

Groton Daily Independent

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Groton Community Calendar

Monday, Dec. 19

Senior Menu: Swedish meat balls, mashed potatoes, peas and carrots, fruit cocktail, whole wheat bread.

School Breakfast: Breakfast pizza.

School Lunch: Cheese Burger Bake, Peas.

Emmanuel Lutheran Bible Study, 6:30 a.m.

Cancelled: JHGBB hosts Sisseton (7th at 6 p.m. followed by 8th)

Senior Citizens meet at the community center with Christmas potluck at noon

The Pantry, 11 a.m. to 3 p.m.

Groton UMC Advent Bible Study, 6 p.m.

Tuesday, Dec. 20

Senior Menu: Meat loaf, baked potato with sour cream, creamed peas, fruited Jell-O, whole wheat bread.

School Breakfast: French toast.

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

St. John's Quilting, 9 a.m.

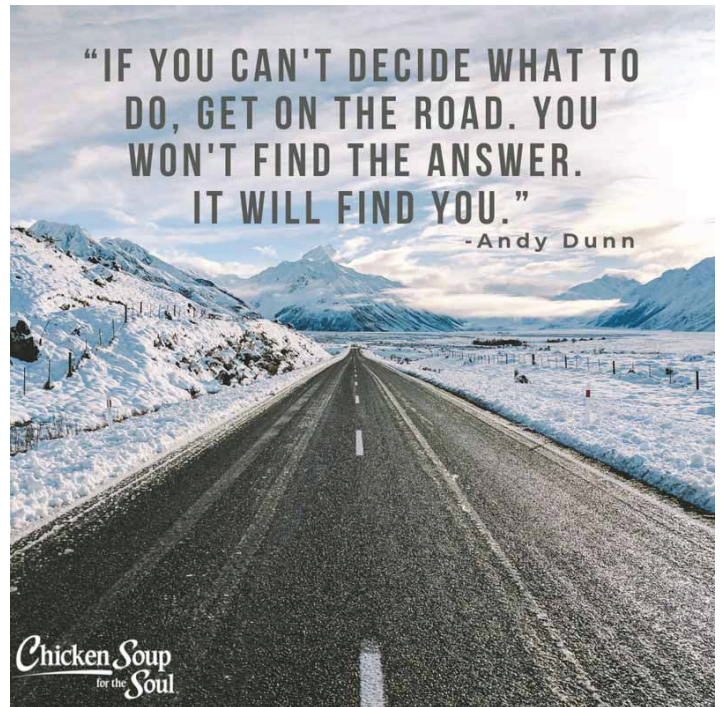
Emmanuel Lutheran newsletter deadline

GBB hosts Aberdeen Roncalli (7th grade at 4 p.m.)

Groton Daily Independent

PO Box 34, Groton SD 57445

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



followed by 8th grade in GHS Gym; JV at 6 p.m. followed by varsity in Arena)

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

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

City Council Meeting, 7 p.m.

Conde UMC Ad Council; Conde Advent Bible Study, 6 p.m.

Wednesday, Dec. 21- 1st DAY OF WINTER

Senior Menu: chicken tetrazzini, mixed vegetables, honey fruit salad, whole wheat bread.

School Breakfast: Egg omelets.

School Lunch: Pizza, Cooked Carrots.

St. John's Bible Study, 2:45 p.m.; Confirmation, 3:45 p.m.; Pre-School Christmas program, 7 p.m.

Emmanuel Lutheran Confirmation, 6 p.m.; League, 6:30 p.m.; Longest Night Service, 7:15 p.m.

Community Coffee Hour at Groton UMC, 9:30 a.m.

OPEN: Recycling Trailer in Groton

The recycling trailer is located west of the city shop. It takes cardboard, papers and aluminum cans.

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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

X SERIES | *Cub Cadet*

PUT WINTER IN ITS PLACE



3X 30" HD

Gear up for the worst of winter weather with the 3X 30" HD powered by a 420cc Cub Cadet OHV engine.

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

MSRP
\$1,999*



3X 26" TRAC

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

- Track Drive ideal for slopes, inclines and gravel driveways
- Heavy-duty 14-gauge steel auger housing and side plates
- 23" intake height
- Heated hand grips
- OVH crank chute control w/ high-arc steel chute
- LED light bar on auger housing plus dual LED in-dash headlights
- Heavy-duty cast aluminum auger gear box w/ 5-year limited warranty**

MSRP
\$2,099*



2X 30" MAX

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

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

MSRP
\$1,899*

■ Indicates step-up feature



YOUR INDEPENDENT DEALER – EXPERT SERVICE. LOCALLY OWNED.

The advice, service, selection and support you need to find the right fit for you.

HARRY IMPLEMENT INC.

109 CENTER ST.
FERNEY, SD 57439
www.harrysinc.com
605-395-6421

¹Restrictions apply. See dealer or cubcadet.com/en_US/financing for details.

[†]When compared to the same engine without IntelliPower™ technology. Improvements vary depending on engine models and specific operating conditions.

* Actual retail prices are set by dealer and may vary. Taxes are additional and vary by location. Freight and PDI charges may be additional and vary by dealer. Models subject to limited availability. Images may not reflect dealer inventory and/or unit specifications.

** See owner's manual for warranty details and information. Certain restrictions apply.

© 2022 Cub Cadet

**EXCEPTIONAL FINANCING
OFFERS AVAILABLE!**



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GDILIVE.COM

Girls' Basketball

Tuesday, Dec. 20, 2022

Aberdeen Roncalli at Groton Area

Junior Varsity Game starts at 6 p.m.

Sponsored by Adam and Nicole Wright

followed by Varsity Game

Sponsored by

Bary Keith at Harr Motors

Bierman Farm Service

Blocker Construction

Dacotah Bank

Groton Chamber of Commerce

Groton Ford

John Sieh Agency

Locke Electric

Spanier Harvesting & Trucking

Bahr Spray Foam

Thunder Seed with John Wheeting

St. John's Lutheran Pre-School Christmas

Program

Wed., Dec. 21, 2022, 7 p.m.

Sponsored by Love to Travel

Elementary Christmas Program

Thursday, Dec. 22, 2022, 2 p.m.

GDI Subscription or Ticket required

Boys' Basketball

Thursday, Dec. 22, 2022

Groton Area at Aberdeen Roncalli

Junior Varsity Game starts at 6 p.m.

Sponsored by Hefty Seed

followed by Varsity Game

Sponsored by

Bary Keith at Harr Motors

Bierman Farm Service

Blocker Construction

Dacotah Bank

Groton Chamber of Commerce

Groton Ford

John Sieh Agency

Locke Electric

Spanier Harvesting & Trucking

Bahr Spray Foam

Thunder Seed with John Wheeting

Anyone wanting to sponsor a JV game, Call/Text Paul at 605-397-7460

Advances in surgery

My son is one of the many Americans with cleft lip and palate. The specifics of each affected individual's situation vary, but one thing they have in common is that they will be having surgery. Lots of surgery. Although most individuals with orofacial clefts, including my son, are otherwise healthy and lead normal lives, the process of restoring a normal smile, normal speech, normal chewing, involves many steps from birth into adulthood.

Most of his surgeries have blurred together in my mind, however, his first bone graft remains starkly vivid.

In this surgery, bone is removed from the hip for implantation in the ridge under the nose, where your front teeth are anchored. The pain where the bone was removed was excruciating. He was hospitalized for four days, and once home we struggled to keep him comfortable despite acetaminophen, ibuprofen, and two different opioids.

We were understandably dismayed ten years later to learn he would have to undergo this procedure again. Not enough bone had grown from the earlier graft to support the next stage of the repair.

It was with great trepidation that we checked into the hospital for surgery earlier this summer. Despite the reassurances of our surgeon, we both expected the same gauntlet we had faced last time.

We were wrong.

In the intervening years, a new delivery system for an injectable anesthetic had been developed, and then approved for use in young people. His surgeon used this medication at the graft harvest site. The difference was almost inconceivable. He needed minimal supplemental pain medication during our single night in the hospital, and once discharged took only the occasional dose of Tylenol or Motrin. I suspect those doses were prompted mostly by the fear that it might start to hurt more, and not by pain itself.

Like all of medicine, surgery has experienced change at an ever-accelerating pace, but the apparent "revolutions" are built on a foundation of step-by-step science. In medical school, I watched the first laparoscopic nephrectomy performed at the University of Iowa, a major tertiary care center. This amazing "new" technology could trace its history back nearly 200 years, to a German doctor who invented a primitive precursor. Advancements in both medicine and technology have brought us to today, when endoscopic, laparoscopic, and robotic surgeries have become commonplace.

The path to developing new techniques and technologies may not be smooth, but we are the beneficiaries of pioneers and scientists who move medicine forward. I am grateful for them all, as a doctor, and as a parent.

Debra Johnston, M.D. is part of The Prairie Doc® team of physicians and currently practices family medicine in Brookings, South Dakota. Follow The Prairie Doc® based on science, built on trust, at www.prairiedoc.org and on Facebook featuring On Call with the Prairie Doc® a medical Q&A show, broadcast on SDPB and streaming live on Facebook most Thursdays at 7 p.m. central.



Based on Science, Built on Trust



Debra Johnston, M.D.



SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

Nursing home complaints surge 117% higher since 2021

BY: MAKENZIE HUBER - DECEMBER 19, 2022 1:42 AM

Nursing home complaints are on the rise this year after falling during the early pandemic years of 2020 and 2021.

The state Department of Health, which oversees more than 100 long-term care facilities, fielded 39 complaints as of Dec. 9. That's an increase of 117% over 2020 and 2021, when the state received 18 complaints each year.

Both 2020 and 2021 saw COVID lockdowns at long-term care facilities across the state and nation, restricting family members from entering facilities and engaging with residents.

Most complaints submitted this year concern quality of life and care, resident neglect and nursing services. The facilities were inspected after the complaints and in just over half the cases, no violations were found.

Federal and state law require long-term care facilities to create a "plan of correction" if a deficiency is found by inspectors. One facility, Bennett County Hospital and Nursing Home, terminated staff because of issues raised in complaints surrounding resident neglect. An investigation into a death at Avantara Arrowhead in Rapid City found that nurses weren't properly monitoring the patient as directed by the patient's doctor after a surgery.

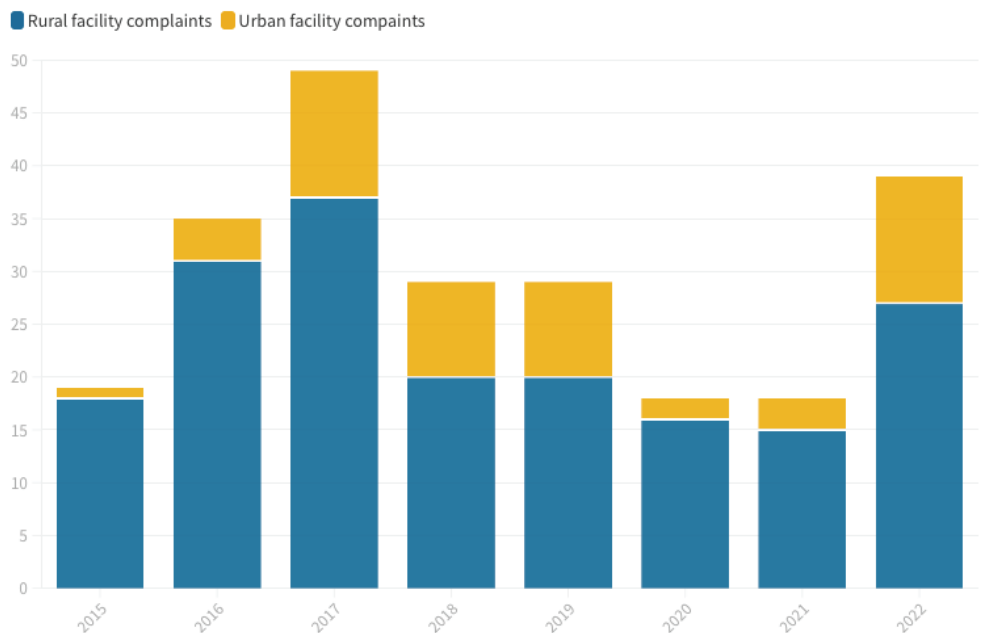
While 2022 has seen an increase in complaints compared to 2020 and 2021, it's only slightly higher than the typical number of complaints in years leading up to the pandemic. The average number of complaints between 2015 and 2019 was 32 per year, with a high of 49 complaints in 2017.

Erik Nelson, associate state director for advocacy with American Association of Retired Persons (AARP) South Dakota, said the increase in complaints is tied to the "new realities" long-term care facilities are facing post-pandemic.

"As all of South Dakota is aware, there's a workforce shortage across our state, and it's definitely hitting the long-term care industry," Nelson said. "I'm sure staffing challenges can play into patient satisfaction for sure."

Nelson added that AARP South

Number of complaints at SD nursing facilities



Source: South Dakota Nursing Facility Survey Reports • Urban facilities include those in Sioux Falls and Rapid City

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Dakota advocates for programs that allow individuals to age in their home as long as possible.

"After COVID hit and post-COVID, there's a higher awareness of what some of those opportunities might be," he added.

Sixteen nursing homes have closed across South Dakota in the past six years, according to an article by the Mitchell Republic. Seven facilities have closed or announced closures in 2022. Many of the closures are the only nursing homes in a rural community — or miles around. Closed facilities were in communities such as Armour, Clear Lake, Custer, Lennox, Mobridge, Elk Point, Ipswich, Hudson, Tripp, Bryant and Rosholt.

Good Samaritan Society Vice President of Operations Aimee Middleton blamed the pandemic for putting "unprecedented stress on the senior care industry" while announcing the closure of the Lennox and Clear Lake facilities in May.

The final nursing facility survey on the Good Samaritan Society in Clear Lake reported that there wasn't enough staff at the facility "to respond promptly to residents' needs." The final report for Lennox stated that only one person was staffed on night shifts sometimes, and that it could take "one-half hour to 45 minutes" for staff to answer a resident's call light.

"One CNA for forty-four residents, I don't see how that's appropriate," one resident told the surveyor in a September 2021 interview.

The Legislature gave a one-time 20% increase in funding to nursing homes in 2022. Gov. Kristi Noem proposed in her budget address earlier this month another 21% increase in funding for nursing homes, aiming for a 90% reimbursement rate for the costs facilities incur caring for Medicaid patients.



MAKENZIE HUBER

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

Ranchers say they're waiting months for brand registrations

State office manually checking requests against 25,000 existing symbols

BY: JOSHUA HAIAR - DECEMBER 18, 2022 12:56 PM

Some South Dakota ranchers say they're waiting more than six months to get a livestock brand registered with the state board, while the wait is about a week in neighboring North Dakota and Nebraska.

Brands are the symbols on hot irons used for marking livestock and identifying ownership.

Rancher Tim Allen received his first licensed brand in South Dakota 24 years ago. He said ranchers are frustrated about the wait times.

"I've seen it, in my own case, take up to six months to get a brand," Allen said. "And even longer for trying to get brands for my kids. And nobody can understand why."

One reason is the volume of symbols currently in the system, according to Scott Vance, president of the South Dakota Brand Board.

There are over 25,000 brands registered in South Dakota, and when someone requests a new one, the staff of the Brand Board has to make sure the new brand design doesn't duplicate or look too much like any existing brand.

The staff has two ways to do that, according to Vance.

"You either flip through the brand book or use the website," Vance said. "They have their list of conflicting symbols, but it's manual. You have to go through every brand."

The state's Brand Board website has a searchable catalog of all the brands in the state.

All brand, no cattle

You don't need to be a rancher, or own livestock, to get a brand in South Dakota.

Rancher Tim Allen said that should change.

"You have to own a car to get a license plate or registration, but for brands, you don't have to have animals," Allen said.

There are good reasons some people without cattle own a brand, according to Gary Cammack, a rancher and state legislator from Union Center.

"If somebody has their great-grandfather's brands that are not active in the cattle business, it's difficult to tell them they can't have one," Cammack said. "In fact, my cousins have my grandfather's brand and they're not currently in the cattle business, but I don't regret the fact that they own it."

Allen acknowledges that. But he said relinquishing unused brands could lower the number of brands in the system and speed up the review of brand requests.

"Really if you don't have an animal, you should have to relinquish your brand to somebody that does need it," Allen said. "Or, the state could give that family some kind of historical recognition."

Calls for an update

Timber Lake rancher John Maciejewski said the Brand Board needs support. It currently has six employees.

"That Brand Board down there in Pierre is a small office," Maciejewski said. "They don't have a lot of people working there. I think that their workload is pretty darn high."

Maciejewski does not think easing that workload would require hiring more staff. He wants to see if a



(Illustration by Joshua Haiar/South Dakota Searchlight; photo by John Moore/Getty Images)

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piece of software could be written or purchased to speed up the process.

"Our brand is an S-K-Y on the right rib," Maciejewski said. "They should be able to start looking by three-letter brands starting with an S."

Scott Vance, president of the brand board, said software that would increase productivity is something the board is open to, and it's a matter of finding the right program.

Wait times to register a brand are about seven to 10 days in neighboring Nebraska, according to Mista White with the Nebraska Brand Committee. She said there are 33,000 registered brands in that state.

That office started using new software in 2017, but White said the wait times have always been about one week.

"It was still a week to 10 days," White said. "If we get an application today, we work on it today. We could even have it back on that same day."

White said the software does speed up the search for conflicting brands.

And the situation is similar in North Dakota, according to that state's Chief Brand Inspector Corby Ward, where there are about 24,000 registered brands.

"It takes about seven to 10 days with a staff of two," Ward said.

Policy change suggested

Cammack supports relaxing the conflicting symbol standards to speed up approvals of brand requests.

"That would open up literally thousands of brands," Cammack said. "I believe, for instance, if there's a quarter-circle, right now, they're concerned about that being able to be modified to a zero, or something like that, and there are some real questions about how valid that concern is."

Cammack's concern about modification refers to someone buying a brand that too closely matches another brand, and the problems that can stem from there – everything from cattle thievery to confusion at a sale barn.

Vance would not confirm or deny that the board is considering loosening the standards.



JOSHUA HAIAR  

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



Groton Community Transit
Invites you to their

Holiday Bake Sale **Thursday Dec. 22, 2022**

9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.

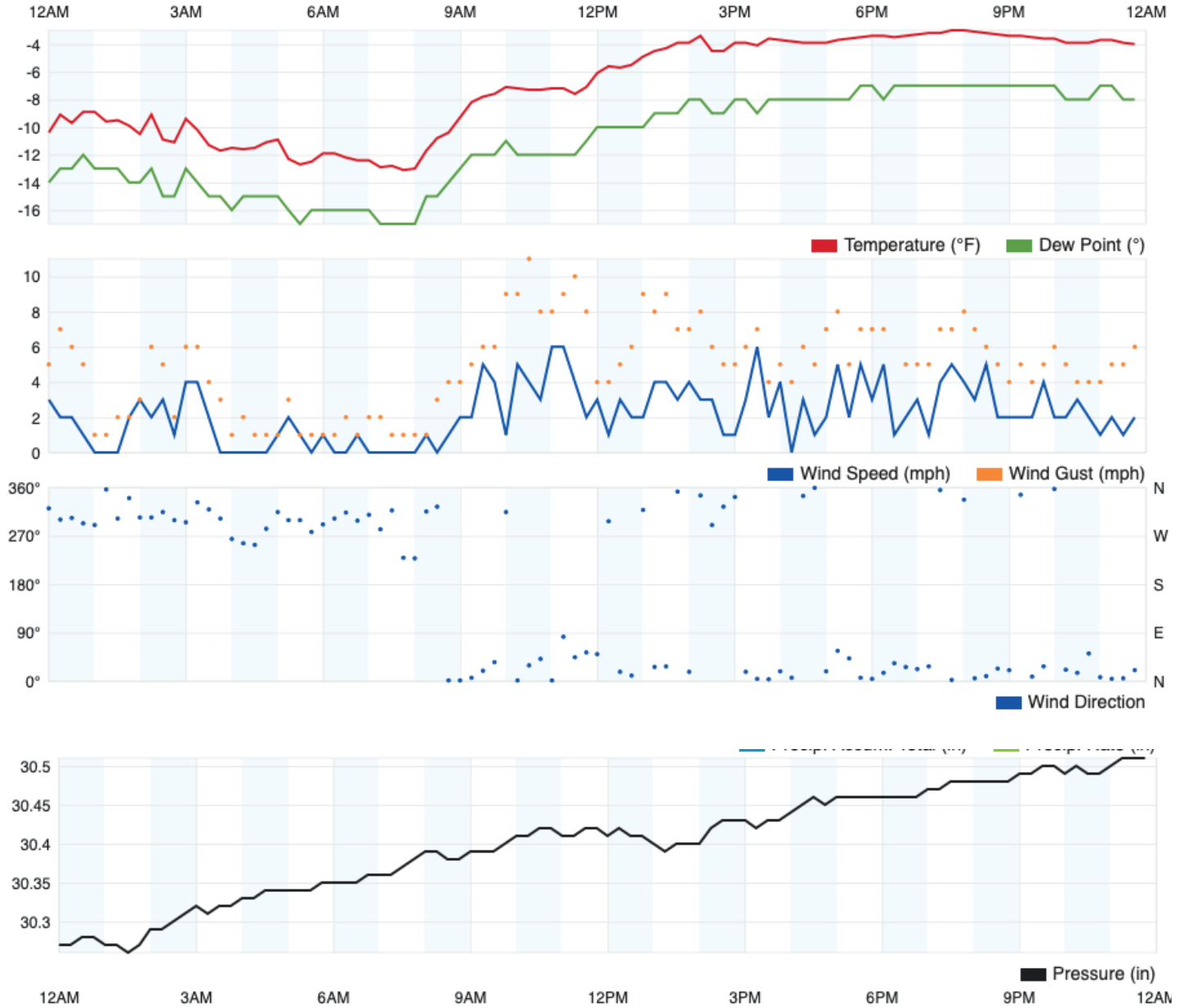
**Coffee, cider and Christmas
goodies will be served!**

If you would like to donate baked goods, please contact Groton Community Transit office at 605-397-8661. Any and all donations are welcome!! We are looking forward to seeing you!!

