

Groton Daily Independent

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Groton Community Calendar Saturday, Dec. 17

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

Cancelled: Wrestling Tournament at Sioux Valley, 10 a.m.

Cancelled: Basketball at Jamestown College



"If we experienced life through the eyes of a child, everything would be magical and extraordinary. Let our curiosity, adventure and wonder of life never end."

AKIANE KRAMARIK

(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.

Sunday, Dec. 18

Groton CM&A: Sunday School at 9:15 a.m., Worship Service at 10:45 a.m.; Christmas Program at 5 p.m. with banquet to follow.

St. John's worship with communion, 9 a.m.; Sunday school, 9:45 a.m.; Zion's worship with communion, 11 a.m.

Emmanuel Lutheran worship with Sunday school program, 9 a.m.; Worship at Avantara, 3 p.m.; Choir, 7 p.m.

United Methodist: Conde worship, 8:30 a.m.; Coffee hour, 9:30 a.m.; Sunday school, 9:30 a.m.; Groton worship with Sunday school Christmas program, 10:30 a.m.; Noon meal at Groton.

Catholic: SEAS Confession, 7:45-8:15 a.m., SEAS Mass, 8:30 a.m.; Turton Confession, 10:30-10:45 a.m.; Turton Mass, 11 a.m.

Open Gym: Grade JK-8, 2 p.m. to 3:30 p.m.; Grades 6-12, 3:30 p.m. to 4 p.m.

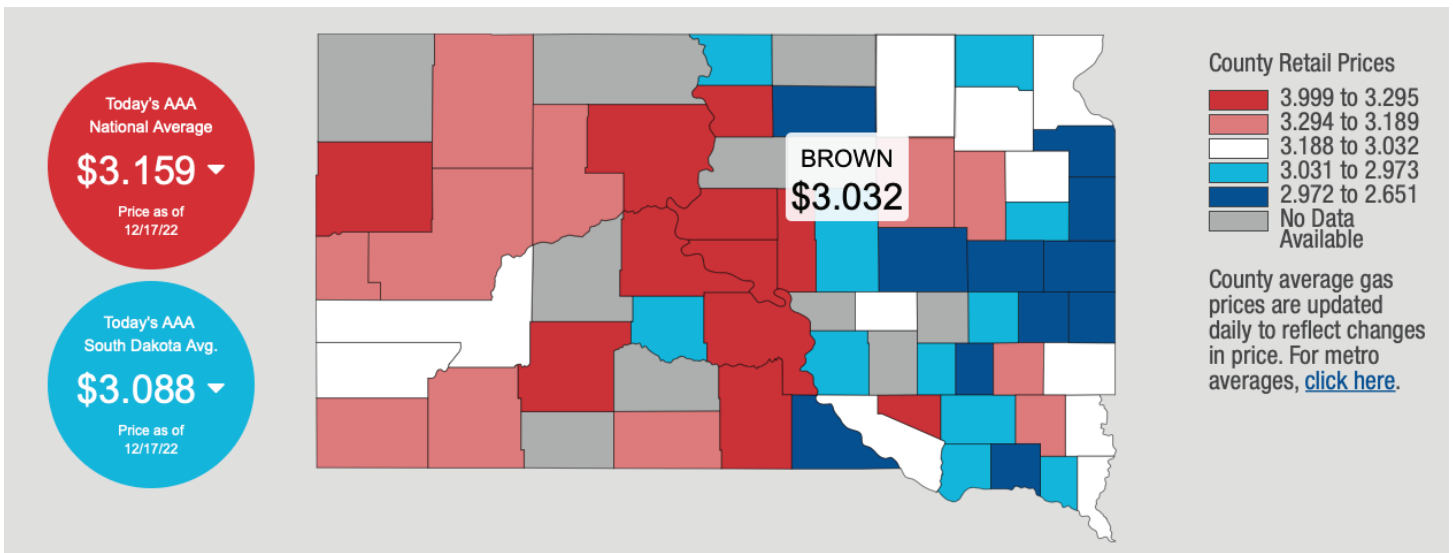
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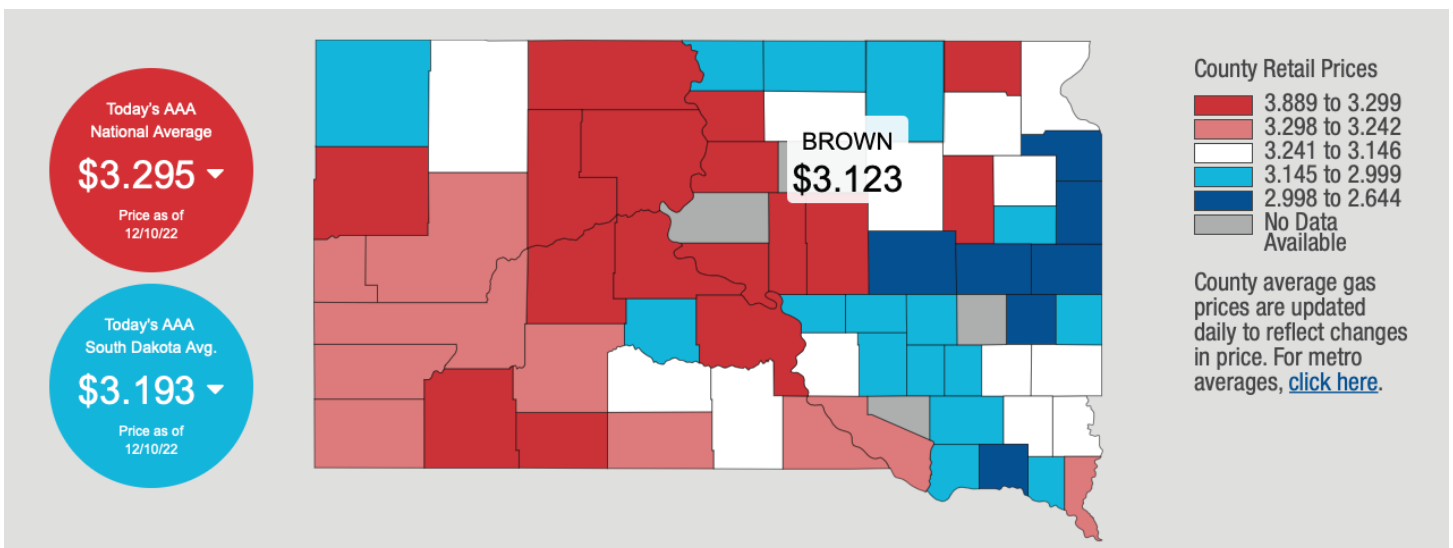
South Dakota Average Gas Prices

	Regular	Mid-Grade	Premium	Diesel
Current Avg.	\$3.088	\$3.285	\$3.777	\$4.459
Yesterday Avg.	\$3.093	\$3.297	\$3.786	\$4.439
Week Ago Avg.	\$3.193	\$3.417	\$3.882	\$4.531
Month Ago Avg.	\$3.601	\$3.767	\$4.265	\$5.105
Year Ago Avg.	\$3.213	\$3.327	\$3.679	\$3.473

This Week



Last Week



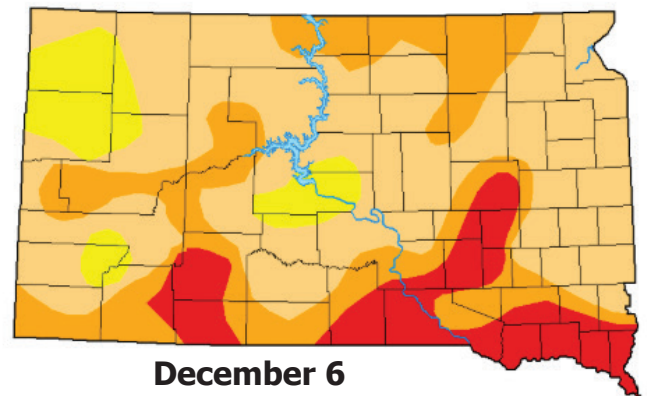
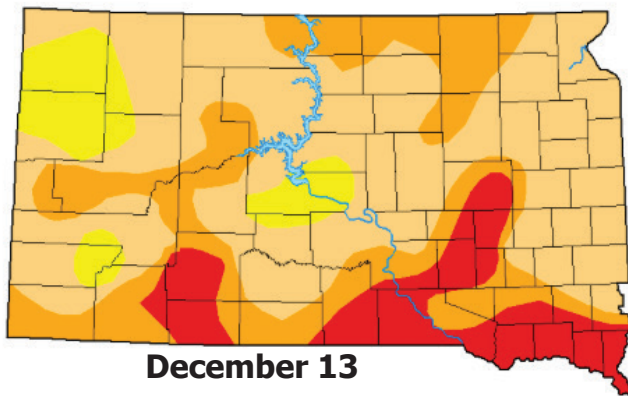
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Drought Classification



Drought Monitor



Heavier rains accumulated Monday night into early Tuesday in parts of southeast Kansas, leading to some improvements in the drought situation there as precipitation deficits lessened. Dry weather continued in parts of northwest Kansas, where soil moisture deficits and long-term precipitation deficits continued to worsen. A few small changes (one improvement and one degradation) were made in southeast Colorado and adjacent northeast New Mexico, where surface conditions changed in tandem with recent precipitation or lack thereof. Elsewhere, conditions did not change much across the region. Snow and rain that fell Monday night and Tuesday morning from northeast Colorado into Nebraska and southern South Dakota will be analyzed further next week for possible improvements to ongoing drought. Temperature anomalies for the week varied from north to south across the region, with below-normal temperatures occurring in most of North Dakota, while near- or slightly above-normal temperatures were more common in Colorado and Kansas.

No Aberdeen American News Today

We got word that there would be no paper today. Whenever all of the papers arrive in Aberdeen, the carriers will be notified and then the big delivery will begin. Some area have not received a paper at all this week.

Dacotah Bank American Banker 2022 Best Banks to Work For

Dacotah Bank strives to be one of the best banks to work for and an employer of choice throughout our territory. A true testament to these efforts, starting January 1, 2023, Dacotah Bank will be covering 100% of health and dental insurance premiums for employees and their families.

“We are excited about this enhancement to our employee benefit package that will impact our employees and their loved ones day-in and day-out. Earlier this year, we implemented a paid parental leave program, and believe these additions demonstrate our commitment to the entire Dacotah Bank family who contribute so much to the Company and the communities in which we live and work,” said President and CEO Robert Fouberg.

In recognition of this dedication to employees and their families, Dacotah Bank has been named one of the Best Banks to Work For by American Banker for the fifth consecutive year. In 2022, Dacotah Bank climbed the rankings to number 22, up 17 places from number 39 in 2021. Dacotah Bank was ranked number 28 in 2020.

“Creating a great workplace culture is the best way to retain and recruit employees,” said Fouberg. This includes providing development opportunities for staff members. The bank offers continuing education through a variety of options, such as participating in online learning programs and attending conferences and webinars. It has also revamped its employee performance review process to ensure employees and supervisors are on the same page regarding expectations, and to encourage communication.

“Whether we empower employees to make the best decision with respect to a customer, the extent to which we offer developmental opportunities to employees, whether we treat employees as equals in conversations about their employment and whether and to what extent we engage in the vitality of the communities in which we live and work all contributes to a welcoming and supportive environment in which employees can discover their talents and best contribute to the success of the company,” Fouberg said.

The Best Banks to Work For program, which was initiated in 2013 by American Banker and Best Companies Group, identifies, recognizes and honors U.S. banks for outstanding employee satisfaction. Full results of this year’s program are available at AmericanBanker.com and in the November issue of American Banker Magazine.

Determining the Best Banks to Work For involves a two-step process. The first step is an evaluation of participating companies’ workplace policies, practices, and demographics. In the second step, employee surveys are conducted to directly assess the experiences and attitudes of individual employees with respect to their workplace. The combined scores determine the top banks and the final ranking.

To go directly to a full list of this year’s winning banks, [click here](#).

Best Companies Group managed the overall registration, survey process and analysis of the data. They used their expertise to determine the final ranking.

The program is open to commercial banks, thrifts, savings banks and other chartered retail financial institutions with at least 50 employees in the United States. For more information on eligibility or other questions related to the Best Banks to Work For program, visit www.BestBankstoWorkFor.com or contact Katrina Heimbach at 717-323-5244.

Winter Storm Forces NSU Basketball Postponements

Aberdeen, S.D. – Mother Nature continues to strike for Northern State basketball this weekend with all games moved to a later date. Out of an abundance of caution, the Northern Sun Intercollegiate Conference and participating institutions have decided to postpone contests involving Northern State, MSU Moorhead, St. Cloud State, and Minnesota Duluth. The full updated schedule is below with all games played on the road for the Wolves.

Saturday, December 31
Northern State at Minnesota Duluth
Women's game at 1 p.m.
Men's game at 3 p.m.

Sunday, January 1
Northern State at St. Cloud State
Women's game at 1 p.m.
Men's game at 3 p.m.

Tuesday, January 10
Northern State at MSU Moorhead
Women's game at 5:30 p.m.
Men's game at 7:30 p.m.

To stay up to date on any other potential schedule adjustments, continue to check nsuwolves.com and the Wolves social media accounts on Twitter and Facebook.

Student soil health essay contest open

PIERRE, SD – The South Dakota Soil Health Coalition is excited to announce a student essay contest for the 2023 Soil Health Conference, Jan. 24-25 in Sioux Falls, SD. The contest is open to students in the following divisions: middle school, high school and post-secondary students. Cash Prizes and hoodies will be awarded to winners in each of the age categories. The top prize in the post-secondary division will be \$400, and the top prize in the middle school and high school divisions will be \$200.

The deadline for essay submissions is January 8, 2023. Contest rules and information are available at www.sdsoilhealthcoalition.org/soil-health-conference/students.

Contest winners will be announced during the Soil Health Conference. Student registration for the conference is free. More information about the conference is available at www.sdsoilhealthcoalition.org/soil-health-conference.

Conference speakers: Solving ag problems begins with the soil

By Stan Wise

South Dakota Soil Health Coalition

PIERRE, SD – For fifth-generation Indiana crop and livestock producer Rick Clark, soil health and regenerative agriculture are about stewardship.

"You have to be good stewards of the land," he said. "If you think it's OK to watch your topsoil blow away in the wind, then I guess regenerative is not for you. But you need to be a good steward to the land and at least start thinking about how we can hold what precious soil we have left."

Food Water Wellness Foundation Senior Soil Scientist Kris Nichols agrees. "We have one problem in agriculture, and that problem is that we don't have enough soil," she said. "And if we solve that problem, all of the other issues that we're having will be solved."

Her observation certainly seems to have held true on Clark's farm in west central Indiana where he grows corn, soybeans, wheat, alfalfa, peas, milo and cover crops and raises cattle and sheep.

Clark said that when he started using no-till practices and cover crops 15 years ago, he did it to fight erosion. With the addition of other practices like a diverse crop rotation, livestock integration, good residue management, and planting green into cover crops, he has also seen many other benefits.

"You're seeing the benefits of armoring the soil, the benefits of increasing water infiltration rates, increasing water holding capacity, building aggregate stability – all of these things you see happening when you start doing these regenerative practices," he said. "We have aggregate stability that is 6 to 8 inches deep. We have water infiltration rates that are 20 inches an hour. We have earthworm counts on our farm that are one and a half to 2 million earthworms per acre."

These benefits are showing up on Clark's bottom line.

"We're heading into year nine of not adding any phosphorous or potassium now on the farm," he said. "We're saving over 50 percent on fuel. We've reduced our tractor fleet by two-thirds. We've eliminated inputs of fertilizer or herbicides or insecticides. We no longer seed treat."

Clark said that he started with soybean genetics not covered by patents and is growing soybean seed for his operation using epigenetics. "Epigenetics is basically keeping seed and allowing that seed to adapt to your system," he said. Clark said that he will have enough seed to plant two-thirds to three-fourths of his 2023 soybean crop. The reduced seed cost, combined with the other benefits of soil health practices, adds up to significant savings on his operation.

"When you add all that up on our farm, we're saving about \$2 million a year in inputs," Clark said. Over the entire operation, he said those savings average out to approximately \$300 per acre.

Nichols said there's no set recipe of practices to achieve the kind of soil health benefits Clark has seen. "There are multiple paths, multiple options and opportunities that can exist out there for farmers and ranchers to determine how it is that they would like to go forward within their systems and put these things in place that are going to work the best for them with the resources that they have in the environment that they're in," she said. "This is really about thinking about how the entire system functions together."

Clark said the first step for producers wishing to improve their operations is a simple one. "The first thing to do is to go to the South Dakota Soil Health Coalition Conference," he said.

Both Clark and Nichols will be keynote speakers at the 2023 Soil Health Conference, Jan. 24-25 at the Best Western Plus Ramkota Hotel in Sioux Falls. Other keynote speakers will include Mitchell Hora, a seventh-generation Iowa farmer and CEO/Founder of Continuum Ag, and Roy Thompson, a South Dakota producer connecting soil health with human health. The conference will also feature breakout sessions, discussion panels, award presentations, contests, social activities, and networking opportunities. The event is also being held in conjunction with the Midwest Cover Crops Council's annual meeting and conference, which will take place on Jan. 23 at the same location.

"The Soil Health Conference will offer useful information and unique experiences for everyone, regardless of where they are on their soil health journey," South Dakota Soil Health Coalition Coordinator Cindy Zenk said. "From students to gardeners, from producers to industry professionals, anyone involved in

agriculture will find something valuable at this event.”

“You cannot underestimate the power of what goes on at a conference,” Clark said. “It’s not so much going into that room and listening to those great speakers speak. It’s going into the hall and finding people that think like you do or who are trying to do the same things you want to do and trade contact information and stay in touch and then go out to the restaurant and eat dinner with different folks. That’s where you make the great contacts.”

Those contacts are extremely important, Clark said, once planting season starts and the conference is several months in the past. “April and May rolls around, and they’re like, ‘No, wait a minute, what did that wacky guy from Indiana say about are we supposed to do this or are we doing that? I don’t remember what he said. Who am I going to call, and who am I going to talk to?’ So, we need that local support group,” he said.

Registration for the 2023 Soil Health Conference is \$50 per person. Students may register for the conference at no cost, and they may enter an essay contest for a chance to win up to \$400. More information about the conference may be found at www.sdsoilhealthcoalition.org/soil-health-conference. Questions about the event may be directed to the South Dakota Soil Health Coalition at 605-280-4190 or sdsoilhealth@gmail.com.



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

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- LED light bar on auger housing plus dual LED in-dash headlights
- Heavy-duty cast aluminum auger gear box w/ 5-year limited warranty**

MSRP
\$2,099*



2X 30" MAX

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

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

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Rix Quinn – Holiday traditions

One of my favorite stories is "A Christmas Carol" by Charles Dickens. How many other tales feature a miser, four ghosts, tombstones, and a goose?

Actually, before I read this story, I thought it was about somebody named Carol. See, I once had a girlfriend I called Christmas Carol, because we broke up every December.

But if you haven't read this fantastic Dickens classic, here's a brief synopsis:

Ebenezer Scrooge is crochety old geezer working Christmas Eve with his clerk Bob Cratchit. When his nephew Fred invites him to Christmas dinner, Scrooge says it's a waste of a workday, and tells the nephew to leave.

But when Scrooge gets home that night, he's visited by the ghost of his deceased partner Jacob Marley, who also lived a self-ish life. He warns Scrooge that he'll soon be visited by three ghosts who might be able to save him.

The Ghost of Christmas Past reminds Scrooge he could have married if he had not chosen money over matrimony. The Ghost of Christmas Present transports Scrooge to the Cratchit household, where he sees a happy family enjoy the evening. (Sadly, they couldn't watch television, because 18th century TV offered few channels.)

Next, the scary Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come takes Scrooge to a graveyard, where he views his gravestone and hears negative comments about himself from acquaintances.

Christmas morning finds Scrooge a changed man, who helps Cratchit and suddenly becomes friendly and generous. This story reminds us that (1) a selfish life is a sad one, (2) it's impossible to find Christmas movies on a 200-year-old TV, and (3) giving money away brings a happier day.

Rix's new Amazon Kindle e-book is now available for 99 cents. It's a Thanksgiving-related humor title called Turkey's Viewpoint. I hope you'll buy it and read it...and then leave a review.

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We the People

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



By David Adler

Law and History Reject Unlimited Legislative Power

For the generation that framed and adopted the Constitution, legislative despotism was not merely theoretical, but real. The Founders' fears were drawn from their experience under Parliament, which saddled an aspiring Republic with laws that violated their rights and liberties and denied their goal of independence. Henry Adams, the preeminent historian of the founding period, observed, "a great majority of the American people shared the same fears of despotic government."

Suspicion of legislative power was exacerbated in the years following the Declaration of Independence by the fact that early state constitutions vested virtually unchecked powers in the state legislatures. The untested confidence of Americans that "their" legislators, elected by the "people," unlike English representatives, would not betray fundamental values, principles and freedoms, was soon shaken.

Thomas Jefferson, writing in 1781, blamed Americans' inexperience and naivete in "the science of government" for writing state constitutions that concentrated power in the legislative branch which, he noted, represented "precisely the definition of despotic government." He added, "an elective despotism was not the government we fought for," in undertaking the revolution.

The corruption of early state legislatures, it was widely acknowledged at the time, constituted a primary reason for convening the Constitutional Convention. James Madison noted that there had been a tendency to "throw all power into the legislative vortex. If no effective checks be devised for restraining the instability and encroachments of the latter, a revolution would be inevitable." In a letter to Jefferson, written on October 24, 1787, Madison stated that the "injustice" of state laws represented a "frequent and flagrant alarm to the most steadfast friends of Republicanism."

Among the "effective checks" on what delegates to the Convention variously described as legislative usurpation, tyranny and despotism, was the power of judicial review. This pillar of constitutionalism and the rule of law countered the lingering but significant influence in the United States of Sir William Blackstone's emphasis on the "legislative absolutism" of Parliament in England. The availability of judicial review, the Framers believed, would check both the theory and practice of legislative supremacy.

There is, in our time, irony in the fact that delegates to the Philadelphia Convention and the North Carolina State Ratifying Convention were among the most passionate champions of curbing legislative power. Their enthusiasm and advocacy resonate today, as the nation closely watches the U.S. Supreme Court in its handling of a North Carolina case, *Moore v. Harper*, in which the Speaker of the North Carolina House of Representatives, on behalf of the state legislature, claims that North Carolina courts and, indeed, the North Carolina Constitution, are disabled by the Independent State Legislature theory from limiting the legislature's exercise in flagrant gerrymandering.

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Moore v. Harper is a case layered with various legal issues. The North Carolina Supreme Court held the legislature's redistricting map as an exercise in extreme, partisan gerrymandering, "egregious, flagrant and unconstitutional." The legislature is appealing the decision to the U.S. Supreme Court.

Our immediate interest is with the question of whether state legislatures, in this case, North Carolina, may create congressional redistricting maps and, more broadly, pass laws governing the time, place and manner of elections that are unconstrained by the state constitution and state courts. North Carolina's theory—Blackstone's theory of legislative supremacy—was demonstrably rejected by the Framers of the Constitution, yet it is in full sprint in North Carolina.

The implications for American Constitutionalism are grave. If the Supreme Court decides, probably in June of 2023, to uphold the legislature's assertions, then the legislature's preferences on matters of federal elections will be unimpeded by judicial review, as well as the text, structure and history of the Constitution. Consequently, state courts, state governors and redistricting commissions could be deprived of their respective roles in the election process, including their participation in invalidating, vetoing and drawing congressional maps. Once a political party obtained a majority, it would be extremely difficult to dislodge it from power, essentially ending competitive races.

If the U.S. Supreme Court were to overrule the state supreme court decision, it would mark a historic break from the principles and traditions of federalism which, among other practices, reflects a 200-year-old understanding that the High Tribunal will defer to state court interpretations of state law. Given that state authority is at its highest pitch when a state's highest court contemplates and rules on its own constitution and state laws, it would be extremely awkward for the U.S. Supreme Court to say to the high court in North Carolina: You are wrong about your constitution.

There is a better authority on the meaning of the North Carolina Constitution than the current state legislature. In 1786, James Iredell, one of the nation's most acute legal theorists, a leading member of the state's ratifying convention and one of the first Justices on the U.S. Supreme Court, remarked on the formation of the state constitution: We "considered how to impose restrictions on the legislature, to guard against the abuse of unlimited legislative power. We should have been guilty of the grossest folly, if in the same moment when we spurned at the insolent despotism of Great Britain, we established a despotic power among ourselves."

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

Small But Mighty Group of Family Farmers & Ranchers Gather in Huron for 2022 Farmers Union State Convention

HURON, S.D. - Policy is the focus of the 2022 South Dakota Farmers Union (SDFU) State Convention. Held in Huron, December 15 and 16 in spite of Winter Storm Diaz.

"Policy and making it is a big deal to us," said Dick Kolousek, a Wessington Springs cattle producer who ranches with his wife Janet and son, Scott and his wife, Amber.

Due to winter storms, the Kolousek family are among a small group of family farmers and ranchers who were able to attend the convention. They drove to Huron together early Thursday. Many convention-goers made the trip to Huron Wednesday to beat the storm.

"There are some policy issues we need to address and discuss together and I'm happy we made it because I am not a fan of Zoom meetings," said Scott Kolousek.

Along with raising cattle, Kolousek also represents District 2 on the state board of directors. If an in-person convention had been cancelled because of the weather, due to SDFU bylaws, even a remote convention would not be able to be held until later in December.

"Our bylaws state that members need sufficient notice ahead of any change to State Convention date or location. And no one wants to miss out on family holiday celebrations," explained Karla Hofhenke, SDFU Executive Director.

Much of the policy that will be discussed during today (December 16) policy session was developed and reviewed by members during the July 2022 Policy Meeting.

However, a lot can change between July and December, said Groton farmer, Chad Johnson. This is the reason the organization makes time to revisit and formalize policy during the Annual state convention.

"Events change and issues arise," explained Johnson, who represents District 7 on the state board of directors.

A proposed pipeline carrying carbon dioxide will be among the new topics discussed during policy.

"It all boils down to property rights," Johnson said. "During our district meeting many District 7 members expressed concerns. So, I am going to share their concerns during policy and see if Farmers Union can develop policy that will help."

Johnson raises crops and cattle on his family's Brown County farm. He said protecting property rights is a long-standing focus of South Dakota Farmers Union policy.

"As farmers, our land is what we use to earn a living. Whether it is the livestock walking on top of it or the crops planted into it – without our land we are not farmers," Johnson said.

Holding packers accountable will also be a focus of policy discussion. This topic has been a focus of policy for many years. And because of the continued work of SDFU and other livestock-heavy state Farmers Union organizations, holding packers accountable and breaking up monopolies is also a focus of National Farmers Union policy.

It is also the focus of a panel discussion led by Scott Blubough. Blubough is an Oklahoma cattle producer and President of American Farmers & Ranchers, a state Farmers Union organization.

"It is so obvious the packers are abusing their market power," Blubough said. "Like South Dakota Farmers Union, Oklahoma has worked hard on this issue as well."

Blubough recently attended a White House meeting with President Biden, the U.S. Secretary of Agriculture and the U.S. Attorney General to discuss this and other anti-trust issues impacting agriculture.

"Grassroots policy is the reason we were able to bring this kind of attention to this issue - Farmers Union works for family farmers and ranchers," Blubough said.

Aberdeen cattle producer, Jeff Kippley agreed. "Policy is what leads this organization. It provides the direction of our organization for the next year."



Doug Sombke is President of South Dakota Farmers Union. He said policy is the focus of the 2022 South Dakota Farmers Union (SDFU) State Convention. The Annual Convention was held in Huron, December 15 and 16 in spite of Winter Storm Diaz. (Courtesy

Photo)

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Kippley was elected to serve as National Farmers Union Vice President during the 2022 National Farmers Union Convention. Policy voted on during the SDFU state convention will be carried to the National Farmers Union convention March 2023 by delegates elected by members.

"Grassroots policy developed by members and advocated for by members - everything we do is member-driven," said Doug Sombke, SDFU President and a fourth-generation Conde farmer.

After leading the 2020 State Convention via Zoom, Sombke said even though the attendance is low due to weather, he is grateful to be in-person. SDFU Vice President, Wayne Soren agreed.

"It's good to be together to discuss issues important to family farmers and ranchers. It's tough to read body language remotely. It's tough to express passion remotely. I'm grateful we can be together," Soren said.

Rural leaders share experiences

"We are happy those who could make it are here and we are grateful that those who could not are safe at home with their families," Hofhenke said. "And yet we miss our Farmers Union family members who could not meet with us."

The storm forced Hofhenke to re-work the convention speaker line-up and agenda. But in true South Dakota, can-do style, members stepped up to fill in for those the storm forced to stay home. Youth members, Ashley and Tyler Hanson offered to fill in for the entertainment during the evening fundraiser, Nights on the Prairie, and three members filled in on a panel focused on sharing experiences of members who participated on the Farmers Union Enterprise Leadership program.

"The Enterprise Leadership Program is where I learned that it is good as a farmer to share your story and explain why you are doing what you are doing," Kippley said.

Kippley and his wife, Rachel participated in the year-long leadership seminar designed to provide leadership training and personal development to rural leaders. It includes young producers from South Dakota, North Dakota, Montana, Wisconsin and Minnesota.

"What I learned through this program, and through networking with producers from other states has served me well in my work as NFU Vice President," Kippley said.

Scott Kolousek said that in addition to practical training on topics like how to hold efficient meetings, through the program he and his wife, Amber also learned more about the history and focus of Farmers Union.

"What we learned about Farmers Union made me want to become more involved. It is what motivated me to run for a county office and the opportunity to serve on the state board."

Rob Lee and his wife, Darcie, are De Smet farmers who also participated in FUEL. Rob said the experience taught them how to effectively speak up for what they believe in.

"It helped us be comfortable in our own skin. And the more we serve as leaders - the more meetings we run, the more comfortable we become running a meeting and participating in meetings," said Lee, who was elected to serve as supervisor of the Kingsbury County Conservation Board. He also serves as the vice chair of the South Dakota National Crop Insurance Service Committee.

Amber Kolousek added that through the program, she learned more about who she is as a leader. "I learned more about what kind of leader I was and this helped me understand how to work with people who maybe not the same type of leader."

She said she applied what she learned in her work serving on the School Board for the Wessington Springs Schools.

Amber is among 16 members who are hoping to be elected to serve as a delegate to the National Farmers Union Convention.

Elections were held, Dec. 16.

"It's exciting to see the energy among the younger generation of members," Sombke said. "When I think about the work that I and the other board members do, it is not for ourselves, it is for our children and grandchildren. It is for the next generation of South Dakota farm and ranch families."

