so that he's now on the institution's side," he added.

Meghan's lawyer, Jenny Afia, claimed in the series that she saw evidence of "negative briefing from the palace" against the couple "to suit other people's agendas." She did not elaborate on the evidence.

ON BEING BLOCKED FROM SEEING THE QUEEN:

The couple said they planned to see Harry's grandmother, Queen Elizabeth II, during a visit to the U.K. in early 2020, but palace officials blocked it.

Meghan said Harry received an urgent message saying, "You are not allowed to go and see Her Majesty." Harry said he rang the queen, who told him that "I didn't know that I was busy. I've now been told I'm busy all week."

"This is when a family and a family business are in direct conflict because they're blocking you from seeing the queen, but what they're really doing is blocking a grandson from seeing his grandmother," Meghan told the documentary makers.

EXPLAINER: What can the Patriot missile do for Ukraine?

By TARA COPP and LOLITA BALDOR Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Patriot missile systems have long been a hot ticket item for the U.S. and allies in contested areas of the world as a coveted shield against incoming missiles. In Europe, the Middle East and the Pacific, they guard against potential strikes from Iran, Somalia and North Korea.

So it was a critical turning point when news broke this week that the U.S. has agreed to send a Patriot missile battery to Ukraine — something Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy has sought for months to augment his country's air defenses. U.S. officials have confirmed the agreement, and an official announcement is expected soon. But experts caution that the system's effectiveness is limited, and it may not be a game changer in the war.

A look at what the system is and what it does:

WHAT IS THE PATRIOT?

The Patriot is a surface-to-air guided missile system that was first deployed in the 1980s and can target aircraft, cruise missiles and shorter-range ballistic missiles.

Each Patriot battery consists of a truck-mounted launching system with eight launchers that can hold up to four missile interceptors each, a ground radar, a control station and a generator. The Army said it currently has 16 Patriot battalions. A 2018 International Institute for Strategic Studies report found those battalions operate 50 batteries, which have more than 1,200 missile interceptors.

The U.S. batteries are regularly deployed around the world. In addition, Patriots also are operated or being purchased by the Netherlands, Germany, Japan, Israel, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Taiwan, Greece, Spain, South Korea, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Romania, Sweden, Poland and Bahrain.

The Patriot system "is one of the most widely operated and reliable and proven air missile defense systems out there," and the theater ballistic missile defense capability could help defend Ukraine against Iranian-supplied ballistic missiles, said Tom Karako, director of the Missile Defense Project at the Center for Strategic and International Studies.

PATRIOT COST

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Over the years the Patriot system and missiles have been continually modified. The current interceptor missile for the Patriot system costs approximately \$4 million per round and the launchers cost about \$10 million each, CSIS reported in its July missile defense report. At that price, it's not cost effective or optimal to use the Patriot to shoot down the far smaller and dramatically cheaper Iranian drones that Russia has been buying and using in Ukraine.

"Firing a million-dollar missile at a \$50,000 drone is a losing proposition," said Mark Cancian, a retired Marine Corps reserves colonel and senior adviser at CSIS.

DEPLOYMENT CONCERNS

A Patriot battery can need as many as 90 troops to operate and maintain it, and for months the U.S. was reluctant to provide the complex system because sending forces into Ukraine to operate it is a non-starter for the Biden administration.

But there were also concerns that deployment of the system would provoke Russia, or risk that a missile fired could end up hitting inside Russia, which could further escalate the conflict. On Thursday, Russia's Foreign Ministry warned that a U.S. plan to deliver sophisticated air defense missiles to Ukraine would be "another provocative move by the U.S." that could prompt a response from Moscow.

According to officials, the urgent pleadings of Ukrainian leaders and the devastating destruction of the country's civilian infrastructure, including loss of electricity and heat as winter drags on, ultimately overcame U.S. reservations about supplying the Patriots.

A key hurdle will be training. U.S. troops will have to train Ukrainian forces on how to use and maintain the system. Army soldiers assigned to Patriot battalions get extensive training to be able to effectively locate a target, lock on with radar and fire.

The U.S. has trained Ukrainian troops on other complex weapons systems, including the High Mobility Artillery Rocket Systems, known as HIMARS. In many cases they've been able to shorten the training, getting Ukrainian troops out to the battlefield in weeks. Officials have declined to provide details on how long the Patriots training would take and where exactly it will be done.

PATRIOT CAPABILITIES

Ukraine faces a range of Russian threats, and the Patriot is good against some and not that useful against others.

One former senior military official with knowledge of the Patriot system said it will be effective against short-range ballistic missiles and it represents a strong message of U.S. support, but one battery isn't going to change the course of the war.

The official, who spoke on condition of anonymity because the Ukraine deal has not yet been made public, noted that one Patriot battery has a long firing range, but can cover only a limited broad area. As an example, Patriots can effectively protect a small military base, but can't fully protect a large city such as Kyiv. They could only provide coverage for a segment of a city.

Patriots are often deployed as a battalion, which includes four batteries. This won't be the case with Ukraine, which officials said would be receiving one battery.

The Patriot has a more powerful radar that is better at discriminating targets than the Soviet-era S-300 system the Ukrainians have been using, but it has limitations, both Karako and Cancian said.

Still the Patriot's ability to target some ballistic missiles and aircraft could potentially protect Kyiv if Russian President Vladimir Putin carried through on his persistent threat to deploy a tactical nuclear device. But that would depend on how the weapon was delivered, Karako said. If it was a gravity bomb delivered by a warplane, the system could target the aircraft; if it was a cruise or short-to-medium-range ballistic missile, it could also possibly intercept the missile, Karako said.