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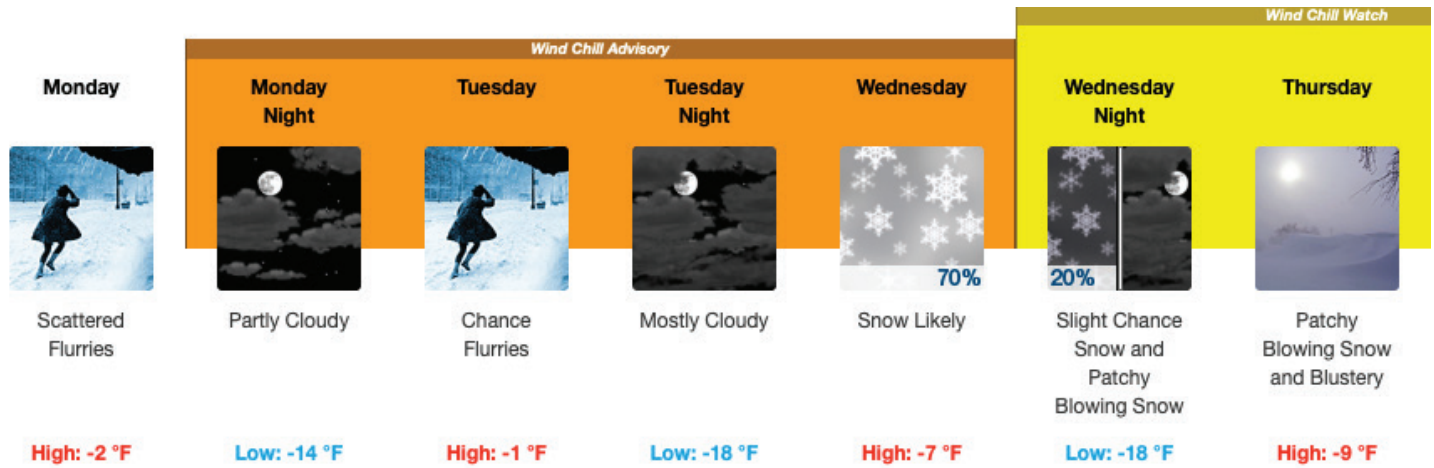
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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Extreme Cold & Dangerous Wind Chills

December 19, 2022
4:06 AM

Plus Light Snow & Blowing Snow Potential

Key Messages

- Prolonged Arctic Outbreak ongoing.
- Clipper responsible for potential light snow accumulation, strong winds, blowing snow and a reinforcing Arctic blast Wednesday/Thursday.
- Thursday/Friday will see extremely dangerous wind chills. If you venture outside with exposed skin, it will be subject to **frostbite in a matter of minutes**.

NEW Important Updates

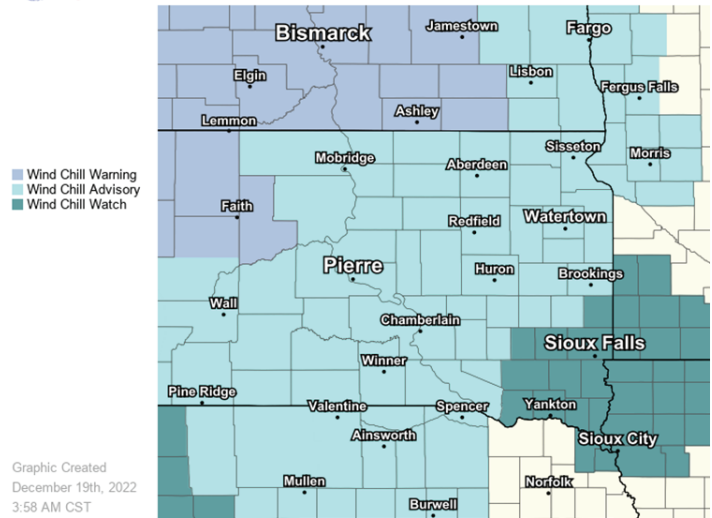
- Wind Chill Advisory Tonight through Wednesday
- Wind Chill Watch Wednesday Night through Saturday

Next Scheduled Briefing

- Monday Afternoon



Excessive Cold



Graphic Created
December 19th, 2022
3:58 AM CST

Valid as of 4 AM Dec 18, 2022



National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD

We remain under an arctic airmass this morning with little movement of temperatures today. Readings will drop tonight, with wind chills of 25 to 35 degrees below zero. Not much warming for Tuesday either, with another surge in arctic air mid week. This surge will come with light snow, blowing snow and extremely dangerous wind chills.

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Upcoming Wind Chills

December 19, 2022
4:06 AM

Minimum Wind Chill Forecast

	12/19 Mon			12/20 Tue			12/21 Wed				12/22 Thu				12/23 Fri				12/24 Sat			
	6am	12pm	6pm	12am	6am	12pm	6pm	12am	6am	12pm	6pm	12am	6am	12pm	6pm	12am	6am	12pm	6pm	12am	6am	12pm
	Aberdeen	-23	-13	-27	-33	-34	-22	-26	-29	-29	-30	-36	-41	-41	-39	-40	-41	-43	-35	-37	-39	-37
Britton	-21	-14	-25	-30	-31	-25	-29	-31	-31	-31	-37	-40	-41	-41	-40	-42	-42	-36	-38	-37	-35	-29
Eagle Butte	-19	-20	-32	-38	-39	-30	-31	-33	-34	-36	-43	-48	-50	-47	-48	-51	-52	-41	-39	-39	-36	-25
Eureka	-23	-16	-29	-35	-36	-28	-34	-36	-37	-36	-45	-47	-49	-43	-44	-47	-50	-38	-42	-42	-40	-30
Gettysburg	-23	-17	-27	-31	-32	-23	-31	-33	-35	-36	-42	-48	-49	-45	-46	-48	-50	-41	-42	-42	-39	-30
Kennebec	-20	-15	-26	-30	-31	-21	-24	-27	-28	-27	-37	-44	-46	-41	-45	-48	-48	-38	-38	-38	-38	-24
McIntosh	-24	-20	-34	-39	-40	-29	-35	-37	-40	-39	-47	-50	-50	-47	-48	-49	-49	-41	-42	-41	-37	-27
Milbank	-20	-10	-22	-25	-26	-18	-24	-25	-25	-25	-31	-38	-39	-37	-40	-40	-40	-36	-36	-36	-33	-24
Miller	-23	-15	-25	-29	-30	-20	-25	-26	-29	-25	-35	-43	-43	-39	-41	-44	-46	-36	-40	-39	-37	-24
Mobridge	-17	-11	-23	-30	-30	-20	-25	-31	-32	-31	-37	-42	-43	-40	-41	-42	-44	-34	-34	-34	-31	-20
Murdo	-21	-17	-31	-34	-36	-23	-27	-28	-29	-31	-40	-46	-48	-45	-46	-49	-50	-38	-39	-39	-34	-21
Pierre	-15	-8	-17	-20	-21	-12	-19	-24	-27	-26	-34	-40	-43	-40	-40	-41	-43	-36	-34	-35	-33	-21
Redfield	-20	-14	-24	-29	-30	-21	-26	-29	-29	-25	-35	-41	-42	-39	-41	-43	-45	-35	-37	-39	-37	-25
Sisseton	-20	-13	-23	-28	-29	-22	-29	-30	-30	-28	-34	-39	-39	-37	-39	-39	-39	-35	-37	-35	-34	-27
Watertown	-21	-8	-22	-27	-28	-21	-23	-26	-26	-27	-32	-41	-43	-39	-43	-45	-45	-38	-39	-37	-37	-29
Webster	-21	-11	-25	-29	-30	-23	-27	-29	-30	-31	-37	-43	-43	-43	-43	-44	-45	-40	-39	-39	-38	-30
Wheaton	-19	-12	-24	-28	-29	-25	-28	-30	-29	-26	-33	-38	-39	-38	-39	-40	-40	-36	-36	-37	-35	-30



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

National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD

Wind Chill Watch

URGENT - WINTER WEATHER MESSAGE
National Weather Service Aberdeen SD
211 AM CST Mon Dec 19 2022

Traverse-Big Stone-Brown-Marshall-Roberts-Day-Spink-Clark-Codington-Grant-Hamlin-Deuel-
Including the cities of Wheaton, Ortonville, Aberdeen, Britton, Sisseton, Webster, Redfield, Clark, Water-
town, Milbank, Hayti, and Clear Lake

...WIND CHILL ADVISORY IN EFFECT FROM 6 PM THIS EVENING TO 6 PM CST WEDNESDAY...

...WIND CHILL WATCH NOW IN EFFECT FROM WEDNESDAY EVENING THROUGH SATURDAY MORNING...

* WHAT...For the Wind Chill Advisory, very cold wind chills expected. Wind chills as low as 35 below zero. For the Wind Chill Watch, dangerously cold wind chills possible. Wind chills as low as 45 below zero.

* WHERE...Portions of west central Minnesota and northeast South Dakota.

* WHEN...For the Wind Chill Advisory, from 6 PM this evening to 6 PM CST Wednesday. For the Wind Chill Watch, from Wednesday evening through Saturday morning.

* IMPACTS...The dangerously cold wind chills could cause frostbite on exposed skin in as little as 10 minutes.

* ADDITIONAL DETAILS...For a few hours Tuesday afternoon, expect wind chills to rise to between 10 below zero and 20 below zero before plummeting again Tuesday evening. We also anticipate a period of snow and wind in the forecast from Wednesday morning through early Thursday morning. Light snow accumulation and strong winds will result the potential for reduced visibility in blowing snow.

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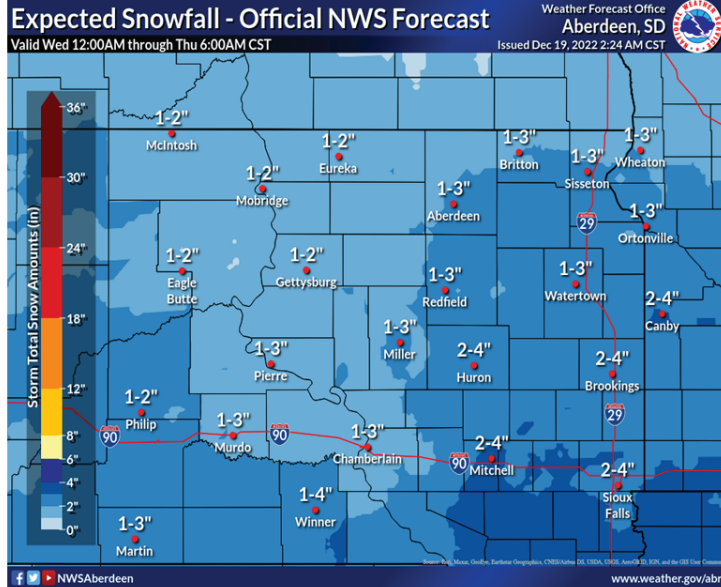
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Upcoming Snowfall Timeline

December 19, 2022
4:06 AM

Early Wednesday Morning Through Wednesday Night



3-Day 6-hour Snow Forecast

	Mon		Tue		Wed		Thu	
	6AM	12PM	6PM	12AM	6AM	12PM	6PM	12AM
Aberdeen					1-2"	1-2"	1-2"	
Watertown					1-2"	1-2"	1-2"	
Britton					1-2"	1-2"	1-2"	
Milbank					1-2"	1-2"	1-2"	
Redfield					1-2"	1-2"	1-2"	
Pierre					1-2"	1-2"	1-2"	
Eagle Butte					1-2"	1-2"	1-2"	
Kennebec					1-2"	1-2"	1-2"	
Gettysburg					1-2"	1-2"	1-2"	
Sisseton					1-2"	1-2"	1-2"	
Mobridge					1-2"	1-2"	1-2"	
Wheaton					1-2"	1-2"	1-2"	



National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD



Upcoming Winds

December 19, 2022
4:06 AM

Maximum Wind Gust Forecast

	12/21 Wed				12/22 Thu			12/23 Fri				12/24 Sat		
	12am	6am	12pm	6pm	12am	6am	12pm	6pm	12am	6am	12pm	6pm	12am	6am
Aberdeen	14	17	22	25	28	30	31	29	29	26	28	23	23	21
Britton	13	15	18	21	24	29	30	26	28	26	28	20	20	22
Eagle Butte	16	26	32	38	40	41	41	40	37	33	31	28	21	20
Eureka	14	21	26	30	30	33	35	32	32	28	28	21	21	22
Gettysburg	15	22	26	31	33	37	37	35	35	30	31	24	24	23
Kennebec	17	23	29	33	38	40	41	39	36	33	32	26	22	23
McIntosh	16	26	30	36	36	36	37	36	31	24	23	21	18	22
Milbank	13	12	15	20	30	30	31	32	33	33	33	29	26	26
Miller	13	17	20	26	32	33	35	32	31	29	28	22	23	23
Mobridge	14	21	28	30	31	32	33	32	30	25	25	20	17	20
Murdo	17	25	32	35	38	40	41	37	36	32	31	29	21	21
Pierre	13	21	28	31	33	37	38	36	33	29	28	22	17	17
Redfield	14	16	18	25	31	32	33	31	30	28	28	21	22	22
Sisseton	15	13	16	20	28	30	32	30	31	32	32	28	28	28
Watertown	13	15	20	21	31	31	33	32	33	32	33	29	26	26
Webster	15	16	20	23	31	31	32	32	32	31	31	29	26	26
Wheaton	14	12	14	16	24	28	29	28	29	30	31	28	24	24

- Red Box highlights period when snowfall is expected.
- Blowing Snow possible with strongest winds late Wednesday into Thursday.



National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD

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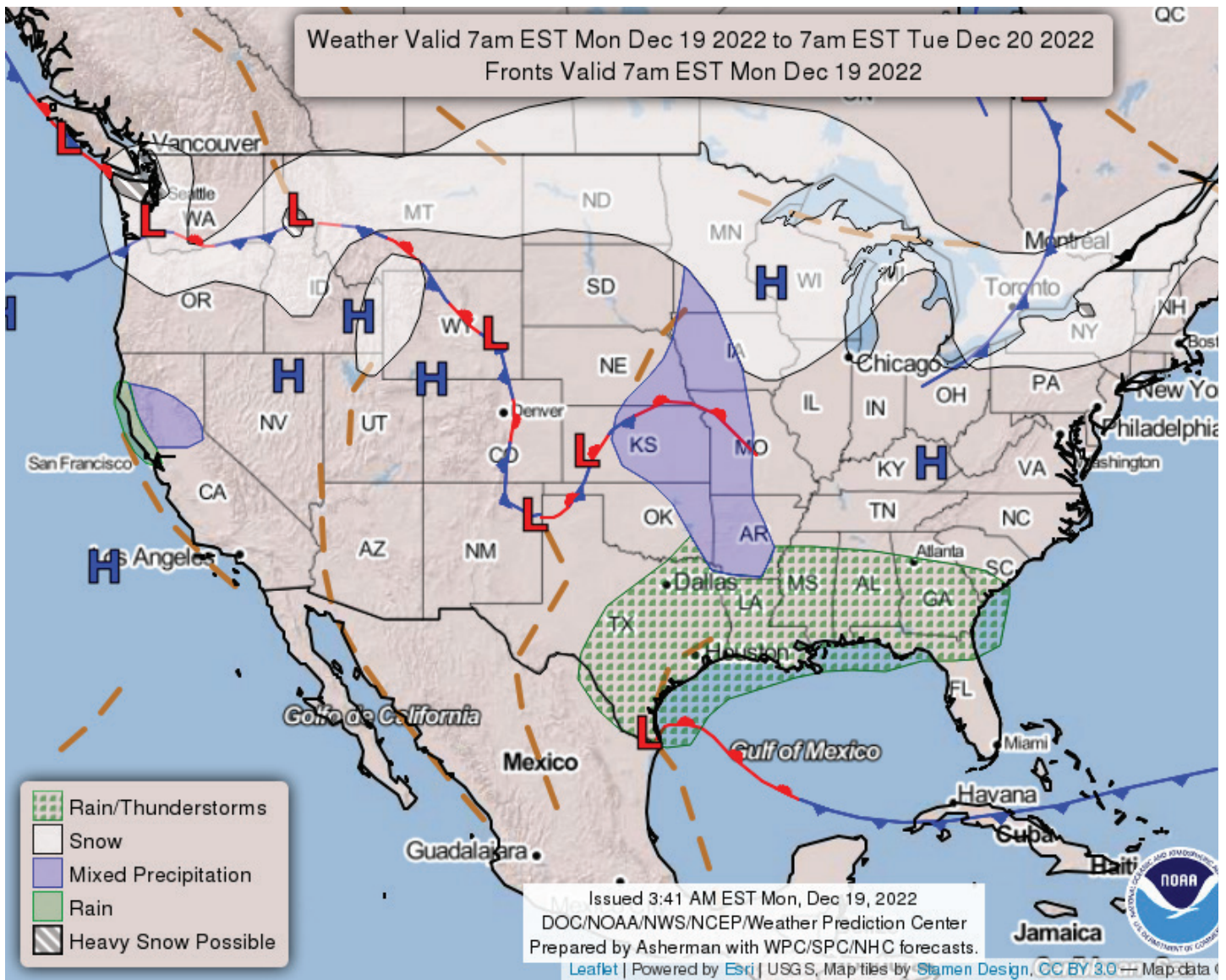
Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: -3 °F at 7:41 PM
Low Temp: -13 °F at 7:41 AM
Wind: 11 mph at 10:24 AM
Precip: : 0.00

Day length: 8 hours, 46 minutes

Today's Info

Record High: 57 in 1893
Record Low: -29 in 1916
Average High: 27°F
Average Low: 7°F
Average Precip in Dec.: 0.36
Precip to date in Dec.: 1.85
Average Precip to date: 21.57
Precip Year to Date: 19.35
Sunset Tonight: 4:52:46 PM
Sunrise Tomorrow: 8:06:58 AM



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Today in Weather History

December 19, 1968: Snow and near-blizzard conditions existed across west-central Minnesota, with 5 to 7 inches of new snow reported. Heavier snowfall amounts were reported further to the southeast in Minnesota. Six inches of snow was reported in Artichoke Lake in Big Stone County.

December 19, 1990: Snow began to fall over the northwest part of Minnesota by early afternoon on the 19th, and fell heavily during the night into the early afternoon of the 20th, spreading over the entire northern 2/3 of the state and into some of northeastern South Dakota overnight. By mid-morning, a swath of snow of 6 inches or more was deposited over much of the northern half of the state, or north of a line from Elbow Lake to Garrison to near Two Harbors. In west-central Minnesota, Wheaton received 6 inches, Browns Valley received 4 inches, and Artichoke Lake received 3 inches. In South Dakota, Webster reported 8 inches, Britton reported 7 inches, Sisseton reported 5 inches, and Aberdeen reported 4 inches.

1777: George Washington led his hungry and weary from long marches men to Valley Forge on this day. The winds greeted the 12,000 Continentals as they prepared for the winter. Click [HERE](#) for more information from the History Channel. Click [HERE](#) for more information from the website, History Things.com.

1924 - The Riverside Ranger Station in Yellowstone Park, WY, reported a low of 59 degrees below zero, a December record for the U.S. (David Ludlum) (The Weather Channel)

1957 - A tornado, 200 yards in width, killed two persons along its 15-mile path from near Waldo to near Bueana Vista in southwestern Arkansas. People from one house were carried 250 yards, and cars were said to have been carried 600 yards. (The Weather Channel)

1967 - A record 83 inches of snow covered the ground at Flagstaff, AZ. The heavy snows inflicted great hardships on reservations. (David Ludlum)

1987 - Thunderstorms produced large hail and damaging winds in eastern Texas and the Lower Mississippi Valley. Thunderstorms produced wind gusts to 90 mph at Venus TX and Providence LA. Rain prevailed from the Southern Plains to the Middle Mississippi Valley. Small stream flooding was reported around Columbia MO. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

2008 - A snow and ice storm on December 19 affected parts of the U.S. Midwest. Over 220,000 homes and businesses across Illinois, Indiana, and Ohio were left without electric services. No fatalities were reported (Reuters).