25 Days - Brown County Fair



Nancy Radke

Fairboard - 3 Years

Committees I have served on -

- *Food, Livestock, & Special Events*

Favorite thing about the Holidays -

- *Family*

Favorite thing about the Fair -

- *Friendships made*

If you could do Anything or go Anywhere -

- *Australia*

In 2023 -

- *Family staying healthy and safe*

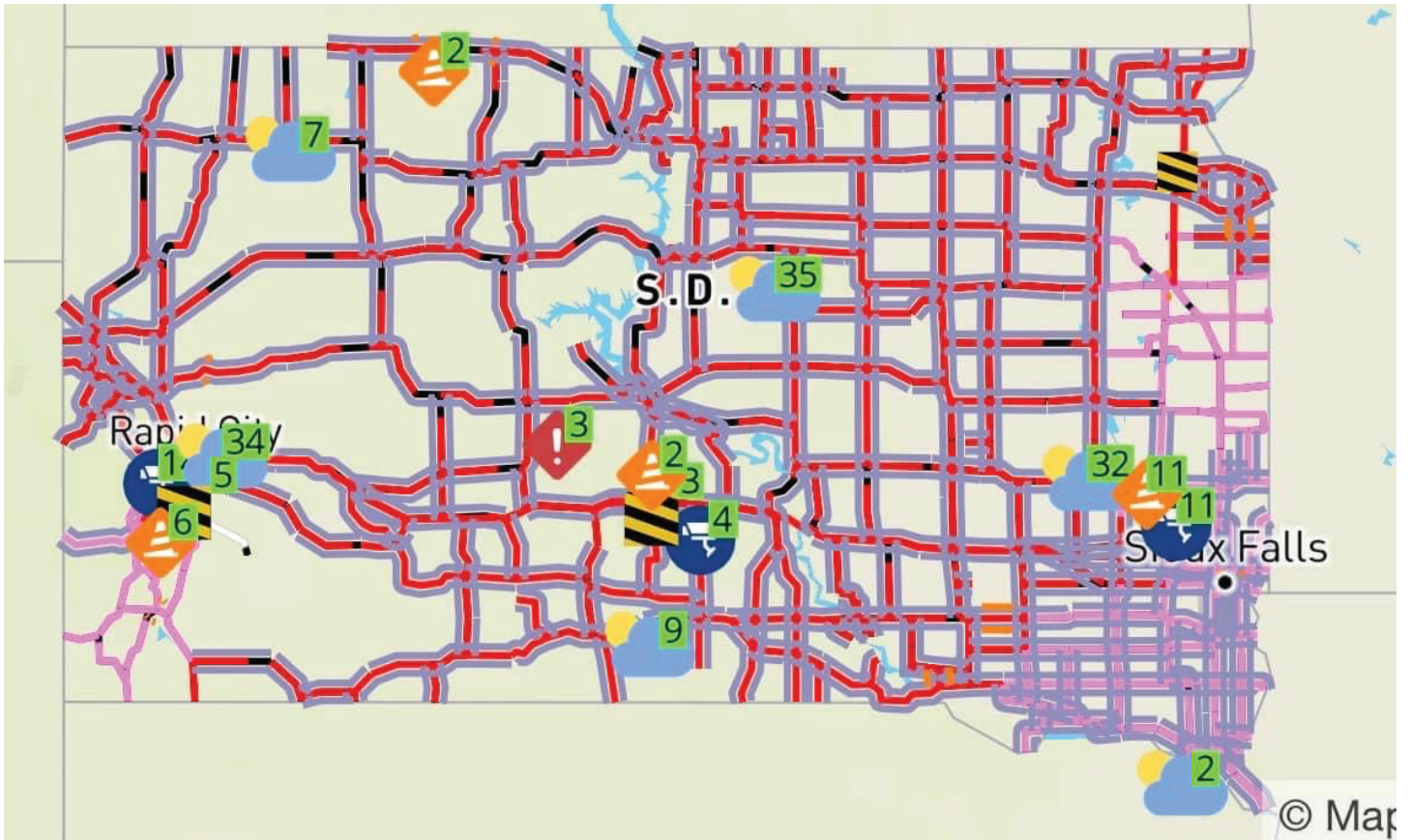
www.BrownCountySDFair.com



The Brown County Fair Facebook page has been featuring board members and we noticed Groton own Nancy Radke was featured, so we had to share it with you as well. We're not sure who is all on the board but there may be more Grotonnites. If I have missed anyone, let me know.

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This travel map features most of South Dakota under no travel advised during the blizzard that hit the state.

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The businesses on the west side of Main Street had a drift as high as four to five feet in some areas.

Groton gets hit with 14 inches of snow

The four-day winter storm that hit the area this week dumped a total of 14 inches of snow on Groton. The first batch of real heavy snow was about four inches resulting in 1" of moisture. After that, an additional 10 inches of snow fell resulting in 0.86" of moisture.



'Treated like a criminal': Native woman's death sparks questions

Felony ingestion charge, unique to state, arose from test in maternity ward

BY: JOHN HULT - DECEMBER 16, 2022 1:33 PM

In May of 2021, Abbey Lynn Steele gave birth to her first child, a baby boy.

A urine test showed methamphetamine in his system.

Steele, who turned 19 that month, also tested positive for meth.

The drug's detection in the baby's urine assured that Steele would not keep full custody under South Dakota law. Its presence in her system set in motion a series of events that defined the rest of her short life.

Instead of receiving a visit from a counselor or a trip to treatment, the young mother was charged with felony ingestion of a controlled substance. Some states criminalize drug ingestion, but South Dakota is the only state in the nation with a law that explicitly allows authorities to press felony charges that could result in prison time.

For well over a year, Steele, a Native American, struggled to comply with the conditions of her pretrial release on that felony charge. On six occasions, she wrote letters to a judge to plead for another chance on a pre-trial sobriety program after missing drug testing appointments or missing court and landing in jail – a place she deeply feared, her family said.

"She's very small, so she was always very scared of getting locked up," said Maria Steele, Abbey's older sister. "She didn't like to go to the hospital, because she was afraid she'd get charged with ingestion again."

On Nov. 16, 2022, for reasons that are under investigation, Abbey Steele's heart stopped at the Pennington County Jail, a few hours after an arrest on warrants for missed court appearances.



A photo of Abbey Lynn Steele on display during a vigil on Dec. 6, 2022, outside the Pennington County Jail in Rapid City. (Photo by

A.J. Etherington/Rapid City Journal)

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She'd given birth to her second child in an emergency cesarean section at a Rapid City hospital just five days earlier.

Paramedics were able to resuscitate Steele, but after two weeks on a ventilator and multiple MRI scans that indicated no prospect of life without the support of a machine, her family chose to pull the plug.

It wasn't the way Maria had pictured saying goodbye to her sister.

Abbey had gone on a walk to buy a soda the day of her arrest and was walking back to Maria's apartment when an officer began trailing her, Maria said. Abbey called her sister about it, then fled toward Maria's apartment, where she was apprehended.

Maria took a video of the events inside her apartment, which shows Abbey on her knees being handcuffed and then being walked out by police.

"That's my last memory of her, basically her getting dragged out of my house to her death bed," said Maria Steele.

Days after Abbey's death on Dec. 2, the Steele family and their supporters in the Native American community sent out a press release for a candlelight vigil outside the Pennington County Jail. They wanted answers on how Abbey died.

"Her death under the watch and authority of major institutions in Rapid City is an affront to common decency and basic human dignity," the release said. "Abbey Steele should be alive today. Two children are now without their mother and have lost the opportunity to know her."

Cries of "justice for Abbey Steele" heard at the vigil doubled as a plea for a re-examination of South Dakota's approach to drug addiction. They also highlighted the impact of that approach on marginalized people, who struggle to see law enforcement as an arm of government with their best interests at heart.

Natalie Stites Means is a Rapid City community organizer who attended the vigil. She's also a member of a U.S. Commission on Civil Rights advisory committee that recently released a report outlining maternal mortality and health disparities for Native American women in South Dakota.

"We issued some demands," Stites Means said. "Broadly, it's 'stop arresting, policing, surveilling and cataloging our people and calling that services.'"

Investigation ongoing

Representatives with the Rapid City Police Department and Pennington County Sheriff's Office have declined to offer many details about the circumstances surrounding Abbey Steele's arrest and detainment on Nov. 16, citing an ongoing probe by the state Division of Criminal Investigation.

An outside investigation is routine in cases of an inmate death or cases with questions about officer conduct.

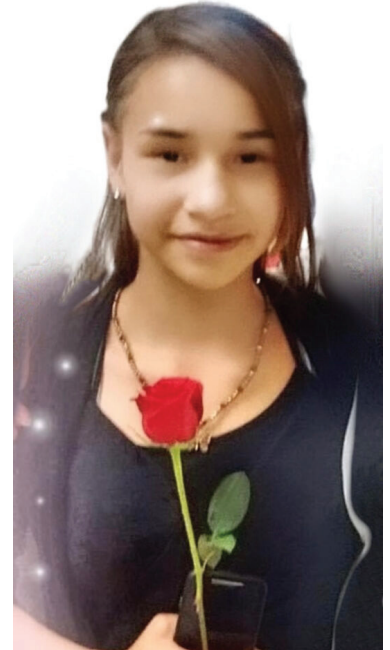
"That evening, Abbey presented with medical symptoms and was transported to Monument Health via ambulance at approximately 8:32 p.m., where she was admitted," wrote sheriff's office spokesperson Helene Duhamel. "The Pennington County Sheriff's Office received notification that Abbey died on December 2, 2022."

On the police side, spokesman Brendyn Medina said an officer saw Abbey on Nov. 16, recognized her as a person with multiple warrants, and called out her name.

"Without any further actions by our officer outside of calling her name, Abbey decided to begin running from the officer," Medina wrote in an email. "The officer observed her run into an apartment that ultimately did not belong to her. Not knowing her intentions, or even if she posed a danger to those inside, the officer followed her into the residence."

Medina wrote that the arrest was "routine," that there were "no indications of any need for medical attention," and that "at no time did the officer ever have to use any force."

"Regardless, this is an entirely tragic situation and the collective sympathies of the RCPD go out to a



Abbey Lynn Steele

(Submitted)

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family and a group of friends that are now grieving the loss of a loved one."

In Maria Steele's video of the arrest, provided to South Dakota Searchlight, she can be heard saying, "I have Rapid City police inside my house right now. I did not tell him he could come in here."

"That's 'cause she came in here to avoid my arrest," the officer says.

The video also shows Maria telling her young children to go upstairs and shuffling them out of the way of the commotion.

Abbey Steele is on her knees in handcuffs as the video begins. Within a minute, Abbey is on her feet and walking toward the door with the officer. Before they leave, a weeping Abbey can be heard saying "I love you so much" as she asks Maria for a hug.

"I've been having nightmares," Maria said, recalling the arrest. "I hear her screams often in my head."

Fear of punishment

No matter what the investigation into the arrest and detainment reveals, Abbey Steele's supporters see her death as evidence of abject systemic failure, threaded through with historical significance for the tribal citizens of South Dakota.

To them, the state's tough-love approach to drug use and addiction is an extension of generations of imbalanced treatment by a system that views Native Americans as projects to be fixed through force and coercion.

More than half the inmates in the state's only women's prison are Native American. As of October 2022, a drug use or possession charge was the highest-level offense for half of all female inmates, regardless of race. The highest-level charge for 15% of inmates was ingestion.

It's unclear how many of the women serving those drug sentences are Native American. The South Dakota Department of Corrections (DOC) keeps statistics on inmate offenses and inmate race and ethnicity, but DOC spokesman Michael Winder said the agency does not keep data on offenses by race.

"Your request was shared with our analytics division," Winder wrote on Dec. 16 in response to South Dakota Searchlight's Dec. 8 data request. "They have many requests to fulfill and your request is under review."

Disparities in detention rates are similar inside the Pennington County Jail. On the morning of Dec. 15, 2022, for example, 322 of the inmates were Native American. The jail's capacity is 587. Native Americans make up 11 percent of Pennington County's population, according to census data.

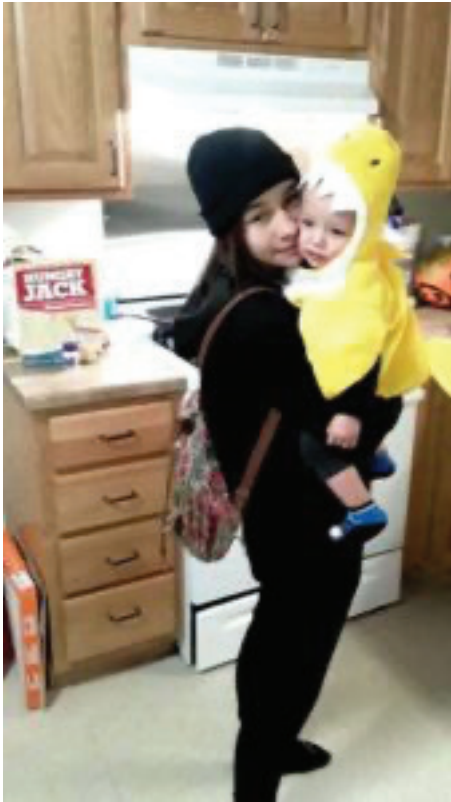
Beyond placing additional pressure on prison staff and facilities already overwhelmed with drug possession crimes, Stites Means said, South Dakota's felony ingestion law creates a climate of fear around pre- and postnatal care whose ripple effects put children and mothers at long-term risk.

The 2021 report on maternal health that Stites Means worked on outlines some of the reasons for that. The study group heard from doctors who said Native American women are more likely to be drug-tested in hospitals – with or without a patient's consent.



Supporters stand outside the Pennington County Jail on Dec. 6, 2022.

(Courtesy photo)



Abbey Lynn Steele poses with her son in this undated photo. (Submitted)

One doctor said Native women “often feel stigmatized, stereotyped and dismissed by the medical system, which makes them hesitant towards accessing necessary health care.”

Several doctors told the commission that mandatory reporting of drug use and the criminal charges that can follow it act as barriers to care. One said it’s impossible for a doctor to forge genuine relationships with drug users “if they fear that they’re going to be thrown into jail if they actually open up.”

With that backdrop, Stites Means said, Abbey Steele’s story stands as tragic proof that fears of sanction for seeking health care are firmly rooted in experience.

The report from the civil rights advisory committee showed that maternal death rates for Native American women are two and a half times higher than rates for white women, Stites Means said, and “felony ingestion is a part of that.”

Drug addiction colored Steele’s life

The report also noted that rates of drug use before and after pregnancy are three times higher among Native American women than white women, according to the Centers for Disease Control.

Abbey Steele’s life reflected that reality long before she gave birth to her son.

Her mother, now the guardian of Abbey’s children, struggled with addiction for years before finding her footing.

Maria and Abbey had different fathers, neither of whom were around. Like her younger daughter, their mother was charged with felony ingestion in South Dakota.

“Me and Abbey were all we had for our whole lives growing up,” Maria Steele said. “Our mom was in and out of prison.”

Like her daughter, Abbey’s mother gave birth at a young age. Abbey was born three years after Maria, in Rapid City, but the Oglala Lakota family spent many of their early years in Bismarck, North Dakota. Abbey returned to the Rapid City area at age 10, when her mother lost custody based on North Dakota charges.

Abbey played flute and volleyball in North Dakota, and continued doing so in middle school in Rapid City. She spent her high school years in Sturgis.

Through it all, Maria said, Abbey maintained a spirit of loyalty that outshined others in her family. She stuck up for the people she loved.

“Abbey was a firecracker,” Steele said. “She was very feisty. If someone said something and she didn’t like it, she wasn’t afraid to tell them how she felt.”

It took years of incarceration, treatment and family separation for the sisters to be reunited with their mother, whose criminal history in South Dakota mirrors that of her younger daughter in many ways – drug use without violence, stumbles on probation that led to incarceration, pleas for mercy and promises to improve.

At one point, their mother wrote a letter explaining that her failed drug test on probation was a relapse after 268 days clean in drug court.

She would go on to serve about a year of a two-year ingestion sentence at the South Dakota women’s prison.

“She was taken from our lives for a very long time,” Maria said. “I do think that knocked some sense into her, because her whole life changed when she came out.”

Like her mother, Abbey found herself wrapped up in drug use as a teenager. She was quick with a joke to lighten the mood, Maria said, but she also had deep trauma and used drugs to help herself cope.

She wasn’t a violent or dangerous person, Maria said.

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"Abbey was an addict and treated like a criminal," she said.

Prior to her first pregnancy, Abbey's criminal record had one ticket: for driving without a license. The first of her other five charges originated in the maternity ward at Monument Health.

Stumbles through the system

The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists recommends that health systems avoid drug tests without consent, over concerns that the tests stigmatize patients and discourage them from seeking health care.

Monument, the Rapid City-based health system, declined to comment on Abbey's case specifically, but Maria said Abbey did not consent to the May 2021 drug test that would ultimately lead to her felony ingestion charge.

The RCPD needs consent or a warrant to obtain a second urine test for charging purposes after an initial test by a hospital, Assistant Chief Scott Sitts said, but he declined to offer further details on Steele's specific situation at the time, citing the ongoing investigation.

The immediate effect of the positive test from 2021 was a loss of full custody. Maria and her mother signed an agreement with the Department of Social Services, promising to help watch over the boy.

Abbey understood why, Maria said, but the loss had a long-term impact.

"She was just broken," Maria said. "She wasn't herself."

The drug test used in the criminal case was administered on May 27, 2021, and after a standard delay to process evidence, Abbey was indicted by a grand jury on the ingestion charge on July 14, 2021.

Abbey was served a warrant and arrested on the charge in September. She was released on bond shortly thereafter. The following month, she was arrested for driving under the influence. A few weeks after that, she was charged with impersonation to deceive law enforcement for giving a fake name to an officer.

In each case, she was released into the 24/7 sobriety program on the condition that she appear for random urinalysis screenings, but she missed several of them. The 24/7 program began in South Dakota as a pretrial condition for repeat DUI offenders, who would appear at the county jail for a breathalyzer test twice a day. The program has since expanded to include alcohol monitoring bracelets, drug patches and random urinalysis tests. Defendants pay for each form of monitoring.

Beyond missed 24/7 appointments, Abbey Steele missed nine court appearances for status hearings and motions in her pending cases from October 2021 through this November.

It wasn't easy to make her court appearances and drug tests, Maria said.

For a time, Abbey was living on the streets with her boyfriend, but she kept working at Wendy's and delivering diapers and clothes for her son. The boyfriend, who is the father of her children, didn't get along with the rest of the family, which led to periods of estrangement. The two "were not good for each other," Maria said, but they loved each other deeply.

Even when she had a place to stay and the couple were at peace with the family, Abbey didn't have reliable transportation.

She was detained on warrants several times. On six occasions, beginning in February of 2022, she wrote letters to Judge Jane Wipf Pfeifle asking for another chance on 24/7. She mentioned her work at Wendy's, illness in her family, her hopes for her children, and the strength of her mother and sister as a support system for staying sober. In one letter, she talked about picking up hours at Hardee's and attending Alcoholics Anonymous and Narcotics Anonymous meetings with her mother.

Her mother needed help with her son, Abbey wrote in February, shortly after the boy hit a developmental milestone.

"He just started calling me mama," she wrote.

Sobriety was her goal, she'd write later.

"If given this chance, I will go to 24-7 and behave in a well manner this time because I want my unborn baby to have a bright future, as both my kids mean the world to me," Abbey wrote over the summer.

Punitive approach scrutinized

To Libby Skarin of the American Civil Liberties Union of South Dakota, Abbey's case is reflective of the

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cascade of sanctions that trail those who grapple with substance abuse in South Dakota.

People trying to kick highly addictive drugs are highly likely to use again – often more than once – before long-term sobriety takes hold, Skarin said. Criminalizing each predictable stumble, she said, places more pressure and stress on drug users, which makes South Dakota’s ingestion law counterproductive.

“When you apply a felony-level penalty to someone and charge them with a crime that is related to addiction, you are starting in motion a series of consequences that the person might never escape from in their life,” Skarin said.

Thus far, the Legislature has been unwilling to change the law.

The most recent attempt came from Sen. Mike Rohl, R-Aberdeen, in 2021. Supporters of the bill pointed out that South Dakota incarcerates more drug users per capita than any other state, among other drug-related statistics.

Rohl’s bill would have reduced ingestion from a felony to a misdemeanor. It failed in committee on a 5-2 vote. Rohl and Republican Sen. Art Rusch, a retired judge from Vermillion, were the lone “yes” votes.

The ingestion law also came under fire in 2017, when an Argus Leader investigation revealed that some defendants had been forced to give urine samples through unwilling catheterization. A federal judge struck down the forced collection of urine in 2020 after a lawsuit by the ACLU.

Law enforcement officials in the state argue that the ingestion law holds accountable drug users who would otherwise avoid treatment. Without it, they say, their hands would be tied in battling methamphetamine, South Dakota’s number one controlled substance in terms of arrests.

Officials also point out that ingestion carries a presumption of probation, meaning that diversion is expected before a prison sentence is levied in an ingestion case.

The law is also a tool for negotiation. Abbey Steele’s mother was charged with both drug possession and ingestion in 2013. Her plea deal kept the ingestion charge, and she took the bargain.

Diversion is part of the charging calculus for Interim Pennington County State’s Attorney Lara Roetzel and her deputies. Not all meth-born baby cases result in charges, she said this week.

“There are a multitude of factors we take into account when charging this type of case,” Roetzel wrote in an email. “Some of these include prior history of the mother, cooperation with the Department of Social Services, prior rehabilitation efforts, and potential danger to the community and to the person. Some of these cases end up in diversion efforts, others in charges, some in no charges at all. It is important not to take a cookie-cutter approach to prosecution.”

Family, supporters: South Dakota system failing

Stites Means sees more than a legal debate. She sees a continuation of a history of racism in South Dakota, with shades of the “kill the Indian, save the man” belief that drove the forced removal of Native American children and placement in boarding schools during the 1800s.

Harsh penalties that statistically hit Native communities harder than white communities are a sign that the state’s criminal justice system has no interest in addressing discrimination against minorities, or the damaging effects of family separation, she said.

“I do think it’s warlike, and I think it’s genocidal, and I’m not going to compromise on that,” Stites Means said. “It’s factual.”

Stites Means also said South Dakota’s drug policies do not reduce drug use, access to drugs, or public safety.

“Nobody’s safer for any of this,” she said.

Near the end of Abbey Steele’s life, the last time she tried to get a spot in a treatment center for mothers and newborns, her sister Maria said, the line was too long. They were told that too many women leaving the prison were ahead of her.

“Abbey was very open to learning and getting help,” Maria said.

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

Advocates: South Dakota has 'counterproductive' approach to drug use by mothers

BY: JOHN HULT - DECEMBER 16, 2022 1:33 PM

Abbey Steele found herself facing a felony drug ingestion charge in 2021, based on a urine test collected after she gave birth to her first child.

Steele was among two dozen mothers whose maternity ward drug test sparked a call to the Rapid City Police Department in 2021.

The RCPD has collected the metric since mid-2016 to measure the scope of the issue of "meth-born babies" in Pennington County. It began to do so in part because no other agency at the state or local level seemed to be tracking it.

"At that time, nobody had the information," said Brendyn Medina, a spokesman for the RCPD.

The RCPD was looking for ways to improve its response to a growing problem in the city. Drug use by pregnant women and new mothers creates a host of potential health risks, particular to each drug. It's not a problem unique to South Dakota, of course. Each state deals with similar issues, and each has a slightly differing approach in its response to those risks.

South Dakota's laws lean toward criminal charges.

Monument Health calls the RCPD each time the health system collects a positive screen for drugs. The police, Assistant Chief Scott Sitts said, always seek an additional test for use in potential criminal charges, through a warrant or consent of the mother.

If that second test comes back positive, Sitts said, the results are always sent to the Pennington County State's Attorney's Office, where prosecutors make the call on a drug ingestion charge.

"They don't arrest the mother there on scene, because one, we need a test that's more than a presumptive positive, and two, because of the medical situation of having just given birth, the jail would just send them right back to the hospital," Sitts said.

Advocates: Criminal system harms new mothers

Many national advocates for maternal health see that approach to drug use by new mothers as counterproductive, or even dangerous.

The ingestion law is only part of the legal picture for mothers who use drugs in South Dakota.

The use of controlled substances can count as criminal neglect under state law – which means health care professionals are required to report it – but that's not the case in every state. South Dakota is also one of a handful of states that allows for the civil commitment of pregnant women suspected of drug use.

"Given the composition of the laws in South Dakota, it is a uniquely punitive framework, not only for pregnant women but for people in general," said Dana Sussman, executive director of an organization called Pregnancy Justice.

Sussman's group advocates for a complete divorce of drug use in pregnancy and new motherhood from the criminal justice system. The group recommends that all states follow guidelines from by the National Harm Reduction Coalition in maternal drug use situations, which focus on non-judgmental intervention through techniques like motivational interviewing.

That strategy, used by social workers across the U.S. and in South Dakota, aims to illicit positive behavior change through open-ended questions, celebrations of good behavior and subtle suggestion.



The exterior of Monument Health in Rapid City, pictured on Dec. 16, 2022. (Seth Tupper/South Dakota Searchlight)

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The idea is to treat substance use disorder (SUD) as a disease and manage it, rather than a crime – if the mother actually has SUD and is not just a woman who uses drugs. Attaching criminal charges to drug use tends to keep women from being honest with their health care provider, Sussman said, as they may fear losing their children or being incarcerated.

“Criminalization has a chilling effect on health care uptake. Criminalizing people prevents people from getting the help they need,” Sussman said.

There’s also a concern for relapse with women recovering from SUD in the first few months after giving birth, during which postpartum depression is a risk for all women. One study published in the scientific journal “Drug and Alcohol Dependence” found that 80% of women who abstained from drugs or alcohol during pregnancy relapsed to at least one substance in less than a year.

The American College of Obstetrics and Gynecology (ACOG) issued an opinion more than a decade ago that called the criminalization of drug use in pregnancy and afterward “a disturbing trend.”

“Seeking obstetric–gynecologic care should not expose a woman to criminal or civil penalties, such as incarceration, involuntary commitment, loss of custody of her children, or loss of housing,” the opinion says.

‘The child’s safety is the number one concern’

Stephany Chalberg, a spokesperson for Monument Health in Rapid City, declined to offer any information on Steele’s situation.

As to general practices for instances of meth-born babies, Chalberg said in a written statement that the health system follows ACOG guidelines to determine which patients qualify for drug testing.

“Pregnant women should seek medical attention for their safety and for the safety of their unborn child, without fear of retribution,” the statement says. “Monument Health’s physicians do order medical tests for the purpose of providing care to patients. Our physicians and caregivers adhere to internal and state-wide policies that address suspected abuse or neglect of minors that require mandatory reporting to law enforcement.”

The statement did not address a question from South Dakota Searchlight on whether the health system seeks consent from a mother before conducting a drug screening, which is also part of ACOG guidelines.

Monument declined to say how many tests had been conducted in the past year, but did say that approximately 2,400 babies were born there last year.

The RCPD’s statistics indicate that 1% of those children tested positive for methamphetamine last year, and that the figure has grown.

As with most statistics tied to methamphetamine use, Sitts said “it’s trending in the wrong direction.”

So far in 2022, Sitts’ officers have logged 26 meth-born babies – more than two each month, and two more than the 2021 total.

The police work with the Department of Social Services each time they get a call, Sitts said, in some cases taking action on behalf of children long before criminal charges emerge.

The immediate goal, he said, is to ensure the babies have a safe and healthy home to return to.

“The child’s safety is the number one concern,” Sitts said.

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

Meth-Born Babies in Rapid City

2016 (August-December): 6

2017: 15

2018: 15

2019: 14

2020: 29

2021: 24

2022 (year to date): 26

Landowners feel sidelined as Custer plans wastewater discharge into French Creek

Critics say the plan could pollute the water and is being done without sufficient research or input

BY: JOSHUA HAIAR - DECEMBER 16, 2022 1:32 PM

Critics of a city's decision to release treated wastewater into a scenic and historic Black Hills creek say it could pollute the water and is being done without sufficient input from affected residents.

The city of Custer is upgrading its wastewater treatment system because of projected population growth and maintenance problems with the current system.

The upgrade includes building a new pipe to discharge the city's treated wastewater into French Creek, downstream of Stockade Lake, and decommissioning the current discharge pipe into Flynn Creek.

The city hired a consultant, DGR Engineering, to manage the project.

A project environmental assessment says replacing the current pipe in Flynn Creek would be too expensive because of its length and elevation. Replacing the entire pipe would cost an estimated \$7.3 million. An alternative option to replace only the section of pipe in need of repair would cost \$3.76 million.

The assessment dismissed the possibility of placing the discharge pipe in Beaver Creek, due to environmental concerns.

"Local landowners and downstream tourist attractions would experience a stream of wastewater that may cause unwanted socioeconomic impacts," the assessment says. "Therefore, this alternative was not chosen."

The estimated cost of the two Beaver Creek alternatives is \$3.25 million and \$5.55 million.

The environmental assessment does not mention "unwanted socioeconomic impacts" in regard to the proposed French Creek location.

"The new force main route would result in lower elevation changes and a shorter distance, decreasing pumping costs," says the assessment of the French Creek option.

French Creek plan

The French Creek pipe is the least expensive alternative, at an estimated \$2.98 million. The pumping cost savings come to a minimum of \$15,000 per year, according to Trent Bruce, the project manager with DGR Engineering.

But the city needed a state permit for discharging into French Creek, according to the city's Wastewater Facility Plan. The plan says state officials spoke with the city's consultant in 2019.

"The population in the area is very protective of their cold-water fisheries, so a socioeconomic analysis is recommended to be presented to the public if a discharge to French Creek is desired by the city of Custer," the plan says.

The state issued a permit to the city on Jan. 13, 2021, that allows Custer's treated wastewater to be



Kids float down French Creek; a sign stands near the city of Custer's treated wastewater discharge point along Flynn Creek. (Courtesy photos)

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discharged into French Creek. That permit allows for an ammonia limit multiple times what currently exists in French Creek.

Scott Kenner, professor emeritus of civil and environmental engineering at South Dakota Mines in Rapid City, said the data the state used to issue that permit is bad.

Custer's planned discharge point is about 20 miles upstream from the tool the state used to measure the amount of water flowing in French Creek. The state used that data to see if the city's discharge would be sufficiently diluted.

Kenner said the discharge will not be diluted enough because the rate of the creek's flow at the actual discharge point is less than the rate 20 miles downstream where the state measured it.

"If they used the actual flow from where they plan to discharge, I think the discharge will go beyond the legal limits," Kenner said.

While some Custer State Park facilities already discharge treated wastewater into French Creek, Kenner said the amount is much less than the amount Custer would discharge into the creek.

Project manager Trent Bruce said that, based on conversations with the state, "even if there was zero flow in the creek, the environmental impacts would be minimal. The design of this treatment system ensures the water meets the requirements for zero flow."

Some locals feel sidelined

An analysis by the city's consultant said local landowner input would be crucial.