Raytheon, which manufactures the Patriot, says it has been involved in 150 intercepts of ballistic missiles since 2015. The success rate of the Patriot, however, has been repeatedly questioned. A 1992 Government Accountability Office report said it could not find evidence to support reports that the system had achieved a 70% success rate against Scud missiles in the Gulf War. In 2018, Saudi Arabia's success in using Patriots against missiles fired by Houthi rebels in Yemen was questioned when videos surfaced of systems failing.

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But beyond the Patriot's capabilities, its deployment is a big statement of support for Ukraine. "There's a lot of symbolism here," Cancian said.

Today in History: December 16, Battle of the Bulge begins

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Friday, Dec. 16, the 350th day of 2022. There are 15 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On Dec. 16, 1944, the World War II Battle of the Bulge began as German forces launched a surprise attack against Allied forces through the Ardennes Forest in Belgium and Luxembourg (the Allies were eventually able to turn the Germans back).

On this date:

In 1653, Oliver Cromwell became lord protector of England, Scotland and Ireland.

In 1773, the Boston Tea Party took place as American colonists boarded a British ship and dumped more than 300 chests of tea into Boston Harbor to protest tea taxes.

In 1907, 16 U.S. Navy battleships, which came to be known as the "Great White Fleet," set sail on a 14-month round-the-world voyage to demonstrate American sea power.

In 1950, President Harry S. Truman proclaimed a national state of emergency in order to fight "world conquest by Communist imperialism."

In 1960, 134 people were killed when a United Air Lines DC-8 and a TWA Super Constellation collided over New York City.

In 1991, the U.N. General Assembly rescinded its 1975 resolution equating Zionism with racism by a vote of 111-25.

In 2000, President-elect George W. Bush selected Colin Powell to become the first African-American secretary of state.

In 2001, after nine weeks of fighting, Afghan militia leaders claimed control of the last mountain bastion of Osama bin Laden's al-Qaida fighters, but bin Laden himself was nowhere to be seen.

In 2011, in San Francisco, eight years of being investigated for steroid allegations ended for home run king Barry Bonds with a 30-day sentence to be served at home. (Bonds never served the sentence; his conviction for obstruction of justice was overturned.)

In 2014, Taliban gunmen stormed a military-run school in the northwestern Pakistan city of Peshawar, killing at least 148 people, mostly children.

In 2019, House Democrats laid out their first impeachment case against President Donald Trump; a sweeping report from the House Judiciary Committee said Trump had "betrayed the Nation by abusing his high office to enlist a foreign power in corrupting democratic elections."

In 2020, the first COVID-19 vaccinations were underway at U.S. nursing homes, where the virus had killed 110,000 people. Tyson Foods said it had fired seven top managers at its largest pork plant after an investigation confirmed allegations that they had wagered on how many workers at the plant in Iowa would test positive for the coronavirus. (An outbreak centered around the plant infected more than 1,000 employees, at least six of whom died.)

Ten years ago: President Barack Obama visited Newtown, Connecticut, the scene of the Sandy Hook Elementary School massacre; after meeting privately with victims' families, the president told an evening vigil he would use "whatever power" he had to prevent future shootings. A 23-year-old woman was brutally raped and beaten on a bus in New Delhi, a crime that triggered widespread protests in India. (The woman died 13 days later.)

Five years ago: Two female couples tied the knot in Australia's first same-sex weddings under new legislation allowing gay marriages.

One year ago: U.S. health officials said most Americans should get the Pfizer or Moderna vaccines instead of the Johnson & Johnson shot; the decision came after government advisers reviewed new safety

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data about rare but potentially life-threatening blood clots linked to J&J's shot. A federal judge rejected OxyContin maker Purdue Pharma's sweeping deal to settle thousands of lawsuits over the toll of opioids; the judge found flaws in the way the bankruptcy settlement protected members of the Sackler family who owned the company from lawsuits. The last 12 hostages from a U.S.-based missionary group who were kidnapped and held for ransom in Haiti were freed and were flown out of the country following a two-month ordeal; five others had been released earlier. Urban Meyer's tumultuous NFL tenure ended after just 13 games — and two victories — when the Jacksonville Jaguars fired him because of an accumulation of missteps.

Today's Birthdays: Civil rights attorney and co-founder of the Southern Poverty Law Center Morris Dees is 86. Actor Joyce Bulifant is 85. Actor Liv Ullmann is 84. CBS news correspondent Lesley Stahl is 81. Pop musician Tony Hicks (The Hollies) is 77. Pop singer Benny Andersson (ABBA) is 76. Rock singer-musician Billy Gibbons (ZZ Top) is 73. Rock musician Bill Bateman (The Blasters) is 71. Actor Xander Berkeley is 67. Actor Alison LaPlaca is 63. Actor Sam Robards is 61. Actor Jon Tenney is 61. Actor Benjamin Bratt is 59. Actor-comedian JB Smoove is 57. Actor Miranda Otto is 55. Actor Daniel Cosgrove is 52. R&B singer Michael McCary is 51. Actor Jonathan Scarfe is 47. Actor Krysten Ritter is 41. Actor Zoe Jarman is 40. Country musician Chris Scruggs is 40. Actor Theo James is 38. Actor Amanda Setton is 37. Rock musician Dave Rublin (American Authors) is 36. Actor Hallee Hirsh is 35. Actor Anna Popplewell is 34. Actor Stephan James is 29.