2009: Snowfall totals from 1 to 2 feet were commonplace in what will go down as one of the biggest snowstorms in history on the East Coast and the first of four snowstorms for the Mid-Atlantic during the winter of 2009-10. The 15 inches of snow measured at Reagan International Airport on Dec. 19th was the third-highest daily snowfall on any calendar day at Washington, DC, since snowfall records began in 1884. The total storm snowfall of 16.4 inches on Dec 18-19 2009 marks the 6th highest two-day snowfall record for Washington, DC putting it just below the second President's Day storm in 2003 and ahead of the Jan 1996 storm. Baltimore Washington Airport saw 20.5 inches of snow and went down as the fifth-highest daily snowfall on any calendar day in Baltimore since snowfall records began in 1893. The total storm snowfall of 21.0 inches on Dec 18-19 2009 marks the 6th highest two-day snowfall record for Baltimore. The daily snowfall records for Dec 19 were smashed for the most snowfall for any calendar day during December at the following stations. Reagan National Airport's new record was 15.0 inches, old record 11.5 in 1932. Baltimore Washington Airport's new record was 20.5 inches, old record 11.5 in 1932. This was the biggest December snowstorm on record and setting a record for the snowiest December for Baltimore, MD. Dulles Airport's new record was 16.0 inches, old record 10.6 in 1982. Richmond International Airport had a total of 6.4 inches. Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, reported its second greatest daily snowfall total on record with 22.9 inches. It also was the single most significant December snowfall for the city of Philadelphia, PA. Roanoke, Virginia, recorded 17.8 inches setting a record for the greatest 24-hour snowfall in December. Washington, DC, reported 16.4 inches of snowmaking 2009 the snowiest December on record, all in one storm. In New York, Upton on Long Island recorded 26.3 inches, the biggest snowstorm on record.

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Daily Devotionals

Seeds of Hope

NO MISTAKE

Walter came home from Sunday school with a question all over his face. "Mom," he asked, "did the shepherds have washing machines where they kept their sheep?"

"Shepherds? Washing machines?" After a moment she said, "No, darling, they did not have washing machines. Why do you ask?"

"Well, Mrs. Mathis was reading the story of the birth of Jesus and she said, 'While shepherds washed their socks that night...' and I didn't understand what was going on."

While we often think of the shepherds in the field that night, the glory that appeared with the angel and the fear that gripped them, we seldom connect the shepherds in that field with the Good Shepherd.

Jesus said, "I am the Good Shepherd" twice in John's Gospel. In those statements, he summarized all of the prophetic images of His role as prophet in the Old Testament. This declaration is a claim to His divinity as revealed in the Old Testament and focuses on His love, protection, and guidance of us – His lambs – in the New Testament.

But there is more. Not only is He our Shepherd but He chose to identify Himself as the "good shepherd" – and good is a term that carries with it nobility. It stands in sharp contrast to shepherds who were hired hands who worked and cared only for their own self-interests.

Prayer: We thank You, Lord, for loving us, for being our Good Shepherd and for laying down Your life for us. May we always follow You, our "Good Shepherd!" In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: Luke 2:8 And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night.



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

Jan. 6 panel pushes Trump's prosecution in forceful finish

By MARY CLARE JALONICK Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The House Jan. 6 committee is wrapping up its investigation of the violent 2021 U.S. Capitol insurrection, with lawmakers expected to cap one of the most exhaustive and aggressive congressional probes in memory with an extraordinary recommendation: The Justice Department should consider criminal charges against former President Donald Trump.

At a final meeting on Monday, the panel's seven Democrats and two Republicans are poised to recommend criminal charges against Trump and potentially against associates and staff who helped him launch a multifaceted pressure campaign to try to overturn the 2020 election.

While a criminal referral is mostly symbolic, with the Justice Department ultimately deciding whether to prosecute Trump or others, it is a decisive end to a probe that had an almost singular focus from the start.

"I think the president has violated multiple criminal laws and I think you have to be treated like any other American who breaks the law, and that is you have to be prosecuted," Rep. Adam Schiff, D-Calif., a member of the panel, said Sunday on CNN's "State of the Union."

The panel, which will dissolve on Jan. 3 with the new Republican-led House, has conducted more than 1,000 interviews, held 10 well-watched public hearings and collected more than a million documents since it launched in July 2021. As it has gathered the massive trove of evidence, the members have become emboldened in declaring that Trump is to blame for the violent attack on the Capitol by his supporters almost two years ago.

After beating their way past police, injuring many of them, the Jan. 6 rioters stormed the Capitol and interrupted the certification of President Joe Biden's win, echoing Trump's lies about widespread election fraud and sending lawmakers and others running for their lives.

The attack came after weeks of Trump's efforts to overturn his defeat — a campaign that was extensively detailed by the committee in its multiple public hearings. Many of Trump's former aides testified about his unprecedented pressure on states, federal officials and on Vice President Mike Pence to find a way to thwart the popular will.

"This is someone who in multiple ways tried to pressure state officials to find votes that didn't exist, this is someone who tried to interfere with a joint session, even inciting a mob to attack the Capitol," Schiff said. "If that's not criminal, then I don't know what it is."

Members of the committee have said that the referrals for other individuals may also include ethics violations, legal misconduct and campaign finance violations. Lawmakers have suggested in particular that their recommended charges against Trump could include conspiracy to defraud the United States, obstruction of an official proceeding of Congress and insurrection.

On insurrection, Schiff said Sunday that "if you look at Donald Trump's acts and you match them up against the statute, it's a pretty good match." He said that the committee will focus on those individuals — presumably Trump — for whom they believe there is the strongest evidence.

While a so-called criminal referral has no real legal standing, it is a forceful statement by the committee and adds to political pressure already on Attorney General Merrick Garland and special counsel Jack Smith, who is conducting an investigation into Jan. 6 and Trump's actions.

The committee is also expected at the hearing to preview its massive final report, which will include findings, interview transcripts and legislative recommendations. Lawmakers have said a portion of that report will be released Monday.

"We obviously want to complete the story for the American people," said Rep. Jamie Raskin, D-Md., another member of the committee. "Everybody has come on a journey with us and we want a satisfactory conclusion, such that people feel that Congress has done its job."

The panel was formed in the summer of 2021 after Senate Republicans blocked the formation of what

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would have been a bipartisan, independent commission to investigate the insurrection. That opposition spurred the Democratic-controlled House to form a committee of its own. House Republican leader Kevin McCarthy of California, a Trump ally, decided not to participate after House Speaker Nancy Pelosi rejected some of his appointments. That left an opening for two anti-Trump Republicans in the House — Reps. Liz Cheney of Wyoming and Adam Kinzinger of Illinois — to join the seven Democrats serving on the committee.

While the committee's mission was to take a comprehensive accounting of the insurrection and educate the public about what happened, they've also aimed their work at an audience of one: the attorney general. Lawmakers on the panel have openly pressured Garland to investigate Trump's actions, and last month he appointed a special counsel, Smith, to oversee several probes related to Trump, including those related to the insurrection.

In court documents earlier this year, the committee suggested criminal charges against Trump could include conspiracy to defraud the United States and obstruction of an official proceeding of Congress.

In a "conspiracy to defraud the United States," the committee argues that evidence supports an inference that Trump and his allies "entered into an agreement to defraud the United States" when they disseminated misinformation about election fraud and pressured state and federal officials to assist in that effort. Trump still says he won the election to this day.

The panel also asserts that Trump obstructed an official proceeding, the joint session of Congress in which the Electoral College votes are certified. The committee said Trump either attempted or succeeded at obstructing, influencing or impeding the ceremonial process on Jan. 6 and "did so corruptly" by pressuring Pence to try to overturn the results as he presided over the session. Pence declined to do so.

The committee may make ethics referrals for five House Republicans — including McCarthy — who ignored congressional subpoenas from the panel. Those referrals are unlikely to result in punishment since Republicans are set to take over the House majority in January.

Jury selection to begin in Proud Boys Jan. 6 sedition trial

By MICHAEL KUNZELMAN and ALANNA DURKIN RICHER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Jury selection will get underway Monday in the seditious conspiracy trial of former Proud Boys national chairman Enrique Tarrío and four other members of the extremist group accused of plotting to attack the U.S. Capitol on Jan. 6, 2021, in a desperate bid to overturn President Joe Biden's victory.

Tarrío and four of his lieutenants are heading to trial in Washington just weeks after two leaders of another extremist group, the Oath Keepers, were convicted of seditious conspiracy in a major victory for the Justice Department's extensive Jan. 6 prosecution.

Tarrío is perhaps the highest-profile defendant to face jurors yet in the attack that halted the certification of Biden's win, left dozens of police officers injured and led to nearly 1,000 arrests. Tarrío, of Miami, and the others — Ethan Nordean, Zachary Rehl, Dominic Pezzola and Joseph Biggs — are charged with several other crimes in addition to seditious conspiracy.

If convicted of sedition, they could face up to 20 years in prison. Jury selection is likely to take several days and the trial is expected to last at least six weeks.

Tarrío wasn't in Washington on Jan. 6 because he had been arrested two days earlier on charges that he vandalized a Black Lives Matter banner at a historic Black church during a protest in December 2020. But prosecutors say he was the leader of a conspiracy to stop the transfer of power from President Donald Trump to Biden.

Days before the riot, Tarrío posted on social media about "revolution," according to court papers. Citing what they alleged was an encrypted message group created by Tarrío, authorities say members discussed attacking the Capitol. One message said: "Time to stack those bodies in front of Capitol Hill." Another asked whether people were going to "push thru police lines and storm the capitol buildings?"

Prosecutors allege that even after his arrest, Tarrío kept command over the Proud Boys who attacked the Capitol on Jan. 6 and cheered on their actions from afar. As rioters stormed the building, he posted

“don’t (expletive) leave” on social media, and then later “We did this...”

Nordean, Pezzola, Biggs and Rehl were part of the first wave of rioters to push onto Capitol grounds and charge past police barricades toward the building, according to prosecutors. Pezzola used a riot shield he stole from a Capitol police officer to break a window, allowing the first rioters to enter the building, prosecutors allege.

“January 6 will be a day in infamy,” Biggs said in a video outside the Capitol, according to court papers.

Nordean, of Auburn, Washington, was a Proud Boys chapter president; Biggs, of Ormond Beach, Florida, was a self-described Proud Boys organizer; Rehl was president of the Proud Boys chapter in Philadelphia; and Dominic Pezzola was a Proud Boys member from Rochester, New York.

Defense attorneys have denied that the Proud Boys leaders planned or led an attack on the Capitol.

Tarrio’s lawyers say he didn’t instruct or encourage anyone to go into the Capitol or engage in violent or destructive behavior. Nordean’s attorney accused the Justice Department of selective prosecution and targeting him based on his political associations and beliefs. Rehl’s lawyer asked the judge to toss the indictment on First Amendment grounds, arguing that the case rested solely on Rehl’s political views and free speech.

Another former Proud Boys leader, Jeremy Joseph Bertino, pleaded guilty to seditious conspiracy in October, and could testify against Tarrio and the others under a cooperation deal with the government.

Last month’s guilty verdicts for Oath Keepers founder Stewart Rhodes and Florida chapter leader Kelly Meggs were the first seditious conspiracy trial convictions in decades. Seditious conspiracy, enacted after the Civil War to arrest Southerners who might keep fighting the U.S. government, has rarely been brought in recent memory, with mixed results.

Jurors acquitted three other Oath Keeper defendants of seditious conspiracy, although they were convicted of other crimes. Four others associated with the Oath Keepers are also currently standing trial for seditious conspiracy.

Saudi-Iran talks said to have stalled over protests in Iran

By QASSIM ABDUL-ZAHRA Associated Press

BAGHDAD (AP) — Baghdad-mediated diplomatic talks between regional rivals Iran and Saudi Arabia have come to a halt, largely because of Tehran claims the Sunni kingdom has played a role in alleged foreign incitement of the mass anti-government protests underway in Iran, multiple Iraqi officials said.

The talks had been lauded as a breakthrough that would ease regional tensions. Iraq’s new Prime Minister Mohammed Shia al-Sudani said last month after taking office that Iraq had been asked to continue facilitating the dialogue.

However, an anticipated sixth round of talks, to be hosted by Baghdad, has not been scheduled because Tehran refuses to meet with Saudi officials as protests in Iran enter a fourth month, according to the Iraqi officials.

“The Iranian-Saudi negotiations have stalled, and this will have a negative impact on the region,” said Amer al-Fayez, an Iraqi lawmaker and member of the parliamentary Foreign Relations Committee.

On his first official visit to Tehran in November, al-Sudani inquired about resuming the talks and mentioned he would be traveling to the Saudi capital of Riyadh soon.

But the Iranians told him they would not meet with Saudi counterparts and accused the kingdom of supporting country-wide protests in Iran through Saudi-funded media channels, according to an official who is a member of Iraq’s ruling Coordination Framework coalition, an alliance of mostly Iran-backed groups.

The details were confirmed by five Iraqi officials, including government officials, Iran-backed militia groups and Shiite Muslim political party figures. All spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to discuss the subject with the media.

Iran’s U.N. mission confirmed the talks had halted but did not provide an explanation. “The talks between Iran and Saudi Arabia ceased before the recent developments in Iran, for a variety of reasons. It might be worth asking Saudi Arabia about them,” the mission said in a statement.

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The kingdom did not respond to requests for comment.

Iran's apparent refusal to continue with the talks is a setback for al-Sudani, who had hoped an ongoing Saudi-Iran dialogue would enable Iraq to buttress its role as a regional mediator. Halting the talks could have regional repercussions as well, with the two nations supporting opposing forces in several conflicts across the Middle East, including in Syria and Yemen, where Iran backs Houthi rebels fighting against the kingdom.

Iran accuses Saudi Arabia of funding the London-based Iran International, a news channel which has been reporting extensively on the protests that erupted in Iran in mid-September. Iran International is a Farsi-language satellite news channel that was once majority-owned by a Saudi national.

Tehran was also irked by a joint statement issued after an Arab-China summit in Riyadh last week, according to an Iraqi official in the Foreign Ministry. In the statement, Saudi Arabia and China said they agreed to "strengthen joint cooperation to ensure the peaceful nature of Iran's nuclear program," while also calling on Iran to respect "principles of good neighborliness and non-interference in internal affairs of states."

China has been a longtime economic partner to Iran, with bilateral relations centered on Beijing's energy needs but also including arm sales. The deepening ties between the countries are also seen as strategic regional counterweight to the United States and its allies. Tehran is worried that improved economic ties between Beijing and Riyadh could unravel this status quo, Iraqi officials said.

Saudi Arabia, with a majority Sunni population, and Iran, which is majority Shiite, have been at odds since Iran's 1979 Islamic Revolution, but relations worsened after the 2016 execution of Shiite cleric Nimr al-Nimr by Riyadh. The incident set off protests in Saudi Arabia and Iran, where demonstrators set fire to the Saudi Embassy in Tehran. Diplomatic relations soured after that.

Direct talks were launched in April 2021, brokered by Iraq, in a bid to improve relations. The mere existence of a dialogue was seen as important, even if the only notable result so far has been Iran reopening the country's representative office to the Organization of Islamic Cooperation in the Saudi city of Jeddah.

Iran has been mired in anti-government protests since Sept. 16, following the death of 22-year old Mahsa Amini in police custody, after she was arrested for allegedly violating the country's strict Islamic dress code. From demonstrations calling for greater freedoms for women, the protests have become one of the greatest challenges to Iran's theocracy since the chaotic years after the Islamic Revolution.

At least 495 people have been killed since the demonstrations started, according to Iran rights monitor HRANA, with reported incidents of Iranian security forces using live ammunition, pellets and rubber bullets to disperse crowds. Over 18,000 people have been detained across dozens of cities.

Iran claims the protests are orchestrated by foreign agents, including the U.S. and its regional allies. At the start of the protests, Tehran blamed Kurdish opposition groups exiled in Iraq for fueling the demonstrations and funneling weapons into Iran, without providing evidence for the claims. Iran unleashed a barrage of missile attacks into northern Iraq targeting the party bases, killing at least a dozen people.

Kurdish opposition groups have denied Tehran's allegations that they smuggled weapons into Iran, and said their involvement was limited to standing in solidarity with protesters, especially in the Kurdish-speaking regions of Iran, and raising awareness globally.

Iran has continued to pressure Iraq to enforce stricter border controls.

The topic was broached again during al-Sudani's visit to Tehran, officials said. Iraq has deployed specialized border forces to the area near its border with Iran. The forces are made up mainly of Kurdish soldiers to avoid tensions with the government of Iraq's northern, semi-autonomous Kurdish region.

"Iran is now facing a real crisis," said Ihsan al-Shammari, an Iraqi political analyst.

Iran, he said, is attempting to scapegoat other countries and groups, "in order to convince the Iranian people that the crisis is the result of foreign interference."

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Twitter poll closes, users vote in favor of Musk exit as CEO

By MATT O'BRIEN AP Technology Writer

More than half of 17.5 million users who responded to a poll that asked whether billionaire Elon Musk should step down as head of Twitter voted yes when the poll closed on Monday.

There was no immediate announcement from Twitter, or Musk, about whether that would happen, though he said that he would abide by the results.

Musk has clashed with some users on multiple fronts and on Sunday, he asked Twitter users to decide if he should stay in charge of the social media platform after acknowledging he made a mistake in launching new speech restrictions that banned mentions of rival social media websites.

In yet another significant policy change, Twitter had announced that users will no longer be able to link to Facebook, Instagram, Mastodon and other platforms the company described as "prohibited."

But that decision generated so much immediate criticism, including from past defenders of Twitter's new billionaire owner, that Musk promised not to make any more major policy changes without an online survey of users.

The action to block competitors was Musk's latest attempt to crack down on certain speech after he shut down a Twitter account last week that was tracking the flights of his private jet.

The banned platforms included mainstream websites such as Facebook and Instagram, and upstart rivals Mastodon, Tribel, Nostr, Post and former President Donald Trump's Truth Social. Twitter gave no explanation for why the blacklist included those seven websites but not others such as Parler, TikTok or LinkedIn.

Twitter had said it would at least temporarily suspend accounts that include the banned websites in their profile — a practice so widespread it would have been difficult to enforce the restrictions on Twitter's millions of users around the world. Not only links but attempts to bypass the ban by spelling out "instagram dot com" could have led to a suspension, the company said.

A test case was the prominent venture capitalist Paul Graham, who in the past has praised Musk but on Sunday told his 1.5 million Twitter followers that this was the "last straw" and to find him on Mastodon. His Twitter account was promptly suspended, and soon after restored as Musk promised to reverse the policy implemented just hours earlier.

Musk said Twitter will still suspend some accounts according to the policy but "only when that account's (asterisk)primary(asterisk) purpose is promotion of competitors."

Twitter previously took action to block links to Mastodon after its main Twitter account tweeted about the @ElonJet controversy last week. Mastodon has grown rapidly in recent weeks as an alternative for Twitter users who are unhappy with Musk's overhaul of Twitter since he bought the company for \$44 billion in late October and began restoring accounts that ran afoul of the previous Twitter leadership's rules against hateful conduct and other harms.

Musk permanently banned the @ElonJet account on Wednesday, then changed Twitter's rules to prohibit the sharing of another person's current location without their consent. He then took aim at journalists who were writing about the jet-tracking account, which can still be found on other social media sites, alleging that they were broadcasting "basically assassination coordinates."

He used that to justify Twitter's moves last week to suspend the accounts of numerous journalists who cover the social media platform and Musk, among them reporters working for The New York Times, Washington Post, CNN, Voice of America and other publications. Many of those accounts were restored following an online poll by Musk.

Then, over the weekend, The Washington Post's Taylor Lorenz became the latest journalist to be temporarily banned. She said she was suspended after posting a message on Twitter tagging Musk and requesting an interview.

Sally Buzbee, The Washington Post's executive editor, called it an "arbitrary suspension of another Post journalist" that further undermined Musk's promise to run Twitter as a platform dedicated to free speech.

"Again, the suspension occurred with no warning, process or explanation — this time as our reporter merely sought comment from Musk for a story," Buzbee said. By midday Sunday, Lorenz's account was

restored, as was the tweet she thought had triggered her suspension.

Musk's promise to let users decide his future role at Twitter through an unscientific online survey appeared to come out of nowhere Sunday, though he had also promised in November that a reorganization was happening soon.

Musk was questioned in court on Nov. 16 about how he splits his time among Tesla and his other companies, including SpaceX and Twitter. Musk had to testify in Delaware's Court of Chancery over a shareholder's challenge to Musk's potentially \$55 billion compensation plan as CEO of the electric car company.

Musk said he never intended to be CEO of Tesla, and that he didn't want to be chief executive of any other companies either, preferring to see himself as an engineer instead. Musk also said he expected an organizational restructuring of Twitter to be completed in the next week or so. It's been more than a month since he said that.

In public banter with Twitter followers Sunday, Musk expressed pessimism about the prospects for a new CEO, saying that person "must like pain a lot" to run a company that "has been in the fast lane to bankruptcy."

"No one wants the job who can actually keep Twitter alive. There is no successor," Musk tweeted.

EU accuses Meta of antitrust breaches with classified ads

LONDON (AP) — The European Union on Monday accused Facebook parent Meta of breaching the bloc's antitrust rules by distorting competition in the online classified ads business.

The bloc's executive commission said Monday that it "takes issue" with the tech company tying its online classified ad business, Facebook Marketplace, to Facebook.

That means Facebook users automatically have access to Marketplace "whether they want it or not," the European Commission said.