"It is important to evaluate the social and economic impacts these limits for French Creek would have on the community and surrounding area," the analysis says.

However, some affected landowners said around 100 people who live or own land immediately downstream of the French Creek discharge location were not directly contacted.

They say their concerns are the same as the reasons the Beaver Creek location was not chosen: "landowners and downstream tourist attractions would experience a stream of wastewater that may cause unwanted socioeconomic impacts."

Maureen Kougl is one of the landowners along French Creek.

"How did the 'public' make this determination?" Kougl said. "Shouldn't the local landowners living along the creek be part of this determination?"

The state published a notice of the project in the Custer County Chronicle weekly newspaper, and on a website for public notices. The Chronicle also published news stories about the project.

Critics say that's inadequate.

Todd Konechne, a local landowner with a background in industrial engineering projects, said DGR Engineering did not communicate enough.

"No fact sheets, letters, or calls to affected stakeholders occurred," Konechne said. "This occurred during the height of COVID. Over 90 people in the Lower French Creek area were not aware of this plan and strongly oppose it."

Trent Bruce with DGR Engineering said the Custer County Chronicle articles were shared on social media by the paper.

"We went beyond what is required of us by the state," Bruce said. "And we did meet with some locals who expressed concerns."

Bruce could not recall if those locals were landowners who live immediately downstream of the planned discharge location.

Tourism and recreation

French Creek starts 5 miles northwest of Custer and flows for 62 miles in an eastward direction through Custer State Park before dumping into the Cheyenne River, west of Badlands National Park.

The French Creek Natural Area, a hiking, angling and horseback riding area, and the French Creek Camping Area are both downstream of the proposed discharge location.

Gold was discovered in French Creek during an expedition led by George Armstrong Custer in 1874. The discovery triggered the Black Hills gold rush.

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French Creek attracts many anglers and hikers from all over the country, according to Mike Kintigh, a French Creek landowner and a seasonal park ranger with the state Department of Game, Fish and Parks.

Kintigh said he does not speak for GF&P.

"I see people swimming in or wading in French Creek all the time," Kintigh said. "Flynn Creek and Beaver Creek have no tourism, zero, compared to French Creek."

Hans Stephenson, owner of Dakota Angler & Outfitter in Rapid City, said in an email that French Creek is a good trout fishing spot.

"I have had several successful outings to French Creek below Stockade in the past three to four years," Stephenson said. "I was surprised at the quality and size of the brown trout I caught."

Ecological concerns

The city of Custer and its consultant say the treated wastewater will not negatively impact wildlife or water quality.

Project documents say, "This project will benefit the fish and wildlife surrounding the community, especially during dry years. During dry years, the effluent into French Creek may provide an additional water source for wildlife."

But some are skeptical of that claim.

Scott Kenner, South Dakota Mines professor emeritus of civil and environmental engineering, is concerned for the health of French Creek.

Kenner said the discharged, treated wastewater will increase ammonia levels in the creek and pollute small pools of fresh water along the creek. He said that could result in dense plant growth and the death of aquatic life due to reduced oxygen levels.

"Another treated sewage pollutant that could hurt the health of the stream is phosphorus," Kenner said. "And the state doesn't even have a limit on that."

University of South Dakota freshwater biologist Jeff Wesner said in an email, "Treated wastewater also has lots of other contaminants in it, like antibiotics, amphetamines, hormones, and other waste products of personal use. All of those things have been shown to harm aquatic life to varying degrees."

The Department of Agriculture and Natural Resources did not detect ammonia in any of its seven French Creek 2022 water samples. Ammonia was detected in three of its seven samples at Flynn Creek, where Custer currently discharges its treated wastewater.

The 2022 state water quality report indicates Flynn Creek's water quality is within the standards set by the state. Those standards are for "non-immersive" uses, like "limited contact recreation."

Those are the same standards set for French Creek, despite neighboring landowner reports that it is used for immersive recreation, like swimming.

DGR Engineering project manager Trent Bruce said the consultant's role in the environmental analysis is minimal. He said the state determines what needs to be done on the environmental side of things, and it did not require more than what was submitted.

"The Department of Agriculture and Natural Resources reviews all the project info provided by the city to determine the level of environmental clearances and requirements necessary to approve the project," Bruce said.

Bruce said the Department of Agriculture and Natural Resources and the Department of Game, Fish and Parks were highly involved in the process. He said neither department had environmental concerns about the discharge.

Neither department replied to questions or interview requests.

Bruce said critics should not worry. He said the discharged water from the upgraded system will be cleaner than what is going into Flynn Creek today.

"The wastewater treatment plant, as designed, will allow for the city of Custer to adapt to stricter effluent limits in the future," Bruce said.

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

Congress clears one-week bill to fund the government, but many hurdles remain

BY: JENNIFER SHUTT - DECEMBER 16, 2022 4:10 PM

WASHINGTON — The U.S. Senate sent President Joe Biden a one-week government funding bill late Thursday, giving negotiators a few more days to wrap up talks on what is expected to be a \$1.7 trillion package to keep the federal government up and running through September.

The short-term bill is the second time Congress has leaned on what's known as a continuing resolution this fiscal year to keep the lights on as lawmakers try to reach agreement on full-year appropriations bills. The big package likely also is the last opportunity for other priorities like legislation protecting the presidential electoral count process.

"Negotiations keep trending in the right direction, but we still have a lot of work left to do and not enough time to do it, unless we extend government funding for another week," Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer said.

Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell noted that getting a government funding package done is essential to backing up the annual defense policy bill, which also was passed by the Senate on Thursday night, with "actual dollars and cents" for the Pentagon. The policy bill, known as the National Defense Authorization Act or NDAA, does not appropriate funds.

The Kentucky Republican said he hoped negotiators on the spending package can wrap up talks with bill text "that can pass the Senate before our hard deadline next Thursday."

"Otherwise, I'll support pivoting next week to a short-term resolution into the next year," McConnell said. Biden signed the bill into law on Friday.

Nine House Republicans vote yes

The U.S. House voted 224-201 on Wednesday night to send the short-term spending bill to the Senate, though just nine Republicans voted for the measure amid opposition from their party leaders to Congress fully funding the government during the lame-duck session.

Pennsylvania Rep. Brian K. Fitzpatrick, Ohio Rep. Anthony Gonzalez, Michigan Rep. Fred Upton and Arkansas Rep. Steve Womack were among the House GOP members to vote for funding the government through Dec. 23.

The U.S. Senate cleared the bill for Biden following a 71-19 vote Thursday, with the backing of 22 GOP senators. Those voting yes included John Boozman and Tom Cotton of Arkansas, Bill Cassidy and John Kennedy of Louisiana, Susan Collins of Maine, Chuck Grassley of Iowa, McConnell, Lisa Murkowski and Dan Sullivan of Alaska, Robert Portman of Ohio, Marco Rubio of Florida, John Thune of South Dakota and Todd Young of Indiana.

The Senate first rejected two GOP amendment attempts.

Senators voted 35-56 to reject an amendment from Utah Sen. Mike Lee that would have funded the government on a stopgap basis through March 10, pushing off decisions on the larger spending package until Republicans control the House.

Lee said ahead of the vote that moving the deadline would avoid Congress passing an omnibus package just before the holidays, giving lawmakers more flexibility on when they vote on the omnibus.

"The American people deserve nothing less than to allow us to make decisions consciously, knowingly, under the light of day with clarity of mind," Lee said.

The Senate voted 45-47 to reject an amendment from Florida Sen. Rick Scott that would have eliminated the money Democrats approved earlier this year to bolster staffing at the Internal Revenue Service.

Oregon Democratic Sen. Ron Wyden spoke against the proposal, saying the funding boost is essential for the IRS "to go after wealthy tax cheats, who are refusing to pay taxes they already owe."

Work left undone

The short-term spending bill is needed since Congress didn't complete work on the 12 annual bills that

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fully fund the government by the start of the current fiscal year on Oct. 1.

Lawmakers used a stopgap spending bill, which keeps government spending flat, to give themselves until Dec. 16 to reach a bipartisan agreement on full year appropriations bills.

Key negotiators, including Senate Republicans, reached a framework agreement this week, clearing the way for lawmakers to draft the 12-bill omnibus spending package.

That task, which can take weeks, needs to be done in just days this time around. Otherwise, Congress will have to pass a third stopgap spending measure or face a partial government shutdown just before the holidays.

Speaker Nancy Pelosi, a California Democrat, said Thursday she is "optimistic" that Congress will be able to pass the spending package next week, before the new Dec. 23 deadline. But she also noted, "there's a better way to" handle the annual spending process.

"We would have liked to have done it much sooner," Pelosi said, noting the U.S. Senate hadn't debated any of its appropriations bills in committee or on the floor.

"But the fact is we're on a good path to get something done," she said. "It's not the bill any one of us would have written, but it's the bill we can agree to. And we will have it done in a timely fashion."

House GOP opposition

During House floor debate on the one-week funding bill Wednesday, Appropriations Chair Rosa DeLauro pushed back against House Republican opposition to the stopgap spending bill and efforts to wrap up the dozen funding bills this Congress.

The Connecticut Democrat said that House Republicans "were invited to the table many, many times to join the negotiations; they decided not to do that."

"There was an offer made to my Republican colleagues on where we should go with an omnibus in June; another was in October," DeLauro said. "We were told at the time that they couldn't move to do anything until after the elections. We were then told that they had to then wait for their leadership elections to occur before they could actually engage. Then we were told we had to wait until after a Georgia election in order to engage."

DeLauro added, "Enough is enough."



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.

Pipeline trespassing case against SD man goes to court in Iowa

BY: JARED STRONG - DECEMBER 16, 2022 9:39 AM



District Associate Judge Shawna Ditsworth is considering a request to dismiss a trespassing charge against a carbon pipeline surveyor.

(Photo by Seth Boyes/Dickinson County News)

A company that wants to build a sprawling carbon dioxide pipeline in northwest Iowa should have obtained a court order before attempting to survey private land from which it had been previously barred, a Dickinson County prosecutor argued Thursday.

At issue is a trespassing charge against Stephen James Larsen, 28, of Arlington, South Dakota, who was part of a land survey crew from Summit Carbon Solutions that attempted to evaluate farmland east of Spirit Lake in August.

Summit intends to build about 680 miles of pipe in the northwestern half of the state to transport carbon dioxide from ethanol

plants to North Dakota for underground sequestration. The company is surveying land to help determine the pipeline's path and depth.

State law allows pipeline companies to gain access to private land after they have held informational meetings in affected counties and have given 10 days' notice through certified mail to landowners and tenants.

"The entry for land surveys ... shall not be deemed a trespass and may be aided by (court) injunction," the law says.

Alan Ostergren, a Des Moines attorney who is defending Larsen, said it's unnecessary to get a court order to be protected against a criminal trespassing charge by the survey law.

"If you if you think of this as a sword and a shield in the same sentence, the shield is: The entry is not deemed a trespass," Ostergren said Thursday during a district court hearing. "The sword is: The pipeline company gets the ability to go to court and get legal process to aid its entry."

Ostergren is asking a judge to dismiss the trespassing charge against Larsen outright. The case had been set for trial, but the trial was delayed and has not been rescheduled.

Assistant County Attorney Steven Goodlow, who is prosecuting the case, argued Thursday against dismissal because the landowners and tenant refused to accept certified letters that were meant to give notice of the land survey.

Court records show Summit sent five letters in March and July. The company attempted to survey the land in April and August. In April, tenant Jeff Jones told a survey crew to leave the property and never return.

Goodlow argued the warning — in combination with the refusal to accept survey notices — meant Sum-

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mit needed to get a court injunction to survey the land without risking a trespassing charge.

"My concern for property owners — landowners — is do they have to repeatedly, basically stand guard at the gate to continue to turn away the survey crews when they told them not to come back?" Goodlow said Thursday in court, according to a recording of the hearing provided by the Dickinson County News. He continued later: "What prevents them from coming back over and over and over again, and without any recourse? They're trying to protect the property."

District Associate Judge Shawna Ditsworth did not decide Thursday whether to dismiss the charge. She gave a deadline of next week for the defense to submit additional information and the prosecution a deadline of Jan. 12. It's unclear when Ditsworth might rule on the dismissal request.

Larsen was cited Aug. 24 for trespassing when he and four others in his crew went to Jones' farmland and were first approached by Jones' father. The other surveyors left and were not charged with a crime. Jones said Larsen declined to provide their identities.

Summit sued three sets of landowners in September to get injunctions to perform the land surveys. Those cases are pending.

Landowners sued by Summit and by another pipeline company, Navigator CO2 Ventures, argue that the forced surveys are unconstitutional infringements of their property rights. The first trial to test that argument is currently set for February.



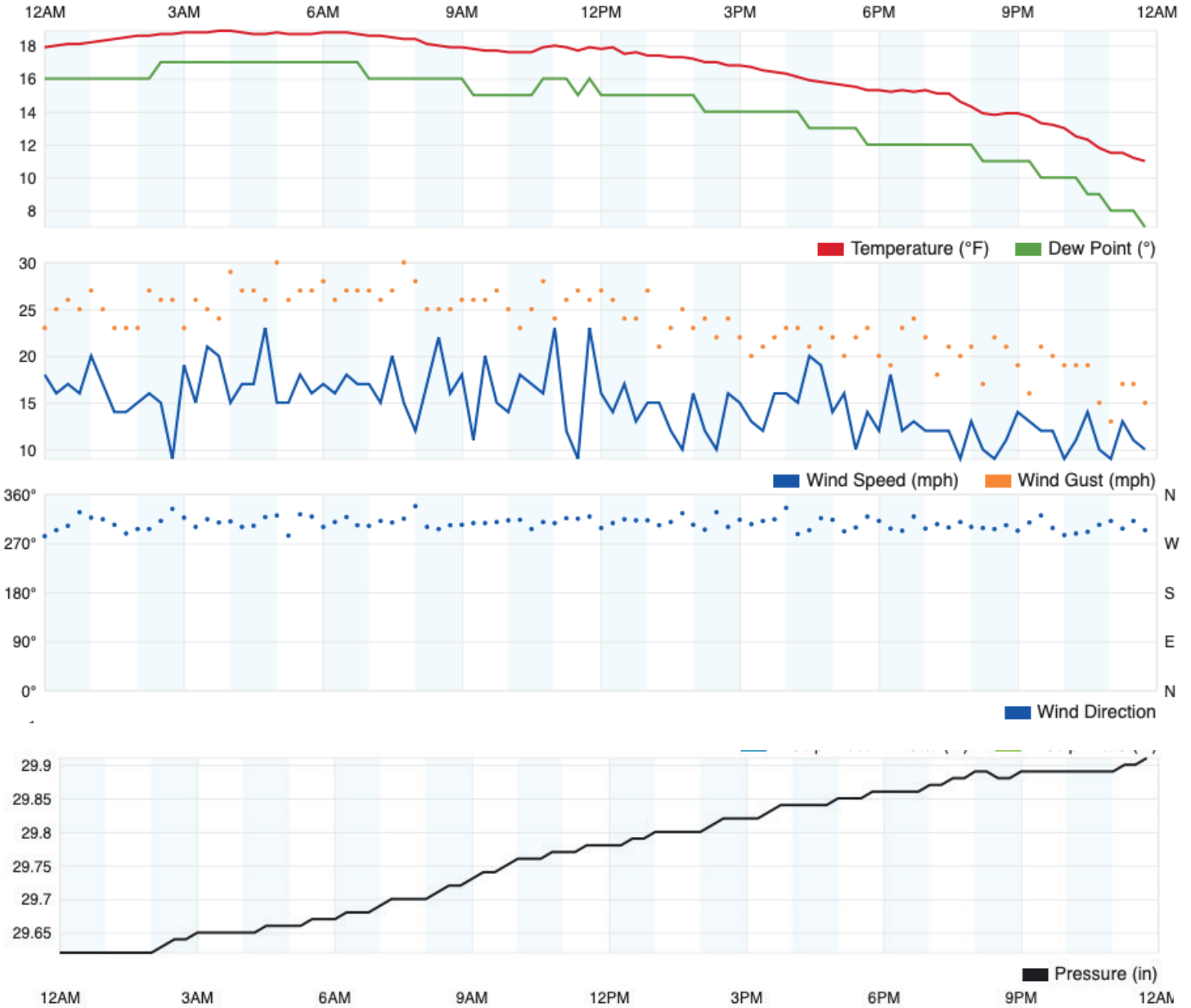
JARED STRONG

Jared Strong is the senior reporter for the Iowa Capital Dispatch. He has written about Iowans and the important issues that affect them for more than 15 years, previously for the Carroll Times Herald and the Des Moines Register. His investigative work exposing police misconduct has notched several state and national awards. He is a longtime trustee of the Iowa Freedom of Information Council, which fights for open records and open government. He is a lifelong Iowan and has lived mostly in rural western parts of the state.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Today	Tonight	Sunday	Sunday Night	Monday	Monday Night
					
Cold	Mostly Cloudy then Slight Chance Snow	Slight Chance Snow then Mostly Cloudy	Mostly Cloudy	Slight Chance Snow	Partly Cloudy
High: 9 °F	Low: -7 °F	High: 5 °F	Low: -8 °F	High: 4 °F	Low: -16 °F

Cold Is Coming...


 NWS Aberdeen, SD

SAT



9 to 15°

SUN



5 to 10°

MON



2 to 7°

TUE



-5 to 1°

WED



-5 to 5°



Today is going to be the warmest day for at least the next week as northerly winds bring some very cold air into the area. Temperatures will steadily decrease over the weekend and dip below zero in many areas on Tuesday. Some snow flurries are possible through Monday and again in the second half of the week. Wind chills will be below -30°F almost continually through at least next Saturday.

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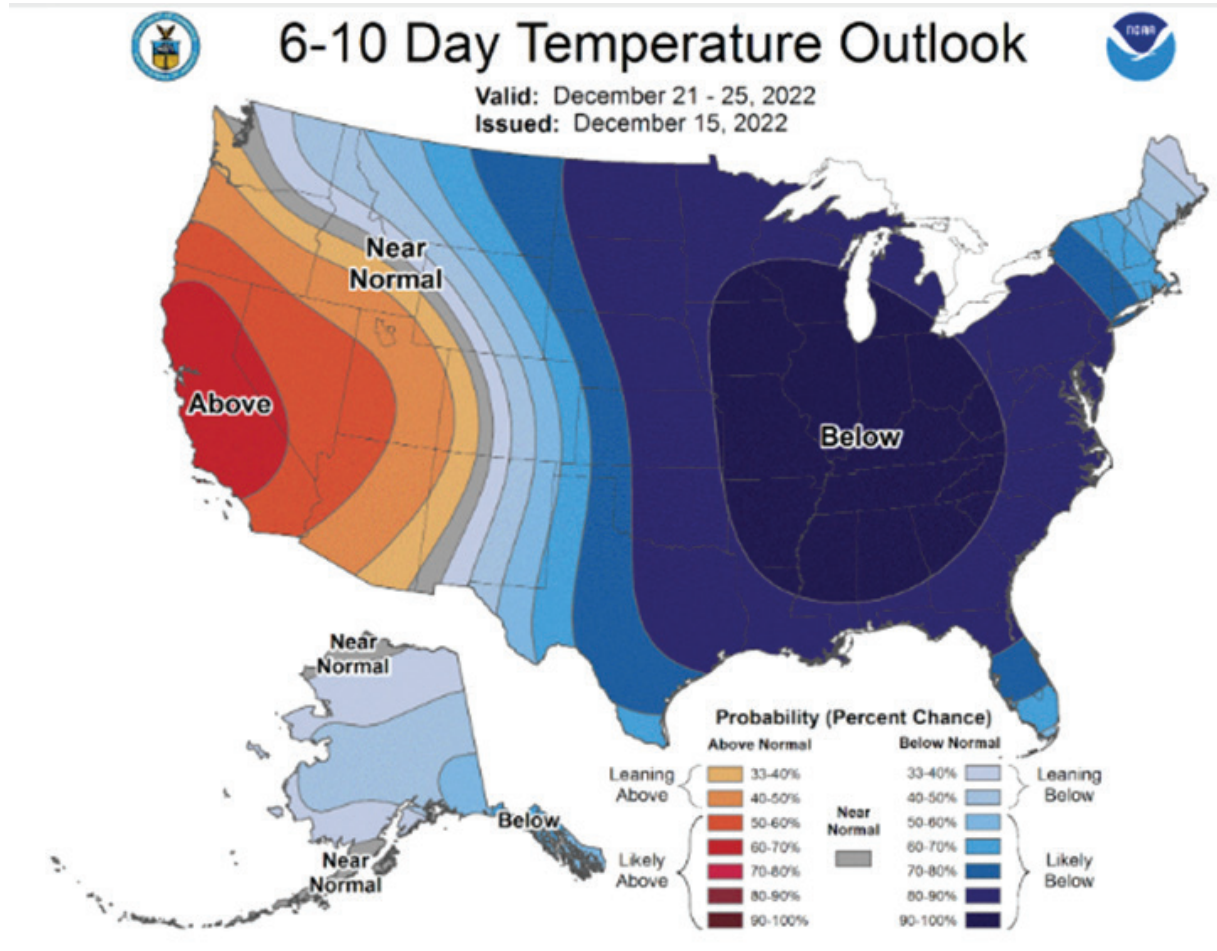


Very Cold Next Week

December 16, 2022
3:29 PM

Key Points

- An arctic air mass moves in next week and remains in place over the Northern Plains through the end of the week.
- 20 to 30 degrees below climatological average.
- Dangerously cold wind chills expected.
 - ◆ Especially during the overnight and early morning hours.



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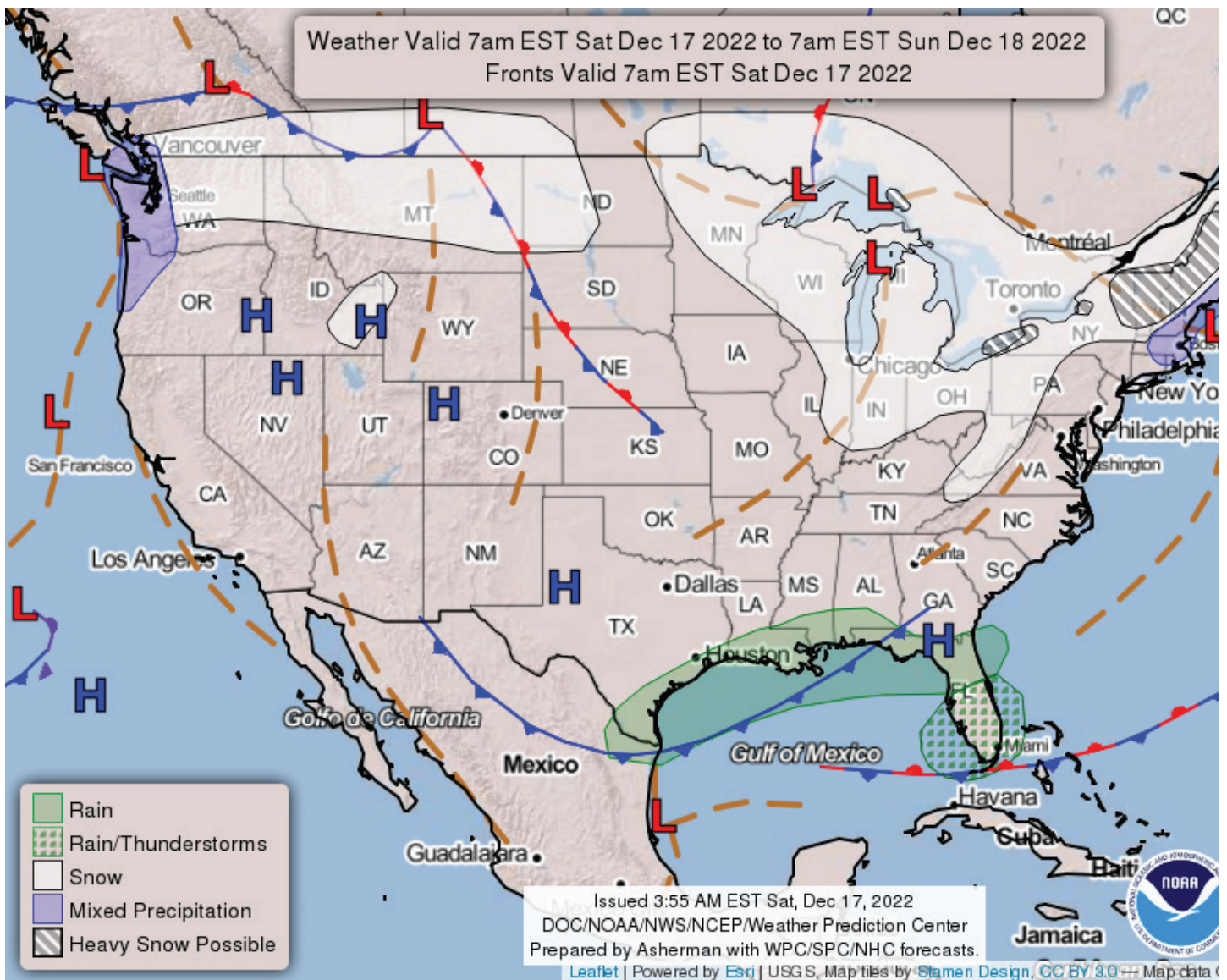
Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 18.9 °F at 4:00 AM
Low Temp: 11.0 °F at 11:45 PM
Wind: 30 mph at 7:45 AM
Precip: : Total Snow: 14" Total Moisture: 1.85"

Day length: 8 hours, 46 minutes

Today's Info

Record High: 53 in 1939
Record Low: -32 in 2016
Average High: 28°F
Average Low: 7°F
Average Precip in Dec.: 0.32
Precip to date in Dec.: 1.85
Average Precip to date: 21.53
Precip Year to Date: 19.35
Sunset Tonight: 4:52:02 PM
Sunrise Tomorrow: 8:05:49 AM



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Today in Weather History

December 17, 1993: A prolonged period of snow occurred from December 15th through the 19th over the western half of South Dakota. Several accidents leading to injuries occurred due to ice on the 15th, and many vehicles slid into ditches. Snowfall amounts were 4 to 10 inches. McIntosh received three inches of snow; Timber Lake, Murdo, and Selby received five inches of snow; and six inches accumulated at McLaughlin. Eagle Butte recorded seven inches of new snow.

December 17, 1903: Wilbur and Orville Wright made four brief flights at Kitty Hawk, North Carolina with their first powered aircraft on this day. After having success with their 5-foot biplane kite, the brothers realized the weather conditions in Dayton were not ideal for their flying experiments. They wrote the Weather Bureau in Washington, D.C. requesting a list of suitable places on the east coast where winds were constant. Below is the response the Wright Brothers received from Joseph Doshier, who staffed the Weather Bureau office, wrote in August of 1900 regarding the suitability of Kitty Hawk. 2000 - An F4 tornado hits communities near Tuscaloosa, AL, killing 11 people and injuring 125 others. It was the strongest December tornado in Alabama since 1950.

"Mr. Wilbur Wright

Dayton Ohio

Dear Sir,

In reply to yours of the 3rd, I will say the beach here is about one mile wide clear of trees or high hills, and islands for nearly sixty miles south. Conditions: the wind blows mostly from the North and Northeast September and October which is nearly down this piece of land. Giving you many miles of a steady wind with a free sweep. I am sorry to say that you could not rent a house here. So you will have to bring tents. You could obtain frame.

The only way to reach Kitty Hawk is from Manteo Roanoke Island N.C. in a small sail boat. From your letter I believe you would find it here like you wish. Will be pleased at any time to give you any information. Yours very respectfully

JJ. Doshier"

On December 17, with the winds were averaging more than 20 mph, Orville took a flight that lasted 12 seconds for a total distance of 120 feet.

December 17, 1924: From the Monthly Weather Review, "a severe glaze storm occurred in west-central Illinois on December 17 and 18, the area of great destruction embracing a territory about 75 miles in width and 170 miles in length. In the affected area, trees were badly damaged, wires broken, and thousands of electric poles went down. Electric services were paralyzed, and it required weeks to restore operation and months to permanently rebuild the lines.

The street railway company and the Illinois Traction System resumed complete operation 17 days after the storm. Electric light service was completely restored January 10. The ice had practically disappeared from the trees and wires by January 4, but on January 20, there was still considerable ice on the ground.

The Western Union Telegraph Co. lost 8,000 poles and the Illinois Bell Telephone Co. about 23,000. The total damage to wire service in Illinois probably equaled or exceeded \$5,000,000." If the loss of business, the damage to trees and possible injury to winter grains, the storm may be considered one of the most disastrous of its kind in the history of Illinois."

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Daily Devotionals

Seeds of Hope

NEVER QUIT!

"Don't let this be you!" said a coach to his football team after a difficult loss. He was pointing to a picture of a player sitting in front of his locker. His helmet was between his feet. His elbows were on his knees and his head was between his hands with a look of sadness in his eyes. Under his helmet were the words, "I quit!"

As we look into the manger this Christmas, we can rejoice together and say, "Thank You, God, that You didn't quit – that You never gave up!"

Whenever we think of the eternal love that God has for us, we often forget about the disappointments He must have endured. Imagine, if you can, what must have entered into His mind and heart when Adam and Eve rejected His plan and the path before them. Consider, if you will, the many agreements He made with people who promised to obey Him and then abandoned their word when they thought He was out of sight. We will never know the grief He suffered because of the hope He had that people would love Him and be obedient to Him.

But, He never gave up. He never quit. Finally, John wrote, "We have seen and testify that the Father has sent the Son to be the Savior of the world!"

All of us have suffered many losses in life. None, however, can ever be compared to God's losses. But He refused to give up even though it cost the life of His one and only Son.

Prayer: We thank You, Father, for Your unfailing love and determination to rescue us. We are overwhelmed when we think that You would sacrifice Your Son for us. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: 1 John 4:14 And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent the Son as Savior of the world.



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

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2022-23 Community Events

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

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News from the  Associated Press

Friday's Scores

The Associated Press

BOYS PREP BASKETBALL=

Morrill, Neb. 48, Edgemont 14

Sioux Falls Christian 69, Elk Point-Jefferson 51

Lakota Nation Invitational=

He Sapa Bracket=

Crazy Horse 60, Wakpala 42

Dupree 66, Oelrichs 20

Tiospaye Topa 73, Takini 44

Matosica Bracket=

Little Wound 67, Cheyenne-Eagle Butte 37

Marty Indian 69, St. Francis Indian 46

Tiospa Zina Tribal 69, Crow Creek 56

Wall 86, McLaughlin 79, 3OT

Oceti Sakowin Bracket=

Custer 49, Todd County 48

Red Cloud 66, Pine Ridge 55

White River 52, Lakota Tech 43

POSTPONEMENTS AND CANCELLATIONS=

Bennett County vs. Gordon/Rushville, Neb., ppd.

Canton vs. Dakota Valley, ppd.

Chester vs. Sioux Falls Lutheran, ppd.

Deubrook vs. Oldham-Ramona/Rutland, ppd.

Faulkton vs. Florence/Henry, ppd.

Great Plains Lutheran vs. Tri-State, N.D., ppd.

Harrisburg vs. Sioux Falls Washington, ppd.

Hills-Beaver Creek, Minn. vs. Alcester-Hudson, ppd.

Irene-Wakonda vs. Viborg-Hurley, ppd.

Iroquois/ Lake Preston Co-op vs. Elkton-Lake Benton, ppd.

James Valley Christian vs. Sunshine Bible Academy, ppd.

Lemmon vs. Grant County/Mott-Regent, N.D., ppd. to Dec 27th.

Newcastle, Wyo. vs. Belle Fourche, ppd.

Parkston vs. Chamberlain, ppd.

Potter County vs. Northwestern, ppd.

Rapid City Central vs. Huron, ppd.

Rapid City Stevens vs. Mitchell, ppd.

Scotland vs. Bon Homme, ppd.

Sioux Falls Jefferson vs. Sioux Falls O'Gorman, ppd.

Spearfish vs. Aberdeen Central, ppd.

Sturgis Brown vs. Pierre, ppd.

Sundance, Wyo. vs. Lead-Deadwood, ppd.

Tea Area vs. Dell Rapids, ppd.

Waubay/Summit vs. Waverly-South Shore, ppd.

Webster vs. Britton-Hecla, ppd.

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GIRLS PREP BASKETBALL=

Edgemont 50, Morrill, Neb. 28
Sioux Falls Christian 55, Elk Point-Jefferson 42
Lakota Nation Invitational=
He Sapa Bracket=
Omaha Nation, Neb. 59, Oelrichs 23
Santee, Neb. 68, Crazy Horse 17
Tiospa Zina Tribal 56, Tiospaye Topa 35
Wakpala 59, Takini 26
Makosica Bracket=
Crow Creek 64, St. Francis Indian 42
McLaughlin 54, Cheyenne-Eagle Butte 37
Todd County 61, Pine Ridge 36
Oceti Sakowin Bracket=
Dupree 48, Little Wound 38
Lakota Tech 53, White River 27
Red Cloud 51, Rapid City Christian 49
Lakota Nations Invitational=
Makosica Bracket=
Lower Brule 55, Marty Indian 37
Oceti Sakowin Bracket=
Custer 57, Wall 45

POSTPONEMENTS AND CANCELLATIONS=

Aberdeen Central vs. Spearfish, ppd.
Bennett County vs. Gordon/Rushville, Neb., ppd.
Brandon Valley vs. Sioux Falls Roosevelt, ppd.
Gregory vs. Platte-Geddes, ppd.
Hanson vs. Menno, ppd.
Hills-Beaver Creek, Minn. vs. Alcester-Hudson, ppd.
Howard vs. McCook Central/Montrose, ppd.
Huron vs. Rapid City Central, ppd.
Irene-Wakonda vs. Viborg-Hurley, ppd.
Kadoka Area vs. Newell, ppd.
Langford vs. Ipswich, ppd.
Lead-Deadwood vs. Newcastle, Wyo., ppd.
Lead-Deadwood vs. Sundance, Wyo., ppd.
Lemmon vs. Grant County/Mott-Regent, N.D., ppd. to Dec 27th.
Mitchell vs. Rapid City Stevens, ppd.
Newcastle, Wyo. vs. Belle Fourche, ppd.
Parkston vs. Chamberlain, ppd.
Pierre vs. Sturgis Brown, ppd.
Sioux Falls Jefferson vs. Sioux Falls O'Gorman, ppd.
Sioux Falls Washington vs. Harrisburg, ppd.
Sunshine Bible Academy vs. James Valley Christian, ppd.
Tea Area vs. Dell Rapids, ppd.
Wilmot vs. Wyndmere/Lidgerwood/Hankinson Co-op, N.D., ppd.

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

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SD Lottery

By The Associated Press undefined

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

Mega Millions

08-35-40-53-56, Mega Ball: 11, Megaplier: 3

(eight, thirty-five, forty, fifty-three, fifty-six; Mega Ball: eleven; Megaplier: three)

Estimated jackpot: \$465,000,000

Powerball

Estimated jackpot: 149,000,000

Lower Brule Tribe, Lyman County agree on electing commission

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — A South Dakota county and the Lower Brule Sioux Tribe have finalized an agreement that will give a tribal member a seat on the Lyman County Board of Commissioners to settle a lawsuit over changing the county's election system that had kept tribal members from winning a seat on the board.

The tribe and county finalized an agreement Thursday for one of the commissioners, Brian Kraus, to resign from the five-member board so that the board could appoint a member of the Lower Brule Sioux Tribe.

It will mark the first time a member of the tribe will hold a seat on the board that oversees the county, the Native American Rights Fund said in a statement. The county contains part of the Lower Brule reservation and has a Native American population of 38%, but previously voted at-large for commissioners.

Lyman County and the tribe had agreed that the county must establish two commissioner positions chosen by Native American voters, but the tribe sued after that system would not be implemented until 2024.

"This agreement ensures that reservation voters may elect representatives to advocate for people that live on the reservation and be part of the team working for solutions," Lower Brule Sioux Tribe member Stephanie Bolman-Altamirano, who sued the county, said in a statement.

The county also agreed to pay \$150,000 in expenses and legal fees.

2022's Most Wanted Christmas Gift Is the PlayStation 5

Jake Valentine | Wealth of Geeks undefined

Video game consoles take home three of the five 2022 most-wanted Christmas gifts by state. The Xbox Series X|S and Nintendo Switch are all looking up at Sony's PlayStation 5. It's official: the PS5 is the hottest Christmas gift of the year.

Rakuten researchers analyze Google trends and calculate the most wanted items in each state during the holiday shopping season. Gaming and tech are a big focus. Except for one slot, all the top ten most-wanted Christmas gifts are related to tech hardware or video games.

Presenting Your Most Wanted Christmas Gift of 2022

Only two items were the most popular in double-digit states. The PlayStation 5 tops Christmas lists in 13 states, including Texas, Florida, and Louisiana. It has been a great year for PS5 fans. Horizon Forbidden West is an excellent sequel to 2017's Horizon Zero Dawn on the PlayStation 4. God of War Ragnarök is one of the best games of the year.

The Nintendo Switch is in demand in ten states, including Georgia, Iowa, and Oregon. It should come as no surprise that the Switch is one of 2022's most wanted Christmas gifts. Like the PS5, it's been an excellent year for the Nintendo Switch. Kirby and the Forgotten Land is a fantastic platformer. Pokémon games were released.

Nintendo aims to end the year as strong as it began in 2022. Lil Gator Game was recently released, and Sports Story is due this month. The future is bright for indies on Nintendo Switch.

Next on our list are two Apple products. The iPad continues to do well during the holiday shopping season. iPads are the most wanted gift in seven states, including Indiana, West Virginia, and Hawaii. I guess

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the idea of sitting on a lovely Hawaiian beach with your iPad continues to be appealing.

Apple Products Are Still Popular Holiday Gifts

Apple AirPods are behind the iPad, topping Christmas lists in six states. These states include North Carolina, Arizona, Wyoming, and Kansas. Those AirPods can come in handy on one of Arizona's hiking trails.

Finally, we reached the Xbox Series X on the list of the most wanted Christmas gifts for 2022. It's the hottest item of the year in five states: Massachusetts, Minnesota, South Dakota, Connecticut, and South Carolina.

Unlike the PS5 and Nintendo Switch, the Xbox has struggled a bit this console generation, particularly this year. Nevertheless, games like Tunic, Immortality, and Vampire Survivors are some of the best of the year. Still, they're sadly lacking the same mainstream appeal as games from Sony and Nintendo.

Help is on the way in 2023 for the Xbox Series X and Series S. Surprisingly, we didn't hear much about it during The Game Awards.

Christmas Lists Include Video Games, Tech, And A... Vacuum?

The only non-gaming or tech item to be one of 2022's most-wanted Christmas gifts is the Dyson Airwrap. Four states wish for this under their Christmas tree: Alabama, New York, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin. One thing that has helped the Dyson Airwrap was going viral on TikTok. The hashtag #DysonAirwrap has an impressive 3.2 billion views.

The MacBook is still a hotly desired Christmas gift, particularly in Maryland and Vermont. This accounts for both the MacBook Air and MacBook Pro. Meanwhile, the Apple Watch tops the Christmas list in Nebraska.

Finally, two more states to account for. Arkansas' most searched-for holiday gift is the Oculus headset. As for Maine, the Samsung Galaxy Watch is the most-wanted Christmas gift of the year.

This article was produced by Boss Level Gamer and syndicated by Wealth of Geeks.

Basin Electric to buy power from South Dakota wind farm

BISMARCK, N.D. (AP) — Bismarck-based Basic Electric Power Cooperative has reached a 25-year deal to buy power from a new South Dakota wind project being developed by a Houston company.

The 200 megawatts of power Basin will purchase from ENGIE North America's North Bend Wind project will help meet the monthly electricity needs of about 73,000 households, the Bismarck Tribune reported.

The project in central South Dakota is expected to begin operations late next year, with 71 wind turbines on about 47,000 acres outside Harold, South Dakota, near the co-op's service area. The power Basin will buy will help support its 131 member cooperatives across nine states.

ENGIE operates or is building almost 5 gigawatts of wind, solar and battery storage projects across the U.S. and Canada.

Dead boy pulled from rubble of latest Russian hit on Ukraine

By JAMEY KEATEN Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Emergency crews pulled the body of a toddler from the rubble in a pre-dawn search for survivors on Saturday of a Russian missile strike that tore through an apartment building in the central Ukrainian city of Kryvyi Rih.

The missile was one of what Ukrainian authorities said were 16 that eluded air defenses among the 76 missiles fired Friday in the latest Russian attack targeting Ukrainian energy infrastructure, part of Moscow's strategy to leave Ukrainian civilians and soldiers in the dark and cold this winter.

Gov. Valentyn Reznichenko of the Dnipropetrovsk region, where Kryvyi Rih is located, wrote on the Telegram social media app that "rescuers retrieved the body of a 1-1/2-year-old boy from under the rubble of a house destroyed by a Russian rocket." In all, four people were killed in the strike, and 13 injured — four of them children — authorities said.

Reznichenko said the pounding from Russian forces continued overnight, damaging power lines and houses in the cities and towns of Nikopol, Marhanets and Chervonohryhorivka, which are across the Dnieper River from the Russian-occupied Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant.

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By Saturday morning, Ukraine's military leadership said Russian forces had fired more than a score of other missiles since the barrage a day earlier. It did not say how many of those might have been stopped by the air defenses.

Friday's onslaught, which pummeled many parts of central, eastern and southern Ukraine, constituted one of the biggest assaults on the capital, Kyiv, since Russia began the war by attacking Ukraine on Feb. 24. Kyiv came under fire from about 40 missiles on Friday, authorities said, nearly all intercepted by air defenses.

Utility crews scrambled to patch up damaged power and water systems.

Kyiv Mayor Vitali Klitschko reported Saturday that two-thirds of homes had been reconnected to electricity and all had regained access to water. The subway system also resumed service, after serving as a shelter the day before.

The head of Ukraine's northeastern Kharkiv province Oleh Syniehubov said Saturday that electricity had been restored to the entire region, including Kharkiv city, the country's second-largest metropolis. The power had been knocked out on Friday in attacks involving 10 S-300 missiles.

In Kryvyi Rih, 596 miners were stuck underground because of missile strikes, but all were eventually rescued, Mayor Oleksandr Vilkul said late Friday.

Installation of a protective dome has begun at the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant, an official from the Moscow-installed authorities of Ukraine's southeastern Zaporizhzhia province said on Saturday. Vladimir Rogov said the dome would protect against fragments of shells and improvised explosive devices carried by drones. The Russian-held plant, Europe's biggest nuclear power station, has been repeatedly shelled. Its six reactors have been shut down for months.

The International Atomic Energy Agency recently announced plans to station nuclear safety and security experts at Ukraine's nuclear power plants to prevent any nuclear accident. The U.N. nuclear watchdog has already deployed a permanent mission to the Zaporizhzhia plant.

Qatar offers World Cup visitors an introduction to Islam

By LUIS ANDRES HENAO Associated Press

DOHA, Qatar (AP) — Fatima Garcia donned a headscarf and a black abaya — a long, loose-fitting robe — over her clothes as she walked into a mosque in Doha to learn about Islam.

In Qatar to enjoy the World Cup with friends, the Salvadoran visitor took a day off from soccer to go sightseeing at the Katara mosque, where preachers have been introducing Islam in multiple languages to curious fans from around the world.

"Qatar is my first exposure to Islam," Garcia said inside the house of prayer, also known as the blue mosque for its beautiful turquoise tiles. "Qatar has been a life-changing adventure because it gives you a perspective on different cultures."

Hundreds of thousands of visitors have come to Qatar during the World Cup. For many it's their first visit to a Muslim country. Those who don't venture far beyond the stadiums and Doha's glitzy hotels will have only limited exposure to the country's religion, such as hearing the call to prayer at a distance or witnessing Muslims prostrate at prayer rooms in stadiums, airports and hotels. But for those who are curious to find out more about Islam, Qatari authorities and religious officials are eager to help.

Local mosques are offering multilingual tours to visitors and the Islamic Cultural Center in Doha offers a virtual reality tour of the holy city of Mecca. Booths at tourist sites hand out free copies of the Quran and brochures about Islam are available in hotel lobbies. Billboards have been set up across Doha featuring U.S. Olympic fencer Ibtihaj Muhammed and other Muslim personalities as part of a campaign encouraging people to explore Islam.

"Why during the World Cup? Everyone is coming here from across the world to Qatar, a Muslim country, and it's an opportunity to educate people about the faith," said Abu Huraira, a volunteer for the campaign by the Explore Islam Foundation and the Islam & Muslims Initiative.

Qatari officials say they hope the tournament will help provide visitors with a better understanding of

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their culture and that of the larger region.

Qatar follows an ultraconservative form of Sunni Islam known as Wahhabism. But unlike neighboring Saudi Arabia, where adherence to Wahhabism led to strict segregation of unmarried men and women, banned women from driving and kept concerts, cinemas and even yoga off-limits for decades, Qatar has long sponsored the arts, allowed women to participate in high levels of governance and encouraged tourists to feel at ease.

The World Cup host, though, has faced intense criticism over human rights issues, including the treatment of migrant workers, and accusations of "sportswashing" or attempting to use the event's prestige to remake its image.

Qatari officials have argued that the nation's progress and achievements are being overlooked. The ruling emir, Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani, said some of the criticism against the first Arab and Muslim country to host the World Cup included "fabrications and double standards."

The Ministry of Endowments and Islamic Affairs and the host country's Supreme Committee for Delivery and Legacy did not respond to requests for comment.

Back inside the ornate Ottoman-style Katara mosque, Riffat Ishfaq, a guide from Pakistan, told Garcia that it was designed by Turkish interior designer Zeynep Fadillioglu, whose first name is the Turkish form of the name of the eldest daughter of the Prophet Muhammed. The tiles had been handmade, Ishfaq said; the columns were covered with leather and the domed roof contained gold. By the end of the tour, Garcia also learned why women dress modestly in Islam and the origins of the religion.

"We want to tell people about Islam. We feel pride in our identity," Ishfaq said, before telling Garcia to keep the abaya as a parting gift. "This helps to dispel misconceptions."

Nearby, Sergio Morales, a Guatemalan who had come for the whole tournament, finished listening to a tour and walked out of the mosque to a booth located at the entrance where he asked for a free copy of the Quran.

"Today I became interested because the guided tour was in Spanish and I could understand it all," he said. "There should be guides in Spanish in every mosque because there are so many Latin American people coming to these countries."

Booths with free Qurans and booklets introducing the religion in several languages are also available in the winding cobbled alleys of Souq Waqif, the capital's oldest bazaar where stores hawk spices and perfumes, scented oils and silk scarves.

Just steps from there, World Cup visitors walked into the spiral-like building of the Abdullah Bin Zaid Al-Mahmoud Islamic Cultural Center, for a tour and a visit to the mosque, where people gathered for Friday prayer.

Carlos Bustos, Mireya Arias and their sons, 8-year-old Jacobo and 13-year-old Matias toured the cultural center. The Colombian family read information on large placards about the contributions of the Islamic world to medicine, science, math and architecture.

"What we've seen is that they've made an effort to change the image that we have in the West of seeing Islam. It's breaking that barrier," said Carlos Bustos, who along with his sons had dressed in traditional Qatari clothes.

"They've told us that we're very different but we see more similarities than differences," he said.

His wife, Mireya Arias, admired the devotion of Muslims to their faith and how they follow the call to prayer. She also appreciated the efforts made by Qatar to introduce visitors to Islam.

"They've used a lot of strategies to get closer to visitors, for us to understand and learn," she said. "When you're on the buses that take you to the (World Cup) stadiums, you point to a QR code and it gives you explanations about the Quran."

Doha's Museum of Islamic Art also offers glimpses into religious beliefs and rituals. Visitors can read about the five pillars of Islam — the profession of faith, prayer, almsgiving, fasting and hajj or pilgrimage — or learn about hajj rituals and different funerary practices in the Islamic world.

"The more you understand this Islamic culture, the more fascinating it is," said Jose Antonio Tinoco, a Brazilian museum visitor, who wore his country's soccer jersey. "The most important part of the museum

for me was the part on Islam.”

Philippine Communist Party founder Sison dies in exile at 83

MANILA, Philippines (AP) — Jose Maria Sison, the founder of the Communist Party of the Philippines, whose armed wing has been waging one of Asia’s longest-running insurgencies, has died. He was 83.

Sison died peacefully late Friday after two weeks of confinement in a hospital in Utrecht, the Netherlands, the party’s spokesman, Marco Valbuena, said in a statement on Saturday. The cause of death was not disclosed.

Sison had lived in self-exile in The Netherlands since then-President Corazon Aquino released him from detention in 1986, shortly after the “People Power” revolt overthrew dictator Ferdinand Marcos, the father and namesake of the current Philippine president.

Sison died 10 days before the party he founded in 1968 was marking its 54th anniversary on Dec. 26. Its armed wing, the New People’s Army, was established months later in March 1969, numbering only about 60 Maoist fighters armed with nine automatic rifles and 26 single-shot rifles and pistols. But the movement gradually grew and expanded across the impoverished nation.

Battle setbacks, surrenders and infighting, however, have weakened the guerrilla group, which is considered a terrorist organization by the United States and remains a major Philippine security threat. The communist rebellion has left about 40,000 combatants and civilians dead. It also has stunted economic development, especially in the countryside, where the military says about 2,000 insurgents are still active.

Past administrations had engaged in on and off peace negotiations with communist rebels represented by the umbrella organization National Democratic Front of the Philippines, where Sison served as chief political consultant.

Former President Rodrigo Duterte ended peace talks in March 2019, and negotiations have not resumed.

“The Filipino proletariat and toiling people grieve the death of their teacher and guiding light,” the party’s statement said.

“Even as we mourn, we vow (to) continue to give all our strength and determination to carry the revolution forward guided by the memory and teachings of the people’s beloved Ka Joma,” the statement added, referring to Sison by his nickname.

Vice President Sara Duterte, daughter of the former president, issued a brief statement on Sison’s death, saying: “May God have mercy on his soul.”

The Department of National Defense said Sison was responsible for the death of thousands of civilians and combatants. It said his death “deprived the Filipino people of the opportunity to bring this fugitive to justice under country’s laws.”

A Manila court in 2019 ordered the arrest of Sison and 37 others for their alleged involvement in a massacre in 1985. A mass grave discovered by soldiers in Inopacan town on Leyte Island in 2006 supposedly contained skeletal remains of rebels killed by their colleagues on suspicion they were informants of the military.

Sison, in a Facebook post in September 2019, denied the accusations against him, saying it was a “fake plot” and that authorities had collected bones from cemeteries to frame him and the others. He said he and the other suspects were in jail at the supposed time of the killings.

Sison, a former youth activist and university professor before founding the Communist Party, played a key role in the bitter split in the ranks of the rebels in the 1990s over differences in strategies. A bloody internal purge left hundreds dead, further weakening the rebels whose numbers have dwindled from a peak of around 25,000.

“A new era without Jose Maria Sison dawns for the Philippines, and we will all be the better for it,” the Defense Department said.

The Communist Party gave no indication about a possible successor to Sison.

Malaysia landslide death toll rises to 23, 10 more missing

BATANG KALI, Malaysia (AP) — Rescuers on Saturday found the bodies of a mother and her son, raising the death toll from a landslide on an unlicensed campground in Malaysia to 23 with 10 others still missing.

Selangor state fire chief Norazam Khamis told reporters the two bodies were found buried under a meter (3 feet) of mud and debris. He said there was hope of finding survivors if they clung on to piles or branches or rocks with pockets of air but that chances were slim.

Authorities said 94 people were sleeping at the camping site on an organic farm early Friday when the dirt tumbled from a road about 30 meters (100 feet) above them and covered about 1 hectare (3 acres). Most were families enjoying a short vacation during the yearend school break.

The 23 victims included six children and 13 women. Authorities were still carrying out autopsies and waiting for next of kin to identify the victims.

A mother and her toddler daughter were found Friday hugging each other in a heart-rending scene, rescuers said. Seven people were hospitalized and dozens more, including three Singaporeans, were rescued unharmed.

Wearing helmets and carrying shovels and other equipment, rescuers worked in teams Saturday to comb through debris as deep as 8 meters (26 feet). Excavators were deployed to clear mud and fallen trees and rescue dogs were sent to sniff out possible signs of life and cadavers. Officials said an estimated 450,000 cubic meters (nearly 16 million cubic feet) of debris — enough to fill 180 Olympic-sized swimming pools — hit the campsite.

Norazam said rescuers were treading carefully as underground water streams may trigger further landslides.

Authorities have said the landowners did not have a license to run a campground. Officials are unable to pinpoint the exact cause of the landslide, which came without warning, but believed it could be due to underground water movement while the yearend monsoon rains made the soil unstable.

Survivors recounting their ordeal told local media they heard a thunderous noise and felt the earth move before soil collapsed on their tents. The government has ordered all campsites nationwide that are near rivers, waterfalls and hillsides to be shut for a week to assess their safety.

The campsite in Batang Kali, about 50 kilometers (30 miles) north of Kuala Lumpur, is a popular recreational site for locals to pitch or rent tents from the farm. But authorities said it has been running illegally for the past two years. It has permission to run the farm but no license to operate camping activities. If found guilty, the operator faces up to three years in prison and a fine.

Journalist suspensions widen rift between Twitter and media

By MAE ANDERSON and MATT O'BRIEN AP Technology Writers

Elon Musk's abrupt suspension of several journalists who cover Twitter widens a growing rift between the social media site and media organizations that have used the platform to build their audiences.

Individual reporters with The New York Times, The Washington Post, CNN, Voice of America and other news agencies saw their accounts go dark Thursday.

Musk tweeted late Friday that the company would lift the suspensions following the results of a public poll on the site. The poll showed 58.7% of respondents favored a move to immediately unsuspend accounts over 41.3% who said the suspensions should be lifted in seven days.

The company has not explained why the accounts were taken down. But Musk took to Twitter on Thursday night to accuse journalists of sharing private information about his whereabouts, which he described as "basically assassination coordinates." He provided no evidence for that claim.

Many advertisers abandoned Twitter over content moderation questions after Musk acquired it in October, and he now risks a rupture with media organizations, which are among the most active on the platform.

Most of the accounts were back early Saturday. One exception was Business Insider's Linette Lopez, who was suspended after the other journalists, also with no explanation, she told The Associated Press.

Lopez published a series of articles between 2018 and 2021 highlighting what she called dangerous Tesla

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manufacturing shortcomings.

Shortly before being suspended, she said she had posted court-related documents to Twitter that included a 2018 Musk email address. That address is not current, Lopez said, because "he changes his email every few weeks."

On Tuesday, she posted a 2019 story about Tesla troubles, commenting, "Now, just like then, most of @elonmusk's wounds are self inflicted."

The same day, she cited reports that Musk was renegeing on severance for laid-off Twitter employees, threatening workers who talk to the media and refusing to make rent payments. Lopez described his actions as "classic Elon-going-for-broke behavior."

Alarm over the suspensions extended beyond media circles to the United Nations, which was reconsidering its involvement in Twitter.

The move sets "a dangerous precedent at a time when journalists all over the world are facing censorship, physical threats and even worse," U.N. spokesman Stephane Dujarric said.

The reporters' suspensions 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 the new policy and Musk's rationale for imposing it, which involved his allegations about a stalking incident he said affected his family Tuesday night in Los Angeles.

The official Twitter account for Mastodon, a decentralized alternative social network where many Twitter users are fleeing, was also banned. The reason was unclear, though it had tweeted about the jet-tracking account. Twitter also began preventing users from posting links to Mastodon accounts, in some cases flagging them as potential malware.

"This is of course a bald-faced lie," cybersecurity journalist Brian Krebs posted.

Explaining the reporter bans, Musk tweeted, "Same doxxing rules apply to 'journalists' as to everyone else."

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 someone's identity, address, phone number or other personal details that violate their privacy and could bring harm.

The Washington Post's executive editor, Sally Buzbee, said technology reporter Drew Harwell "was banished without warning, process or explanation" following the publication of 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," the statement added.

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 his own suspension.

The screenshot showed a statement from the Los Angeles Police Department sent earlier Thursday to multiple media outlets, including the AP, about how it was in touch with Musk's representatives about the alleged stalking incident.

Binder said he did not share any location data or any links to the jet-tracking account or other location-tracking accounts.

"I have been highly critical of Musk but never broke any of Twitter's listed policies," Binder said in an email.

The suspensions come as Musk makes major changes to content moderation on Twitter. He has tried, through the release of selected company documents dubbed "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. He has also said he would suppress

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negativity and hate by depriving some accounts of "freedom of reach."

Opinion columnist Bari Weiss, who tweeted out some of "The Twitter Files," called for the suspended journalists to be reinstated.

"The old regime at Twitter governed by its own whims and biases and it sure looks like the new regime has the same problem," she tweeted "I oppose it in both cases."

If the suspensions lead to the exodus of media organizations that are highly active on Twitter, the platform would be changed at the fundamental level, said Lou Paskalis, longtime marketing and media executive and former Bank of America head of global media.

CBS briefly shut down its activity on Twitter in November due to "uncertainty" about new management, but media organizations have largely remained on the platform.

"We all know news breaks on Twitter ... and to now go after journalists really hurts at the main foundational tent pole of Twitter," Paskalis said. "Driving journalists off Twitter is the biggest self-inflicted wound I can think of."

The suspensions may be the biggest red flag yet for advertisers, Paskalis said, some of which had already cut their spending on Twitter over uncertainty about the direction Musk is taking the platform.

"It is an overt demonstration of what advertisers fear the most — retribution for an action that Elon doesn't agree with," he added.

On Thursday night, Twitter's Spaces conference chat went down shortly after Musk abruptly signed out of a session hosted by a journalist during which he had been questioned about the reporters' ousting. Musk later tweeted that Spaces had been taken offline to deal with a "Legacy bug." Late Friday, Spaces returned.

Advertisers are also monitoring the potential loss of Twitter users. Twitter is projected to lose 32 million users over the next two years, according to a forecast by Insider Intelligence, which cited technical issues and the return of accounts banned for offensive posts.

Meanwhile, some Twitter alternatives are gaining momentum.

Mastodon on Friday had more than 6 million users, nearly double the 3.4 million it had on the day Musk took ownership of Twitter. On many of the thousands of confederated networks in the open-source Mastodon platform, administrators and users solicited donations as disaffected Twitter users strained computing resources. Many of the networks, known as "instances," are crowd-funded. The platform is designed to be ad-free.

More questions than answers as EU corruption scandal unfolds

By LORNE COOK and COLLEEN BARRY Associated Press

BRUSSELS (AP) — No one answers the door or the phone at the offices of the two campaign groups linked to a cash-for-favors corruption scandal at the European Union's parliament, allegedly involving Qatar. No light is visible inside.

No Peace Without Justice (NPWJ), a pro-human rights and democracy organization, and Fight Impunity, which seeks to bring rights abusers to book, share the same address, on prime real estate in the governmental quarter of the Belgian capital.

The heads of the two organizations are among four people charged since Dec. 9 with corruption, participation in a criminal group and money laundering. Prosecutors suspect certain European lawmakers and aides "were paid large sums of money or offered substantial gifts to influence parliament's decisions." The groups themselves do not seem to be under suspicion.

Qatar rejects allegations that it's involved. The Gulf country that's hosting the soccer World Cup has gone to considerable trouble to boost its public image and defend itself against extensive criticism in the West over its human rights record.

The lawyer for Fight Impunity President Pier Antonio Panzeri is not talking. He declined to comment about his client's role in an affair that has shaken the European Parliament and halted the assembly's work on Qatar-related files.

The secretary-general of NPWJ, Niccolo Figa-Talamanca, has left jail but must wear an electronic moni-

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toring bracelet. On its Italian website, after he stepped down, the group praised his work, saying it hopes "the ongoing investigation will demonstrate the correctness of his actions."

Charged along with them are Eva Kaili, who was removed as an EU parliament vice president after the charges were laid, and her partner Francesco Giorgi, a parliamentary assistant. Pictures they've posted on social media project the image of an attractive and ambitious Mediterranean jet-set couple.

Following months of investigations, police have so far launched more than 20 raids, mostly in Belgium but also in Italy. Hundreds of thousands of euros have been found in Brussels: at an apartment and in a suitcase at a hotel not far from the parliament.

Mobile telephones, computer equipment and the data of 10 parliamentary assistants were seized.

Taking to Twitter, Belgian Justice Minister Vincent Van Quickenborne described what he calls the "Qatargate" investigation as a "game changer." It was achieved, he said, "partly thanks to years of work by State Security," the country's intelligence agency.

According to what Italian newspaper La Repubblica and Belgian daily Le Soir said were transcripts of his Dec. 10 statements to prosecutors, Giorgi allegedly confessed to managing money on behalf of an "organization" led by Panzeri that dealt with Qatari and Moroccan representatives.

"I did it all for money, which I needed," Giorgi told prosecutors, according to La Repubblica. He tried to protect his partner Kaili, a 44-year-old Greek former TV presenter with whom he has an infant daughter, asking that she be released from jail. Kaili's lawyer has said she knew nothing about the money.

Giorgi arrived in Belgium in 2009. He made a career at the parliament with the center-left Socialists and Democrats (S&D) group. He met Panzeri, at the time an EU lawmaker, at a conference. "I asked him to give me an internship, and he did," Giorgi said in his statement.

Panzeri became his mentor, made him an assistant and introduced him around, the Italian newspaper said. Giorgi expressed relief that the scheme had been uncovered. He described himself as a simple person who got in over his head due to a moral obligation he felt toward Panzeri.