The commission, the 27-nation bloc's top antitrust enforcer, said Meta also imposes unfair trading conditions on competing online classified ad companies that advertise their services on Facebook or Instagram.

Meta didn't respond immediately to a request for comment.

The EU's competition watchdog and its British counterpart last year opened twin investigations into the company's classified business.

If confirmed, the practices would be in breach of EU rules that prevent "abuse of a dominant market position."

The commission said its preliminary finding is that Meta dominates the EU's social network market as well as the online display advertising on social media in the bloc's national markets.

Companies that breach EU antitrust rules can be hit with fines worth up to 10% of their annual global revenue.

Court: UK plan to send asylum-seekers to Rwanda is legal

By JILL LAWLESS Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — The U.K. government's plan to send asylum-seekers on a one-way trip to Rwanda is legal, two High Court judges ruled Monday in a victory for backers of the controversial policy.

But the judges also said the government failed to consider the individual circumstances of the people it tried to deport, signaling further legal battles ahead before anyone is put on a plane to East Africa.

A court hearing in the case is set for next month, and appeals are likely.

Several asylum-seekers, aid groups and a border officials' union filed lawsuits to stop the Conservative government acting on a deportation agreement with Rwanda that aims to deter migrants from trying to reach the U.K. by crossing the English Channel.

The U.K. plans to send some migrants who arrive in the U.K. as stowaways or in small boats to the East African country, where their asylum claims would be processed. Under the plan, applicants granted asylum would stay in Rwanda rather than returning to the U.K.

"The court has concluded that it is lawful for the government to make arrangements for relocating

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asylum-seekers to Rwanda and for their asylum claims to be determined in Rwanda rather than in the United Kingdom," Judge Clive Lewis said.

But he added that the government "must decide if there is anything about each person's particular circumstances which means that his asylum claim should be determined in the United Kingdom or whether there are other reasons why he should not be relocated to Rwanda."

"The Home Secretary has not properly considered the circumstances of the eight individual claimants whose cases we have considered," the judge said.

Ever Solomon, head of the charity Refugee Council, said the group was "very disappointed" by the ruling.

"Treating people who are in search of safety like human cargo and shipping them off to another country is a cruel policy that will cause great human suffering," he said.

More than 44,000 people who crossed the Channel in small boats have arrived in Britain this year, and several have died in the attempt, including four last week when a boat capsized in freezing weather.

Human rights groups say the government's deal with Rwanda is illegal and unworkable, and that it is inhumane to send people thousands of miles to a country they don't want to live in. They also cite Rwanda's poor human rights record, including allegations of torture and killings of government opponents.

Britain has paid Rwanda 120 million pounds (\$146 million) under the deal struck in April, but no one has yet been sent to the country. The U.K. was forced to cancel the first deportation flight at the last minute in June after the European Court of Human Rights ruled the plan carried "a real risk of irreversible harm."

The British government is determined to press on with the policy, arguing that it will deter people-trafficking gangs who ferry migrants on hazardous journeys across the Channel's busy shipping lanes.

Home Secretary Suella Braverman, who has called the Channel crossings an "invasion of our southern coast," told the Times of London it would be "unforgivable" if the government did not stop the journeys.

Rwandan government spokeswoman Yolande Makolo welcomed the British court's decision.

"This is a positive step in our quest to contribute innovative, long-term solutions to the global migration crisis," she said.

The U.K. government has argued that while Rwanda was the site of a genocide that killed more than 800,000 people in 1994, the country has since built a reputation for stability and economic progress. Critics say that stability comes at the cost of political repression.

The U.K. receives fewer asylum-seekers than many European nations, including Germany, France and Italy, but thousands of migrants from around the world travel to northern France each year in hopes of crossing the Channel. Some want to reach the U.K. because they have friends or family there, others because they speak English or because it's perceived to be easy to find work.

The government wants to deport all migrants who arrive by unauthorized routes, and aims to strike Rwanda-style deals with other countries. Critics point out there are few authorized routes for seeking asylum in the U.K., other than those set up for people from Ukraine, Afghanistan and Hong Kong.

A surge in arrivals and a U.K. bureaucratic backlog, exacerbated by the coronavirus pandemic, has led to many Channel migrants languishing in overcrowded processing centers, where there have been outbreaks of diphtheria and other diseases.

Night-time drone attack hits Kyiv as Putin heads to Belarus

By HANNA ARHIROVA and VASILISA STEPANENKO Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Multiple explosive drones attacked Ukraine's capital before dawn Monday, local authorities reported, as Russian President Vladimir Putin prepared to visit ally Belarus, which provided the Kremlin's forces with a launch pad for its invasion of Ukraine almost 10 months ago.

The drone attack came three days after what Ukrainian officials described as one of Russia's biggest assaults on Kyiv since the war started and as Moscow presses on with its effort to torment Ukraine from the air amid a broad battlefield stalemate.

Russia launched 23 self-exploding drones over Kyiv while the city slept, but Ukrainian forces shot down 18 of them, the Kyiv city administration said on Telegram. No major casualties were reported.

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Monday was St. Nicholas Day, an occasion that marks the start of the Christmas holidays in Ukraine and is when children typically receive their first gifts hidden under pillows.

"This is how Russians congratulated our children on the holiday," Serhii Kruk, the head of Ukraine's State Emergency Service, wrote on Telegram, attaching photos of firefighters barely distinguished amid the flames of an infrastructure facility that got hit.

"In the night when everyone is waiting for a miracle, the terrorist country continues to terrorize the peaceful Ukrainian people," Ukraine's human rights chief, Dmytro Lubinets, said.

Bits of wreckage from the downed drones damaged a road in the central Solomianskyi district and broke windows in a multi-story building in the Shevchenkyvskyi district of Kyiv, city officials said.

One drone struck the home of Olha and Ivan Kobzarenko, ages 84 and 83, in the outskirts of the capital. Ivan sustained a head injury.

Their garage was completely destroyed and their dog, Malysh, was killed. Olha, speaking in her bedroom where shattered glass and blood covered the floor, said the blast flung the front gate into the couple's house.

"I know that I am not alone," Olha said. "Everyone is suffering. Everyone."

Nina Sobol, a 59-year-old clerk working at one of the city's power companies, was on her way to work when the strikes happened. Like many of her colleagues, she waited outside while emergency services inspected damage.

"I feel really anxious," she said. "Anxious because you never know at which moment there will be an incoming missile."

Authorities said a critical infrastructure point was also hit, without giving more details.

Although the capital appeared to be the main target of the latest Russian attack, the armed forces said other places in the country were also targeted.

Kyiv region Gov. Oleksii Kuleba said on Telegram that some infrastructure facilities were damaged across the Kyiv region, as well as private houses, and at least two people were injured.

Ukraine's air force said on Telegram that its personnel were able to destroy 30 of at least 35 self-exploding drones that Russia launched across the country from the eastern side of the Azov Sea on Ukraine's south-east coast. Russia is on the other side of the sea.

The Ukrainian military has reported increasing success in shooting down incoming Russian missiles and explosive drones.

Moscow has targeted Ukraine's energy infrastructure, including in Kyiv, since October as part of a strategy to try to leave the country without heat and light during the bitterly cold winter. It has kept up that effort despite Western sanctions and the supply of Western air defense systems to Ukrainian forces.

On Friday, Ukraine's capital was attacked as part of a massive strike from Russia. Dozens of missiles were launched across the country, triggering widespread power outages.

Putin was set to travel Monday to Belarus for talks with its authoritarian leader, Alexander Lukashenko, who allowed Russian forces to use Belarusian territory for invading Ukraine and has close defense links with Moscow.

It was to be a rare trip to Minsk by Putin, who usually receives Lukashenko at the Kremlin. Belarus is believed to have Soviet-era weapons stockpiles that could be useful for Moscow, while Lukashenko needs help with his country's ailing economy.

Analysts say the Kremlin might look again for some kind of Belarusian military support for its Ukraine operations. But the winter weather and Russia's depleted resources mean any attack probably won't come soon, according to the Institute for the Study of War, a think tank in Washington.

"The capacity of the Russian military, even reinforced by elements of the Belarusian armed forces, to prepare and conduct effective large-scale mechanized offensive operations in the next few months remains questionable," the think tank said in an assessment published Sunday.

It also concluded that "it is unlikely that Lukashenko will commit the Belarusian military (which would also have to be re-equipped) to the invasion of Ukraine."

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Thai navy searching for 31 missing sailors after ship sank

BANGKOK (AP) — Thai navy ships and helicopters searched Monday for more than 30 sailors still missing more than 17 hours after their warship sank in rough seas in the Gulf of Thailand.

As of Monday afternoon, 75 sailors from the HTMS Sukhothai corvette had been rescued and 31 were still missing, the navy said. The high waves that caused the accident had lessened since Sunday night's sinking, but were still high enough to endanger small boats, the navy said.

A rescued crew member interviewed by Thai PBS television said he had to float in the sea for three hours before he was rescued. He said the ship was buffeted by waves 3 meters (10 feet) high as it was sinking Sunday night, complicating rescue efforts.

"The waves are still high and we cannot search for them from the horizontal line. We have to fly the helicopters and search for them from a bird's eye view instead," navy spokesman Adm. Pokkrong Monthatphalin told Thai PBS.

Eleven of the rescued sailors were being treated in a hospital. The navy denied a local media report that one death had been confirmed, saying the fatality was from an accident involving another boat.

Strong winds blew seawater onto the HTMS Sukhothai and knocked out its electrical system Sunday evening, making control of the ship difficult. The navy dispatched three frigates and two helicopters with mobile pumping machines to try to assist the disabled ship by removing the seawater, but couldn't do so because of the strong winds.

The loss of power allowed more seawater to flow into the vessel, causing it to list and sink.

Thailand's Meteorological Department had issued a weather advisory for the general area just a few hours before the accident, saying that waves in the Gulf of Thailand were expected to be 2-4 meters (7-14 feet) high with thundershowers. It suggested that all ships "proceed with caution" and warned small craft not to go to sea until Tuesday.

The Sukhothai was built in Tacoma, Washington, and commissioned in 1987. With a maximum displacement of 959 tons and a length of 76.8 meters (252 feet), it is about midsize for a corvette, a type of armed vessel that typically is used for patrolling close offshore waters.

The warship had been on patrol 32 kilometers (20 miles) from the pier at Bangsaphan district in Prachuap Khiri Khan province. Pokkrong said the ship had been on a regular patrol to assist any fishing boats needing help.

"Our top priority now is to rescue all the sailors. We will plan to have the ship salvaged later," he said. The search was being conducted in a 16-square kilometer (6.2-square mile) area around the site of the sinking.

While northern and central Thailand are seeing their coldest temperatures of the year, far southern Thailand has been experiencing storms and flooding in recent days.

Global stock markets sink under global recession fears

By JOE McDONALD AP Business Writer

BEIJING (AP) — Global stock markets fell Monday as investors wrestled with fears the Federal Reserve and European central banks might be willing to cause a recession to crush inflation.

Frankfurt, Shanghai, Tokyo and Wall Street futures declined. London rose. Oil prices advanced.

Wall Street fell Friday after the Fed raised its forecast of how long interest rates have to stay elevated to cool inflation that is near a four-decade high. The European Central Bank warned more rate hikes are coming.

That "hawkish rhetoric" indicates "mounting pipeline risks of a global recession," said Tan Boon Heng of Mizuho Bank in a report.

In early trading, the DAX in Frankfurt lost 0.7% to 13,893.07 and the CAC 40 in Paris fell 1.1% to 6,452.63. The FTSE 100 in London gained 0.3% to 7,356.32.

On Wall Street, futures for the benchmark S&P 500 index and the Dow Jones Industrial Average were off less than 0.1%.

On Friday, the S&P 500 index lost 1.1% and turned in its second weekly decline. It is down about 19%

this year. The Dow dropped 0.8% and the Nasdaq composite lost 1%.

In Asia, the Shanghai Composite Index lost 1.5% to 3,118.95 despite the ruling Communist Party announcing Friday it will try to reverse China's economic slump by stimulating domestic consumption and the real estate market.

The Nikkei 225 in Tokyo sank 1.1% to 27,226.12 and the Hang Seng in Hong Kong shed 0.5% to 19,359.03.

The Kospi in Seoul retreated 0.6% to 2,346.49 and Sydney's S&P-ASX 200 was 0.2% lower at 7,133.90.

India's Sensex lost 0.8% to 61,337.81. Singapore and Bangkok advanced while New Zealand and Jakarta declined.

U.S. consumer inflation has eased to 7.1% over a year earlier in November from June's 9.1% high but still is painfully high.

The Fed on Wednesday raised its benchmark short-term lending rate by one-half percentage point for its seventh hike this year. That dashed hopes the U.S. central bank might ease off increases due to signs inflation and economic activity are cooling.

The federal funds rate stands at a 15-year high of 4.25% to 4.5%. The Fed forecast that will reach a range of 5% to 5.25% by the end of 2023. Its forecast doesn't call for a rate cut before 2024.

In energy markets, U.S. benchmark crude rose 55 cents to \$74.84 per barrel in electronic trading on the New York Mercantile Exchange. The contract fell \$1.82 on Friday to \$74.29. Brent crude, the price basis for international oil trading, gained 57 cents to \$79.61 per barrel in London. It lost \$2.17 the previous session to \$79.04.

The dollar declined to 136.18 yen from Friday's 136.56 yen. The euro gained to \$1.0606 from \$1.0600.

11 people seriously injured amid turbulence on Hawaii flight

By AUDREY McAVOY Associated Press

HONOLULU (AP) — Severe turbulence rocked a flight from Phoenix to Honolulu Sunday, seriously injuring 11 people in what an Hawaiian Airlines official called an isolated and unusual event.

Jon Snook, the airline's chief operating officer, said the airline hasn't experienced "an incident of this nature in recent history." The flight was full, carrying 278 passengers and 10 crew members, he said during an afternoon news conference.

Jim Ireland, director of Honolulu Emergency Medical Services, said 20 people were taken to hospitals, including 11 people deemed to be in serious condition.

At least one person was reported to have been rendered unconscious but all patients were awake and talking when they arrived at hospitals, he said.

Patients suffered cuts, including to the head, as well as bumps and bruises. Some people were nauseous and vomited as a result of extreme motion, he said. Altogether 36 people received treatment.

"We are also very happy and we feel fortunate that there were not any deaths or other critical injuries. And we're also very hopeful that all will recover and make a full recovery," Ireland said.

Snook said three flight attendants were among those taken to hospitals.

Passenger Kaylee Reyes told Hawaii News Now that her mother had just sat down when the turbulence hit and did not have a chance to buckle her safety belt.

"She flew up and hit the ceiling," Reyes said.

Snook said there was some internal damage to the aircraft during the turbulence. The seatbelt sign was on at the time, though some of those injured weren't wearing them, he said.

Thomas Vaughan, a meteorologist with the National Weather Service in Honolulu, said there had been a weather advisory for thunderstorms that included Oahu and areas that would have included the flight path at the time of the incident.

The airline was aware of the weather forecast and the unstable air and weather conditions, but had no warning the particular patch of air where the turbulence occurred "was in any way dangerous," Snook said.

He didn't know how much altitude the plane lost during the turbulence, saying that would be part of an investigation involving the National Transportation Safety Board. The plane's flight data recorder would

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provide those details, he said.

The investigation would also address precisely what the passengers and crew were doing at the time, he said.

The Airbus A330-200 began its descent immediately after the turbulence and crew declared an emergency due to the number of injuries on board, he said. Air traffic controllers gave the flight priority to land.

The aircraft will undergo a thorough inspection and maintenance, mostly to fix components in the cabin, Snook said.

Snook said he could only speculate whether some passengers hit their heads, but that was likely based on the injuries and the damage to cabin paneling.

"If you don't have your seatbelt on, you stay where you are as the aircraft goes down and that's how those injuries occur," Snook said.

The investigation will examine what other measures were taken, aside from turning on the fasten seatbelt sign, to ensure passengers were buckled in, he said.

In 2019, 37 passengers and flight crew members were injured when an Air Canada flight from Vancouver to Sydney hit intense turbulence about two hours past Hawaii. The Boeing 777-200 was diverted to Honolulu, where the injured received treatment. Thirty people were taken to hospitals and nine had serious injuries.

Over the Atlantic, a 2017 American Airlines flight from Athens hit severe turbulence along the New York coastline. Seven crew members and three passengers were injured.

Most people associate turbulence with heavy storms. But the most dangerous type is so-called clear-air turbulence. The wind-shear phenomenon can occur in wispy cirrus clouds or even clear air near thunderstorms, as differences in temperature and pressure create powerful currents of fast-moving air.

Planes can sail into clear-air turbulence without warning.

2 COVID-19 deaths reported in Beijing as virus surges

BEIJING (AP) — Chinese health authorities on Monday announced two additional COVID-19 deaths, both in the capital Beijing, that were the first reported in weeks and come during an expected surge of illnesses after the nation eased its strict "zero-COVID" approach.

China had not reported a death from COVID-19 since Dec. 4, even though unofficial reports of a new wave of cases are widespread.

With the latest reported deaths, the National Health Commission raised China's total to 5,237 deaths from COVID-19 in the past three years, out of 380,453 cases of illness — numbers that are much lower than in other major countries but also based on statistics and information-gathering methods that have come into question.

Chinese health authorities count only those who died directly from COVID-19, excluding people whose underlying conditions such as diabetes and heart disease were worsened by the virus.

In many other countries, guidelines stipulate that any death where the coronavirus is a factor or contributor is counted as a COVID-19-related death.

The announcement comes amid testimony from family members and people who work in the funeral business who did not want to be identified for fear of retribution saying deaths tied to COVID-19 were increasing.

China had long hailed its hardline "zero-COVID" approach as keeping numbers of cases and deaths relatively low — comparing itself favorably to the U.S., where the death toll has topped 1.1 million.

Yet, the policy of lockdowns, travel restrictions, mandatory testing and quarantines placed China's society and the national economy under enormous stress, apparently convincing the ruling Communist Party to heed outside advice and alter its strategy.

The easing began in November, and accelerated after Beijing and several other cities saw protests over the restrictions that grew into calls for President Xi Jinping and the Communist Party to step down — a level of public dissent not seen in decades.

On Wednesday, the government said it would stop reporting asymptomatic COVID-19 cases since they've become impossible to track with mass testing no longer required. Most testing is now carried out privately, with those showing only mild symptoms allowed to recuperate at home without being forced into a centralized quarantine center.

The lack of data has made it more difficult to grasp the scale of the outbreak or its direction. However, a major drop in economic activity and anecdotal evidence of the virus' spread point to a growing caseload, while health experts have projected a possible major wave of new infections and a spike in deaths over the next month or two, particularly among the elderly.

China is trying to persuade reluctant seniors and others at risk to get vaccinated, apparently with only moderate success. The other major concern is shoring up health resources in smaller cities and the vast rural hinterland ahead of January's Lunar New Year travel rush, which will see migrant workers returning to their home towns.

Numbers of fever clinics have been expanded in both urban and rural areas and people have been asked to stay home unless seriously ill to preserve resources. Hospitals are also running short on staff, and reports say workers have been asked to return to their posts as long as they aren't feverish.

North Korea says latest launches tested 1st spy satellite

By HYUNG-JIN KIM Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — North Korea said Monday it fired a test satellite in an important final-stage test for the development of its first spy satellite, a key military capability coveted by its leader Kim Jong Un along with other high-tech weapons systems.

The North's official Korean Central News Agency also released low-resolution, black-and-white photos showing a space view of the South Korean capital and Incheon, a city just west of Seoul, in an apparent attempt to show the North is pushing to acquire a surveillance tool to monitor its rival.

The rocket carrying the test satellite was launched Sunday to assess the satellite's photography and data transmission systems, KCNA said.

The country's National Aerospace Development Administration called the test results "an important success which has gone through the final gateway process of the launch of reconnaissance satellite." It said it would complete the preparations for its first military reconnaissance satellite by April next year, according to KCNA.

"From the images released, the resolution does not appear to be so impressive for military reconnaissance," Soo Kim, a security analyst at the California-based RAND Corporation, said. "I'd note, however, that this is probably an ongoing development, so we may see more improvements to North Korea's military reconnaissance capabilities over time."

South Korea, Japan and U.S. authorities said Sunday they had detected a pair of ballistic missile launches by North Korea from its northwestern Tongchang-ri area, where the North's satellite launch pad is located. They said the two missiles flew about 500 kilometers (310 miles) at a maximum altitude of 550 kilometers (340 miles) before landing in the waters between the Korean Peninsula and Japan.

This meant North Korea likely fired two missiles with different types of cameras — one for black-and-white imagery and video and the other for color, given the North's state media said that Sunday's test involved both types of cameras, said Lee Choon Geun, an honorary research fellow at South Korea's Science and Technology Policy Institute.

An analysis of a photo of the launch also showed the missiles were likely a new type of a liquid-fueled weapon that can be used for a military purpose as well as sending a satellite into orbit, Lee said.

Geon Ha Gyu, a spokesperson for South Korea's Defense Ministry, told reporters Monday that the South Korean and U.S. assessments that North Korea fired the two medium-range ballistic missiles remain unchanged. He said South Korean and U.S. intelligence authorities were analyzing further details of the launches but declined to elaborate.