Up until his arrest, Giorgi worked as an assistant for another S&D lawmaker, Andrea Cozzolino. Italy's center-left Democratic Party suspended Cozzolino on Friday while the probe goes on. He temporarily withdrew from the S&D.

In Italy last weekend, Panzeri's wife, Maria Dolores Colleoni, and daughter, Silvia Panzeri, were taken into custody on a European arrest warrant. A court in Brescia ordered them to be placed under house arrest, one of their lawyers told AP.

On Friday, a Milan judicial source confirmed to AP that 17,000 euros (\$18,075) were seized during a search of Panzeri's house, where his wife is staying, in Calusco d'Adda in the Bergamo province northeast of Milan. Police also seized computers, cell phones, watches and documents.

Police separately found a key to a safe deposit box in the house of Giorgi's parents in the Milan suburb of Abbiategrasso, leading investigators to discover 20,000 euros (\$21,260) in cash.

Panzeri's wife is expected to appear in court again on Monday, when a panel of judges will decide whether to extradite her to Belgium. A similar hearing will be held Tuesday for their daughter. Kaili is due to face court in Brussels on Thursday.

The source in Milan, who spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to comment publicly, said Italian investigators were looking at other people but declined to identify them. The source said they were not EU lawmakers or people associated with the campaign groups.

Many questions remain unanswered about the scandal. What Qatari officials, if any, were involved? Why target the EU's parliament? How wide is the investigators' net? What was the role of Panzeri, the former lawmaker and president of Fight Impunity?

No light shines in his office, but Panzeri's own words on his group's website could point the way: "Martin Luther King Jr. once said, 'let us realize the arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice.' If we are to continue to move towards justice, accountability must be our guiding light."

EXPLAINER: Why Japan is boosting its arms capability, budget

By MARI YAMAGUCHI Associated Press

TOKYO (AP) — Japan this week adopted a new national security strategy that includes determination to possess “counterstrike” capability to preempt enemy attacks and double its spending to gain a more offensive footing and improve its resilience to protect itself from growing risks from China, North Korea and Russia. The new strategy marks a historic change to Japan’s exclusively self-defense policy since the end of World War II. Here is a look at Japan’s new security and defense strategies and how they will change the country’s defense posture.

COUNTERSTRIKE CAPABILITY

The biggest change in the National Security Strategy is possession of “counterstrike capability” that Japan calls “indispensable.” Japan aims to achieve capabilities “to disrupt and defeat invasions against its nation much earlier and at a further distance” within about 10 years.

This puts an end to the 1956 government policy that shelved capability to strike enemy targets and only recognized the idea as a constitutional last-ditch defense.

Japan says missile attacks against it have become “a palpable threat” and its current interceptor-reliant missile defense system is insufficient. North Korea launched missiles more than 30 times this year alone including one that overflew Japan, and China fired ballistic missiles into waters near southern Japanese islands.

Japan says the use of counterstrike capability is constitutional if it’s in response to signs of an imminent enemy attack, but experts say it is extremely difficult to conduct such an attack without risking blame for striking first. Opponents say strike capability goes beyond self-defense under Japan’s pacifist constitution.

“(Japan’s) exclusive self-defense policy is hollowed,” the liberal-leaning Asahi newspaper said.

DOUBLING DEFENSE SPENDING

Japan aims to double its defense spending to about 2% of its GDP to a total of about 43 trillion yen (\$320 billion) through 2027. The new spending target follows the NATO standard and will eventually push Japan’s annual budget to about 10 trillion yen (\$73 billion), the world’s third biggest after the United States and China.

Kishida said his government will need an extra 4 trillion yen (\$30 billion) annually and proposed tax increases to fund a quarter of it. His tax-raise request backfired and the five-year defense buildup plan had to be released without full funding plans while the governing party continued discussing how to pay for the shortfall.

LONG-RANGE MISSILES

Over the next five years, Japan will spend about 5 trillion yen (\$37 billion) on long-range missiles, whose planned deployment begins in 2026. Japan will purchase U.S.-made Tomahawks and Joint Air-to-Surface Standoff Missiles, while Japan’s Mitsubishi Heavy Industry will improve and mass-produce a Type-12 surface-to-ship guided missile. Japanese defense officials said they are still finalizing Tomahawk purchase details.

Japan will also develop other types of arsenals, such as hypersonic weapons and unmanned and multi-role vehicles for possible collaboration with the F-X next-generation fighter jet Japan is developing with Britain and Italy for deployment in 2035.

Several standoff missile units are underway at undisclosed locations.

CYBERSECURITY

Japan, lacking sufficient cybersecurity and intelligence capability, will have to heavily rely on the United States in those areas in launching long-range cruise missiles at intended targets, experts say.

“Without cybersecurity, Self-Defense Force superiority or Japan-U.S. interoperability is difficult to achieve,” according to the five-year defense program also adopted Friday, acknowledging the need to

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ensure cybersecurity at the SDF and Japanese defense industry.

This is a welcome development for the United States as the Japanese government's weak cybersecurity has been "a critical impediment to deeper alliance cooperation and expanded information-sharing," according to Christopher Johnstone, senior advisor and Japan Chair at the Center for Strategic and International Studies.

Japan will spend 8 trillion yen (\$58 billion) over the next five years on cross-domain defense including cybersecurity and space.

CHINA AS 'GREATEST STRATEGIC CHALLENGE'

Fear of a regional security environment described as "the severest and most complicated" in the postwar era has been a driving force behind the revision to Japan's strategy.

China, with its rapid arms buildup, increasingly assertive military activity and rivalry with the U.S., presents "an unprecedented and the greatest strategic challenge" to the peace and security of Japan and the international community, the strategy states.

Russia's war on Ukraine sparked fears of a Taiwan emergency, accelerating the move to bolster Japan's deterrence within the next five years. While North Korea keeps advancing its nuclear and missile capabilities, the main threat is still China, for which Japan has had to prepare "by using North Korea's threat as a cover," said Tomohisa Takei, a retired admiral in Japan's navy.

STILL EXCLUSIVELY SELF-DEFENSE?

Because of its wartime past as aggressor and devastation after its defeat, Japan's postwar policy prioritized the economy over security by relying on American troops stationed in Japan under their bilateral security agreement, in a division of roles known as "shield and dagger."

Prospects for even closer operation with the U.S. military under the new strategy has prompted concerns that Japan would take more offensive responsibility.

Japan says it will keep its pacifist principle of high standards for arms equipment and technology transfer. But some easing is planned to allow currently restricted exports of offensive equipment and components, including those of the next-generation F-X fighter jet, as a way to strengthen the country's defense equipment industry.

What Trump promised, Biden seeks to deliver in his own way

By JOSH BOAK Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Donald Trump pledged to fix U.S. infrastructure as president. He vowed to take on China and bulk up American manufacturing. He said he would reduce the budget deficit and make the wealthy pay their fair share of taxes.

Yet after two years as president, it's Joe Biden who is acting on those promises. He jokes that he's created an "infrastructure decade" after Trump merely managed a near parody of "infrastructure weeks." His legislative victories are not winning him votes from Trump loyalists or boosting his overall approval ratings. But they reflect a major pivot in how the government interacts with the economy at a time when many Americans fear a recession and broader national decline.

Gone are blanket tax cuts. No more unfettered faith in free trade with non-democracies. The Biden White House has committed more than \$1.7 trillion to the belief that a mix of government aid, focused policies and bureaucratic expertise can deliver long-term growth that lifts up the middle class. This reverses the past administration's view that cutting regulations and taxes boosted investments by businesses that flowed downward to workers.

With new laws in place, Biden is taking the gamble that the federal bureaucracy can successfully implement and deliver on his promises, including after he leaves office.

That is a tricky spot, as Trump himself learned that global crises such as a pandemic can quickly ruin the foundations of an economic agenda, causing businesses and voters to shift priorities. There are few

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guarantees that the economy behaves over 10 years as government forecasts expect, while Biden's policies will likely be challenged by the new Republican majority in the House.

Biden and his team say Americans are already seeing the upside with announcements for new computer chip plants and some 6,000 infrastructure projects under way.

"There's an industrial strategy that actually uses public investments to drive more private capital and more innovation in the historical tradition of everybody from Alexander Hamilton to Abraham Lincoln to John F. Kennedy," said Brian Deese, director of the White House National Economic Council. "The outcomes speak for themselves."

Trump's supporters see little overlap with Biden, even though the funding for infrastructure, computer chip production and scientific research was passed along bipartisan lines.

"The Biden administration agenda is 180 degrees different," said James Carter, a policy director at the America First Policy Institute. "More regulation, higher taxes, no border control and a war on fossil fuels. It's two different administrations with two different approaches. One is free market, the other is big government."

The current and former president seem almost bound together in the public arena. On the August eve of Biden signing into law \$280 billion for semiconductors and research, FBI agents raided Trump's home to retrieve classified documents, overshadowing the White House event. Similarly, Biden called out Trump as a threat to democracy ahead of November midterm elections, while Republicans campaigned by hammering the president for troubling levels of inflation.

Biden aides are quick to say that the president is fulfilling his own campaign promises, rather than honoring pledges made by Trump. But one of Biden's first moves as president in 2021 was to provide \$1,400 in direct payments to Americans as part of his coronavirus relief package. Along with the \$600 in payments in a pre-Biden relief package, the sum matched the \$2,000 that Trump called for in the twilight of his presidency, though he could not get it through Congress.

"I would want to avoid the premise that somehow what Joe Biden has done was take Donald Trump's ideas and enact them into law," Deese said. "What President Biden has done is taken the campaign agenda that he campaigned on and actually delivered on it."

For all of that, Americans are giving Biden low marks on the economy. Inflation has come down from a 40-year peak this summer, but consumer prices are still 7.1% higher from a year ago. The Federal Reserve is raising its benchmark interest rate to lower inflation, something that its own projections show will cause unemployment to rise in the next year.

Three in four Americans describe the economy as poor, with nearly the same percentage saying the U.S. is on the wrong track, according to a new poll by The Associated Press and NORC Center for Public Affairs Research.

Biden is asking for patience.

"I know it's been a rough few years for hardworking Americans and for small businesses as well," Biden said in Tuesday remarks about inflation. "But there are bright spots all across America where we're beginning to see the impact of our economic strategy, and we're just getting started."

Trump supporters blame Biden's separate \$1.9 trillion in coronavirus relief for sparking the inflation, although it contained roughly \$400 billion worth of the direct payments that former president said Americans should receive. They argue that the U.S. economy would be stronger if Biden took steps such as allowing all businesses to fully expense their investments in new equipment, instead of providing targeted support to the technology and clean energy sectors.

But even excluding the recession induced by the pandemic, Trump's economic record was far from sterling as the promised growth never materialized. Manufacturers began to slash jobs in 2019 before the coronavirus spread, instead of the steady resurgence promised by Trump. Annual budget deficits worsened under Trump, but they have improved under Biden as pandemic aid has wound down.

Biden is telling Americans that his policies will strengthen the U.S. economy over the next decade. His \$52 billion for computer chip production has led to a series of factory groundbreakings in Arizona, Idaho, New York, North Carolina, Ohio and Texas that will take years to complete. The idea is that government

aid reduces risk and makes it easier for these companies to invest in areas where global demand exceed available supplies.

Chris Miller, a Tufts University professor and author of the book "Chip War," said the incentives are only a fraction of the cost of building the plants. Miller said the benefits of the investments will spill over to the companies that sell raw materials to chipmakers as well as possibly for the makers of autos, electronics and household appliances that increasingly rely on chips.

"The chips funding makes clear that there will be meaningfully more fab construction and chip output in the U.S.," he said, "so for suppliers to the chip industry, they have more clarity that demand for their products will be larger than it otherwise would have been, incentivizing them to invest too."

For all the economic concerns, manufacturing has improved under Biden as factory employment totals 12.9 million jobs, the most since December 2008. Just as Biden has boosted domestic investment, he also expanded the Trump administration's efforts to compete with China and kept his predecessor's tariffs.

The Biden administration has restricted the export of advanced computer chips and semiconductor equipment, arguing on national security grounds that China is using this technology for surveillance and hypersonic missiles. It's also formed deeper partnerships with Australia, Japan, South Korea and several European countries to counter China's rising influence.

Kurt Campbell, Biden's "Asian tsar" on the White House National Security Council, said that many of the initiatives pursued by Trump's State Department on China have been "followed on" during Biden's presidency, saying at an April panel that "in many respects, that's the highest tribute" to the previous administration.

But Steve Yates, a senior fellow at the America First Policy Institute and former president of Radio Free Asia, said that Biden has not shown that he's placed the same emphasis on China as Trump.

Yates cited as evidence that Biden's national security strategy identifies the U.S. as having a shared interest with China in addressing climate change. He said that China will exploit that priority to their advantage as Biden's willingness to cooperate on climate change will prevent him from confronting Beijing as Trump did.

"We just have a weakened hand," Yates said.

US court rejects maintaining COVID-19 asylum restrictions

By GIOVANNA DELL'ORTO and REBECCA SANTANA Associated Press

REYNOSA, Mexico (AP) — Restrictions that have prevented hundreds of thousands of migrants from seeking asylum in the U.S. in recent years remained on track to expire in a matter of days after an appeals court ruling Friday, as thousands more migrants packed shelters on Mexico's border with the U.S.

The ruling from the D.C. Circuit Court of Appeals means the restrictions known as Title 42 are still set to be lifted Wednesday, unless further appeals are filed.

A coalition of 19 Republican-leaning states were pushing to keep the asylum restrictions put in place by former President Donald Trump at the start of the coronavirus pandemic. Migrants have been denied rights to seek asylum under U.S. and international law 2.5 million times since March 2020 on grounds of preventing the spread of COVID-19. The public-health has left some migrants biding time in Mexico.

Advocates for immigrants had argued that the U.S. was abandoning its longstanding history and commitments to offer refuge to people around the world fleeing persecution, and sued to end the use of Title 42. They've also argued the restrictions were a pretext by Trump for restricting migration, and in any case, vaccines and other treatments make that argument outdated.

A judge last month sided with them and set Dec. 21 as the deadline for the federal government to end the practice. Conservative states trying to keep Title 42 in place had pushed to intervene in the case. But a three-judge panel on Friday night rejected their efforts, saying the states had waited too long. Louisiana's Attorney General expressed disappointment with the decision and said they would appeal to the Supreme Court.

Border cities, most notably El Paso, Texas, are facing a daily migrant influx that the Biden administration expects to grow if asylum restrictions are lifted. Tijuana, the largest Mexican border city, has an estimated

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5,000 people in more than 30 shelters, Enrique Lucero, the city's director of migrant affairs said this week.

In Reynosa, Mexico, near McAllen, Texas, nearly 300 migrants — mostly families — crammed into the Casa del Migrante, sleeping on bunk beds and even on the floor.

Rose, a 32-year-old Haitian, has been in the shelter for three weeks with her daughter and 1-year-old son. Rose, who did not provide her last name because she fears it could jeopardize her safety and her attempts to seek asylum, said she learned on her journey of possible changes to U.S. policies. She said she was happy to wait a little longer in Mexico for the lifting of restrictions that were enacted at the outset of the pandemic and that have become a cornerstone of U.S. border enforcement.

"We're very scared, because the Haitians are deported," said Rose, who is worried any mistakes in trying to get her family to the U.S. could get her sent back to Haiti.

Inside Senda de Vida 2, a Reynosa shelter opened by an evangelical Christian pastor when his first one reached capacity, about 3,000 migrants are living in tents pitched on concrete slabs and gravel. Flies swarm everywhere under a hot sun beating down even in mid-December.

For the many fleeing violence in Haiti, Venezuela and elsewhere, such shelters offer at least some safety from the cartels that control passage through the Rio Grande and prey on migrants.

In McAllen, about 100 migrants who avoided asylum restrictions rested on floor mats Thursday in a large hall run by Catholic Charities, waiting for transportation to families and friends across the U.S.

Gloria, a 22-year-old from Honduras who is eight months pregnant with her first child, held onto a printed sheet that read: "Please help me. I do not speak English." Gloria also did not want her last name used out of fear for her safety. She expressed concerns about navigating the airport alone and making it to Florida, where she has a family acquaintance.

Andrea Rudnik, co-founder of an all-volunteer migrant welcome association in Brownsville, Texas, across the border from Matamoros, Mexico, was worried about having enough winter coats for migrants coming from warmer climates.

"We don't have enough supplies," she said Friday, noting donations to Team Brownsville are down.

Title 42, which is part of a 1944 public health law, applies to all nationalities but has fallen unevenly on those whom Mexico agrees to take back — Guatemalans, Hondurans, El Salvadorans and, more recently, Venezuelans, in addition to Mexicans. Illegal border crossings of single adults dipped in November, according to a Justice Department court filing released Friday, though it gave no explanation for why. It also did not account for families traveling with young children and children traveling alone.

According to the filing, Border Patrol agents stopped single adults 143,903 times along the Mexican border in November, down 9% from 158,639 times in October and the lowest level since August. Nicaraguans became the second-largest nationality at the border among single adults after Mexicans, surpassing Cubans.

Venezuelan single adults were stopped 3,513 times by Border Patrol agents in November, plunging from 14,697 a month earlier, demonstrating the impact of Mexico's decision on Oct. 12 to accept migrants from the South American country who are expelled from the U.S.

Mexican single adults were stopped 43,504 times, down from 56,088 times in October, more than any other nationality. Nicaraguan adults were stopped 27,369 times, up from 16,497. Cuban adults were stopped 24,690 times, up from 20,744.

In a related development, a federal judge in Amarillo, Texas, ruled Thursday that the Biden administration wrongly ended a Trump-era policy to make asylum-seekers wait in Mexico for hearings in U.S. immigration court. The ruling had no immediate impact but could prove a longer-term setback for the White House.

White House spokesman Abdullah Hasan said immigration laws would continue to be enforced at the border and the Biden administration would work to expand legal pathways for migrants but discourage "disorderly and unsafe migration."

"To be clear: the lifting of the Title 42 public health order does not mean the border is open," he said. "Anyone who suggests otherwise is doing the work of smugglers spreading misinformation to make a quick buck off of vulnerable migrants."

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Peru's accidental president fails to quell violent protests

By REGINA GARCIA CANO and FRANKLIN BRICEÑO Associated Press

LIMA, Peru (AP) — It might be the world's shortest political honeymoon.

Almost since the moment last week when Dina Boluarte took over from the ousted leader Pedro Castillo to become Peru's first female president, she has appealed for calm and a chance to govern, insisting that the caretaker job came to her out of circumstance, not personal ambition.

In impoverished rural areas, though, fierce protests are showing no signs of abating amid anger over the removal of Castillo, who was Peru's first president with Indigenous heritage. Long overlooked peasant farmers and others remain unwilling to give up on their demand that he be released from prison, where he is being held while under investigation for rebellion.

Despite Boluarte's own humble roots in the Andes, in her home region many are calling her a traitor.

"She is an opportunist. She has easily entered the government palace, but whose job was it," Rolando Yupanqui said after the funeral of one of the at least 14 people who have died from injuries suffered in clashes with security forces. "People are upset here. Do you think that people go out on the streets for fun?"

Yupanqui said Castillo, who lived in a two-story, adobe home before moving to the neo-baroque presidential palace in the capital, Lima, had visited his community of Andahuaylas and "was just like us." As for Boluarte, he said, "We've never met the lady."

Boluarte took over for Castillo after the president sought to dissolve Congress ahead of lawmakers' third attempt to impeach him. His vehicle was intercepted as he traveled through Lima's streets on what prosecutors have said was an effort to reach the Mexican Embassy to request asylum.

Protesters are demanding Castillo's freedom, Boluarte's resignation, and the immediate scheduling of elections to pick a new president and Congress before the scheduled 2026 vote. They have burned police stations, obstructed Peru's main highway and stranded hundreds of foreign tourists by blocking access to airports.

In Huamanga, a provincial capital, protesters set fire to a courthouse and a building belonging to a Spanish-owned telephone operator Friday night, a day after Boluarte declared a state of emergency trying to calm the unrest. The crowd of a few hundred was dispersed by dozens of security officers firing tear gas.

The death count climbed to double digits Thursday after a judge approved a request from prosecutors to keep Castillo in custody for 18 months while they build their case against the former rural schoolteacher who surprised everyone by winning last year's presidential runoff despite having zero political experience.

Boluarte held an emergency meeting Friday night at the presidential palace with leaders of congress and the nation's judiciary — all of whom condemned the violence and called for dialogue. She also spoke to U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken, who she said offered U.S. support for her fledgling government.

"There's obviously a black hand operating here," Jose Williams, a retired army general who as head of congress would be next in the line of succession should Boluarte resign, told journalists following the meeting. "The same behavior is appearing in one place, then another. Something is behind the scenes leading us to chaos."

While Boluarte, under pressure, has endorsed the call for early elections, replacing her would require action by Peru's political establishment, many of whom are in no rush to give up their own slice of power.

On Friday, Congress failed to muster enough votes to amend the constitution to pave the way for early elections, with leftist parties saying they would consent to such a plan only if a broader constitutional convention was also in the mix.

Meanwhile, at least two of Boluarte's allies — the culture and education ministers — have resigned in protest over what they called an overly repressive police response to the protests.

The new president is having to negotiate the crisis with no base of support.

Like Castillo, Boluarte is not part of Peru's political elite. She worked in the state agency that hands out identity documents before becoming vice president. She grew up in an impoverished town in the Andes, speaks one of the country's Indigenous languages, Quechua, and as a leftist promised to "fight for the nobodies."

But unlike Castillo, who wore ponchos, a traditional hat and rubber sandals that embody Peru's countryside, Boluarte has for years lived in Lima — a symbol of rich and conservative politicians in the eyes of rural communities.

For analysts, it's a Peruvian version of the sort of identity politics that has swept across so many other parts of the world in recent years.

"They see this as repudiation of who they are," said Cynthia McClintock, a political science professor at George Washington University who has studied Peru extensively. "But if you asked them three months ago: 'Is Castillo doing a good job?', a lot of those folks would have said: 'No, he isn't doing a good job.'"

Jan. 6 committee eyes referring criminal charges for Trump

By FARNOUSH AMIRI, MARY CLARE JALONICK and MICHAEL BALSAMO Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The House panel investigating the Jan. 6 attack on the U.S. Capitol is considering recommending the Justice Department pursue an unprecedented criminal charge of insurrection and two other counts against former President Donald Trump.

Besides insurrection, an uprising aiming to overthrow the government, the panel is also considering recommending prosecutors pursue charges for obstructing an official proceeding and conspiracy to defraud the United States, according to a person familiar with the matter who could not publicly discuss the private deliberations and spoke to The Associated Press on condition of anonymity. The committee's deliberations were continuing late Friday, and no decisions were formalized on which specific charges the committee would refer to the Justice Department.

The panel is to meet publicly Monday afternoon when any recommendation will be made public.

A second person familiar with the deliberations, who also could not publicly discuss details of the private deliberations, confirmed the committee was considering three charges. The panel's lawyers argued, according to that person, that those three criminal statutes were the strongest cases to make.

The decision to issue referrals is not unexpected. Rep. Liz Cheney, R-Wyo., the vice chair of the committee, has for months been hinting at sending the Justice Department criminal referrals based on the extensive evidence the nine-member panel has gathered since it was formed in July 2021.

"You may not send an armed mob to the Capitol; you may not sit for 187 minutes and refuse to stop the attack while it's underway. You may not send out a tweet that incites further violence," Cheney said about Trump on NBC's "Meet the Press" in October. "So we've been very clear about a number of different criminal offenses that are likely at issue here."

The committee's chairman, Rep. Bennie Thompson, D-Miss., detailed possible referrals last week as falling into a series of categories that include criminal and ethics violations, legal misconduct and campaign finance violations.

It would then fall to federal prosecutors to decide whether to pursue any referrals for prosecution. While it doesn't carry any legal weight, recommendations by the committee would add to the political pressure on the Justice Department as it investigates Trump's actions.

"The gravest offense in constitutional terms is the attempt to overthrow a presidential election and bypass the constitutional order," committee member Jamie Raskin, D-Md., told reporters last week. "Subsidiary to all of that are a whole host of statutory offenses, which support the gravity and magnitude of that violent assault on America."

Raskin, along with Cheney and Democratic Reps. Adam Schiff and Zoe Lofgren, both of California, comprised the subcommittee that drafted the referral recommendations and presented them to the larger group for consideration.

Over the course of its investigation, the committee has made recommendations that several members of Trump's inner circle should be prosecuted for refusing to comply with congressional subpoenas. One, for Steve Bannon, has resulted in a conviction.

Monday's session will also include a preview of the committee's final report, expected to be released Wednesday. The panel will vote on adopting the official record, effectively authorizing the release of the

report to the public.

The eight-chapter report will include hundreds of pages of findings about the attack and Trump's actions and words, drawing on what the committee learned through its interviews with more than 1,000 witnesses.

Garland moves to end disparities in crack cocaine sentencing

By LINDSAY WHITEHURST Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Attorney General Merrick Garland moved Friday to end sentencing disparities that have imposed harsher penalties for different forms of cocaine and worsened racial inequity in the U.S. justice system.

For decades federal law has imposed harsher sentences for crack cocaine even though it isn't scientifically different from powder cocaine, creating "unwarranted racial disparities," Garland wrote in a memo. "They are two forms of the same drug, with powder readily convertible into crack cocaine."

With changes to the law stalled in Congress, Garland instructed prosecutors in non-violent, low-level cases to file charges that avoid the mandatory minimum sentences that are triggered for smaller amounts of rock cocaine.

Civil rights leaders and criminal justice reform advocates applauded the changes, though they said the changes won't be permanent without action from Congress.

Rev. Al Sharpton led marches in the 1990s against the laws he called "unfair and racially tinged" and applauded the Justice Department direction that takes effect within 30 days.

"This was not only a major prosecutorial and sentencing decision — it is a major civil rights decision," he said in a statement. "The racial disparities of this policy have ruined homes and futures for over a generation."

At one point, federal law treated a single gram of crack the same as 100 grams of powder cocaine. Congress shrunk that gap in 2010 but did not completely close it. A bill to end the disparity passed the House last year, but stalled in the Senate.

"This has been one of the policies that has sent thousands and thousands of predominantly Black men to the federal prison system," said Janos Marton, vice-president of political strategy with the group Dream.org. "And that's been devastating for communities and for families."

While he welcomed the change in prosecution practices, he pointed out that unless Congress acts, it could be temporary. The bill that passed the House with bipartisan support last year would also be retroactive to apply to people already convicted under the law passed in 1986.

The Black incarceration rate in America exploded after the Anti-Drug Abuse Act of 1986 it went into effect. It went from about 600 per 100,000 people in 1970 to 1,808 in 2000. In the same timespan, the rate for the Latino population grew from 208 per 100,000 people to 615, while the white incarceration rate grew from 103 per 100,000 people to 242.

The mandatory-minimum policies came as the use of illicit drugs, including crack cocaine in the late 1980s, was accompanied by an alarming spike in homicides and other violent crimes nationwide.

The act was passed shortly after an NBA draftee died of a cocaine-induced heart attack. It imposed mandatory federal sentences of 20 years to life in prison for violating drug laws and made sentences for possession and sale of crack rocks harsher than those for powder cocaine.

Friday's announcement reflects the ways that years of advocacy have pushed a shift away from the war on drugs tactics that took a heavy toll on marginalized groups and drove up the nation's incarceration rates without an accompanying investment in other services to rebuild communities, said Rashad Robinson, president Color Of Change.

"It is a recognition these laws were intended to target Black people and Black communities and were never intended to give communities the type of support and investments they need," he said.

2 students killed, 2 wounded in shooting near Chicago school

CHICAGO (AP) — Two students were killed and two other teens were wounded in a shooting Friday afternoon near a high school on Chicago's West Side, authorities said.

Chicago fire officials said the four 16-year-olds were shot near Benito Juarez High School. Chicago Police Superintendent David Brown, speaking at a news conference, confirmed the deaths of two of the victims.

Police spokesman Tom Ahern said the four were shot outside the school. Police and paramedics responded to the shooting shortly before 3 p.m. Friday.

A Chicago Fire Department spokesperson said all four were taken to the same hospital. One boy was pronounced dead on arrival, another boy was in critical condition, and two other teens, a boy and a girl, suffered non-life-threatening injuries, Ahern initially said.

Chicago Public Schools CEO Pedro Martinez also appeared at the news conference, saying, "We want to first make sure we have the victims in our prayers."

The school system, also known as CPS, released a statement saying in part that "the safety of our school community is our top priority." It added the system's safety and security office was working with school officials and school leaders to gather information on what happened.

Inside the ugly fight to become the next Republican chair

By STEVE PEOPLES AP National Political Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Struggling to unify after another disappointing election, the Republican National Committee is consumed by an increasingly nasty leadership fight as the GOP navigates its delicate relationship with former President Donald Trump.

With a vote for RNC chair not scheduled until late January, the public feud may get worse before it gets better.

"It'll be ugly as hell for a while," says longtime RNC member Ron Kaufman.

The family fight to lead the party has been largely overshadowed for national attention by the equally contentious struggle to become the new Republican House Speaker, with that election set for the first week in January. But both represent critical selections as the GOP works to overcome six years of electoral underperformance heading into another presidential election.

As the Republicans' national political arm, the RNC will raise and spend hundreds of millions of dollars in building or rebuilding the party's framework, in campaign messaging and in the year-long presidential nomination process that will begin in earnest before long.

Ronna McDaniel, Trump's hand-picked choice to lead the committee and the niece of Utah Sen. Mitt Romney, is running for a fourth consecutive term. But the 49-year-old is facing a rising wave of discontent from Trump's "MAGA" movement, even as the former president stays silent — at least, for now.

In an interview, McDaniel said she notified Trump of her intention to seek another term but did not explicitly ask for his support. She said she "didn't think it would be appropriate to be asking for any endorsements" given that party rules require the RNC to remain neutral in the next presidential primary.

McDaniel demurred when asked whether she wanted Trump's support.

"I think the most important support right now is the members," she said. "These are leaders in the party, the grassroots leaders."

California attorney Harmeet Dhillon has emerged as the MAGA favorite to challenge McDaniel, who secured commitments from more than 100 of the RNC's 168 voting members earlier this month. Dhillon is working aggressively to peel away some of that support ahead of the formal vote at next month's annual winter meeting in southern California.

Dhillon said she also notified Trump of her candidacy in a brief phone call shortly before she made her intentions public this month. She did not explicitly ask for his endorsement either, although she said the president did not discourage her from challenging McDaniel.

Dhillon, whose law firm earned more than \$400,000 representing Trump and his political organizations

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in the 2022 midterms, said she would leave her law practice if elected chair. The 53-year-old California attorney, who was born in India, also vowed to remain independent in what is expected to be a crowded 2024 presidential primary contest.

Still, Dhillon defends Trump against those Republicans who blame him for the party's disappointing performance in the November midterm elections. The GOP won a narrow House majority, but a host of Trump's hand-picked candidates lost key elections for the Senate and governor.

"It's not any one person's fault. And I frankly think it's a little too convenient to say it's Donald Trump's fault. Donald Trump hasn't been the president for the last two years," Dhillon said.

Instead of criticizing Trump, Dhillon railed against Senate Republican Leader Mitch McConnell, a frequent Trump target, for not investing enough money in important Senate contests. Actually, McConnell and his allies spent tens of millions of dollars more than Trump's political action committee in the midterms.

"You have Mitch McConnell, because he hates Trump, refusing to support candidates that President Trump endorsed, which I think is really appalling. And I blame him for the Senate losses," Dhillon said.

Meanwhile, McDaniel is facing criticism from a growing chorus of Republicans largely outside the RNC's 168 voting members who are eager to change course after three consecutive disappointing election seasons. Her critics include several high-profile Trump loyalists, including Fox News hosts and prominent MAGA figures on social media.

She has some unlikely supporters within the committee as well.

One frequent Trump critic, RNC member Bill Palatucci, said he would support Dhillon because McDaniel has essentially become Trump's "tool" in recent years. He cited her decisions to stay silent on some of Trump's more egregious behavior and to spend millions of dollars on his legal fees.

"There's just gotta be a change," Palatucci said, describing the committee commitments to McDaniel as "soft." "RNC members are experienced pols who know how to look you right in the eye and say, 'I love you,' and then walk into the voting booth and slit your throat."

At the same time, those RNC members are being flooded with emails from rank-and-file Republican voters and activists who support Dhillon's candidacy. The deluge comes after Dhillon and her allies shared the entire committee's personal emails on social media.

Steve Scheffler, an Iowa-based RNC member who supports McDaniel, said he's receiving 50 to 70 emails each day from Republicans, many of them angry, weighing in on the leadership fight.

"Most of them are like, 'Ronna's gotta go,'" Scheffler said.

Arizona GOP Chair Kelli Ward said she's received "a few thousand emails" in recent days.

"NOT ONE regular person not affiliated with the current RNC apparatus has urged me to retain Ronna Romney McDaniel as Chair," Ward tweeted.

Trump remains a wildcard.

The former president has stayed out of the public fight, but key members of his team — including senior adviser Susie Wiles — have notified members in private conversations that Trump remains supportive of McDaniel's reelection.

Trump's allies note that his strategy could change at any time — especially as conservative media line up against McDaniel.

Wiles also defended McDaniel publicly on Friday following a report in conservative media, written by a Dhillon supporter and legal client, that the RNC had spent millions of dollars on private jets, limousines, donor mementos and floral arrangements under McDaniel's watch.

Wiles noted that such RNC spending was sometimes to cover purchases that came at the discretion of the Trump White House.

"Someone leaving this info out of any criticism of RNC spending — and Ronna McDaniel, in particular — is not painting a complete picture," Wiles told The Associated Press.

Indeed, RNC budget committee chair Glenn McCall described reports of excess spending as "a gross misrepresentation" in a letter to members. Costs associated with luxury car rentals and private jets, he wrote, were largely connected to Trump or other candidates.

McDaniel's supporters are eager to highlight her success in fundraising, arguably the GOP chair's most

important responsibility. She has raised more than \$1.5 billion during her tenure, according to McCall.

Meanwhile, Dhillon is ratcheting up her attacks against McDaniel.

She raised questions about McDaniel's management of RNC funds, accused her of offering members key positions in exchange for their support and suggested the chair was behind an anonymous email smear campaign.

But more than anything, Dhillon says she's running because she wants the party to win again: "I'm tired of losing."

For her part, McDaniel warns that such intense divisions within her party could do serious damage.

"The race I'm running is about unity," she said. "If we continue to fight and be so hateful to each other to the point where Republicans won't vote for other Republicans, we're giving the Democrats what they want."

Judge warned in 2021 of gay bar attacker's shootout plans

By JESSE BEDAYN and MATTHEW BROWN Associated Press

COLORADO SPRINGS, Colo. (AP) — A judge dismissed the 2021 kidnapping case against the Colorado gay nightclub shooter even though she had previously raised concerns about the defendant stockpiling weapons and explosives and planning a shootout, court transcripts obtained Friday by The Associated Press reveal.

Relatives, including the grandparents who claimed to have been kidnapped, had also told Judge Robin Chittum in August last year about Anderson Aldrich's struggles with mental illness during a hearing at which the judge said Aldrich needed treatment or "it's going to be so bad," according to the documents.

Yet no mention was made during a hearing this July of the suspect's violent behavior or the status of any mental health treatment.

And Chittum, who had received a letter late last year from relatives of Aldrich's grandparents warning the suspect was certain to commit murder if freed, granted a defense attorney's motion to dismiss the case as a trial deadline loomed and the grandparents had stopped cooperating.

The revelation that Chittum regarded the defendant as a potentially serious threat adds to the advance warnings authorities are known to have had about Aldrich's increasingly violent behavior and it raises more questions about whether the recent mass shooting at Club Q in Colorado Springs could have been prevented.

Five people were killed and 17 wounded in the Nov. 19 attack. Aldrich was charged last week with 305 criminal counts, including hate crimes and murder. Aldrich's public defender has declined to talk about the case, and investigators have not released a motive.

Harvard law professor Alan Dershowitz said transcripts of court hearings in the case confirmed his view that "more could have been done to prevent the violence."

Dershowitz acknowledged that he didn't know every detail in front of Chittum during the hearings but said that while judges are typically supposed to be umpires, "judges are usually more aggressive in cases like this, when the handwriting is on the wall."

In many cases, Dershowitz said, prosecutors can overreach to get a conviction, but "here, you have the legal system failing."

Chittum's comments in Aldrich's kidnapping case had previously been under a court seal that was lifted last week at the request of prosecutors and news organizations including the AP. Chittum's assistant, Chad Dees, said Friday that the judge declined to comment.

"You clearly have been planning for something else," Chittum told Aldrich during the August 2021 hearing, after the defendant testified about an affinity for shooting firearms and a history of mental health problems.

"It didn't have to do with your grandma and grandpa. It was saving all these firearms and trying to make this bomb, and making statements about other people being involved in some sort of shootout and a huge thing. And then that's kind of what it turned into," the judge said.

Aldrich — whose defense lawyers say is nonbinary and uses they/them pronouns — spoke to Chittum in

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court that day about repeated abuse as a young child by their father and longtime struggles with severe post-traumatic stress disorder and bipolar disorder, the transcript shows.

(The vast majority of people with mental illnesses are not violent, studies show, and experts say most people who are violent do not have mental illnesses. Additionally, nonbinary people and advocates warn against making assumptions about people with nontraditional gender identities.)

Aldrich, who was largely raised by their grandparents, wanted to join the military as a teenager but decided it wasn't going to happen, the transcripts show. The suspect described refusing to take medications and then "getting on track" after moving to Colorado, obtaining a medical marijuana license and starting college, according to the transcripts.

"I also went to the (shooting range) as often as I could since the age of 16," Aldrich testified, the transcripts show. "My mom and I would go ... sometimes multiple times a week and have fun shooting. This is a major pastime for me. Going to school, working and then relaxing at the shooting range."

Aldrich said they went to Dragonman's shooting range east of Colorado Springs, where the dirt driveway was lined by mannequins that looked bloodied Friday. Nearby were rusted vehicles, some peppered in bullet holes. Two people who appeared to work at the range said they did not know Aldrich and declined further comment.

Shooting at the range "was highly therapeutic for me, and was a great way to spend spare time," Aldrich told Chittum.

When Aldrich's grandparents made plans to move to Florida, the suspect became despondent. Leading up to the 2021 confrontation with authorities, Aldrich started drinking liquor regularly and smoking heroin, dropped out of school and quit working, the transcript shows.

The charges in that case against Aldrich — who had stockpiled explosives and allegedly spoke of plans to become the "next mass killer" before engaging in an armed standoff with SWAT teams — were thrown out during a four-minute hearing this past July at which the prosecution didn't even argue to keep the case active.

The prosecution was the responsibility solely of the district attorney, said Ian Farrell, associate professor at the University of Denver Sturm College of Law, noting that judges like Chittum have no power to force charges.

"Since a deadline for proceeding with (Aldrich's) trial was coming up and the prosecution clearly was not ready to proceed ... the trial judge had no choice but to dismiss the case," Farrell said.

Judges can appoint special prosecutors in extreme situations, such as when a decision not to prosecute is done in bad faith, Farrell said. But the 2021 case did not appear to rise to that bar, he said, because witnesses in the case were unavailable.

Howard Black, spokesperson for the district attorney's office, has said he cannot share information about the kidnapping case because it's part of the current investigation. El Paso County District Attorney Michael Allen has said his office did everything it could to prosecute the case, including trying to subpoena Aldrich's mother, but has repeatedly declined to elaborate.

During the 2021 standoff, Aldrich allegedly told the frightened grandparents about firearms and bomb-making material in the basement of the home they all shared. Aldrich vowed not to let the grandparents interfere with plans to "go out in a blaze."

Aldrich livestreamed on Facebook a subsequent confrontation with SWAT teams at the house of their mother, Laura Voepel, where the defendant eventually surrendered, was arrested and had weapons, ammunition and more than 100 pounds (45 kilograms) of explosive materials seized.

The FBI had received a tip on Aldrich a day before the threat but closed out the case just weeks later with no federal charges filed.

By August 2021, when Aldrich bonded out of jail, the grandparents were describing the suspect as a "sweet young" person, according to the transcripts. At two subsequent hearings that fall, defense attorneys described how Aldrich was attending therapy and was on medications, the transcripts show.

In an October 2021 courtroom exchange, Chittum told Aldrich to "hang in there with the meds."

"It's an adjustment period for sure," Aldrich replied, to which the judge replied, "Yeah it will settle, don't worry. Good luck."

The case had been headed toward a plea agreement early this year but fell apart after family members stopped cooperating and prosecutors failed to successfully serve a subpoena to testify to Aldrich's 69-year-old grandmother Pamela Pullen, who was bedridden in Florida.

There is scant discussion in the transcripts of efforts by prosecutors to subpoena other potential witnesses — including Aldrich's mother, grandfather and a fourth person who is listed in court documents but not identified.

Although authorities missed some warning signs about Aldrich's capability for violence, the opposite happened across the country in Minnesota this week, where a man who said he idolized Aldrich was arrested after trying to buy grenades from an FBI informant and building an arsenal of automatic weapons to use against police, according to charges.

Father of July 4 shooting suspect charged with 7 felonies

By KATHLEEN FOODY and MICHAEL TARM The Associated Press

CHICAGO (AP) — The father of an Illinois man charged with killing seven people in a mass shooting at a July 4 parade in a Chicago suburb has been charged with seven felony counts of reckless conduct, prosecutors announced Friday.

Lake County State's Attorney Eric Rinehart said Robert Crimo Jr. surrendered to police on Friday and will have a bond hearing Saturday. Rinehart said the charges are based on Crimo sponsoring his then 19-year-old son's application for a gun license in 2019.

"Parents and guardians are in the best position to decide whether their teenagers should have a weapon," Rinehart said. "In this case, the system failed when Robert Crimo Jr. sponsored his son. He knew what he knew and he signed the form anyway."

Rinehart wouldn't further discuss what led his office to file the charges this week. Authorities have previously said the accused shooter, Robert Crimo III, attempted suicide by machete in April 2019 and in September 2019 was accused by a family member of making threats to "kill everyone."

Both those reports came months before Crimo Jr. sponsored his son's application in December 2019.

Chicago-area attorney George M. Gomez said by phone Friday that he was representing Robert Crimo Jr. in the newly announced criminal case. He declined to answer questions but emailed a statement that described the charges as "baseless and unprecedented."

"This decision should alarm every single parent in the United States of America who according to the Lake County State's Attorney knows exactly what is going on with their 19 year old adult children and can be held criminally liable for actions taken nearly three years later," the statement from Gomez said. "These charges are absurd and we will fight them every step of the way."

Gomez said Crimo Jr. "continues to sympathize and feel terrible for the individuals and families who were injured and lost loved ones," but the attorney called the charges "politically motivated and a distraction from the real change that needs to happen in this country."

A grand jury in July indicted Robert Crimo III on 21 first-degree murder counts, 48 counts of attempted murder and 48 counts of aggravated battery, representing the seven people killed and dozens wounded in the attack on a beloved holiday event in Highland Park.

Until Friday, Rinehart had refused to discuss whether the man's parents could face charges connected to the killings.

Legal experts have said it's rare for an accused shooter's parent or guardian to face charges — in part because it's difficult to prove such charges.

In one notable exception, a Michigan prosecutor last year filed involuntary manslaughter charges against the parents of a teen accused of fatally shooting four students at his high school. A January trial date in that case has been delayed while the state appeals court considers an appeal by the parents.

Authorities have previously said that Illinois State Police reviewed Crimo III's December 2019 gun license application and found no reason to deny it because he had no arrests, no criminal record, no serious mental

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health problems, no orders of protection and no other behavior that would disqualify him.

But following the parade shooting, public records showed that Crimo III attempted suicide by machete in April 2019, according to a police report obtained by The Associated Press that noted a "history of attempts."

In September 2019, police received a report from a family member that Crimo III had a collection of knives and had threatened to "kill everyone."

Both Crimo III and his mother disputed the threat of violence at the time. Police have said father Robert Crimo Jr. later told investigators the knives belonged to him, and authorities returned them.

Robert Crimo Jr. has shown up at several pretrial hearings for his son this year, nodding in greeting when he son entered the courtroom shackled and flanked by guards. The father is a longtime resident of Highland Park and a familiar face around the city, where he was once a mayoral candidate and was well known for operating convenience stores.

In media interviews after the shooting, Robert Crimo Jr. had said he did not expect to face charges and did not believe he did anything wrong by helping his son get a gun license through the state's established process.

US buying 3M barrels of oil to start replenishing reserves

By MATTHEW DALY Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Biden administration said Friday it is buying 3 million barrels of oil to begin to replenish U.S. strategic reserves that officials drained earlier this year in a bid to stop gasoline prices from rising amid production cuts by OPEC and a ban on Russian oil imports.

President Joe Biden withdrew 180 million barrels from the Strategic Petroleum Reserve starting in March, bringing the stockpile to its lowest level since the 1980s. The purchase, to begin in January, will start to replenish the reserve and is likely to be followed by additional purchases, officials said.

The Energy Department called the purchase "a good deal for American taxpayers" since the price will be lower than the \$96 per barrel average the U.S. oil was sold for. The replenishment also will strengthen U.S. energy security, the department said in a statement.

The purchase price was not announced, but benchmark West Texas Intermediate crude oil was selling at \$74.50 per barrel late Friday.

Gasoline prices, meanwhile, averaged about \$3.18 per gallon on Friday, down from \$3.74 a month ago and just over \$5 per gallon at their peak in June, according to the AAA auto club.

Tapping the reserve is among the few things a president can do by himself to try to control the inflation that makes Americans poorer and often creates a political liability for the party in control of the White House.

Global oil prices were rising even before Russia invaded Ukraine last February. When Biden announced a ban on Russian oil imports in early March, he acknowledged it would come at a cost to American consumers.

The administration completed the release of 180 million barrels in October. The reserve now contains roughly 400 million barrels of oil, down from more than 600 million in late 2021, according to the Energy Department.

The reserve was created after the 1970s Arab oil embargo to give the United States a supply that could be used in an emergency.

Contracts for the purchase will be awarded by Jan. 13, with deliveries to an SPR site in Texas expected in February.

Elon Musk claims he was doxxed. But what exactly is that?

By HALELUYA HADERO and KELVIN CHAN AP Business Writers

NEW YORK (AP) — When Twitter abruptly suspended the accounts of several journalists with no explanation, the platform's owner Elon Musk hinted at the possible reason: They allegedly doxxed him.

"You dox, you get suspended. End of story. That's it," he said on a Twitter Space audio discussion late Thursday, referring to the act of disclosing someone personal details online.

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Musk targeted journalists from The New York Times, CNN, Washington Post and other outlets after suspending a Twitter account that tracked his private jet using publicly available data — an account Musk had previously said he would leave alone as a demonstration of his commitment to free speech.

Twitter updated its policy this week, saying it would remove any tweets or accounts that share someone's live location if it's not done to help in humanitarian efforts or during public events.

Several of the journalists whose accounts were suspended had written about the plane tracking Twitter account as well as Musk's reasoning for the new policy, which followed Musk's claims that a family member in Los Angeles had been stalked earlier in the week.

SO WHAT IS DOXXING?

Doxxing, sometimes written as doxing, is a shortened version of "dropping dox" or documents.

It's typically a malicious practice that involves gathering private or identifying information and releasing it online without the person's permission, usually in an attempt to harass, threaten, shame or exact revenge.

Jeff Kosseff, a cybersecurity law professor at the U.S. Naval Academy who wrote a book tied to the topic, said doxxing is not a legally defined term and it can mean different things to different people. Some people think only applies to the sharing of private information. The Department of Homeland Security says doxers may use publicly available information, such as property records.

"If you were to take DHS' definition, the fact that plain data is already open source and publicly available doesn't necessarily mean that it's not doxxing," Kosseff said. "But DHS does have what I think most people include, which is malicious purposes. And it's really hard to make that judgment about why someone is posting this information."

Doxxing sprang from 1990s online hacker culture, which prized anonymity. It was a way for hackers to unmask rivals they were feuding with, according to cybersecurity firm Kaspersky. But that aspect became less relevant as doxxing's definition expanded and many more people moved online using their real names on their social media accounts, the firm says.

NOTABLE DOXXINGS

Celebrities, politicians, journalists have all been victims of doxing. So have people with lower profiles.

In early example, anti-abortion hackers in the 1990s infamously exposed abortion providers' home addresses, photos and other information on a now-defunct website called the "Nuremberg Files."

Another prominent victim was Brianna Wu, a software engineer who was critical of the "Gamergate" movement, a 2014 harassment campaign against female game developers. She told The Associated Press in 2016, "I got death threats, so I had to go to the police, I got 'doxed' so my personal information (was) out there."

Even authorities aren't immune. High-ranking police officials in a number of U.S. cities, including Washington, Atlanta, Boston and New York, had their home addresses, emails and phone numbers shared on social media amid tensions over the police custody death of George Floyd.

IS DOXXING ILLEGAL?

Releasing publicly available information is more of an ethical issue rather than a legal one, said Kosseff, the cybersecurity expert.

It would be difficult to show liability for a crime, for example, if an account is simply republishing public flight data, he said. Any criminal charges that could be filed against anyone involved in sharing personal information would more likely be related to something like harassment, not doxxing.

"To the extent that it's based on publicly available data, I think there would be pretty strong First Amendment protections," Kosseff said. Still, he said that could change depending on the jurisdiction of a potential case and any specific harms that occur.

WAS ELON MUSK DOXXED BY THE SUSPENDED JOURNALISTS?

It depends on how you define doxxing.

The suspended journalists deny they were directly sharing information about Musk's location. Musk's definition of doxxing seems to be much more expansive than its original meaning, to include anyone even linking to personal information posted by someone else.

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When some of the journalists, including the Washington Post's Drew Harwell, held a Twitter Spaces audio discussion to talk about the suspensions Thursday night, Musk made a surprise appearance.

"You're suggesting that we're sharing your address, which is not true," Harwell said. "I never posted your address."

"You posted the link to the address," Musk replied.

Harwell argued that the journalists posted links to the @elonjet account that tracked his private jet as a normal course of reporting.

WHAT ABOUT MUSK'S OWN RECORD?

While it's not clear whether Musk himself has doxxed anyone -- as one of the suspended journalists has alleged -- he does have a history of calling people out and making them the target of harassment by his army of fans.

Business Insider columnist Linette Lopez, who spent years covering Musk, alleged in a Tweet before her suspension Friday that Musk participated in the doxxing of "Montana Skeptic," a prominent Tesla critic who contributed to the website Seeking Alpha. His real identity was posted on Twitter several years ago.

The writer, whose real name is Lawrence Fossi, told Mediate earlier this year that Musk also called into his workplace one day and threatened to sue over the writings.

Among other examples, Musk also faced a defamation lawsuit in 2019 after he called a British cave explorer "pedo guy" in an angry tweet. The man, Vernon Unsworth, had participated in the rescue of 12 boys and their soccer coach after they were trapped in a cave in Thailand in 2018. Musk defeated the suit.

AP Breakthrough Entertainer: Tenoch Huerta, a global hero

By BERENICE BAUTISTA Associated Press

MEXICO CITY (AP) — The opening credits of "Wakanda Forever" fittingly say "introducing Tenoch Huerta." What an introduction it's been.

Huerta's role as Namor in the "Black Panther" sequel has wowed audiences, catapulting him onto the global stage and sparking conversations about race and identity, both in his native Mexico and abroad. It's also led to Huerta being named one of The Associated Press' Breakthrough Entertainers of 2022, joining the ranks of Sadie Sink, Daryl McCormack and his fellow Marvel standout, Iman Vellani.

Like many of the Breakthrough Entertainer honorees, Huerta isn't a newcomer. He's appeared in numerous films such as "The Forever Purge" and series like "Mozart in the Jungle" and "Narcos: Mexico." But "Wakanda Forever" has given him a new level of global exposure, which he's using to advance several causes like inclusivity and social justice.

Huerta grew up in Ecatepec, a suburban area of Mexico City, infamous for its high levels of delinquency and often referred with prejudice by the people in the capital.

"It's not easy to come from there," said Huerta in a recent interview in Mexico City during the promotion of "Wakanda Forever." The area is close to the capital, but "you can spend a couple of hours to reach the nearest subway station, there's violence."

Huerta, 41, acknowledged that the fact that he didn't see "brown skin people" like him on screen or theater, and definitively not in advertisements, made him believe that acting wasn't a serious possibility. "You can't dream of something that you can see," he said.

He spent many years playing American Football, and it wasn't until his father prodded him that he considered acting. "When I was 16 my father insisted to me to become an actor, he pushed me to take workshops," said Huerta. "The workshop was for two or three weeks, and I spent nine months. I liked it a lot but, (it) never was my life plan, it was just a hobby."

He kept going to casting calls and was selected to play a gardener who entertains white rich youngsters in Gael García Bernal's debut feature "Deficit" (2007). That took him to the Cannes Film Festival for the first time, a journey he repeated in 2011 with Everardo Gout's "Days of Grace," for which he won the Ariel, the Mexican equivalent to the Oscars, as best actor.

"Until that moment I assumed, I understood I was an actor, but it takes a long time and a nomination

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to the Ariel, many awards around the world and in Mexico, and finally in that moment I thought, 'Ok I'm an actor.' It was a process," said Huerta.

Huerta said he was a fan of Marvel movies and was really pleased when he received a videocall from the director Ryan Coogler who was explaining the plot of "Wakanda Forever." The story included a shaman and a potion that people drank before jumping into the ocean.

"The communication was frozen for about five minutes so when he is back, he says 'So what do you think?'" recalled Huerta. "I never understood clearly what was about this offer and then I told my agents, and they found out that he (Coogler) was offering me Namor. I assumed it was the shaman, but they said, 'No its Namor.'"

His character is the leader of Tlalokan, the subaquatic world where Namor lives. It is a vibrant world inspired by pre-Hispanic architecture and culture, created with help from Mayan experts.

"They grew up in Mayan communities, they are Mayan speakers and they have degrees and all the credentials to work in this movie," said Huerta. "I just can say that Marvel and Disney they're making a really great job of inclusion and representation and finally people like us, we're able to see ourselves in this movie, so proud, so beautiful and so powerful, that's a gift."

Huerta said the second-best part, after the reassurance of collaborating with experts in the film, was to do all the training and battles, learning to hold his breath for minutes underwater and use wires to simulate the flights of Namor.

"In real life ... my knees hurt, my back and everything. I'm a simple human, and I'm getting old by the way," said Huerta smiling. "But in the movie it's such a great experience."

In Mexico Huerta has become a symbol of the fight for racial justice, winning acclaim but also facing criticism from people who consider him problematic because as a person with dark skin, Huerta denounces prejudice against those who look like him.

Huerta recently published "Orgullo prieto" (which loosely translates as Dark Skinned Pride) a book in which he recalls his own experiences facing racism and classism in his country.

"For me this book is a way to say we need to learn, we need to change and then try to have a better society. I specially wrote this book for the kids for the young people," said the father of two girls. "I try to create, as much as I can, a better place to live for them."

Seeing himself as a breakthrough artist brings Huerta hope.

"I don't know how my life is gonna be changed from this point on, but I hope this movie affects the people, affects the kids and if the kids are able to look at themselves on the mirror and feel proud," he said. "If they are able to look at them and feel proud of themselves, for me, that's perfect."

The AP names its nine Breakthrough Entertainers of 2022

By The Associated Press undefined

They worked hard, with the rewards coming slowly but surely. Then something came along — often a key role or sometimes a cluster, maybe an album — and it all became next-level, a shift triggering where-did-you-come-from vibes.

That describes most of this year's nine Associated Press' Breakthrough Entertainers of the Year, a class of talent that flowered in 2022. They are Sadie Sink, Stephanie Hsu, Tenoch Huerta, Joaquina Kalukango, Iman Vellani, Daryl McCormack, Tobe Nwigwe, Simone Ashley and Danielle Deadwyler.

Sink had been on Broadway and worked alongside stars such as Naomi Watts and Helen Mirren. But playing Max Mayfield in the fourth season of "Stranger Things," she broke through as a brave skater girl who never lets go of her Walkman, who hates pink, plays video games and is a "Dragon's Lair" champion.

Hsu also was a Broadway veteran with a few TV credits when she was asked to play both a sullen teen and an intergalactic supervillain in the movie "Everything Everywhere All at Once." That led to an unforgettable performance that included dressing as Elvis and walking a pig on a leash.

Like many of the others on the list, Kalukango had racked up plenty of Broadway credits when she took a risk and played the lead in a Broadway musical, "Paradise Square." It led to a best actress in a leading

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role Tony Award and a stunning moment in the telecast when she sang "Let It Burn."

"Black Panther: Wakanda Forever" isn't one of Huerta's biggest roles but the Mexican actor suddenly launched a hundred memes as the mutant leader of a kingdom based on Mayan and Aztec influences beneath the ocean for centuries. Huerta, known for roles in the Netflix series "Narcos: Mexico" and the movie "The Forever Purge," has taken a big step for movie diversity.

Nwigwe, just nominated for a Grammy as best new artist, has been bubbling up with noted appearances on NPR's Tiny Desk Concert series and earning a spot on Michelle Obama's 2020 workout playlist with "I'm Dope." This year, the Houston-based artist was featured on the "Black Panther: Wakanda Forever" soundtrack and dropped the EP "moMINTs" to acclaim.

McCormack has worked consistently since 2018 but 2022 seems to have turned into something special with a constellation of roles — "Peaky Blinders," the buzzy, dark comedy thriller "Bad Sisters," plus a star-making performance as the title character in the film "Good Luck to You, Leo Grande" opposite Emma Thompson.

Ashley, a British actress of Indian heritage with a Tamil background, found herself leading season two of the Regency-era period drama "Bridgerton." She had a role in the series "Sex Education," but playing the fiercely independent Kate Sharma for Shonda Rhimes was her first lead character in a major production.

Deadwyler burst into the awards race this year with her performance in "Till" as Mamie Till-Mobley, the mother of teenager Emmett Till, who was lynched in 1955. She has also appeared in "The Harder They Come," "Watchmen" and the Netflix series "From Scratch" and "Station Eleven."

Vellani, another member of the Marvel Cinematic Universe on this list, is the exception, having had no such slow burn. The 19-year-old actor in "Ms. Marvel" plays a high school student enamored with all things superheroes only to find herself suddenly wielding powers of her own. And Vellani, in real life, is just starting to find her powers, like all the entertainers nominated here.

Russia launches another major missile attack on Ukraine

By HANNA ARHIROVA, VASILISA STEPANENKO and JAMEY KEATEN Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Ukraine's capital came under one of the biggest attacks of the war on Friday as Russia's invading forces fired dozens of missiles across the country, triggering widespread power outages, Ukrainian officials said.

Gunfire from air defense systems and thudding explosions combined with the wail of air-raid sirens as the barrage targeted critical infrastructure in cities including Kyiv, Kharkiv, Kryvyi Rih and Zaporhizhzhia. The head of the Ukrainian armed forces said they intercepted 60 of 76 missiles launched.

"My beautiful sunshine. What am I going to do without you?" wailed Svytlana Andreychuk in the arms of Red Cross staffers. Her sister Olha was one of three people killed when a missile slammed into a four-story apartment building in Kryvyi Rih.

"She was so cheerful in life. She was a beauty. She helped everybody. She gave advice to everybody. How I love you so," said Andreychuk.

In Kyiv, city council member Ksenia Semenova said 60% of residents were without power Friday evening, and 70% without water. The subway system was out of service and unlikely to be back in operation Saturday, she said.

Russian strikes on electricity and water systems have occurred intermittently since mid-October, increasing the suffering of the population as winter approaches. But the Ukrainian military has reported increasing success in shooting down incoming rockets and explosive drones.

Friday's attacks took place after the United States this week agreed to give a Patriot missile battery to Ukraine to boost the country's defense. Russia's Foreign Ministry warned Thursday that the sophisticated system and any crews accompanying it would be a legitimate target for the Russian military.

The U.S. also pledged last month to send \$53 million in energy-related equipment to help Ukraine withstand the attacks on its infrastructure. John Kirby, spokesman for the White House National Security Council, said Friday that the first tranche of that aid had arrived in the country.

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More than half the Russian missiles fired Friday targeted Ukraine's capital. The city administration said Kyiv withstood "one of the biggest rocket attacks" it has faced since Russia invaded Ukraine nearly 10 months ago. Ukrainian air defense shot down 37 of about 40 missiles that entered the city's airspace, and one person was injured, it said.

Ukraine's air force said Russian forces fired cruise missiles from the Admiral Makarov frigate in the Black Sea, while Kh-22 cruise missiles were fired from long-range Tu-22M3 bombers over the Sea of Azov, and tactical aircraft-fired guided missiles.

In Kryvyi Rih, President Volodymyr Zelenskyy's hometown in central Ukraine, the apartment building hit by a missile had a gaping hole in its upper floors. Along with the three people killed, at least 13 were taken to the hospital, said Igor Karelin, deputy head of the city's emergency services.

Rescue teams with sniffer dogs searched through the debris for a missing mother and her 18-month-old child.

Also at Kryvyi Rih, nearly 600 miners were stuck underground because of the missile strikes, but were later rescued, Mayor Oleksandr Vilkul said on state TV.

He said "several energy infrastructure facilities were completely destroyed."

State-owned grid operator Ukrenergo wrote on Facebook that Friday's attack was "the ninth wave of missile strikes on energy facilities," and because of the repeated damage, "the restoration of power supply may take longer than before."

Analysts have said Russian strikes targeting energy infrastructure are part of an attempt to freeze Ukrainians into submission after battlefield losses by Russian forces. Experts say that has only strengthened the resolve of Ukrainians to resist Russia's invasion, while Moscow tries to buy time for a possible offensive in coming months after the current battlefield stalemate.