A spy satellite was on a wish list of sophisticated military assets Kim announced during a ruling party

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meeting early last year, together with multi-warhead missiles, solid-fueled long-range missiles, underwater-launched nuclear missiles and nuclear-powered submarines. Kim has called for such modern weapons systems and an expanded nuclear arsenal to pressure the United States to abandon its hostile policies on North Korea, an apparent reference to U.S.-led sanctions and the U.S.-South Korean military drills that North Korea views as an invasion rehearsal.

North Korea has since taken steps to develop such weapons systems. In February and March, North Korea said it conducted tests to check a camera and data transmission systems to be used on a spy satellite. In November, it test-launched its developmental, longest-range Hwasong-17 intercontinental ballistic missile, a weapon believed to be designed to carry multiple warheads. Last week, North Korea said it performed a "high-thrust solid-fuel motor" to be used for a new strategic weapon, an apparent reference to a solid-fueled ICBM.

Ankit Panda, an expert with the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, said that North Korea will likely make a proper orbital launch for a reconnaissance satellite probably around April 15, the birthday of Kim's late grandfather and state founder Kim Il Sung. The day is one of the most important state anniversaries in North Korea.

North Korea has previously put what it called Earth observation satellites into orbit in 2012 and 2016. Many foreign experts say both satellites were tasked with spying on its rivals though there has been no evidence that either satellite has ever relayed any imagery back to North Korea.

According to North Korea's state media, one of the cameras tested Sunday has a 20-meter (65-foot) resolution, which Lee, the expert, said can only recognize relatively big targets such as warships sailing on the ocean and military installations in South Korea.

Lee said North Korea may be able to covertly get a more advanced camera that enable it to monitor tanks and the deployment of U.S. strategic assets to South Korea. He said such a camera would greatly boost North Korea's surveillance capability.

Earlier this year, North Korea test-launched a record number of missiles, many of them nuclear-capable missiles with varying ranges to reach the U.S. mainland and its allies South Korea and Japan. It also legislated a law authorizing the preemptive use of nuclear weapons on a broad range of scenarios, causing security jitters in South Korea and elsewhere.

North Korea has avoided fresh U.N. sanctions for those moves, however, because U.N. Security Council permanent members Russia and China won't support U.S. attempts to impose them.

"Having codified his country's nuclear law earlier this year, tested missiles of varying capabilities, and made it very clear he has no interest in diplomacy with the U.S. and South Korea, Kim has essentially paved the way for nuclearization," Soo Kim, the analyst, said. "He's lent the appearance that the only possible way out of this quagmire is for the international community to fold the conditions set forth by the regime."

She said a handful of other high-priority geopolitical concerns involving China and Russia "has allowed Kim to buy time and the grace of the international community to push forward with his plan."

Disastrous last play sums up day of mistakes by Patriots

By W.G. RAMIREZ Associated Press

LAS VEGAS (AP) — New England coach Bill Belichick uttered the same word 10 times during a postgame press conference that lasted a little more than four minutes.

"Mistake."

It summed up the Patriots' 30-24 loss to the Las Vegas Raiders on Sunday, with by far the biggest miscue coming on the final play of the game.

After falling behind 17-3 at halftime, the Patriots scored 21 unanswered points to take a 24-17 lead with less than four minutes remaining.

But Las Vegas — which came in 0-4 when leading by double digits at halftime, the first team since at least 1930 to lose four times in a season when leading by double digits at the half — answered with a pair of touchdowns in the final 37 seconds.

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"Collectively made too many mistakes and gave up some big plays that were obviously the difference in the game," Belichick said.

One mistake in particular handed the Raiders the win and knocked the Patriots (7-7) out of playoff position in the AFC.

With the game tied, New England running back Rhamondre Stevenson gained 23 yards on the final play before pitching the ball to wide receiver Jakobi Meyers, who then backtracked before heaving it toward quarterback Mac Jones. Raiders defensive end Chandler Jones snagged the ball, stiff-armed Mac Jones and raced 48 yards for the walk-off win.

"Obviously we made a mistake on it," Belichick added. "Made a mistake on the play."

Both Stevenson and Meyers took responsibility, with each saying it was their job to take a knee and send the game to overtime.

"The play call was just a draw play — nothing more, nothing less than that," Stevenson said. "I'm supposed to know the situation. I'm supposed to know how much time is on the clock in critical situations and I failed to do that today."

Stevenson said the play started with him, and had he never pitched the ball to Meyers, the ensuing touchdown would have never taken place.

Meyers said he was the one trying to be a hero by extending the play.

"That ain't his fault. He gave me the ball, I got to be smart with it," Meyers said. "I thought I saw Mac open. I didn't see Chandler Jones at the time. Just thought he was open, tried to get it to him, then let him try to make a play with it. But the score was tied, so like I said, I should have just laid down."

Belichick pointed to plenty of mistakes earlier in the game.

A bad snap resulted in a blocked punt. A false start led to a New England punt with just over two minutes left. And the Patriots allowed the Raiders to convert a fourth-and-10 on their tying drive.

"Obviously we've got to do a better job playing situational football and not make critical mistakes in the game," Belichick said. "We need to try to eliminate all the mistakes that we made. You just can't do this in this league. Got to work to eliminate those and continue to play the good football that we play, but we just had too many mistakes and too many bad plays to win. That was obvious."

US border cities strained ahead of expected migrant surge

By GIOVANNA DELL'ORTO, MORGAN LEE and ACACIA CORONADO ASSOCIATED PRESS

EL PASO, Texas (AP) — Along the U.S. southern border, two cities — El Paso, Texas, and Ciudad Juarez in Mexico — prepared Sunday for a surge of as many as 5,000 new migrants a day as pandemic-era immigration restrictions expire this week, setting in motion plans for emergency housing, food and other essentials.

On the Mexican side of the international border, only heaps of discarded clothes, shoes and backpacks remained Sunday morning on the banks of the Rio Grande River, where until a couple of days ago hundreds of people were lining up to turn themselves in to U.S. officials. One young man from Ecuador stood uncertain on the Mexican side; he asked two journalists if they knew anything about what would happen if he turned himself in without having a sponsor in the U.S., and then gingerly removed sneakers and socks and hopped across the low water.

On the American side, by a small fence guarded by several Border Patrol vehicles, he joined a line of a dozen people who stood waiting with no U.S. officials in sight.

El Paso County Judge Ricardo Samaniego told The Associated Press on Sunday that the region, home to one of the busiest border crossings in the country, was coordinating housing and relocation efforts with groups and other cities, as well as calling on the state and federal government for humanitarian help. The area is preparing for an onslaught of new arrivals that could double their daily numbers once public health rule Title 42 ends on Wednesday.

The rule has been used to deter more than 2.5 million migrants from crossing since March 2020.

At a migrant shelter not far from the river in a poor Ciudad Juárez neighborhood, Carmen Aros, 31, knew

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little about U.S. policies. In fact, she said she'd heard the border might close on Dec. 21.

She fled the cartel violence in the Mexican state of Zacatecas a month ago, right after her fifth daughter was born and her husband went missing. The Methodist pastor who runs the Buen Samaritano shelter put her on a list to be paroled into the United States and she waits every week to be called.

"They told me there was asylum in Juarez, but in truth, I didn't know much," she said on the bunk bed she shared with the girls. "We got here ... and now let's see if the government of the United States can resolve our case."

At a vast shelter run by the Mexican government in a former Ciudad Juárez factory, dozens of migrants watched the World Cup final Sunday on two TVs while a visiting team of doctors from El Paso treated many who had come down with respiratory illness in the cold weather.

Constantly changing policies make it hard to plan, said Dylan Corbett, director of the Hope Border Institute, a Catholic organization helping migrants in both El Paso and Juarez. The group started the clinic two months ago.

"You have a lot of pent-up pain," Corbett said. "I'm afraid of what's going to happen." With government policies in disarray, "the majority of the work falls to faith communities to pick up the pieces and deal with the consequences."

Just a couple blocks across the border, sleet fell in El Paso as about 80 huddled migrants ate tacos that volunteers grilled up. Temperatures in the region were set to drop below freezing this week.

"We're going to keep giving them as much as we have," said Veronica Castorena, who came out with her husband with tortillas and ground beef as well as blankets for those who will likely sleep on the streets.

Jeff Petion, the owner of a trucking school in town, said this was his second time coming with employees to help migrants in the streets. "They're out here, they're cold, they're hungry, so we wanted to let them know they're not alone.

But across the street from Petion, Kathy Countiss, a retiree, said she worries the new arrivals will get out of control in El Paso, draining resources and directing enforcement away from criminals to those claiming asylum.

On Saturday, El Paso Mayor Oscar Leeser issued an emergency declaration to access additional local and state resources for building shelters and other urgently needed aid.

Samaniego, the county judge, said the order came one day after El Paso officials sent Texas Gov. Greg Abbott a letter requesting humanitarian assistance for the region, adding that the request was for resources to help tend to and relocate the newly arriving migrants, not additional security forces.

Samaniego said he has received no response to the request and plans to issue a similar county-wide emergency declaration specifying the kind of help the area needs if the city does not get state aid soon. He urged the state and federal governments to provide the additional money, adding they had a strategy in place but were short in financial, essential and volunteer resources.

El Paso officials have been coordinating with organizations to provide temporary housing for migrants while they are processed and given sponsors and relocate them to bigger cities where they can be flown or bused to their final destinations, Samaniego said. As of Wednesday, they will all join forces at a one-stop emergency command center, Samaniego said, similarly to their approach to the COVID-19 emergency.

Abbott, El Paso city officials and U.S. Customs and Border Protection did not immediately respond to requests for comment on Sunday.

Abbott has committed billions of dollars to "Operation Lone Star," an unprecedented border security effort that has included busing migrants to so-called sanctuary cities like New York, Los Angeles and Washington, D.C., as well as a massive presence of state troopers and National Guard along the Texas-Mexico border.

Additionally, the Republican Texas governor has pushed continued efforts to build former President Donald Trump's wall using mostly private land along the border and crowdsourcing funds to help pay for it.

El Paso was the fifth-busiest of the Border Patrol's nine sectors along the Mexico border as recently as March and suddenly became the most popular by far in October, jumping ahead of Del Rio, Texas, which itself had replaced Texas' Rio Grande Valley as the busiest corridor at lightning-speed late last year. It

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is unclear why El Paso has become such a powerful magnet in recent months, drawing especially high numbers of migrants since September.

Recent illegal crossings in El Paso – at first largely dominated by Venezuelans and more recently by Nicaraguans – are reminiscent of a short period in 2019, when the westernmost reaches of Texas and eastern end of New Mexico were quickly overwhelmed with new arrivals from Cuba and Central America. El Paso had been a relatively sleepy area for illegal crossings for years.

Meanwhile, a group of about 300 migrants began walking northward Saturday night from an area near the Mexico-Guatemala border before being stopped by Mexican authorities. Some wanted to arrive on Dec. 21, under the mistaken belief that the end of the measure would mean they could no longer request asylum. Misinformation about U.S. immigration rules is often rife among migrants. The group was largely made up of Central Americans and Venezuelans who had crossed the southern border into Mexico and had waited in vain for transit or exit visas, migratory forms that might have allowed them to make it across Mexico to the U.S. border.

“We want to get to the United States as soon as possible, before they close the border, that’s what we’re worried about,” said Venezuelan migrant Erick Martínez.

Head of Nobel Prize-winning UN World Food Program to quit

ROME (AP) — The executive director of the United Nations World Food Program, which won the Nobel Peace Prize two years ago, says he will step down at the end of a six-year term heading the world’s largest humanitarian organization.

David Beasley, a Republican, served one term as South Carolina’s governor from 1995 to 1999. In a statement Saturday, Beasley said he will exit his role at the conclusion of his term in April 2023.

“Serving in this capacity has been the greatest joy and deepest heartache of my life,” Beasley said. “Thanks to the generosity of governments and individuals, we have fed so many millions of people. But the reality is we have not been able to feed them all — and the tragedy of extreme hunger in a wealthy world persists.”

Beasley was appointed to the U.N. post in 2017 by then-U.S. President Donald Trump, and was recommended for the job by Nikki Haley, another former South Carolina governor. Haley also served as the U.S. ambassador to the U.N. during the Trump administration. Beasley succeeded Ertharin Cousin, an American lawyer and former U.S. ambassador.

The World Food Program won the Nobel Peace Prize in 2020 for fighting hunger and seeking to end its use as “a weapon of war and conflict” at a time when the coronavirus pandemic threatened to exacerbate starvation.

In March 2022, Beasley’s term was extended under the Biden administration for an extra year. In September, he said that when he assumed his role in 2017, only 80 million people around the world were headed toward starvation. But climate problems, the COVID-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine increased that number to 135 million.

The Rome-based World Food Program was established in 1961 at the behest of U.S. President Dwight Eisenhower and has brought aid to multiple crises, including Ethiopia’s famine of 1984, the Asian tsunami of 2004 and the Haiti earthquake of 2010.

Beasley said the process to select his successor has already begun.

Anti-abortion priest Pavone defrocked for blasphemous posts

By NICOLE WINFIELD Associated Press

VATICAN CITY (AP) — The Vatican has defrocked an anti-abortion U.S. priest, Frank Pavone, for what it said were “blasphemous communications on social media” as well as “persistent disobedience” of his bishop who repeatedly told him to stop his partisan activism for Donald Trump.

A letter to U.S. bishops from the Vatican ambassador to the U.S., Archbishop Christophe Pierre, obtained Sunday, said that the decision against Pavone, who heads the anti-abortion group Priests for Life, had

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been taken Nov. 9, and that there was no chance for an appeal.

Pavone has been in conflict with the bishop of Amarillo, Texas, for over a decade over his pro-life and partisan political activities that came to a head in 2016 when he put an aborted fetus on an altar and posted a video of it on two social media sites. The video was accompanied by a post saying that Hillary Clinton and the Democratic platform would allow abortion to continue and that Trump and the Republican platform wanted to protect unborn children.

Even before then, Pavone successfully appealed 2011 restrictions on his ministry that Amarillo Bishop Patrick Zurek had placed on him.

Pavone remained a firm supporter of Trump and in 2020 disputed the outcome of the election won by Joe Biden. Ahead of the election, the Amarillo diocese denounced Pavone's use of social media for political ends, distanced the diocese from him and said his positions weren't consistent with Catholic teaching.

Pavone relocated from Amarillo and was allowed to move to Colorado Springs, Colorado. His Twitter handle still features him wearing a "MAGA" hat with a background photo of former President Trump, who is praised by many conservatives for his Supreme Court nominees who helped overturn the constitutional right to abortion in the United States.

In a tweet Sunday, Pavone sounded defiant, comparing his fate to that of the unborn.

"So in every profession, including the priesthood, if you defend the #unborn, you will be treated like them! The only difference is that when we are 'aborted,' we continue to speak, loud and clear."

He later appeared in a social media video wearing a black leather biker jacket over his priestly collar against a faux backdrop of St. Peter's Basilica vowing that the anti-abortion "war" would continue and denouncing the "cancel culture" of the church that he said had persecuted him for decades.

In a statement on his Priest For Life website, he said that his laicization was "the result of an abusive process" and that he was considering unspecified legal action against unnamed U.S. bishops.

His supporters immediately denounced the defrocking, including the bishop of Tyler, Texas, Joseph Strickland, who referred to U.S. President Joe Biden's support for abortion rights as "evil."

"The blasphemy is that this holy priest is canceled while an evil president promotes the denial of truth & the murder of the unborn at every turn, Vatican officials promote immorality & denial of the deposit of faith & priests promote gender confusion devastating lives...evil," Strickland tweeted.

In his letter, Pierre cited information from the Congregation for Clergy that Pavone had been laicized — he can no longer present himself as a priest — after being found guilty in a canonical proceeding "of blasphemous communications on social media and of persistent disobedience of the lawful instructions of his diocesan bishop." The letter was first reported by Catholic News Agency.

The statement said Pavone was given "ample opportunity to defend himself" as well as to submit to his bishop. "It was determined that Father Pavone had no reasonable justification for his actions."

The statement concluded that since Priests for Life is not a Catholic organization, it would be up to the group to determine whether he could continue his role "as a lay person."

Laicization, or being reduced to the lay state, is one of the harshest sanctions in the church's canon law for priests.

Arctic air will blast much of US just before Christmas

By JEFF MARTIN and JULIE WALKER Associated Press

ATLANTA (AP) — Forecasters are warning of treacherous holiday travel and life-threatening cold for much of the nation as an arctic air mass blows into the already-frigid southern United States.

"We're looking at much-below normal temperatures, potentially record-low temperatures leading up to the Christmas holiday," said Zack Taylor, a meteorologist with the National Weather Service.

The polar air arrives as an earlier storm system gradually winds down in the northeastern U.S. after burying parts of the region under two feet (61 centimeters) of snow. More than 80,000 customers in New England were still without power on Sunday morning, according to poweroutage.us, which tracks outages across the country.

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The incoming arctic front brings "extreme and prolonged freezing conditions for southern Mississippi and southeast Louisiana," the National Weather Service in a special weather statement Sunday.

By Thursday night, temperatures will plunge as low as 13 degrees (minus 10.6 Celsius) in Jackson, Mississippi; and around 5 degrees (minus 15 Celsius) in Nashville, Tennessee, the National Weather Service predicts.

For much of the U.S., the winter weather will get worse before it gets better.

The coming week has the potential for "the coldest air of the season" as the strong arctic front marches across the eastern two-thirds of the country in the days before Christmas, according to the latest forecasts from the federal Weather Prediction Center in College Park, Maryland.

The center warned of a "massive expanse of frigid temperatures from the Northern Rockies/Northern Plains to the Midwest through the middle of the week, and then reaching the Gulf Coast and much of the Eastern U.S. by Friday and into the weekend."

The arctic air was already pouring into Montana Sunday night, but that wasn't deterring residents from ice fishing and hunting coyotes.

Ice fishing will continue through the cold blast, since the temperatures won't scare away anglers there — "not the hard-core ones anyway," said Jason Mundel, who runs the Ripp'n Lipps Guide Service in north-eastern Montana.

Mundel said it was 4 degrees (minus 15.6 Celsius) there Sunday night, and a coyote contest was still going on in a nearby community. "Those guys are just out in the elements, just bundled up," he said.

In Atlanta, where temperatures are set to drop below freezing early Monday morning, forecasters warn of even colder air by late in the week, according to the National Weather Service office in Peachtree City, Georgia. The low Friday night in Atlanta will be around 13 degrees (minus 10.6 Celsius) with the high temperature Saturday still below the freezing mark at around 29 degrees (minus 1.7 Celsius), the Weather Service projects.

Freezing temperatures can take lives in an instant — a heartbreaking reality that Atlanta homeless advocate George Chidi knows firsthand.

He went to check on a woman with severe mental health issues in downtown Atlanta earlier this year, and found she had died of suspected hypothermia just hours earlier. Her body was found outside the Greyhound bus station, which is open 24 hours in the heart of downtown Atlanta, he said.

"She died within 100 feet of three heated buildings," Chidi said.

He said people without housing who die in freezing weather often do so because they are battling alcohol, drugs or severe mental illness, or they do not trust others and find themselves on the streets rather than a shelter with other people.

Homeless people in southern states are also vulnerable to its weather patterns that make it comfortable one week, but suddenly freezing the next.

"A main factor isn't the temperature itself," Chidi said. "It's the speed with which the temperature drops."

Florida will not have a white Christmas, but forecasters are expecting that weekend to be unusually cold throughout the state.

Northern Florida cities such as Jacksonville, Tallahassee and Pensacola have predicted lows in the 20s (minus 3 Celsius) on Christmas Eve, with highs of about 40 (4 Celsius).

In the Northeast, utility companies brought in extra workers from other states but were hampered by slick roads and dangerous conditions.

"This was a heavy, wet snow so that had impacts on both travel and the infrastructure," said Frank Pereira, a meteorologist with the National Weather Service.

Police across New England responded to hundreds of crashes or vehicles sliding off the road this weekend. Maine State Police said Saturday night they had responded to more than 180 crashes since Friday evening. There were only minor injuries.

Vermont officials said they're finding locations for potential warming centers in the hardest-hit areas, in case they're needed. State officials warned Saturday that some customers' power may not be restored

for two to three days.

"Last night we had some people come in who weren't able to cook for themselves, and so we definitely made sure that we had room for them," Becket Gourlay, a host at the Waterhouse Restaurant in Peterborough, New Hampshire, said on Sunday. "Even today we had some people who came in to watch the final match for the World Cup because their TVs were out."

Ex-Mafia boss 'Cadillac Frank' Salemme dies in prison at 89

By ALANNA DURKIN RICHER Associated Press

BOSTON (AP) — Francis "Cadillac Frank" Salemme, the once powerful New England Mafia boss who was serving a life sentence behind bars for the 1993 killing of a Boston nightclub owner, has died at the age of 89, according to the Bureau of Prisons.

Salemme died on Tuesday, according to Bureau of Prisons' online records. Bureau officials did not immediately respond to an email seeking more information on Sunday. Salemme's death was first reported Sunday by WPRI-TV.

Salemme led the Patriarca crime family in Boston in the early 1990s before helping prosecutors convict a corrupt FBI agent after learning that other mobsters had been talking about him to authorities.

Salemme, who has admitted to a slew of other gangland killings, was living in Atlanta under the name Richard Parker when remains of the nightclub owner were unearthed in 2016, making the elderly ex-Mafia don a government target once again.