Kharkiv regional governor Oleh Syniehubov reported three strikes Friday on critical infrastructure in that city, Ukraine's second-largest. By evening, about 55% of the city had its electricity restored.

The southeastern city of Zaporizhzhia and its surrounding region were hit by 21 rockets, city council secretary Anatoly Kurtev said. There were no initial reports of injuries.

And Kyiv Mayor Vitali Klitschko reported explosions in at least four districts there. Many residents were sheltering deep underground in subway tunnels.

At the site of one attempted strike in Kyiv, military commanders told The Associated Press that the city's territorial defense mobile group had shot down a cruise missile with a machine gun. It wasn't immediately clear whether other Ukrainian fire may have contributed to downing the rocket.

"Almost impossible to hit a missile with a machine gun, but it was done," said a commander who asked to be identified only by the call sign "Hera" for security reasons.

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. But trains continued to run after electric power was switched to backup, steam-engine power.

In neighboring Moldova, the state-owned energy company reported disruptions to its electricity network 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 Ukraine took place on Dec. 5.

"Grateful for the work of Ukraine's air defense amid more escalatory Russian attacks this morning on civilian infrastructure in Kyiv and around the country," the U.S. ambassador in Kyiv, Bridget Brink, wrote on Twitter.

Angelina Jolie leaves role as UN refugee agency envoy

UNITED NATIONS (AP) — Angelina Jolie and the United Nations' refugee agency are parting ways after more than two decades.

In a joint statement issued Friday, the U.S. actor and the agency announced she was "moving on" from

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her role as the agency's special envoy "to engage on a broader set of humanitarian and human rights issues."

"I will continue to do everything in my power in the years to come to support refugees and other displaced people," Jolie was quoted as saying in the statement, adding that she felt it was time "to work differently" by directly engaging with refugees and local organizations.

Jolie first started working with the U.N. refugee agency in 2001 and was appointed its special envoy in 2012. The release described the multi-hyphenate as "carrying out more than 60 field missions to bear witness to stories of suffering as well as hope and resilience."

"After a long and successful time with UNHCR, I appreciate her desire to shift her engagement and support her decision," U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees Filippo Grandi was quoted as saying. "I know the refugee cause will remain close to her heart, and I am certain she will bring the same passion and attention to a wider humanitarian portfolio."

In an opinion piece published in The Guardian last month, Jolie alluded to frustration with the lack of global progress in ending sexual violence in conflict.

"We meet and discuss these horrors and agree that they should never be allowed to happen again. We promise to draw — and to hold — that line. But when it comes to hard choices about how to implement these promises, we run into the same problems time and again," she wrote, specifically calling out U.N. Security Council members for "abusing their veto power."

Jolie previously characterized the United Nations as "imperfect" during a 2017 speech in Geneva, but also defended the international body and said it needed to be supported.

She later pressed the United Nations to create a permanent and independent investigative body to amass and evaluate evidence in cases regarding alleged war crimes, crimes against humanity and other human rights violations. While promoting that effort at U.N. headquarters in 2019, she told the AP that promoting equality for women, combatting injustice, and helping refugees were the most important parts of her life after her children.

"But in many ways, they go hand in hand," she said. Jolie has been involved in other advocacy efforts, recently pushing for the renewal of the Violence Against Women Act in the U.S.

Jolie began visiting refugee camps in 2001, and was appointed as a UNHCR goodwill ambassador that same year. At the time, the then-high commissioner said he hoped the then-26-year-old actress could direct young people's attention to the plight of refugees.

Last year, Jolie told The Associated Press in Burkina Faso that she was concerned that increasing displacement across the world would drive more instability — and that governments had to do something to address the conflicts at the root of the issue.

"Compared to when I began working with UNHCR 20 years ago, it seems like governments have largely given up on diplomacy ... countries which have the least are doing the most to support the refugees," she told the AP.

Developing countries play host to more than 80% of the world's refugees, according to UNHCR, which also announced in May that the number of displaced people crossed 100 million for the first time. Speaking to the AP in August, Grandi praised the European Union's efforts to aid Ukrainian refugees but implored world leaders to remember the other humanitarian crises for which its agency was fundraising.

"The big problem that we have at the moment is that it tends to marginalize all other crises in which people suffer," Grandi said of Russia's war in Ukraine.

UNHCR lists different categories of "prominent supporters" on its website, including goodwill ambassadors like Australian actor Cate Blanchett, British author Neil Gaiman and Pakistani actor Mahira Khan.

In response to a request for additional comment, a spokesperson for the U.N. agency declined to offer further details beyond saying that UNHCR "has no intention of appointing anyone else in the role of special envoy."

QAnon follower who chased officer on Jan. 6 gets 5 years

By LINDSAY WHITEHURST Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — An Iowa construction worker and QAnon follower was sentenced Friday to five years in prison for his role in the Jan. 6, 2021, insurrection at the U.S. Capitol, when he led a crowd chasing a police officer who diverted rioters away from lawmakers.

Wearing a T-shirt celebrating the conspiracy theory with his arms spread, Douglas Jensen became part of one of the most memorable images from the riot.

As he handed down the sentence, Judge Timothy Kelly said he wasn't sure Jensen understood the seriousness of a violent attack in which he played a "big role."

"It snapped our previously unbroken tradition of peaceful transfer of power. We can't get that back," Kelly said. "I wish I could say I had evidence you understood this cannot be repeated."

Jensen was convicted at trial of seven counts, including felony charges that he obstructed Congress from certifying the Electoral College vote and that he assaulted or interfered with police officers during the siege. His sentence also includes three years of supervised release and a \$2,000 fine.

He gave a brief statement to the judge, saying that he wanted to return to "being a family man and my normal life before I got involved with politics."

Jensen scaled a retaining wall and entered through a broken window so he could be one of the first people to storm the Capitol that day, Kelly said. He led a group that chased Capitol Police Officer Eugene Goodman up a staircase. He would later re-enter the building and scuffle with police.

"Doug Jensen wanted to be the poster boy of the insurrection," prosecutor Emily Allen said.

Jensen wore a T-shirt with a large "Q" on it because he wanted the conspiracy theory to get credit for what happened that day, his defense attorney Christopher Davis said.

Davis said Jensen's own "childhood of horrors" influenced his later faith in the baseless belief that former President Donald Trump was secretly fighting against enemies in the "deep state" and a child sex trafficking ring run by satanic pedophiles and cannibals.

It also includes the apocalyptic prophecy that "The Storm" was coming and would usher in mass arrests and executions of Trump's foes, including then-Vice President Mike Pence, who Trump would deride that day as lacking courage.

Davis has argued Jensen was dressed as a "walking advertisement for QAnon" and not intending to attack the Capitol. He did not physically hurt people or damage anything inside the Capitol, Davis said, and many friends and family members wrote letters to the judge on his behalf.

Goodman's quick thinking that day — to divert the rioters away from the Senate and then find backup — avoided "tremendous bloodshed," Capitol Police Inspector Thomas Lloyd said Friday.

Pence was presiding over the Senate on Jan. 6 as a joint session of Congress was convened to certify President Joe Biden's 2020 electoral victory. Before the riot, Trump and his allies spread the falsehood that Pence somehow could have overturned the election results.

Approximately 900 people have been charged with federal crimes for their conduct on Jan. 6. More than 400 of them have pleaded guilty, mostly to misdemeanor offenses. Sentences for the rioters have ranged from probation for low-level misdemeanor offenses to 10 years in prison for a man who used a metal flagpole to assault an officer.

Huge Berlin aquarium bursts, unleashing flood of devastation

By EMILY SCHULTHEIS and FRANK JORDANS Associated Press

BERLIN (AP) — A huge aquarium in Berlin burst, spilling debris, water and hundreds of tropical fish out of the AquaDom tourist attraction in the heart of the German capital early Friday.

Police said parts of the building, which also contains a hotel, cafes and a chocolate store, were damaged as 1 million liters (264,000 gallons) of water poured from the aquarium shortly before 6 a.m. (0500 GMT). Berlin's fire service said two people were slightly injured.

The company that owns the AquaDom, Union Investment Real Estate, said in a statement Friday after-

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noon that the reasons for the incident were "still unclear."

Mayor Franziska Giffey said the tank had unleashed a "veritable tsunami" of water but the early morning timing had prevented far more injuries.

"Despite all the destruction, we were still very lucky," she said. "We would have had terrible human damage" had the aquarium burst even an hour later, once more people were awake and in the hotel and the surrounding area, she said.

The website of the AquaDom described it as the biggest cylindrical tank in the world at 25 meters tall (82 feet tall), although Union Investment Real Estate clarified Friday that the tank portion of the attraction had a height of 14 meters (46 feet).

There was speculation freezing temperatures that got down to minus 10 degrees Celsius (14 degrees Fahrenheit) overnight caused a crack in the acrylic glass tank, which then exploded under the weight of the water. Police said they found no evidence of a malicious act.

Nearly all of the 1,500 fish that were inside at the time of the rupture died, the Berlin Mitte district government confirmed via Twitter, adding "a few fish at the bottom of the tank" could still be saved. Among the 80 types of fish it housed were blue tang and clownfish, two colorful species known from the popular animated movie "Finding Nemo."

Veterinarians, fire service officers and other officials spent the afternoon working to rescue 400 to 500 smaller fish from a separate set of aquariums housed under the hotel lobby. Without electricity, their tanks were not receiving the necessary oxygen for them to survive, officials said. They were evacuated to other tanks in the neighboring Sea Life aquarium that were unaffected.

"It's a great tragedy that for 1,500 fish there was no chance of survival," said Almut Neumann, a city official in charge of environmental issues for Berlin's Mitte district. "The focus in the afternoon was clearly on saving the fish in the remaining tanks."

Various organizations, including the Berlin Zoo, offered to take in the surviving fish.

Aquarium operator Sea Life said it was saddened by the incident and trying to get more information from the owners of the AquaDom. It said what happened with the AquaDom was "unique and unprecedented" and that Sea Life's exhibits were not in danger of similar damage.

Sea Life Berlin is located in the same building and visitors can tour it and the AquaDom on a single ticket.

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 woken 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."

Police said a Lindt chocolate store and several restaurants in the same building complex, as well as an underground parking garage next to the hotel, sustained damage. A fire service spokesman said building safety experts were assessing the extent to which the hotel had sustained structural damage.

Hours after the incident, trucks began clearing away the debris that had spilled out onto the street in front of the hotel. Brightly colored Lindt chocolate wrappers were scattered in front of the building where the chocolate shop was damaged. A small crowd of tourists and onlookers snapped photos from behind the police line across the street.

Animal rights group PETA tweeted Friday that the aquarium became a "death trap" for the fish housed in it. "This man-made tragedy shows that aquariums are not a safe place for fish and other marine life," the group wrote.

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.

Iva Yudinski, a tourist from Israel who was staying at the hotel, said she was shocked by the incident

"Just yesterday we watched it and we were so amazed (by) its beauty," she said. "Suddenly it's all gone. Everything is a mess, a total mess."

Trump omits dinner with white nationalist in speech to Jews

By STEVE PEOPLES AP National Political Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Speaking at a conference of Orthodox Jews on Friday, Donald Trump did not address a widely criticized private meal he shared last month with a Holocaust-denying white nationalist and a rapper who has spewed antisemitic conspiracies.

The former president told the audience he was “the best ally you’ve ever had.”

Over and over, Trump heaped praise on the Jewish people and highlighted his support for Israel as he addressed the annual President’s Conference of Torah Umesorah at his National Doral club in Miami. He alleged Congress was “almost anti-Israel” and said without evidence that some Democrats in Washington “hate Israel with a passion.”

Trump is struggling for political momentum a month after becoming the first official candidate to enter the 2024 presidential contest. He hoped the early announcement might scare off potential challengers, but a series of political setbacks have instead left him deeply vulnerable as he ramps up his third presidential campaign.

The 76-year-old Republican faced pointed criticism from within his own party late last month after dining with Holocaust-denying white supremacist Nick Fuentes and the rapper formerly known as Kanye West. Shortly after the meeting, West, who is now known as Ye, said, “I love Jewish people, but I also love Nazis.”

Former Vice President Mike Pence called on Trump to apologize for the meeting and said the former president had “demonstrated profoundly poor judgment.”

Trump at the time said he was not aware of his dinner guests’ views.

On Friday, Trump ignored the episode altogether. He also quoted his own 2019 State of the Union address in which he highlighted the importance of speaking out against antisemitism.

“We must never ignore the vile poison of antisemitism or those who spread its venomous creed,” Trump said, reading from his own remarks. “With one voice we must confront this hatred; we must confront it everywhere; we must confront it very, very strongly.”

The audience interrupted his remarks with standing ovations multiple times.

“I believe I’m the best ally you’ve ever had,” Trump said.

Brittney Griner says she’ll play basketball in Arizona again

By DOUG FEINBERG AP Basketball Writer

Brittney Griner said she’s “grateful” to be back in the United States and plans on playing basketball again next season for the WNBA’s Phoenix Mercury. Her comments came a week after she was released from a Russian prison, freed in a dramatic high-level prisoner exchange.

“It feels so good to be home!” Griner posted to Instagram on Friday in her first public statement since her release. “The last 10 months have been a battle at every turn. I dug deep to keep my faith and it was the love from so many of you that helped keep me going. From the bottom of my heart, thank you to everyone for your help.”

Griner was arrested in February in Russia on drug-related charges and was later convicted and sentenced to nine years in a Russian jail. After months of strained negotiations, and an extraordinarily rare public revelation by the Biden administration that it had made a “substantial proposal” to bring home Griner and another detained American, Paul Whelan, the case resolved last week with a prisoner swap in which the WNBA star was exchanged in the United Arab Emirates for Russian arms dealer Viktor Bout.

“President Biden, you brought me home and I know you are committed to bringing Paul Whelan and all Americans home too,” Griner said. “I will use my platform to do whatever I can to help you. I also encourage everyone that played a part in bringing me home to continue their efforts to bring all Americans home. Every family deserves to be whole.”

Whelan’s brother David said last week in a statement that he was “so glad” for Griner’s release but also disappointed for his family. He credited the White House with giving the Whelan family advance notice

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and said he did not fault officials for making the deal.

"The Biden administration made the right decision to bring Ms. Griner home, and to make the deal that was possible, rather than waiting for one that wasn't going to happen," he said.

Griner also thanked the military staff and medical team in Texas, where she was receiving care after returning to the U.S. last week. She wrote that she would "transition home to enjoy the holidays with my family" but did not say where.

While WNBA Commissioner Cathy Engelbert said she was going to give Griner all the time she needed to decide whether she wanted to play basketball again, Griner made it clear that: "I intend to play basketball for the WNBA's Phoenix Mercury this season, and in doing so, I look forward to being able to say 'thank you' to those of you who advocated, wrote, and posted for me in person soon."

"Amazing timing for her to be home before the holidays," Engelbert told the AP in an interview Thursday. "It's a great story for all who know her."

The Mercury open the season on the road against the Los Angeles Sparks on May 19. The team's first home game is two days later against the Chicago Sky.

So long, California: Major county votes to study secession

By MICHAEL R. BLOOD, JAE HONG and AMY TAXIN Associated Press

RANCHO CUCAMONGA, Calif. (AP) — The November elections saw Californians continue to embrace progressive leadership, but voters in one of the state's most populous counties are so frustrated with this political direction that they voted to consider seceding and forming their own state.

An advisory ballot proposal approved in San Bernardino County — home to 2.2 million people — directs local officials to study the possibility of secession. The razor-thin margin of victory is the latest sign of political unrest and economic distress in California.

This attempt to create a new state — which would be the first since Hawaii in 1959 — is a longshot proposition for the county just east of Los Angeles that has suffered from sharp increases in cost of living. It would hinge on approval by the California Legislature and Congress, both of which are highly unlikely.

Still, it's significant that the vote came from a racially and ethnically diverse county that is politically mixed, as well as the fifth-most populous in the state and the largest in the nation by area. San Bernardino's 20,000 square miles (51,800 square kilometers) is composed of more land than nine states.

The votes speaks to the alienation that some voters feel from a statehouse long dominated by Democrats who have made little progress on the growing homeless crisis, soaring housing costs and rising crime rates while residents pay among the highest taxes in the country.

There is "a lot of frustration overall" with state government and how public dollars are spent — with far too little coming to the county, said Curt Hagman, chairman of the Board of Supervisors that placed the proposal on the ballot. The county will look at whether billions of dollars in state and federal funds was fairly shared with local governments in the Inland Empire.

From record inflation to friction over the state's long-running COVID-19 pandemic policies, "it's been a rough few years" for residents, Hagman said.

Kristin Washington, chair of the San Bernardino County Democratic Party, dismissed the measure as a political maneuver to turn out conservative voters, rather than a barometer of public sentiment.

"Putting it on a ballot was a waste of time for the voters," she said. "The option of actually seceding from the state is not even something that is realistic because of all the steps that actually go into it."

In San Bernardino County, Democratic voters now outnumber Republicans by 12 points. Still, in November Democratic Gov. Gavin Newsom lost in the county by 5 points. He easily defeated a recall last year driven by opposition to pandemic health orders that shuttered schools and businesses. California was among the first states to close schools and turn to online learning, and also among the last for students to return to in-person teaching.

Democrats dominate the California Legislature and congressional delegation, and the state is known as an incubator of liberal policy on climate, health care, labor issues and immigration, and the vote could

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be seen as partly a reaction to the state's priorities. Once solidly Republican terrain, with recent population growth San Bernardino County has become more diverse and Democratic, much like San Diego and Orange counties.

Throughout its 172-year history, California has weathered more than 220 failed attempts to dismantle the state into as many as six smaller states, according to the California State Library. Earlier breakaway efforts sought to carve out a new "State of Jefferson" from nearly two dozen Northern California counties, though they were largely rural, conservative-leaning and sparsely populated.

Competition between mining and agricultural interests, as well as opposition to taxation, have driven some of these secession efforts. There have been proposals to divide the sprawling state into north and south sections, as well as splitting it lengthwise to create separate coastal and inland regions.

"Everybody outside this county thinks we are the wild, wild West," said Ontario Mayor Paul Leon, whose city is one of the largest in the county. Despite the county's size, it "gets a pittance" when it comes to state and federal aid for roads, courthouses and transit, said Leon, who backed the measure.

The city of San Bernardino, with a population of about 220,000, anchors the third largest metropolitan area in the state, behind L.A. and San Francisco. Beyond the urban centers, its communities range from placid suburbs crisscrossed by freeways, mountain towns framed by towering pines and isolated desert havens such as hippie Joshua Tree. Inflation and economic stress are challenging many communities. Before the pandemic, the county's unemployment rate was already 9.5% in 2019, with 12.2% of households living below the poverty line.

"I tend to be very skeptical of these secession maneuvers," said William Deverell, director of the Huntington-USC Institute on California and the West.

"The state's problems are not likely to be addressed by the jurisdictional chopping block," Deverell said in an email. He's wary of the "hubris" of: "If only this part of the state could go its own way, as we aren't the root of the problem."

Since the proposal passed, the county's next step is to form a committee — likely composed of public and private sector members — to conduct an analysis of funding that will compare San Bernardino to other counties.

Many Inland Empire communities are struggling financially even though California's economy — by itself — may soon become the fourth largest in the world, up from fifth. The state announced last month that it had recovered all of the 2.7 million jobs it lost at the start of the pandemic. However, there are projections for a \$25 billion budget deficit next year and signs of an unsteady economy, as even the historically powerful tech industry has seen layoffs.

From 2018 to 2021, 352 companies moved their headquarters from California to other states, according to a Hoover Institution study. After decades of growth, the state population of 39 million has been shrinking, partly because residents are leaving for states that offer more affordable housing and lower taxes.

Because of decreased population, the state is even losing a congressional seat in 2023, dropping from 53 to 52.

Housing prices in Los Angeles, San Francisco and other metropolitan hubs frequently top \$1 million and are sharply increasing. Billions of dollars in spending statewide has made no visible difference in the homeless crisis in many cities. This has all fueled a reckoning with the direction of the state, which has long been mythologized as a land of opportunity.

"A lot of Californians are unhappy in many ways," said Claremont McKenna College political scientist Jack Pitney, citing record gas prices, the rising cost of living, and real estate prices that make home ownership unattainable for many working-class families.

"The vote on secession was like smashing the china. It's a way of getting attention but in the end it doesn't accomplish much," Pitney said.

Even Hagman said he doesn't want to see his home state broken apart, though he sees approval of the measure as an important statement on frustration with Sacramento.

"I want to remain part of California right now," he said. "I'm proud to be a Californian."

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In 2022, AP photographers captured pain of a changing planet

By PETER PRENGAMAN Associated Press

In 2022, Associated Press photographers captured signs of a planet in distress as climate change re-shaped many lives.

That distress was seen in the scarred landscapes in places where the rains failed to come. It was felt in walloping storms, land-engulfing floods, suffocating heat and wildfires no longer confined to a single season. It could be tasted in altered crops or felt as hunger pangs when crops stopped growing. And taken together, millions of people were compelled to pick up and move as many habitats became uninhabitable.

2022 will be a year remembered for destruction brought on by a warming planet and, according to scientists, was a harbinger for even more extreme weather.

PARCHED EARTH

In June, two young men sat smoking in front of a boat that had previously been under water. The waterline in parts of Lake Mead National Recreation Area in Nevada had dropped so much that the boat was now standing up in the mud. Such dramatic manifestations were seen in myriad places.

In Germany, drought combined with a bark beetle infestation left large swaths of Harz forest trees spindly, while in Kenya mothers struggled to keep their children nourished and animals died because of a lack of water. Along the Solimoes River in the Brazilian Amazon, houseboat dwellers found themselves living on mud instead of water, as parts dried up.

In eastern France, normally lush sunflowers looked as if they had been fried, their leaves withered and seeds blackened. Similar scars on the Earth's surface were seen in reef-like structures exposed by receding waters in Utah's Great Salt Lake, the cracked bed of Hungary's Lake Velence and the shrunken Yangtze River in southwestern China.

STORMS AND FLOODS

While a lack of rain did damage in many places, in others too much precipitation altered landscapes and swallowed lives. Sometimes the same region, in a short amount of time, went from drought to deluge — what scientists refer to as a "whiplash effect." This happened in parts of Yellowstone National Park last summer.

The country hardest hit by floods was Pakistan, with a third of its land submerged, millions of people displaced and at least 1,700 killed. But many countries were hit hard by storms.

In Cuba, a tropical cyclone in June led to so much flooding that rescuers moved through the streets of Havana in boats. Just a few months later, Hurricane Ian slammed into the island before continuing to Florida, leaving destruction and death in its wake.

Heavy floods were also seen in parts of Nigeria, India, Indonesia and numerous other places, while in one part of Brazil, a common aftereffect of flooding — landslides — killed more than 200 people.

To be sure, there were human attempts to better prepare and deal with flooding. One example: Chinese authorities continued to develop and expand "sponge cities," which aim to use porous pavement and green spaces to absorb water and reduce the destruction of flooding.

HEAT AND FIRE

In recent years, wildfires have become commonplace across the Western U.S. amid a 23-year drought and rising temperatures. Compared to last year, there were slightly fewer wildfires in 2022 in California — the state routinely hardest hit — but many blazes still chewed through land and homes.

America was hardly alone. There were significant fires in Portugal, Greece, Argentina and many other countries. Images like a living room engulfed in flames, an evacuated woman clinging to a police officer and a man using a branch to protect his home were visceral reminders of the fury that fires unleash.

Along with fires, there were periodic bouts of extreme heat. A sweating British soldier, wearing a traditional bearskin hat outside Buckingham Palace, captured a reality for many Brits, as temperatures reached 104 degrees Fahrenheit (40.3 degrees Celsius), a new record for the country.

How people coped with sauna-like conditions depended on the place. In Madrid, a fountain at an urban beach provided relief to parents and children. In Hungary, three people cooled off in a fill-up pool. And in Los Angeles, a woman stuck her head in front of an open fire hydrant.

IMPERILED FOOD

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In October, Wilbur Kuzuzuk pulled a spotted seal to the edge of the lagoon in Shishmaref, a town in western Alaska that is on the verge of disappearing because of climate change.

The 600 residents of the Inupiat village have stayed put despite increasing risks to their way of life, including their food supply, as warming seas encroach on land and warming temperatures hurt habitats. But residents like Kuzuzuk know Shishmaref's days are likely numbered: Twice the town has voted to relocate, though nothing has been put in motion.

All around the world there were clear threats to food supply. In India, floods damaged corn and other crops, leaving farmers no choice but to try to salvage as much as possible. In Kenya and surrounding countries, drought increased hunger and pushed villagers to dig ever deeper in search of groundwater, a lifeline for many.

Other threats were subtle. In Canada, northern gannet birds had to travel farther and dive deeper to colder waters in order to hunt fish. And in Brazil, rising sea levels brought more salt to the roots of acai palm trees, altering the taste —and marketability — of the beloved acai berry.

To be sure, there were stories of success. In a part of the Brazilian Amazon, locals putting limits on the number of giant pirarucu fish that can be caught has led the population to increase.

CLIMATE MIGRATION

Taken together, all of these problems pushed millions of people to migrate. Perhaps nowhere was that clearer than in Somalia, where severe drought led to starvation and prompted thousands of people to flee. Many migrants ended up in makeshift camps, like one in Dollow, emaciated, young children in tow, desperately seeking food and water.

Much of the migration happened within borders. In India's Ladakh region, a cold mountainous desert that borders China and Pakistan, shrinking grazable land, along with other effects of climate change, continued to force many to migrate from sparsely populated villages to urban settlements.

In Indonesia, a big driver of migration was encroaching seas. In Central Java, homes not outfitted with raised floors were swallowed, pushing those who didn't have the means to seek other abodes.

In Kenya, a woman named Winnie Keben recounted how she lost her leg to a crocodile attack. She blamed the attack, in part, on the fact that rising water levels around Lake Baringo have brought animals closer to humans. Many scientists attribute that to climate change.

Keben's home was also washed away, sending her family to another village.

Easter Island rebounds from wildfire that singed its statues

By MARÍA TERESA HERNÁNDEZ Associated Press

RAPA NUI, Chile (AP) — The hillside of Rano Raraku volcano on Rapa Nui feels like a place that froze in time.

Embedded in grass and volcanic rock, almost 400 moai — the monolithic human figures carved centuries ago by this remote Pacific island's Rapanui people -- remained untouched until recently. Some are buried from the neck down, the heads seemingly observing their surroundings from the underground.

Around them, there has been a pervasive smell of smoke from still-smoldering vegetation — the vestige of a wildfire that broke out in early October. More than 100 moai were damaged by the flames, many of them blackened by soot, though the impact on the stone remains undetermined. UNESCO recently allocated nearly \$100,000 for assessment and repair plans.

In this Polynesian territory that now belongs to Chile and is widely known as Easter Island, the loss of any moai would be a blow to ancient cultural and religious traditions. Each of the moai — the nearly 400 on the volcano and more than 500 others elsewhere on the island -- represents an ancestor. A creator of words and music. A protector.

The president of Rapa Nui's council of elders, Carlos Edmunds, recalled his emotions when he first heard about the fire.

"Oh, I started crying," he said. "It was like my grandparents were burned."

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It takes a close look at a map of the Pacific to find Rapa Nui, a tiny triangle covering about 63 square miles (164 square kilometers). Home to about 7,700 people – about half of them with Rapanui ancestry -- it's one of the world's most isolated inhabited islands. The quickest way to get there is a six-hour flight from Santiago, Chile, covering 2,340 miles (3,766 kilometers). Much farther away, to the northwest, are the more populous islands of Polynesia.

The remoteness has shaped the community's view of the world, its spirituality and culture. Its small size also plays a part: it seems everyone knows one other.

Rapa Nui was formed at least 750,000 years ago by volcanic eruptions. Its first inhabitants were sailors from Central Polynesia who gradually created their own culture. The moai were carved between the years 1000 and 1600.

The first Europeans arrived in 1722, soon followed by missionaries. Current religious activities mix ancestral and Catholic beliefs.

The arrival of outsiders had grim effects: Hundreds of Rapanui were enslaved by Peruvian raiders in 1862 and taken to South America, where many died in cruel conditions.

In 1888 Chile annexed the island and leased it to a sheep company. Only by the 20th century did the islanders begin to recover their autonomy, though there were no written Rapanui annals to recount their early history.

Without such books to preserve their legacy, the Rapanui have imprinted their people's memory in activities and traditions passed from generation to generation. The hand of the fisherman who casts a hook carries the wisdom of his ancestors. The women's hairstyle evokes the pukao, a hat made of reddish stone placed on the heads of the moai.

Even music is not merely music.

"You write books; we write songs," said Jean Pakarati, head adviser of Ma'u Henua indigenous community. "Dancing is an expression and that expression is history."

Pakarati's duties include helping administer Rapa Nui National Park; she was shaken by the damage to moai within the park's boundaries.

"Everything that affects archaeology, as you call it, is so important," she told The Associated Press. "It is part of us."

At 2 in the morning on Oct. 4, when the fire was finally controlled, those risking their safety around the burning crater were untrained volunteers using shovels and rocks, cutting down trees and branches.

"Family, friends and Rapanui came," Pakarati said. "What are you going to tell people when they are in such anguish, when they know that their volcano, where the moai were built, is burning?"

The fire covered 254 hectares (about one square mile). It originated away from the volcano, on a cattle ranch, but the wind brought flames to Rano Raraku. Some residents say they know who started the fire, but don't expect any punishment due to a cultural reluctance to file a complaint against fellow Rapanui.

Each moai preserves precious information about its tribe. When an important Rapanui died -- a grandfather, a tribal chief -- some of his bones were placed under the ceremonial platform called an ahu and his spirit had the possibility of rebirth after a craftsman carved a moai in his likeness. Thus every moai is unique, bearing a name of its own.

When the moai were carved, the island was divided according to its clans, but most of the statues were created in Rano Raraku. The ahu were built near the sea.

It is not certain how the moai -- which average 13 feet (four meters) in height and weigh many tons -- were transported to their ahu. One theory is that they were moved as if they were standing, dragged with small turns as one would do with a refrigerator.

Rapa Nui's council of elders, headed by Carlos Edmunds, brings together the leaders whose predecessors were born in Rapanui tribes. Among other responsibilities, Edmunds, 69, fights for the island's autonomy, preventing land from being sold to foreigners, insisting that certain areas are regulated only by Rapanui, ensuring that tourists prove that after a visit they will not stay to become residents.

Edmunds' mother tongue is Rapanui, the only language he spoke until he turned 18 and left for South

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America to study.

His ancestors were born in Anakena, site of a beach with white sand and transparent waters where King Hotu Matua is believed to have landed 1,000 years ago, bringing the first inhabitants of Rapa Nui with him.