Salemme's 2018 trial became a flashback to the days when the mob was a feared and powerful force in New England. Salemme maintained he had nothing to do with Steven DiSarro's death, but was convicted after his onetime best friend testified against him.

Salemme participated in numerous killings in Boston's 1960s gang wars and spent 16 years behind bars for trying to kill a lawyer, who survived but lost a leg, when his car was blown up in 1968. After being released from prison, Salemme was seriously wounded in a shooting outside a suburban Boston pancake house.

His reign as Mafia boss ended when he, notorious Boston gangster James "Whitey" Bulger and others were charged in a sweeping racketeering case in 1995. Salemme and Bulger fled after they were tipped off to the impending indictment by Bulger's FBI handler, John Connolly Jr.

Salemme was arrested in Florida several months later while Bulger spent 16 years on the lam before being captured at the age of 81 in Santa Monica, California. Bulger was killed by fellow inmates in prison in 2018 at the age of 89.

The racketeering case revealed that Bulger and Salemme's best friend, Stephen "The Rifleman" Flemmi, had secretly worked as FBI informants. Upset that his fellow mobsters had turned on him, Salemme agreed to plead guilty and cooperate with authorities.

Salemme testified in 2002 against Connolly, who was convicted of helping Bulger avoid prosecution. In exchange, Salemme was released from prison early and entered the witness protection program.

At his 2018 trial in Boston, Salemme's slicked back, wispy grey hair and thin frame made him almost unrecognizable from the bulky, feared mob boss jurors saw in grainy surveillance photos from the 1990s.

Another former mobster told authorities that he saw Salemme's son strangle DiSarro while Weadick held the nightclub owner's feet and Salemme stood by. Salemme's son, known as "Frankie boy," died in 1995.

DiSarro's nightclub, The Channel, was under scrutiny at the time for the Salemmes' involvement in the business. Just before DiSarro's death, the FBI told him he was about to be indicted and should cooperate with the government against the Salemmes.

Salemme's longtime attorney, Steven Boozang, said Sunday his client had been nothing but a "gentleman" to him and he believed the man "regretted a lot of the things he had done in his life, particularly the effects it had on his immediate family and the families of others."

Before being sentenced to life in prison in 2018, Salemme rose from his chair, called the proceeding "ridiculous" and said DiSarro's family hasn't been told the truth. But he seemingly predicted years earlier

that his own story would end behind bars.

"You're not going to beat the government," Salemme told a reporter in 2004. "Let's face it. One way or the other, they're going to get you."

Jesuits ask victims to come forward in artist abuse case

By NICOLE WINFIELD Associated Press

VATICAN CITY (AP) — Pope Francis' Jesuit order on Sunday asked any more victims to come forward with complaints against a famous Jesuit artist who was essentially let off the hook by the Vatican twice despite devastating testimony by women who said he sexually and spiritually abused them.

The Jesuits asked for new evidence against the Rev. Marko Ivan Rupnik, and offered a timeline about his case in an effort to tamp down the scandal.

The Slovenian priest is relatively unknown among rank-and-file Catholics but is well known in the hierarchy because he is one of the church's most sought-after artists. His mosaics decorate chapels, churches and basilicas around the globe.

The scandal exploded this past week after the Jesuits admitted he had been excommunicated for having committed one of the gravest crimes in the Catholic Church — using the confessional to absolve a woman with whom he had engaged in sexual activity.

He was declared excommunicated in May 2020, but the Vatican's Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith lifted the excommunication later that month after he repented, an unusually quick turnaround for such a serious violation.

A year later, the same Congregation decided not to prosecute him for another allegation of spiritual and sexual abuse of a former nun, declaring the statute of limitations had expired. The Congregation, which routinely waives the statute of limitations, is headed by a Jesuit prefect, has a Jesuit sex crimes prosecutor and a former No. 2 who lived in Rupnik's Jesuit community.

The Congregation has not responded to requests for information about the case, which has exposed the Vatican's general refusal to consider spiritual and sexual abuse of adult women as a crime that must be punished. Rather, the Vatican has long considered such abuse a mere lapse of priestly chastity that can be forgiven, without considering the trauma it causes victims.

The Jesuit appeal came on the same day the Italian newspaper Domani published the most explosive testimony yet by the former nun who made the complaint in 2021. She detailed years of sexual abuse and spiritual manipulation by Rupnik and said she made repeated efforts to turn him in only to face Jesuit and other superiors who routinely protected Rupnik at her expense.

"It was truly an abuse of conscience," said the nun, who was not identified but whose account was confirmed to The Associated Press by someone familiar with the case.

"His sexual obsession was not impromptu but was profoundly connected to his concept of art and his theological thinking. Father Marko started slowly and sweetly infiltrating my psychological and spiritual world, leveraging my uncertainties and fragility and using my relationship with God to push me into sexual experiences with him."

She said that her first complaint about his behavior dated from 1994 in Slovenia but that it was ignored as Rupnik's community — first in Slovenia, then in Rome — grew and gained an international following.

In the meantime, other sisters were similarly harmed, she said, describing the use of pornography, humiliation and multiple partners "in the image of the Trinity" in Rupnik's spiritual and sexual abuse.

The scandal has been accentuated by conflicting accounts given by the Jesuits.

After the first allegations of the 2021 complaint were aired in Italian blogs and websites this month, the Jesuits issued a statement only referring to the 2021 case. But under questioning by AP at a Christmas reception, the Jesuit superior, the Rev. Arturo Sosa, admitted Rupnik had previously been excommunicated for the confession-related crime.

Sosa said that Rupnik's ministry had been restricted and that he was forbidden from hearing confessions, giving spiritual direction or leading spiritual exercises. However, Rupnik is listed as scheduled to

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deliver spiritual exercises Feb. 13-17 at the Loreto Marian shrine on Italy's Adriatic coast, according to the Loreto website.

On Sunday, Rupnik's immediate superior, the Rev. Johan Verschueren, said he wanted to try to clarify some of the questions that have erupted about the case. In a statement, he appealed for anyone with old or new allegations to come forward. He provided an email address: teamreferente.dir@gmail.com.

"My main concern in all of this is for those who have suffered, and I invite anyone who wishes to make a new complaint or who wants to discuss complaints already made to contact me," he said.

He said complaints would be accepted in English, French, Italian, Spanish, Dutch and German.

Jewish festival of lights begins in Ukraine as battles rage

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Jews in Ukraine waging a "war between darkness and light" lit a giant menorah on Sunday night to start the eight-day Hanukkah holiday as tens of thousands remained without electricity and Russia's nearly 10-month war produced new victims.

Dozens gathered in Maidan Independence Square in the capital, Kyiv, at sundown to light the first candle of what local Jewish leaders say is Europe's tallest menorah. Kyiv Mayor Vitali Klitschko joined ambassadors from Israel, the United States, Japan, Poland, Canada and France in a ceremony organized by the Federation of Jewish Communities of Ukraine. They sang blessings under the flames of the menorah, which towered over the crowd and passing cars in frigid weather.

Rabbi Mayer Stambler, a leader of Ukraine's Jewish community, drew parallels to the story of Hanukkah, an eight-day commemoration of the rededication of the Temple in Jerusalem by the Maccabees after their victory over the Syrians more than 2,000 years ago. When only enough oil was available to keep the temple candles lit for one day and night, the oil inexplicably burned for eight days and eight nights — a feat now celebrated as the Jewish Festival of Lights.

"We are actually now living through the same situation," said Stambler, drawing a parallel with the current blackouts in Ukraine that Russian bombardments have caused. "This is a war between darkness and light."

In congratulating the world's Jews on Hanukkah, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, who is Jewish, also noted the holiday's inspiration for his people.

"Those who were fewer defeated those who were more. Light defeated darkness. It will be the same this time," he vowed in a video address late Sunday.

Among those watching the Kyiv menorah lighting was 47-year-old Viktoria Herman, who said the festival of lights brought her hope during the December days with the least sunlight of the year.

"There will be light and everything will be fine for everyone. And finally the war will end," she said.

The Israeli ambassador to Ukraine, Michael Brodsky, said: "I wish for the people of Ukraine all of that which Hanukkah symbolizes. I wish there was light on every Ukrainian house ... and I wish you victory."

Volunteers distributed thousands of menorahs, candles, printed materials, family puzzle games and sweets for the holiday to members of Ukraine's Jewish minority population.

With the holiday symbolism as a backdrop, Ukraine's state-owned power grid operator Ukrenergo said it was still working Sunday to restore electricity knocked out by Russian missile damage. The grid operator said the volume of electricity consumption increased compared to Saturday, due to falling temperatures.

Zelenskyy reported that power had been restored Sunday to 3 million Ukrainians, on top of 6 million the day before.

On the battlefield, Russian military forces on Sunday shelled the center of Kherson, the major city that Russian soldiers retreated from last month in one of Moscow's biggest battlefield setbacks in Ukraine.

Three people were wounded in the attacks, said presidential deputy chief of staff Kyrylo Tymoshenko.

The southern city and its surrounding region have come under frequent attack since the Russian pullback. Regional governor Yaroslav Yanushevych said Sunday that Russia had carried out 54 attacks with rocket, mortar and tank fire over the previous day, killing three people and wounding six.

In the city of Donetsk, capital of a region Russia illegally annexed, a Ukrainian attack that hit a hospital killed one patient and wounded several others, the Russian-installed mayor reported on the Telegram

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messaging app.

Meanwhile, in Russia, the governor of the Belgorod region, Vyacheslav Gladkov, said Sunday that one person was killed and eight wounded in Ukrainian shelling of the region, which lies along Ukraine's northern border.

In the latest phase of the war, Moscow's forces have been heavily targeting infrastructure serving civilians, such as water and electricity supply lines, compounding Ukrainians' suffering as winter deepens.

Zelenskyy used Sunday's final match of the soccer World Cup to decry war.

"This World Cup proved time and again that different countries and different nationalities can decide who is the strongest in fair play but not in the playing with fire — on the green playing field, not on the red battlefield," Zelenskyy said in an English video statement released hours before Argentina beat France 4-2 in a penalty shootout.

EXPLAINER: How do parties and states set presidential votes?

By MEG KINNARD Associated Press

COLUMBIA, S.C. (AP) — Even before President Joe Biden told Democrats his preference for reordering the presidential primary calendar, states began balking.

Officials in Iowa, the leadoff voting state for 40 years, noted a state law mandating that its caucuses take place at least eight days before any other nominating contest. In New Hampshire, the site of the first-in-the-nation primary for more than a century, a state law requires that its presidential primary be held first by at least a week.

Nonetheless, the Democratic National Committee's rule-making arm on Dec. 2 approved a revamped schedule for early votes for the 2024 presidential primary: first South Carolina, followed by New Hampshire and Nevada on the same day, then Georgia and finally Michigan.

States can pass laws with the aim of telling other states what they can and cannot do, but such laws have no force. Any state could enact a law saying it must vote first — without it binding elsewhere.

So what happens if state law clashes with what national party leaders want on voting order? A state must change that law or run the risk that its delegates will not count toward the national nominating total.

WHY ALL THE CHANGES NOW?

The new calendar, awaiting approval by the full DNC, has been in the works for years. The party has long debated putting more diverse states in front of largely white states and moving away from the time-consuming and confusing caucus process.

What accelerated the changes was the debacle of the 2020 Iowa caucuses.

A new smartphone app designed to calculate and report results failed, leading to a telephone backlog that prevented the party from reporting final results for nearly a week after the contest. There were so many irregularities and inconsistencies in the reporting of the results that The Associated Press was unable to declare a winner, though Pete Buttigieg, a former mayor of South Bend, Indiana, who is now Biden's transportation secretary, and Vermont Sen. Bernie Sanders finished essentially tied for the lead.

Biden finished fourth in Iowa and fifth in New Hampshire that year before going on to win the nomination after a dominant performance in South Carolina, the first state with a predominantly Black Democratic base. After that commanding victory, voters in other states followed suit, elevating Biden from a crowded field of candidates.

South Carolina's vault into the first spot would put it in a premier position in 2024.

WHAT ARE THE STATES SAYING?

Iowa had been bracing for losing its leadoff slot ever since the 2020 caucus chaos.

Former Iowa Democratic Chair Scott Brennan, a member of the DNC committee that considered the 2024 calendar, voted against the changes to the order of states. He said they would "certainly favor front-runners and billionaire vanity candidates" by not including early-voting states in the center of the country. Ross Wilburn, the current head of the Iowa Democratic Party, said over the weekend that he plans to step

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down in the wake of the DNC move to put the South Carolina primary ahead.

New Hampshire's delegation has long threatened to defy Democratic rules and hold its primary first anyway. A state law passed in the 1970s requires that its presidential primary be held first, laying out the purpose as to "protect the tradition of the New Hampshire first-in-the-nation presidential primary." It also gives the secretary of state the exclusive power to set the primary date.

On news of the revised calendar plan, New Hampshire Democrats appeared ready to spurn the national party. "We will always hold the first in the nation primary, and this status is independent of the president's proposal or any political organization," said Sen. Maggie Hassan.

Nevada has been the first voting state in the West since 2008. Last year, Democratic Gov. Steve Sisolak signed a law changing the contest from a party-run, in-person caucus to a government-run primary election, to be held on the first Tuesday in February in a presidential election year — or, for 2024, on Feb. 6.

While Nevada officials had hoped this would lead to the state's holding the new first-in-the-nation status, it will still hold significant prominence, especially with early voting beginning on Jan. 27.

WHAT HAPPENS IF STATES DON'T GO ALONG WITH THE NATIONAL PARTY?

If states defy the DNC, there are a few possible penalties, including refusal to seat delegates at the national convention from any state that held its votes out of order.

That happened in 2008. Florida and Michigan held voting contests before their slots on both parties' calendars. National Republicans banned half of the delegates from the states. Democrats removed both states' delegates from the national convention, although the DNC ultimately voted to seat all of the delegates, awarding half a vote to each.

Four years later, states including Florida again scheduled their contests before the early window only then allocated to Iowa, New Hampshire, Nevada and South Carolina; all but Nevada moved their votes into January. National party leaders again penalized the rogue states by pulling half of their delegates.

The parties could penalize candidates directly, perhaps by denying them prime speaking slots at national conventions. But University of New Hampshire political scientist David Moore said he doubted that ramifications would be severe enough to keep states such as New Hampshire from defying the calendar.

"I don't know right now how committed the Democratic Party is to penalizing Iowa and New Hampshire if they go rogue," he said.

WHAT ABOUT THE REPUBLICANS?

The Republican National Committee has already decided to keep Iowa as the first contest on its presidential calendar. For months, potential GOP hopefuls have been making trips as the field begins to form.

RNC members also voted unanimously to keep New Hampshire, South Carolina and Nevada in the early-voting window.

South Carolina's parties, and not its lawmakers, set primary dates, so Democrats have no concern of their 2024 voting date being held up by the GOP-controlled Legislature.

No date has been set for Georgia's GOP presidential preference primary in 2024.

Gabriel Sterling is a top official in the office of Republican Secretary of State Brad Raffensperger, who has sole responsibility for setting primary dates. Sterling said the agency "has been telling Democrats for over a year that we will do nothing that would require having two dates" for the parties' primaries. He said that because of the national GOP's calendar, holding Georgia's Republican primary before March 1 "would cut their delegate count in half."

Messi wins World Cup, Argentina beats France on penalties

By STEVE DOUGLAS AP Sports Writer

LUSAIL, Qatar (AP) — Lionel Messi, wearing a black Qatari robe over his blue-and-white Argentina shirt, kissed the World Cup, shuffled toward his teammates and hoisted the golden trophy high in the air.

It was an iconic sight that finally — definitively — places the soccer superstar in the pantheon of the game's greatest players.

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Messi's once-in-a-generation career is complete: He is a World Cup champion.

In probably the wildest final in the tournament's 92-year history, Argentina won its third World Cup title by beating France 4-2 in a penalty shootout after a 3-3 draw featuring two goals from the 35-year-old Messi and a hat trick by his heir apparent, France forward Kylian Mbappé.

"It's just crazy that it became a reality this way," Messi said. "I craved for this so much. I knew God would bring this gift to me. I had the feeling that this (World Cup) was the one."

Amid the chaos inside Lusail Stadium, Mbappé did all he could to emulate Brazil great Pelé as a champion at his first two World Cups. Even scoring the first hat trick in a final since Geoff Hurst for England in 1966. It wasn't enough.

Now there's no debate. Messi joins Pelé — a record three-time World Cup champion — and Diego Maradona, the late Argentina great with whom Messi was so often compared, in an exclusive club of the best soccer players of all time.

Who is the greatest? It's a discussion that will rage forever because there can never be a definitive answer. Messi has put up a good argument, though, and — with the World Cup title on his resume — he is surely above Cristiano Ronaldo as the best player of his generation.

Messi achieved what Maradona did in 1986 and dominated a World Cup for Argentina. He scored seven goals and embraced the responsibility of leading his team out of those dark moments after a shocking 2-1 loss to Saudi Arabia in the group stage.

Playing in the spirit of Maradona, Messi coupled his dazzling skills with rarely seen aggression and led Argentina to the title by becoming the first man in a single edition of the World Cup to score in the group stage and then in every round of the knockout stage.

The torch will one day pass to Mbappé, but not just yet.

"Let's go, Argentina!" Messi roared into a microphone on the field in the post-match celebrations after playing in a record 26th World Cup match.

Later, he said: "I can't wait to be in Argentina to witness the insanity of this."

Messi had a tantalizing glimpse of the 18-carat gold World Cup trophy when walking on the stage to collect the Golden Ball, awarded to the player of the tournament. He even kissed the World Cup and rubbed it repeatedly.

He got his hands on it for good about 10 minutes later, after a ceremonial robe — a bisht — was draped over his shoulders by Qatar's emir, Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani. And, oh, did he enjoy the moment, celebrating with his family and the teammates who put Argentina atop the soccer world for the first time since the 1986 World Cup in Mexico. The country's other title came in 1978 on home soil.

Messi was in scintillating form from the start of the final, putting Argentina ahead from the penalty spot after Angel Di Maria was tripped and later playing a part in a flowing team move that resulted in Di Maria making it 2-0 after 36 minutes.

Mbappé, on the other hand, was anonymous until bursting into life by scoring two goals in a 97-second span — one an 80th-minute penalty, the other a volley from just inside the area after a quick exchange of passes — to take the game to extra time at 2-2.

Messi still had plenty of energy and he was on hand to tap in his second goal in the 108th minute, with a France defender clearing the ball just after it had crossed the line. Argentina was on the brink of the title once again, but there was still time for another penalty from Mbappé, after a handball, to take the thrilling game to a shootout.

"We managed to come back from the dead," said France coach Didier Deschamps, whose team was looking to become the first back-to-back champions since Brazil in 1962.

Mbappé and Messi took their teams' first penalties and scored. Kingsley Coman had an attempt saved by Argentina goalkeeper Emi Martinez and Aurelien Tchouameni then missed for France, giving Gonzalo Montiel the opportunity to end it. He converted the penalty to the left and sparked wild celebrations.

"The match was completely insane," said Argentina coach Lionel Scaloni, who was asked if he had a message for Maradona, who died two years ago.

"If he had been here, he would have enjoyed it so much," Scaloni said. "He would have been the first

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person on the field (to celebrate). I wish he'd have been here to enjoy the moment."

Europe's run of four straight World Cup winners, dating to 2006, came to an end. The last South American champion was Brazil, and that was also in Asia — when Japan and South Korea hosted the tournament in 2002.

In Qatar, Argentina backed up its victory from last year's Copa America, its first major trophy since 1993. It's quite the climax to Messi's international career, which is not over just yet. He said after the match that he would continue to play with the national team.

It was quite a final for a unique World Cup — the first to be played in the Arab world.

For FIFA and the Qatari organizers, a final between two major soccer nations and the world's two best players represented a perfect way to cap a tournament laced in controversy ever since the scandal-shrouded vote in 2010 to give the event to a tiny Arab emirate.

The years-long scrutiny since has focused on the switch of dates from the traditional June-July period to November-December, strong criticism of how migrant workers have been treated, and then unease about taking soccer's biggest event to a nation where homosexual acts are illegal.

On Sunday, there was one narrative at play for most people: Could Messi do it?

He could, despite the 23-year-old Mbappé doing all he could to deny his Paris Saint-Germain teammate. Finishing the tournament as the top scorer with eight goals is likely only a crumb of comfort.

Messi has been a man on a mission in the Middle East, determined to erase memories of his only other World Cup final — in 2014 when Argentina lost to Germany 1-0 and Messi squandered a great chance in the second half.

On that night at the Maracana Stadium, Messi stared down at that golden World Cup trophy that escaped him.

Eight years later, he raised it aloft in the biggest moment of a career like no other.

Peru's dark past surfaces as young protester is laid to rest

By FRANKLIN BRICENO Associated Press

QUINUA, Peru (AP) — This rural hamlet nestled high in the Peruvian Andes was the site of a major battle that secured South America's independence from Spain in the 19th century.

But on Saturday, the streets of Quinua were overrun by weeping residents commemorating a far more senseless loss: the death of Clemer Rojas, a 23-year-old student who left his parents' home Thursday to protest the ousting of President Pedro Castillo and never returned.

A funeral procession of a few thousand peasant farmers, led by a steady drumbeat and people speaking in their native Quechua language, carried Rojas' casket draped in Peru's red and white flag to a colonial church where a mass was celebrated, and he was later buried in a nearby cemetery. Interspersed amid the crowd were signs calling for the closure of Congress and denouncing caretaker President Dina Boluarte as an "assassin."

"My son is leaving. Tell me he's not leaving," Nilda Garcia, a street vendor, wailed as friends and family members struggled to keep her from falling down.

Rojas died in clashes with the army in the nearby provincial capital of Ayacucho, which has emerged as an unlikely epicenter of unrest in Peru's still unfolding political crisis. The tumult was triggered by Castillo's attempt to close Congress — a futile act of gamesmanship widely condemned by the U.S. and others as a self-coup but seen here, in Peru's long-neglected countryside, as a pride-filled display of defiance against a hostile establishment that never allowed the former rural school teacher to govern since his shock victory 17 months ago.

Boluarte has tried to quell the protests, emphasizing her own humble roots and support for protesters' demands that elections, scheduled for 2026, be pushed up to next year. At a news conference Saturday, Peru's first female president delivered extensive remarks in Quechua — a foreign language to past Peruvian presidents — comparing the highway blockades, acts of arson and violent protests engulfing Peru to the invisible, emotional damage suffered by children growing up in a broken home with constantly feuding

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parents.

"Didn't you see me walking across the country, filling plazas and looking for votes among brothers and sisters?" said Boluarte, who served as Castillo's running mate and only broke with him following his attempt to dissolve Congress. "Then why this violence in the streets? I didn't look to be here. I tried to protect him as much as I could."

Authorities blame the bloodshed in Ayacucho on a horde of young protesters who on Thursday attacked an army patrol with sharp objects, explosives and homemade weapons as it was racing toward the airport to break up an unruly crowd.

Nine people died that day — more than a third of the total deaths reported nationwide — as soldiers hustled from the barracks as part of a 30-day state of emergency and indiscriminately fired tear gas, rubber bullets and live ammo into large crowds.

In a tragic irony, Rojas was killed by a fellow soldier's bullet. Like his father, still a teenager he joined the Peruvian army, which recruits heavily from impoverished, Quechua-speaking homes.

"He wasn't armed," says his father, Reider Rojas, who was dressed in black. "They fired at point-blank range. The autopsy said a bullet fired by a Galil rifle used by the army pierced his liver and lungs."

In his hometown, Rojas is remembered as a good kid and an avid participant in folk dances around Carnival time who drove a moto taxi to pay for his studies at a vocational school.

Ayacucho's small size and sclerotic agro-based economy belie the oversized role it has played in Peru's history.

Once a thriving outpost of the Incan empire, it was vanquished in the 16th century by Spanish colonizers. Centuries later, it was renamed Ayacucho, in reference to the battle where a rebel army led by Venezuelan-born Simon Bolivar gained the definitive upper hand against royalist forces sent from Spain. Its name in native Quechua translates as "corner of death" in honor of the battle's many casualties.

The region's poverty — even today 45% of children under the age of 3 suffer from iron deficiency, according to the government — made it a hotbed of clandestine activity for Maoist guerrillas that once terrorized much of Peru. The spread of the Shining Path in decades past, in turn, generated a ferocious backlash by Peru's military that has forever embittered residents against the ruling elite in the far away capital.

In an echo of past statements stigmatizing residents of Ayacucho to terrorist sympathizers, Jose Williams, who as the head of Congress is next in the line of succession should Boluarte resign, blamed the violence on a "black hand" operating behind the scenes.

"The same behavior is appearing in one place, then another," said Williams, a retired army general. "Something is behind the scenes leading us to chaos."

In recent years, investigators discovered on the abandoned edge of the Los Cabitos barracks outside Ayacucho a giant oven containing shoes, clothes and human remains of more than 100 victims killed during the army's own macabre killing spree in the 1980s — part of a dirty war estimated to have claimed the lives of 70,000 people across the country between 1980 and 2000.

That dark past was front and center for the thousands who poured into Ayacucho's cobblestoned streets Friday — a day after the deadly disturbances — demanding Boluarte's resignation. Some sang a popular folk song whose lyrics recall an even earlier tragedy here, in 1969, when 20 students protesting against the then-military dictatorship were brutally killed.

"We are returning to those painful years," said Rocio Leandro, a community leader who was among those who marched Friday seeking justice for those killed. "They consider us third- and fourth-class people."

What to watch as Jan. 6 panel cites Trump's 'attempted coup'

By FARNOUSH AMIRI and HOPE YEN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The House committee investigating the Capitol riot will make its final public presentation Monday about the unprecedented effort by Donald Trump to overturn the results of the presidential election he lost in 2020. The committee has called it an "attempted coup" that warrants criminal prosecution from the Justice Department.

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That is expected to be the committee's closing argument as it wraps up a year-and-a-half-long inquiry and prepares to release a final report detailing its findings about the insurrection in the nation's capital on Jan. 6, 2021, as Congress was certifying Joe Biden's presidential victory. The committee of seven Democrats and two Republicans is set to dissolve at the end of the year.

Monday's meeting will be the committee's 11th public session since forming in July 2021. One of the first hearings, on June 9, was viewed by more than 20 million people.

What to watch for in Monday's meeting at 1 p.m. EST:

REFERRING A PRESIDENT

The committee is expected to make both criminal and civil referrals against the former president and his allies, who, according to lawmakers, broke the law or committed ethical violations.

The committee's chairman, Rep. Bennie Thompson, D-Miss., said the referrals may include criminal, ethics violations, legal misconduct and campaign finance violations. Lawmakers have suggested in particular that their recommended charges against Trump could include conspiracy to defraud the United State, obstruction of an official proceeding of Congress and insurrection.

Rep. Adam Schiff, D-Calif., said Sunday that he believes Trump committed multiple crimes. Pointing specifically to insurrection, Schiff said that "if you look at Donald Trump's acts and you match them up against the statute, it's a pretty good match."

"This is someone who in multiple ways tried to pressure state officials to find votes that didn't exist, this is someone who tried to interfere with a joint session, even inciting a mob to attack the Capitol," Schiff told CNN's "State of the Union." "If that's not criminal then I don't know what it is."

Rep. Jamie Raskin, D-Md., said last week that the committee's actions will focus on "key players" where there is sufficient evidence or abundant evidence that they committed crimes.

It will fall to federal prosecutors to decide whether to bring charges. Even though they are non-binding, the recommendations by the committee would add to the political pressure on the Justice Department as special counsel Jack Smith conducts an investigation into Jan. 6 and Trump's actions.

COMPLICIT LAWMAKERS?

The committee on Monday could also make ethics referrals involving fellow lawmakers.

"We will also be considering what's the appropriate remedy for members of Congress who ignore a congressional subpoena, as well as the evidence that was so pertinent to our investigation and why we wanted to bring them in," Schiff said. "We have weighed what is the remedy for members of Congress. Is it a criminal referral to another branch of government, or is it better that the Congress police its own?"

He said the committee considered censure and ethics referrals and will be disclosing their decision Monday.

Lawmakers who did not comply with subpoenas from the Jan. 6 committee included House Republican leader Kevin McCarthy of California, as well as GOP Reps. Jim Jordan of Ohio, Scott Perry of Pennsylvania, Andy Biggs of Arizona and Mo Brooks of Alabama.

A RECORD FOR HISTORY

Lawmakers have promised that Monday's session will 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 efforts to subvert democracy, drawing on what the committee learned through its interviews with more than 1,000 witnesses.

It will roughly mirror the series of public hearings the committee held in the summer that detailed the various facets of the investigation, including the role of extremist groups in the violence on Jan. 6, Trump's attempt to enlist the Justice Department in his schemes and Trump's coordination with GOP lawmakers to overturn the election results.

Additional evidence, including some of the massive trove of video footage and testimony the committee

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collected, is expected to be released publicly before the end of the year.

Anticipation for the final report is high. Book publishers are already offering pre-release versions for sale to the public.

LEGISLATIVE CHANGES

As the committee convenes one final time, a major legislative response to the insurrection could be on the fast-track to passage.

Lawmakers are expected to overhaul the arcane election law that Trump tried to subvert after his 2020 election defeat by including legislative changes in a year-end spending bill.

The proposed overhaul of the Electoral Count Act is one of the many byproducts of the Jan. 6 attack on the Capitol. A group of bipartisan lawmakers has been working on the legislation since the insurrection. Trump and his allies tried to find loopholes in that law before the congressional certification of the 2020 vote as the former president worked to overturn his defeat to Biden and unsuccessfully pressured Pence to go along.

The bill, if passed, would amend the 19th century law that, along with the Constitution, governs how states and Congress certify electors and declare presidential election winners, ensuring the popular vote from each state is protected from manipulation and that Congress does not arbitrarily decide presidential elections.

The committee is also expected to release its own legislative proposals in its final report, with ideas for how to strengthen and expand the guardrails that protected the Electoral College certification in 2021.

CLOSING ARGUMENTS

Since its formation, the Jan. 6 committee has strived to build a record for history and deepen the public's understanding of what led to the Capitol attack and the individuals involved in it.

"We obviously want to complete the story for the American people," Raskin said. "Everybody has come on a journey with us and we want a satisfactory conclusion, such that people feel that Congress has done its job."

After conducting thousands of interviews — ranging from Trump Cabinet secretaries to members of his own family — and obtaining tens of thousands of documents, congressional investigators say they have created the most comprehensive look at the worst attack on the Capitol in two centuries.

But the 16-month investigation has also provided a road map of sorts for criminal investigations, influencing the probes of Trump and Jan. 6 that are progressing at the local, state and federal level.

There is some question whether the Justice Department will act with Trump announced as a 2024 presidential candidate. Schiff expressed worry on Sunday that federal prosecutors may be slow to move on charges as long as Trump is politically relevant. "I think he should face the same remedy, force of law, that anyone else would," Schiff said.

Still, Monday's session remains the last word for the committee as its temporary, or "select," committee status expires at the end of the current Congress.

Once Republicans take the majority next year, they are not expected to renew the committee, instead launching a slew of investigations that will focus on the Biden administration and the president's family.

'Avatar 2' makes waves with \$134 million domestic debut

By LINDSEY BAHR AP Film Writer

"Avatar: The Way of Water" didn't make quite as big of a splash as many assumed it would, but James Cameron's big budget spectacle still helped breathe life into the box office this weekend. The sequel earned \$134 million from North American theaters and \$300.5 million internationally for a \$434.5 million global debut, according to studio estimates on Sunday.

It tied with "The Batman" as the fourth highest domestic debut of the year, behind "Doctor Strange in the Multiverse of Madness" (\$187.4 million in May), "Black Panther: Wakanda Forever," (\$181 million in

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November) and "Thor: Love and Thunder" (\$144.2 million in July).

Expectations were enormous for "Avatar 2," which carried a reported price tag of over \$350 million, the pressure of following up the highest grossing film of all time (thanks in part to various re-releases) over a decade later and the daunting task of propping up an exhibition business that's still far from normal. Everything "Avatar" is oversized, though: the Na'vi characters, the runtime (a staggering three hours and 12 minutes), the technical advancements and the release strategy from 20th Century Studios and The Walt Disney Co.

Going into the weekend many were expecting a domestic debut of at least \$150 million. Some even said \$175 or higher, but tracking has also not been as reliable a metric during the pandemic.

Disney saw early that "The Way of Water" was going to be a different kind of beast when they looked at pre-sales. For a normal, spoiler-heavy movie like many Marvel offerings, post-opening weekend sales are usually around 5%. For "The Way of Water," they were at 20%. In other words, the company knew that tracking was overinflated.

"We've got a terrific movie that is playing across all demographics and (has) terrific word of mouth," said Tony Chambers, the Walt Disney Co.'s executive vice president for theatrical distribution. "We've got the screens and we've got a clear run. This isn't about the opening day or the opening weekend. This is about the entire run."

The film began its international rollout on Wednesday and debuted in North America on Thursday evening. Domestically, "Avatar: The Way of Water" was released in 4,202 theaters on over 12,000 screens, 400 of which were IMAX 3D. The studio and filmmakers bet big on the draw, and higher prices, of the 3D format and premium large screens.

By the end of Friday, "Avatar: The Way of Water" had already earned \$53 million in the U.S. and Canada and \$180.1 million globally, aided by a China release — the first major Hollywood release in the country since "Minions: The Rise of Gru" in August. It blows "Avatar's" \$26.7 million first day in 2009 out of the water, though that didn't include Thursday previews.

An estimated 66% of the \$435 million opening weekend revenue came from worldwide 3D ticket sales.

Travis Reid, CEO at 3D company RealD, set a "new benchmark for the current 3D marketplace."

Over \$48.8 million of the global total came from IMAX screens alone (1,543 in 80 markets), the company's second biggest weekend.

"As excited as we are about these early results, we anticipate a long and successful run for 'Avatar: The Way of Water,'" said Rich Gelfond, CEO of IMAX, in a statement.

As with many ambitious Cameron projects, from "Titanic" to the first "Avatar," nerves were high for the costly sequel, one of the most expensive of all time, which began production five years ago. It faced repeated delays and weathered The Walt Disney Co's acquisition of 21st Century Fox in 2019. It's also one of four "Avatar" sequels Cameron had in mind. Filming on the third movie, which shot simultaneously with "The Way of Water," is done, with an expected release in December 2024.

In the 13 years since the first film, "Avatar" has also been the butt of jokes for the perception that the biggest movie of all time, one that has made nearly \$3 billion, has left a relatively minor footprint in the culture. But even so, critics have largely been on board with "The Way of Water," not just for the visuals but also for improving on the story of the first. It holds a 78% positive rating from critics on Rotten Tomatoes.

The question of whether "Avatar 2" will earn enough is a complicated one with varied answers. Is it enough for exhibitors, who've had several significant hits this year, including "Top Gun: Maverick," "Black Panther 2" and "Doctor Strange 2," but are still hurting? Is it enough to justify starting production on fourth and fifth movies? Is it enough for the business as a whole, which is looking at a domestic year-end total in the \$8 billion range, as opposed to a pre-pandemic normal of \$11 billion?

But like the critics shouting "never doubt James Cameron," the studio and analysts are singing a similar tune.

"Avatar: The Way of Water" has the benefit of a holiday corridor that is, relatively speaking, lacking in major blockbuster-style movies. Next week sees the debut of Damien Chazelle's "Babylon" and the family-

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friendly "Puss in Boots: The Last Wish" but there are no comparable blockbusters until "Ant-Man and the Wasp: Quantumania" in February. The hope is that audiences will continue seeking "Avatar 2" out for weeks and months to come, similar to the first movie.

"Historically James Cameron's movies are about the long haul, not the opening weekend," said Paul Dergarabedian, the senior media analyst for Comscore. "Avatar" is going to develop its box office over time. It's about where it will end up months from now."

Estimated ticket sales for Friday through Sunday at U.S. and Canadian theaters, according to Comscore, with Wednesday through Sunday in parentheses. Final domestic figures will be released Monday.

1. "Avatar: The Way of Water," \$134 million.
2. "Black Panther: Wakanda Forever," \$5.4 million.
3. "Violent Night," \$5 million.
4. "Strange World," \$2.2 million.
5. "The Menu," \$1.7 million.
6. "Devotion," \$825,000.
7. "The Fabelmans," \$750,000.
8. "Black Adam," \$500,000.
9. "I Heard the Bells," \$308,893.
10. "Empire of Light," \$235,000.

Biden marks 50th anniversary of death of wife, daughter

By COLLEEN LONG Associated Press

WILMINGTON, Del. (AP) — President Joe Biden and his family held a private memorial service Sunday to mark the 50th anniversary of the car crash that killed his first wife and their baby daughter.

Biden, who had just been elected to the Senate in November 1972, was not in the car when his wife, 30-year-old Neilia, and their 13-month-old daughter, Naomi, were broadsided by a tractor-trailer on Dec. 18 of that year as they went out to buy a Christmas tree. The couple's two sons, Beau and Hunter, who were just about to turn 4 and 3 at the time, were also in the car and were seriously injured.

The tragedy almost prompted Biden, also age 30 when the accident happened, to give up his fledgling political career. But on the advice of other senators he stayed in office, commuting back and forth from Washington to Delaware. Biden's raw openness around grief and his ability to empathize with fellow Americans who have experienced loss have become defining traits of his political career.

Biden married Jill Jacobs in 1977 and they had a daughter, Ashley. Both women joined him on Sunday, as did Hunter and many of the president's grandchildren among others at St. Joseph on the Brandywine Roman Catholic Church. After the service, the family walked out toward the graves carrying two large wreaths.

Beau Biden died of brain cancer in 2015 at 46. He is also buried at the cemetery.

Mass funeral in Gaza draws tears, rare criticism of Hamas

By WAFSA SHURAFU and FARES AKRAM Associated Press

KHAN YOUNIS, Gaza Strip (AP) — Thousands of people on Sunday joined the funerals of eight young Palestinian men who drowned off the coast of Tunisia nearly two months ago as they tried to sail to new lives in Europe.

The drownings have reverberated across Gaza, drawing attention to the dire conditions in the territory after a 15-year Israeli-Egyptian blockade but also prompting some rare public criticism of the ruling Hamas militant group.

"The government that governs us here is the reason. It's to blame. It's to blame," said Naheel Shaath, whose 21-year-old son Adam was among the dead. "I blame all officials here who don't care for the youths or provide job opportunities for them."

Israel and Egypt imposed the blockade after Hamas seized control of Gaza from the internationally rec-

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ognized Palestinian Authority in 2007.

Israel says the closure, which restricts the movement of people and goods in and out of the territory, is needed to prevent Hamas from arming itself. Israel and its Western allies have branded Hamas, an Islamic group sworn to Israel's destruction, a terrorist group. Critics say the blockade amounts to collective punishment.

The blockade has stifled the economy of Gaza, where unemployment hovers near 50%, and residents are usually quick to blame Israel for the difficult conditions. But increasingly, families have begun to complain about Hamas' leadership, citing the high taxes, its heavy-handed rule and a growing stream of leaders, including its supreme leader Ismail Haniyeh, who have moved abroad to more comfortable places with their families.

"Our children are drowning in the sea and their children are enjoying luxury. Isn't this unfair?" Mrs. Shaath said.

The eight men who were buried Sunday, all from the southern town of Khan Younis, were among about two dozen Palestinians who drowned over the past three months en route to Europe

In the past few years, thousands of migrants from poverty-stricken or war-ravaged countries in Africa, Middle East and Afghanistan have perished in the dangerous crossing of the Mediterranean Sea.

Mrs. Shaath said her son had studied hairdressing but could not find a decent job. Even when he was hired at a local barber shop, he earned just 10 shekels, or about \$3, a day.

"If there was work here for those sad youths, would they have left and migrated?" she said.

He followed a path taken by thousands before him, fleeing to Turkey, one of the few countries that accepts Palestinians from Gaza, on a perilous journey meant to reach Europe.

From Turkey, he went to Egypt and then to Libya. The family said it lost contact with him on Oct. 4, holding out hopes that he had somehow made it to Belgium. But the bad news came on Oct. 24: He was on a boat that sank off Tunisia.

According to the Geneva-based nonprofit Euro-Med Human Rights Monitor, around 360 people from Gaza have either died or gone missing in the Mediterranean on smuggling ships since 2014.

The bodies of the eight Palestinians on Adam's boat were returned to Gaza on Sunday through the Rafah border crossing with Egypt. Eight ambulances carried the bodies to a hospital, where thousands of wailing people joined a mass funeral.

The procession broke down into smaller funerals as each family took their son home for a final goodbye before burial.

Another family, the al-Shaers, buried their son, 21-year-old Mohammed. But his younger brother Maher, 20, is still missing. They were on the same doomed boat.

Their mother, Amina, blamed Hamas for the family's misery.

"What do we see in Gaza? We only see oppression," she said. "They are suffocating the youth and the youth flee because of their suffocation."

Texas mayor declares state of emergency over migrant swell

EL PASO, Texas (AP) — The mayor of a Texas border city declared a state of emergency Saturday over concerns about the community's ability to handle an anticipated influx of migrants across the Southern border.

El Paso Mayor Oscar Leeser issued the state of emergency declaration to allow the city on the U.S. border with Mexico to tap into additional resources that are expected to become necessary after Title 42 expulsions end on Dec. 21, the El Paso Times reported.

Leeser had previously resisted issuing an emergency declaration, but said he was moved to action by the sight of people on downtown streets with temperatures dipping below freezing, the Times reported.

"That's not the way we want to treat people," Leeser said during a news conference Saturday evening.

A ruling Friday by the D.C. Circuit Court of Appeals means restrictions that have prevented hundreds of thousands of migrants from seeking asylum in the U.S. in recent years are still set to be lifted Wednesday,

unless further appeals are filed.

Leeser added that the increase would be "incredible" after Wednesday, when daily apprehensions and street releases could reach up to 6,000 per day, the Times reported.

El Paso Deputy City Manager Mario D'Agostino said the state emergency of declaration would give the city greater flexibility in operating larger sheltering operations and providing additional transportation for asylum seekers.

Israel deports Palestinian activist to France

By JOSEF FEDERMAN Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — Israel on Sunday deported a Palestinian lawyer and activist to France after claiming he has ties to a banned militant group, drawing a rare condemnation from the French government.