When Chile leased the island, the foreigners who took over stripped all Rapanui tribes of their property, though several ahu and moai can still be seen on land they used to control.

Edmunds recently visited the moai in Anakena that were carved by his ancestors; he says the protection of his loved ones never abandons him. "For us, the spirits continue to live."

In his house, he keeps a small moai that an artisan carved for him. Pointing to his neck, where Catholics often wear a cross, he said: "I can't wear moai because it's very heavy, but I have moai in there. Made of stone, of wood, these figures protect me."

Moai were not meant to be eternal. When they fell apart or needed replacement, their remains were used to erect a new one in the same location.

Between the arrival of Europeans and the mid-19th century, all the moai erected on platforms had been toppled, perhaps due to environmental factors or neglect. Major restoration projects and new archaeological surveys, led by foreign experts, commenced in the 1960s and '70s.

At that time, said Rapanui historian Christian Moreno, many of the islanders didn't understand why foreigners were so fascinated by the statues, which no longer served a specific religious or cultural role.

Gradually, Moreno said, the community began to delve into its collective memory, talking to elders and – bit by bit -- retrieving the history of the moai.

"Then the Rapanui once again understood that the moai represent the ancestors who walked through the same land that we do, who breathed the same air as us, who saw this very ocean," Moreno said.

Now, in Rapa Nui, people can trace a family history just by knowing their last name and where the moai named after their ancestors were placed.

The moai have a place in a history class at the Eugenio Eyraud high school. When teacher Konturi Atán finished drawing one on the blackboard on a recent day, the students laughed. It looked more like a bishop on a chessboard.

Atán, 36, joined the laughter as he began the day's lesson: "Compare ancient civilizations with Rapa Nui."

"What about the moai? Were they related to religion or to politics?" he asked. "It's quite complicated, right?"

Atán said he constantly tries to incorporate Rapanui culture into the curriculum guidelines designed by Chilean authorities. He has taught about the island's relation to the ocean, and led field trips to sites where moai are positioned.

"Local schools are structured theoretically, politically and technically from the continent (Chile)," he said "What we do is provide the skills and, from there, the history of the island, the culture, the link with the community."

Among the deep-rooted Rapanui traditions is the umu – a traditional feast. It's offered to tourists at the Te Ra'ai restaurant, where meat covered with banana leaves is cooked in a pit over wood and volcanic stones.

Through 18 years of operation, Te Ra'ai has welcomed up to 120 foreigners per day, but from March 2020 to last August there were none. To protect the community from COVID-19, the mayor banned foreigners from entering the island, whose economy depends 80% on tourism.

The mayor of Rapa Nui is Pedro Edmunds, the brother of Carlos Edmunds. Unlike other mayors eager to plunge into new projects, he does not even add streetlights without first consulting the community's ancestors.

"Incorporating heavy machinery on an ancestral territory is a violation of the protective spirit of the place," he explained.

Before making renovations anywhere on the island, or even moving a rock from one place to another, the spirits of the dead are summoned. In some cases, the new project will be celebrated with an umu; in more delicate cases, such as how to deal with pandemic-related restrictions, the ancestors have been asked to advise on ancient Rapanui principles.

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Among these is "umanga" -- a concept of collective responsibility for passing on knowledge and skills. "It is beautiful because those who are empowered with knowledge help those who do not have it and together we multiply it," said Edmunds. "We, as Rapanui, have taken care of ourselves. We lost care when the state stepped in and applied foreign rules on our ancestral codes."

Edmunds, the mayor for 25 years, worries about the future but also has hope.

"Our daughters and sons have not lost the essence of being Rapanui and that guarantees that this culture will have a future," he said. "We are a society that respects its environment and is tremendously protective of its culture".

That culture includes the Rapanui language, which has only 14 letters. Yet a single word can incorporate metaphor, parable and philosophy simultaneously. A single name can express who you are, what you do, what you love.

"I've asked many times to people from other countries: who are you? And they all tell me their names," said Jean Pakarati. "When someone asks me that question, my answer is: 'I am Rapanui.'"

At World Cup, women 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 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

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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."

Satellite launched to map the world's oceans, lakes, rivers

By MARCIA DUNN AP Aerospace Writer

A U.S.-French satellite that will map almost all of the world's oceans, lakes and rivers rocketed into orbit Friday.

The predawn launch aboard a SpaceX rocket from Vandenberg Space Force Base in California capped a highly successful year for NASA.

Nicknamed SWOT — short for Surface Water and Ocean Topography — the satellite is needed more than ever as climate change worsens droughts, flooding and coastal erosion, according to scientists. Cheers erupted at control centers in California and France as the spacecraft started its mission.

"It is a pivotal moment, and I'm very excited about it," said NASA program scientist Nadya Vinogradova-Shiffer. "We're going to see Earth's water like we've never before."

About the size of a SUV, the satellite will measure the height of water on more than 90% of Earth's surface, allowing scientists to track the flow and identify potential high-risk areas. It will also survey millions of lakes as well as 1.3 million miles (2.1 million kilometers) of rivers.

The satellite will shoot radar pulses at Earth, with the signals bouncing back to be received by a pair of antennas, one on each end of a 33-foot (10-meter) boom.

It should be able to make out currents and eddies less than 13 miles (21 kilometers) across, as well as areas of the ocean where water of varying temperatures merge.

NASA's current fleet of nearly 30 Earth-observing satellites cannot make out such slight features. And while these older satellites can map the extent of lakes and rivers, their measurements are not as detailed, said the University of North Carolina's Tamlin Pavelsky, who is part of the mission.

Perhaps most importantly, the satellite will reveal the location and speed of rising sea levels and the shift of coastlines, key to saving lives and property. It will cover the globe between the Arctic and Antarctica at least once every three weeks, as it orbits more than 550 miles (890 kilometers) high. The mission is expected to last three years.

Laurie Leshin, the director of NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory in Pasadena, California, noted that while the agency is known for its Mars rovers and space telescopes, "this is the planet we care most about."

"We've got a lot of eyes on Earth," with even more globe-surveying missions planned in the next few years, she added.

NASA and the French Space Agency collaborated on the \$1.2 billion SWOT project — some 20 years in

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the making — with Britain and Canada chipping in.

Already recycled, the first-stage booster returned to Vandenberg eight minutes after liftoff to fly again one day. When the double sonic booms sounded, "Everybody jumped out of their skin, and it was exhilarating. What a morning," said Taryn Tomlinson, an Earth science director at the Canadian Space Agency.

It's the latest milestone this year for NASA. Among the other highlights: glamour shots of the universe from the new Webb Space Telescope; the Dart spacecraft's dead-on slam into an asteroid in the first planetary defense test; and the Orion capsule's recent return from the moon following a test flight.

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, a growing number bleed cricket.

Kalyan "K.J." Jarajapu, a temple volunteer watching the Frisco-sponsored cricket league match, said no one played cricket in Plano when he arrived in 1998, but four or five years later things started to change.

"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," he said.

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, assimilation and mental health challenges.

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, said they raised enough money to build a 33,000-square-foot (3,065-square-meter) temple in 2015.

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

New housing and schools soon followed. Laxmi Tummala, a trustee, temple secretary and realtor, says many of her clients settle for less just to live nearby so their families can be exposed to South Asian culture.

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

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.

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"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."

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. She was later arrested.

"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 in multiple languages.

The anonymity of call-in radio on Azad — which means freedom in Hindi and Urdu — has allowed for difficult discussions. 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.

Everywhere you look, South Asian cultures — and even politics — are merging into the Texas zeitgeist.

Scores of people joined recent protests in Frisco on behalf of Christians in India who claim a Frisco-based group supports Hindu nationalists threatening their churches.

On a more festive front, you can find a Diwali celebration in several Dallas suburbs around October or November. The commemoration of light over darkness was celebrated by more than 15,000 people in Southlake's town square.

Southlake Mayor John Huffman believes close to a fifth were non-Asians. He credits its success to the Southlake Foundation, a nonprofit that oversees cultural events and community service activities.

"I feel like they're setting the bar in a lot of ways," 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, dozens of families didn't let the pouring rain stop them from worshipping.

Cricket fan Jarajapu, directing cars, 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."

2 cities pursued more school for kids. Only 1 pulled it off.

By BIANCA VÁZQUEZ TONESS AP Education Writer

RICHMOND, Va. (AP) — Jonathan Oliva is in third grade, but struggles to read and write.

"His teacher said he's like a kindergartner. He doesn't know anything. And she can't help because her class is too big," his mother, Veronica Lucas, said in Spanish, standing in the parking lot outside his elementary school.

Jonathan, his older sister and cousins watched from the backseat as Lucas shook her head. So many obstacles stand between Jonathan and reading fluently. Much of his short academic career was spent online.

"We can only help him so much," said Lucas, who came to the U.S. from Guatemala when she was 13 and has limited experience with school herself. "He needs more time in school."

Lucas doesn't know the man in charge of Richmond's schools tried — not once, but twice — to give students just that.

Superintendent Jason Kamras tried to remake one of the most untouchable aspects of school — the academic calendar — to give kids more time with teachers. It's the kind of drastic intervention some experts say is needed to help students recover after two-and-a-half years of interrupted schooling.

While Richmond school board members said it would be too expensive and disruptive, school officials 20 miles away, in Hopewell, pushed forward. In 2021, theirs became the first Virginia district to adopt year-round schooling systemwide.

Why was one city able to do the seemingly impossible, while another failed?

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Richmond's superintendent met opposition from teachers and parents, particularly among more affluent families. Hopewell's much smaller size, and teachers that backed the change, made it easier to build support in the community.

Nationwide, a small number of districts have extended the academic year or changed to year-round school to address concerns about pandemic setbacks. The state of Washington is urging schools there to consider doing the same. If educators use the extra time to reinforce learning, adding school days is one of several strategies that could give kids the best chance of catching up, researchers say.

Both Virginia school systems continue to face challenges helping children recover. Hopewell has struggled to enroll students to attend optional extra school days — especially those who need help the most.

Back when Hopewell schools followed a traditional calendar, 10-year-old Gi'Shiya Broggin remembers sleeping late, swimming and visiting family during summers away at her father's house. After returning to Hopewell and her mother's home in a public housing development near a coal-fired power plant, she would feel like she "didn't know anything" — especially in math.

Math still vexes the talkative fourth grader with glasses and cornrows. "I need help with subtraction," said Gi'Shiya. "If the bigger number is not on top, I get really confused."

Several years before the COVID-19 pandemic, Hopewell had begun studying year-round school as a way to boost lackluster performance in the 4,000-student district, where 91% of students are economically disadvantaged and 60% are Black. Only one school was fully accredited by the state.

Most teachers supported the change, according to district documents. The state had been pushing districts to extend the school year after a review showed benefits especially for Black students.

The need for intervention became acute after kids spent 16 months outside of school buildings. Test scores show Hopewell students lost the equivalent of more than two years of learning in math, one of the worst outcomes among thousands of school districts in a recent study.

In the summer of 2021, students began the new calendar. Summer vacation was reduced to four weeks in June and July. The school also added three new breaks, or intersessions, when students can opt in for additional classes. Each lasts two weeks.

Gi'Shiya's mother, Quinn Branch, hoped the change would help her kids retain more information and skills. "This will be good for my children," she remembers thinking.

Now in its second year, it's hard to know how much the change has helped. Chronic absenteeism remains high — 53% of high school students have missed at least 10% of school days, compared with 16% before the pandemic. However, teacher turnover is lower than it has been in years, Superintendent Melody Hackney said.

For some teachers, the schedule is an improvement over the traditional August-to-June marathon. "I always feel a break is coming up, and that's a relief," said high school teacher John Johnson, who's active in the teachers union.

The intersessions are meant to give students an opportunity to try new subjects and more time to work on math and reading, but the courses are not required. Teachers must teach at least one intersession course a year.

This year, only 20% to 25% of students participated in at least one intersession class. Hackney attributes the low turnout to the program's newness. Some students just want to sleep in, she said. Hopewell is now considering making the intersession programs mandatory for students who are furthest behind.

"The kids that are struggling to be successful in school are those that I would most especially want to see take advantage of these experiences," said Hackney.

The experience of Gi'Shiya's family suggests some may not be aware of the need.

Branch struck out trying to sign up her twins for their top choices — gymnastics and cooking for Gi'Shiya and sign language for Gi'Shaun. The courses filled up so quickly she gave up and sent her kids to visit their father during the three-week breaks.

But Branch did not know her twins were receiving help because they are behind in math and reading until contacted by a reporter. Had she known, she would have tried harder to get them into the intersession programs, she said.

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In Richmond, Superintendent Kamras initially resisted suggestions to extend the school year.

Then the pandemic hit, and the school board voted to shutter schools for the 2020-2021 academic year. Kamras saw online learning and social isolation devastate children's emotional lives and academic motivation.

"I was all in then," he said. "I just felt this enormous sense of urgency."

Tests have since shown Richmond's average student lost the equivalent of nearly two years in math learning.

In the spring of 2021, the school board agreed to add days for the 2022-2023 school year. Kamras proposed either extending the school year by 10 days, or keeping the 180-day schedule and adding three, one-week intersessions to help the neediest students. By the next fall, however, several board members were skeptical.

"The timing is not appropriate," said board member Kenya Gibson. She said the changes would put too much strain on teachers and students.

"Family time is sacred," she said. "We must be incredibly cautious when we talk about social-emotional learning and we are taking away critical family time from our kids."

Gibson, a Black, Yale-educated architect, represents one of the more affluent areas of the city. She was elected on a platform advocating for teachers and is one of two board members who have received campaign money from Richmond's teachers union.

"We need to find a way to make the time we have work better," Gibson said in an interview. She said she remains concerned that schools are understaffed, and she likely wouldn't support adding extra required time until schools hire more teachers and administrators.

Gibson asked Kamras to consider another option — maintaining the schedule as it was.

Kamras, who answers to the board, complied. In a survey issued to staff and families, teachers overwhelmingly chose the option closest to the status quo.

It was a huge defeat for Kamras.

"It feels like the mantra is: 'Fix everything, but don't change anything,'" he said. But Kamras said he also understands where teachers and parents are coming from.

"It's a huge change. I still believe in many ways the pandemic is the exact right time to make a change," said Kamras. "But I also understand and empathize with folks who said, 'Actually, the last thing I want right now is more change.'"

Most teachers responded to the online survey, but students' and parents' voices were largely missing. In a district of more than 20,000 students, only 539 students responded, and 2,285 families. Most respondents were among the minority of families in the district who have higher incomes and do not qualify for government benefits such as food stamps or Medicaid.

Richmond struggled to adopt year-round school because wealthier parents couldn't see any benefit of more class time for their children, said Taikein Cooper, executive director of Virginia Excels, a statewide education advocacy organization.

"Parents who had resources were complaining that it would mess up their annual vacations," he said. "But a lot of students who really need year-round school don't take an annual vacation."

In Hopewell, by contrast, all students were more or less in the same boat, so the district had an easier time selling the change, he said.

The small number of low-income Richmond parents who did respond to Kamras' survey said they preferred fewer school days, not more. Had the district reached more parents, however, Kamras might have found parents more receptive to change.

On the city's south side, where enrollment is growing thanks to an influx of Latino immigrants, Kamras would have found an eager, if unrepresented, audience. A quarter of Richmond students are Latino, but there is no Latino member on the school board. More than half of Latino high school students in the class of 2022 dropped out before graduation.

On a recent afternoon, dozens of mothers waited in their cars in the pick-up line outside Cardinal Elementary School. Ranchera music drifted from one car, Spanish-language talk radio from another.

None of five mothers interviewed as they waited for their children knew about the attempts to extend

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the school year. Each of them would have jumped at the chance to get more time in school.

"It's good to have vacation, but it's too long," Leticia Mazariegos said in Spanish. Her 9-year-old son speaks English very timidly, and she said more school would help his confidence. "Why don't they do that?"

Veronica Lucas would like more time in school for her son Jonathan. Richmond schools have trained teachers in phonics to improve reading instruction, but he still needs more help. "I can't afford to hire him a tutor," Lucas said.

There may be another chance for Jonathan.

Kamras is making a third attempt at year-round school, this time calling it a pilot for interested schools. In his proposal, five schools would add 20 required days to the school calendar next year. As before, approval rests with the school board.

Messi's hometown in Argentina yearns for World Cup victory

By DANIEL POLITI Associated Press

ROSARIO, Argentina (AP) — Fernanda Quiroga still remembers how Lionel Messi played soccer in what were then dirt roads around their working class neighborhood in Rosario, Argentina's third-largest city.

"(Messi) was always kicking something, a ball, a bottle cap," said Quiroga, who at 35 is the same age as the captain of Argentina's national soccer team. "The memory I have of him because he lived right in front of my house, is going to buy sweet pastries at his grandmother's around the block and he was always kicking something."

Excitement for Sunday's World Cup final, when Argentina will face defending champion France in Qatar, is rising fast and anxiety is running particularly high in Messi's hometown as many are hoping this will be the year when Messi finally wins the one major trophy that has been missing from his illustrious career.

"Even though it pains us all, it's been said this is Leo's last World Cup, so we're all hoping he wins it, I think more for him than for the national team itself," Quiroga said. "I think what weighs more this time around is that we want him to get it because he has generated so much love and respect."

After beating Croatia in the semifinals Tuesday, Messi said Sunday's match would likely be his last in a World Cup.

The neighborhood popularly known as La Bajada has turned into a sort of altar for Messi with murals and graffiti that praise the soccer star.

"From another galaxy and from my neighborhood," reads graffiti that is seemingly ubiquitous in the area.

A large mural of Messi looking up at the sky is painted on the side of his old house that still belongs to his family.

"The little guy was very spicy. If he got mad, he grabbed the ball and took it away," said Marcelo Almada, a 37-year-old construction worker who played soccer with Messi in the streets around the neighborhood where he still lives. "He didn't like to lose ... but he was a very good kid."

With the World Cup, "there has been an explosion in the neighborhood," where "we're all like brothers," he added, noting that after every Argentina victory people celebrate in the streets until the early hours of the morning.

The neighborhood has also turned into a place of pilgrimage, with fans from all over the world coming to visit Messi's old house and the small soccer field in the corner where he started to learn the skills that would eventually turn him into an all-time great.

"I've been a fan of Barcelona and Messi since I was a little boy and ... my dream is to see Messi win (the World Cup)," said 23-year-old Niv Reznik, an Israeli who traveled to Argentina with a group of friends to watch the tournament in the homeland of the soccer star who played 17 seasons with Barcelona.

When Reznik and his friends got to Messi's house, one of them kneeled and waved his hands in ovation.

A few blocks away, another person who is hoping for a Messi victory is 55-year-old Andrea Liliana Sosa, who was Messi's math and science teacher in fifth and sixth grade.

"He was a quiet and dutiful student, responsible with what he had to do for school and well loved by his classmates ... especially during the breaks to play ball," Sosa said in one of the classrooms of the school that has chipped paint across many of its walls. "He was very focused on soccer."

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"(A victory Sunday) would be like the cherry that he's missing, so let's hope he makes it, but he has done enough already to be recognized and loved by everyone," she added.

School children are living the World Cup "with a beautiful passion" and want Argentina to win "for Messi," said Milena Fernández, a 13-year-old student who was standing in front of a large mural of the soccer star on the school's grounds.

Across the street from the school, another large mural of Messi adorns the side of a residential building that has also turned into a place of pilgrimage for fans.

"We've even seen people praying here," said 21-year-old Valentina Rota, who lives in the building. "There's a whole feeling of belonging because he was born around the corner, he's one of us, he's a neighbor."

Messi, and the national team as a whole, have managed to raise the hope and optimism of Argentines in a country that has been stuck in economic doldrums for years with one of the world's highest inflation rates, closing in on almost 100% per year, and where close to four of every 10 people live in poverty.

"Everyone wants Messi to win and that generates a community, a very pleasant feeling that is very infrequent in Argentina, which is always fighting, divided, angry, frustrated," said Diego Schwarzstein, an endocrinologist who treated Messi for growth hormone deficiency until he left for Barcelona at 13 after the European club promised to pay for his costly treatment.

In Rosario, a city marred by drug violence, that feeling seems even more stark.

"You forget a little bit about the murders, the robberies and all other things that are happening," Sosa said. "This distracts us a little bit."

It isn't, of course, just about a distraction. For those who have followed Messi's career from the beginning, a victory Sunday would mean the culmination of lifelong work considering the soccer star himself has talked about the importance of winning a World Cup title.

"Despite the fact that he's now a rock star, has a beautiful family, a gorgeous wife, a bulky bank account and lots of popularity, his path was not covered in rose petals," Dr. Schwarzstein said. "Those of us who know that path, and know the importance this Cup has for him, profoundly want him to have it."

In La Bajada, residents are hopeful that if Messi wins on Sunday he will come back to his old home for a visit.

"We all have the dream that he will come back," Quiroga said. "It's a very strong wish, especially for the youngest who've heard that we all know him and they want to meet him, too. There are huge expectations for him to come back and I think that some day it will happen, whether it be now or later. This is his house, his family's house, let's hope it happens."

Caribbean divided as Netherlands mulls slavery apology

By GEROLD ROZENBLAD and DÁNICA COTO Associated Press

PARAMARIBO, Suriname (AP) — Dutch colonizers kidnapped men, women and children and enslaved them on plantations growing sugar, coffee and other goods that built wealth at the price of misery.

On Monday, the Netherlands is expected to become one of the few nations to apologize for its role in slavery. Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte plans to speak in the Netherlands as members of his Cabinet give speeches in seven former Caribbean colonies, including Suriname.

Symbolism around crimes against humanity is controversial everywhere, and debates over Monday's ceremonies are roiling Suriname and other Caribbean countries.

In Suriname, activists and officials say they have not been asked for input about the apology, and that's a reflection of a Dutch colonial attitude. What's really needed, they say, is compensation.

In 2013, the Caribbean trade bloc known as Caricom made a list of requests including that European governments formally apologize and create a repatriation program for those who wish to return to their homeland, which has not happened.

"We are still feeling the effects of that period, so some financial support would be welcome," said Orlando Daniel, a 46-year-old security guard and a descendant of slaves.

Suriname is an ethnically diverse country where roughly 60% of its 630,000 inhabitants live below the

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poverty line and 22% identify as Maroon — ancestors of slaves who escaped and established their own communities.

The Dutch first became involved in the trans-Atlantic slave trade in the late 1500s but did not become a major trader until the mid-1600s, when they seized Portuguese fortresses along Africa's west coast and plantations in northeastern Brazil. Eventually, the Dutch West India Company became the largest trans-Atlantic slave trader, said Karwan Fatah-Black, an expert in Dutch colonial history and an assistant professor at Leiden University in the Netherlands.

Hundreds of thousands of people were branded and forced to work in plantations in Suriname and other colonies.

Portugal became the first European country to buy slaves in West Africa with help from the Catholic Church in the 1400s, followed by Spain. Some experts argue that large-scale sugar production in what is now Brazil then gave rise to the Atlantic slave trade that saw an estimated 12 million Africans transported to the Caribbean and the Americas over some 400 years, with at least 1 million dying en route.

Britain was among the first countries to ban the slave trade, in 1807. Dutch slavery continued until 1863.

If, as expected, the government issues a formal apology on Monday, it will put the Netherlands, which has a long history of progressive thinking and liberal laws, in the vanguard of nations and global institutions seeking to atone for their roles in historical horrors.

In 2018, Denmark apologized to Ghana, which it colonized from the mid-17th century to the mid-19th century. In June, King Philippe of Belgium expressed "deepest regrets" for abuses in Congo. In 1992, Pope John Paul II apologized for the church's role in slavery. Americans have had emotionally charged fights over taking down statues of slaveholders in the South.

A Dutch government-appointed board issued a report last year saying that "today's institutional racism cannot be seen separately from centuries of slavery and colonialism."

Politicians and civil-society organizations in Suriname say that July 1, 2023 would be a more appropriate date for the apology ceremony because it marks 160 years since the abolition of slavery in the country.

"Why the rush?" asked Barryl Biekman, chair of the Netherlands-based National Platform for Slavery Past.

Johan Roozer, chairman of Suriname's National Slavery Past Committee, said that Legal Protections Minister Franc Weerwind, who has slave ancestors and is visiting Suriname Monday, should also be given reparations.

Romeo Bronne, a 58-year-old businessman in Suriname, said an apology is needed, but he wants to hear it from the king of the Netherlands or its prime minister.

"Slavery was a terrible period, and degrading acts were committed," he said as he called for financial reparations to be spent on education, health and other public benefits. "We remained poor."

Irma Hoever, a 73-year-old retired civil servant who lives in the capital, Paramaribo, said that the Dutch "do not understand what they have done to us."

"They still enjoy what their ancestors did to this day. We still suffer. Reparations are needed," she said.

Activists in the Dutch Caribbean territory of St. Maarten have rejected the anticipated apology and demanded reparations, too.

"We've been waiting for a few hundred years for true reparatory justice. We believe that we can wait a little further," Rhoda Arrindell, a former government minister and member of a local nonprofit, said at a recent government meeting.

Like many nations, the Netherlands has been grappling with its colonial past, with the history of Dutch slavery added for the first time to local school curriculums in 2006.

"There is a sector in society that really clings to colonial pride and finds it difficult to acknowledge that their beloved historical figures have played a part in this history," Fatah-Black said, referring to seafarers and traders long revered as heroes of the 17th century Dutch Golden Age, when the country was a major world power.

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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 mortgages 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

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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 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."

Today in History: December 17, Wright Brothers' first flight

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Saturday, Dec. 17, the 351st day of 2022. There are 14 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On Dec. 17, 1903, Wilbur and Orville Wright of Dayton, Ohio, conducted the first successful manned powered-airplane flights near Kitty Hawk, North Carolina, using their experimental craft, the Wright Flyer.

On this date:

In 1777, France recognized American independence.

In 1933, in the inaugural NFL championship football game, the Chicago Bears defeated the New York Giants, 23-21, at Wrigley Field.

In 1944, the U.S. War Department announced it was ending its policy of excluding people of Japanese ancestry from the West Coast.

In 1957, the United States successfully test-fired the Atlas intercontinental ballistic missile for the first time.

In 1969, the U.S. Air Force closed its Project "Blue Book" by concluding there was no evidence of extra-terrestrial spaceships behind thousands of UFO sightings.

In 1975, Lynette "Squeaky" Fromme was sentenced in Sacramento, California, to life in prison for her attempt on the life of President Gerald R. Ford. (She was paroled in Aug. 2009.)

In 1979, Arthur McDuffie, a Black insurance executive, was beaten by police after leading them on a chase with his motorcycle in Miami. McDuffie died in a hospital four days later. (Four white police officers accused of beating McDuffie were later acquitted, sparking riots.)

In 1992, President George H.W. Bush, Canadian Prime Minister Brian Mulroney (muhl-ROO'-nee) and Mexican President Carlos Salinas de Gortari (sah-LEE'-nuhs deh gohr-TAHR'-ee) signed the North American Free Trade Agreement in separate ceremonies. (After President Donald Trump demanded a new deal, the three countries signed a replacement agreement in 2018.)

In 2011, North Korean leader Kim Jong Il died after more than a decade of iron rule; he was 69, accord-

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ing to official records, but some reports indicated he was 70.

In 2014, the United States and Cuba restored diplomatic relations, sweeping away one of the last vestiges of the Cold War.

In 2018, a report from the Senate intelligence committee found that Russia's political disinformation campaign on U.S. social media was more far-reaching than originally thought, with troll farms working to discourage Black voters and "blur the lines between reality and fiction" to help elect Donald Trump.

In 2020, a government advisory panel endorsed a second COVID-19 vaccine, paving the way for the shot from Moderna and the National Institutes of Health to be added to the U.S. vaccination campaign.

Ten years ago: Newtown, Connecticut, began laying its dead to rest, holding funerals for two 6-year-old boys, the first of the 20 children killed in the Sandy Hook Elementary School massacre. A pair of NASA spacecraft, named Ebb and Flow, were deliberately crashed into a mountain near the moon's north pole, ending a mission that peered into the lunar interior. Longtime Democratic U.S. senator and World War II hero Daniel Inouye (ih-NOH'-way) of Hawaii died in Bethesda, Maryland, at age 88.

Five years ago: Facing an investigation of allegations of sexual misconduct and using racist language, Carolina Panthers owner Jerry Richardson announced that he would sell the NFL team after the season. "Star Wars: The Last Jedi" took in \$220 million in its debut weekend in North America, good for the second-best opening ever and behind only its predecessor, "The Force Awakens." French sailor Francois Gabart broke the record for sailing around the world alone, circumnavigating the planet in just 42 days and 16 hours.

One year ago: A federal appeals court panel ruled that President Joe Biden's vaccine mandate for larger private employers could take effect. (Weeks later, the Supreme Court rejected that mandate.) A Florida man, 54-year-old Robert Palmer, who had attacked police officers trying to hold back the angry mob at the Capitol on Jan. 6, was sentenced to more than five years behind bars. The National Labor Relations Board confirmed a vote to form a union at a Starbucks store in Buffalo; the coffee retailer, for the first time, would have to bargain with organized labor at a company-owned U.S. store. A fire that spread from a fourth-floor mental clinic in an eight-story building in downtown Osaka in western Japan left 25 dead. (A clinic patient suspected of starting the fire died two weeks later at a hospital where he was being treated for burns and smoke inhalation.)

Today's Birthdays: Actor Armin Mueller-Stahl is 92. Pope Francis is 86. Singer-actor Tommy Steele is 86. Actor Bernard Hill is 78. Actor Ernie Hudson is 77. Comedian-actor Eugene Levy is 76. Actor Marilyn Hasset is 75. Actor Wes Studi is 75. Pop musician Jim Bonfanti (The Raspberries) is 74. Actor Joel Brooks is 73. Rock singer Paul Rodgers is 73. R&B singer Wanda Hutchinson Vaughn (The Emotions) is 71. Actor Bill Pullman is 69. Actor Barry Livingston is 69. Country singer Sharon White is 69. Producer-director-writer Peter Farrelly is 66. Rock musician Mike Mills (R.E.M.) is 64. Pop singer Sarah Dallin (Bananarama) is 61. Country singer Tracy Byrd is 56. Country musician Duane Propes is 56. Actor Laurie Holden is 53. DJ Homicide (Sugar Ray) is 52. Actor Sean Patrick Thomas is 52. Actor Claire Forlani is 51. Pop-rock musician Eddie Fisher (OneRepublic) is 49. Actor Sarah Paulson is 48. Actor Marissa Ribisi is 48. Actor Giovanni Ribisi is 48. Actor Milla Jovovich (YO'-vuh-vich) is 47. Singer Bree Sharp is 47. Singer-songwriter Ben Goldwasser (MGMT) is 40. Rock singer Mikky Ekko is 39. Actor Shannon Woodward is 38. Actor Emma Bell is 36. Actor Vanessa Zima is 36. Rock musician Taylor York (Paramore) is 33. Actor Graham Rogers is 32. Actor-singer Nat Wolff is 28.