The expulsion of Salah Hammouri underscored the fragile status of Palestinians in Israeli-annexed east Jerusalem, where most hold revocable residency rights but are not Israeli citizens. It also worsened a brewing diplomatic spat with France, which had repeatedly appealed to Israel not to carry out the expulsion.

"I'm happy to announce that justice was served today and the terrorist Salah Hammouri was deported from Israel," Israel's interior minister, Ayelet Shaked, announced in a videotaped statement early Sunday. The expulsion capped months of legal wrangling.

Hammouri, who was born in Jerusalem but holds French citizenship, landed in Paris just before 10 a.m. local time. Wearing a black track suit and black and white keffiyeh, or Palestinian headscarf, around his neck, he was greeted by his wife and a group of supporters.

Some hugged him, and others clapped in support.

Speaking to reporters, Hammouri accused Israel of "ethnic cleansing" and said his deportation was meant "to show the generations that nobody can resist Israel." He vowed to fight the order.

"I will continue my right to resist against this occupation until I have the right to go back to my country," he said.

Israel says Hammouri is an activist in the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, a group that it has labeled a terrorist organization. He has worked as a lawyer for Adameer, a rights group that assists Palestinian prisoners that Israel has banned for alleged ties to the PFLP.

He spent seven years in prison after being convicted in an alleged plot to kill a prominent rabbi but was released in a 2011 prisoner swap with the Hamas militant group. He was not charged or convicted in the latest proceedings against him.

Israel, however, claimed he continued his activities with the banned group, stripped him of residency, and placed him last March in administrative detention — a status that allows Israel to hold suspected militants for months at a time without charging them or putting them on trial.

Shaked ordered the deportation when his detention order expired. Israel's Supreme Court had rejected an appeal against the decision to revoke Hammouri's residency status. His lawyers have complained that the decision was based on secret evidence they were not allowed to see.

France's Foreign Ministry condemned Israel's deportation of Hammouri after he landed in Paris, saying it has "taken full action, including at the highest level of the state, to ensure that Mr. Salah Hammouri's rights are respected, that he benefits from all legal remedies and that he can lead a normal life in Jerusalem, where he was born, resides and wishes to live."

It was not clear what, if any, steps the French government might take.

The Israeli human rights group HaMoked, which had defended Hammouri, condemned Sunday's expulsion. A Jan. 1 hearing on the matter had been scheduled, and it was not immediately clear how Israel was able to push ahead with the deportation.

"Deporting a Palestinian from their homeland for breach of allegiance to the state of Israel is a dangerous precedent and a gross violation of basic rights," said the group's director, Jessica Montell. "HaMoked will continue to fight against this unconstitutional law."

Last year, Hammouri was among six human rights activists whose mobile phones were found by indepen-

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dent security researchers to have been infected with spyware made by the Israeli company NSO Group.

It was not known who placed the spyware on the phones. Israel said there's no connection between the terror designation of Adameer and five other Palestinian rights groups and any alleged use of NSO spyware. Israel has provided little evidence publicly to support the terrorism designation, which Palestinian groups say is meant to muzzle them and dry up their sources of funding.

Shaked, a member of a small nationalist party, failed to win re-election to parliament in elections last month.

Aryeh Deri, who is expected to assume the post in the new government, said Hammouri's deportation was "the end of a long but just legal process" and congratulated Shaked for carrying it out.

The new government is still being formed by designated Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. It will have to pass special legislation to allow Deri to serve as a minister because of his recent conviction on tax offenses.

Israel captured east Jerusalem, home to the city's most important religious sites, in the 1967 Mideast war and annexed the area in a move that is not internationally recognized. It considers the entire city to be its capital, while the Palestinians claim east Jerusalem as the capital of a future state.

While Jews in the city are entitled to automatic citizenship, Palestinians are granted residency status. This allows them freedom of movement, the ability to work and access to Israeli social services, but they are not allowed to vote in national elections. Residency rights can be stripped if a Palestinian is found to live outside the city for an extended period or in certain security cases.

Palestinians can apply for citizenship. But few do, not wanting to be seen as accepting what they see as an occupation. Those who do apply, however, face a lengthy and bureaucratic process.

The Haaretz daily reported this year that fewer than 20,000 Palestinians in Jerusalem, some 5% of the population, hold Israeli citizenship, and that just 34% of applications are approved. It cited information from the Interior Ministry delivered by Shaked to a parliamentary inquiry.

N Korea fires 2 ballistic missiles capable of reaching Japan

By HYUNG-JIN KIM Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — North Korea test-fired a pair of ballistic missiles with a potential range of striking Japan on Sunday, in a possible protest of Tokyo's adoption of a new security strategy to push for more offensive footing against North Korea and China.

The launches came two days after the North claimed to have performed a key test needed to build a more mobile, powerful intercontinental ballistic missile designed to strike the U.S. mainland.

The two missiles traveled from the country's northwest Tongchangri area about 500 kilometers (310 miles) at a maximum altitude of 550 kilometers (340 miles) before landing in the waters between the Korean Peninsula and Japan, according to the South Korean and Japanese governments.

South Korea's military described both missiles as medium-range weapons that were launched at a steep angle, suggesting they could have traveled farther if fired at a standard trajectory. North Korea usually tests medium- and longer-range missiles at a high angle to avoid neighboring countries, though it fired an intermediate-range missile over Japan in October, forcing Tokyo to issue evacuation alerts and halt trains.

In an emergency meeting, top South Korean security officials deplored North Korea's continued provocations that they said came despite "the plight of its citizens moaning in hunger and cold due to a serious food shortage." They said South Korea will boost a trilateral security cooperation with the U.S. and Japan, according to South Korea's presidential office.

Japanese Vice Defense Minister Toshiro Ino separately criticized North Korea for threatening the safety of Japan, the region and the international community. The U.S. Indo-Pacific Command said the launches highlight the destabilizing impact of North Korea's unlawful weapons of mass destruction and ballistic missile programs. It said the U.S. commitments to the defense of South Korea and Japan "remain ironclad."

Kwon Yong Soo, a former professor at Korea National Defense University in South Korea, said North Korea likely tested its Pukguksong-2 missile, a solid-fueled, land-based variant of its Pukguksong family

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of missiles that can be fired from submarines. Kwon said that flight details of the weapons tested Sunday were similar to those of the Pukguksong-2's two known tests in 2017.

Kwon said the Pukguksong-2 can fly about 1,200-2,000 kilometers (745-1,240 miles) if it's launched at a normal trajectory, a range enough to strike key facilities in Japan, including U.S. military installations there. Some experts say the Pukguksong-2 is nuclear-capable.

"North Korea staged an armed protest with a land version of a submarine-launched ballistic missile that it can fire quickly in response" to the Japanese national security strategy, Kwon said.

Some observers say North Korea might have tested a newly developed medium-range missile that can still reach Japan.

On Friday, the Japanese government adopted a national security strategy that would allow it to carry out preemptive strikes and double its military spending to give itself more offensive footing against threats from neighboring China and North Korea. That was a major break from its strictly self-defense-only postwar principle. The Japanese strategy names China as "the biggest strategic challenge" — before North Korea and Russia — to Japan's efforts to ensure peace, safety and stability.

Japan's Defense Ministry said Sunday it detected a fleet of five Chinese warships including an aircraft carrier off the southern Japanese island of Okidaitojima the previous day. Ministry officials said fighter jets and helicopters were engaging in takeoff and landing exercises on the Chinese carrier and that Japan responded by scrambling fighter jets and dispatching a destroyer.

Sunday's missile launch is the North's first public weapons test since it fired last month its developmental, longest-range liquid-fueled Hwasong-17 ICBM capable of reaching the entire U.S. homeland. Earlier this year, North Korea test-launched a variety of other missiles at a record pace.

North Korea has defended its weapons testing as self-defense measures to cope with the expanded U.S.-South Korea military drills that it views as an invasion rehearsal. But some experts say North Korea likely used its rivals' military training as an excuse to enlarge its arsenal and increase leverage in future negotiations with the U.S. to win sanctions relief and other concessions.

"In the face of mounting diplomatic pressure after an unprecedented year for North Korean missile tests, the Kim regime is determined to show no weakness ahead of its New Year's political events," said Leif-Eric Easley, a professor at Ewha University in Seoul.

On Friday, North Korea said it tested a "high-thrust solid-fuel motor" for a new strategic weapon the previous day, a development that experts say could enable it to possess a more mobile, harder-to-detect arsenal of intercontinental ballistic missiles that can reach the U.S. mainland.

North Korea will likely use the motor to build a solid-fueled ICBM, which is among a list of high-tech weapons systems that leader Kim Jong Un has vowed to build to deal with what he calls U.S. hostility, experts say.

All of North Korea's existing ICBMs use liquid propellant, which must be added to the weapons before they're fired. This makes it relatively easier for outsiders to spot their launch preparations via satellites. But fuel in solid-propellant rockets is already loaded inside, so it shortens launch preparation times, increases their mobility and makes it harder for outsiders to learn what's happening ahead of liftoff. North Korea already has a growing arsenal of short-range, solid-fueled ballistic missiles targeting key locations in South Korea, including U.S. military bases there.

Kwon, the former professor, said North Korea could test-fire a solid-fueled ICBM designed to reach the U.S. West Coast as early as the first half of next year.

Some experts speculate North Korea already has functioning nuclear-tipped missiles that can hit the entire U.S. and its allies South Korea and Japan, given the number of years it has spent on its nuclear program. But others say the country is still years away from acquiring such weapons, noting it has yet to publicly prove it has a technology to build warheads small enough to be placed on missiles or protect warheads from the harsh conditions of atmospheric reentry.

Tunisian president urged to resign after election debacle

By BOUAZZA BEN BOUAZZA Associated Press

TUNIS, Tunisia (AP) — Tunisian opposition figures called Sunday for the president's resignation after disastrous parliamentary elections in which less than 9% of voters cast ballots.

The mass voter disavowal was a dramatic development for the country that was the birthplace of the Arab Spring uprisings against autocratic leaders a decade ago — and the only one to emerge from that upheaval with a democratic political system.

The elections Saturday were meant to replace and reshape a legislature that President Kais Saied dissolved last year. It was one of several moves he has made to consolidate his power and tackle Tunisia's protracted economic and social crisis.

The election results are expected in the coming days.

Many opposition parties boycotted the vote, and many voters stayed away too.

According to provisional figures announced by the president of the electoral commission Farouk Bouaskar, around 800,000 voters took part in the elections out of approximately 9 million registered.

Opposition politician Ahmed Nejib Chebbi called the unprecedented low turnout "a real earthquake that will have serious consequences."

Chebbi heads the Salvation Front coalition formed by five opposition parties, including the Islamist movement Ennahdha, which held the largest number of lawmakers in the dissolved parliament. In a statement to reporters Sunday, he called on Saied to resign and called for the organization of an early presidential election supervised by an independent magistrate.

In the legislative, presidential and local elections that have taken place in Tunisia since 2011 after the revolution that brought down longtime leader Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, electoral officials say the average turnout rate was 40%. The lowest until Saturday was the 27% turnout in a referendum in July on Saied's new constitution.

"Thank you to the great people of Tunisia," opposition party Ennahdha posted in response on Facebook to the turnout results. "The people have boycotted."

The president of the opposition Free Destourian Party also called for Saied's resignation, as did the opposition Republican Party.

Bouaskar of the electoral commission had predicted a turnout of about 30%. He said participation was lower because parties could no longer use money to bribe voters according to new electoral rules.

There appeared to be multiple reasons for low turnout, including voters' disillusionment with the political class, their focus on financial worries, as well as opposition to Saied's political reforms. His critics said he designed the elections without involving political parties or civil society.

ALS patients contend with \$158K price tag on new drug

By MATTHEW PERRONE AP Health Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — For two years, Becky Mourey pushed the Food and Drug Administration to approve an experimental drug for her Lou Gehrig's disease.

She went to members of Congress and health regulators to make the case for Relyvrio, until patient-advocates finally prevailed.

In September, Relyvrio became only the third drug approved in the U.S. for ALS, or amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, an incurable neurodegenerative disease that is usually fatal within five years. But patients and physicians who celebrated Relyvrio's approval several months ago are now contending with the obstacles posed by the U.S. health care system.

Their odyssey is an object lesson in the soaring cost of specialty drugs and the byzantine systems that insurers have created to try and control them.

Patients with insurance coverage say the \$158,000 per year price tag set by drugmaker Amylyx Pharmaceutical is fueling insurance delays or denials, and sometimes exorbitant out-of-pocket expenses.

Mourey's insurer initially refused to cover Relyvrio, but reversed itself seven weeks later after online

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pressure— including social media posts by Mourey and other ALS advocates.

“Amylyx priced it way too high,” said Mourey, 58, a former music teacher, who now communicates using a vision-controlled speech computer. “They could cut the price in half and still make a hefty profit.”

Even when Relyvrio is covered, some patients see themselves shouldering co-payments between \$1,000 and \$4,000 per month.

Unlike those patients, the Moureys have been exempt from copays due to a combination of company-managed Medicare and Medicaid coverage.

Some ALS patients are covered by private plans, while others receive government coverage through programs like Medicare.

In both cases, patients and their doctors can face onerous requirements to document their condition before insurers will pay for an expensive new treatment. Additionally, many insurers require patients to pay a percentage of their pharmacy costs. With many drugmakers now charging upwards of \$100,000 for drugs approved for hard-to-treat illnesses, even a 5% copay can become unaffordable. The trend has increasingly made the drug industry deeply unpopular in the U.S.

Drugmakers say their prices reflect the years of costly clinical trials needed to win FDA approval.

Amylyx said the delays in coverage for Relyvrio are normal because many insurers are still writing their policies for the drug. The company also highlighted its multiple programs to help patients with costs, including providing the drug for free to the uninsured and covering copays for those who qualify for assistance.

The issues surrounding Relyvrio’s price highlight industry practices that have long been blamed for driving up U.S. health costs: drugmakers can patent new combinations of old ingredients and then charge whatever price the market will bear.

Insurers have responded with extra review hurdles. Those delays weigh heavily on patients with ALS which is measured in the monthly loss of functions like walking, speaking and swallowing.

“It’s just stressful and aggravating to get these multiple denial letters,” said Jim Mourey, who cares for his wife full time at their home in Hopkinton, Massachusetts.

Relyvrio is a powder-based formulation that combines two older ingredients: a prescription drug for liver disorders and a supplement used in traditional Chinese medicine that’s available on Amazon.com for about \$1 per day’s supply.

Insurers typically won’t pay for ALS patients to receive the prescription ingredient, because it’s not approved for their disease. But some patients have gotten their plans to cover it or have found lower-price versions — for less than \$600 a month— at specialty pharmacies. That’s led some patients to skip the new drug entirely by obtaining its two ingredients separately.

Analysts expect Relyvrio to generate \$450 million in annual sales for Amylyx by 2024. It’s the company’s first product.

One group that analyzes drug pricing said a fair price for Relyvrio would be between \$9,100 and \$30,700 per year. The drug showed some effectiveness in slowing the progression of ALS, based on patient questionnaires. Amylyx is conducting a larger study to answer lingering questions about its effectiveness, including whether it extends survival.

Layne Oliff, 63, hasn’t yet decided whether to seek coverage from his Medicare plan. Under the federal program, he would likely owe \$7,400 in copays for Relyvrio before reaching his out-of-pocket maximum. That’s on top of monthly administration fees of over \$600.

But if he pays cash, Oliff says he can buy the prescription ingredient in the drug for \$550 per month, or \$6,600 per year, from a specialty pharmacy. He can get the supplement online for about \$30 a month.

“You’re talking about a drug that’s not a cure, though it has helped slow the progression” said Oliff, who trained as a pharmacist. “But I don’t want to leave my wife someday in a financial hole; I’m not going to spend all my money on this drug.”

Amylyx has set up a program to cover the copay costs for patients with private insurance. But that financial assistance cannot be used for federal plans like Medicare and the Veterans Administration, which cover many ALS patients. After initially restricting coverage, the VA recently broadened its eligibility.

Other insurers are initially rejecting coverage or requiring multiple rounds of documentation from doctors.

“When someone’s lifespan is measured in months, making people go through these multiple rounds of

review is just cruel," said Neil Thakur of the ALS Association. The group invested in Amylyx's early research and stands to recoup that investment.

Dr. Terry Heiman-Patterson, a neurologist at Temple University, says it's taken about four to six hours of phone calls with insurers to get each new patient on Relyvrio.

Heiman-Patterson warns her patients to expect weeks of back-and-forth before getting the drug.

"This is the process we're going to have to go through and I don't know what your copay is going to be in the end," she says.

Some patients who are already taking a do-it-yourself approach to the treatment see little reason to change.

Sarah Nauser, a former police officer, says her insurance has covered the prescription ingredient in Relyvrio — sodium phenylbutyrate — for a \$10 copay since 2020.

"After seeing all the difficulties that people are having, I'm not going to mess with what's working," said Nauser, 34, who credits the combination with slowing her disease and helping her to maintain her ability to walk, talk and feed herself.

The co-founders of Cambridge, Massachusetts.-based Amylyx theorize that the two chemicals in their drug work together to shield cells from premature death. But there's little agreement among scientists about how the drug works, or even which ingredient is responsible for its benefit.

A small European study of the supplement contained in Relyvrio showed a larger effect on slowing ALS than Amylyx's study. And researchers there are conducting a larger, 300-patient study of the ingredient.

"That study could be hugely important in telling us whether this one ingredient—which is very inexpensive-- is actually effective," said Diana Zuckerman of the non-profit National Center for Health Research, which analyzes medical research.

Economic pain, Turkish strikes drive Syrian Kurds to Europe

By KAREEM CHEHAYEB and HOGIR AL ABDO Associated Press

QAMISHLI, Syria (AP) — Baran Ramadan Mesko had been hiding with other migrants for weeks in the coastal Algerian city of Oran, awaiting a chance to take a boat across the Mediterranean Sea to Europe.

Days before the 38-year-old Syrian Kurd was to begin the journey, he received news that a smuggler boat carrying some of his friends had sunk soon after leaving the Algerian coast. Most of its passengers had drowned.

It came as a shock, after spending weeks to get to Algeria from Syria and then waiting for a month for a smuggler to put him on the boat.

But having poured thousands of dollars into the journey, and with his wife and 4- and 3-year-old daughters counting on him to secure a life safe from conflict, the engineer-turned-citizen journalist boarded a small fishing boat with a dozen other men and took a group selfie to send to their families before they went offline.

After a 12-hour overnight journey, Mesko made his way to Almería, Spain, on Oct. 15, and then flew to Germany four days later, where he is now an asylum seeker in a migrant settlement near Bielefeld. He's still getting used to the cold weather, and is using a translation app on his phone to help him get around while learning German. He said he's hopeful his papers will be settled soon so his family can join him.

At least 246 migrants have gone missing while trying to cross the western Mediterranean into Europe in 2022, the International Organization for Migration says. In the past few years, thousands more have perished making the dangerous sea voyage.

Mesko is among a growing number of Syrian Kurds making the journey to Europe on a winding course that includes travel by car and plane across Lebanon, Egypt, Libya, Algeria, then finally by boat to Spain. They say they are opting for this circuitous route because they fear detention by Turkish forces or Turkish-backed militants in Syria if they try to sneak into Turkey, the most direct path to Europe.

According to data from the European Union border agency Frontex, at least 591 Syrians have crossed the Mediterranean from Algeria and Morocco to Spain in 2022, six times more than last year's total.

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A Kurdish Syrian smuggler in Algeria said dozens of Kurds from Syria arrive in the Algerian coastal city of Oran each week for the sea journey.

"I've never had numbers this high before," the smuggler told The Associated Press, speaking on condition of anonymity for fear of arrest by Algerian authorities.

Years of conflict and economic turmoil have left their mark on Syria's northern areas, home to some 3 million people under de facto Kurdish control. The region has been targeted by Islamic State group militants, Turkish forces and Syrian opposition groups from the country's northwestern rebel-held enclave. Climate change and worsening poverty spurred a cholera outbreak in recent months.

Like Mesko, many of the migrants come from the Syrian city of Kobani, which made headlines seven years ago when Kurdish fighters withstood a brutal siege by the Islamic State militant group.

The town was left in ruins, and since then, "not much has happened" to try to rebuild, said Joseph Daher, a professor at the European University Institute in Florence, Italy, adding that most development funding went to cities further east.

Recent events in northeastern Syria have given its residents an additional incentive to leave.

Turkey stepped up attacks on Kurdish areas in Syria after a bombing in Istanbul in November killed six people and wounded over 80 others. Ankara blames the outlawed Kurdish Workers' Party and the U.S.-backed Kurdish militia, the People's Protection Unit in Syria. Both have denied responsibility.

Since then, Turkish airstrikes have pounded areas across northeastern Syria, including Kobani, further battering its already pulverized infrastructure, and Ankara has vowed a ground invasion.

Bozan Shahin, an engineer from Kobani, recalled a Turkish airstrike last month.

"I saw my mother trembling in fear and holding my 4-year-old sister to keep her calm," Shahin said.

He now wants to join the flow of Kurds headed from Syria to Europe.

"I have some friends who found a way to get to Lebanon through a smuggler and go somewhere through Libya," he said. "I'm not familiar with all the details, but I'm trying to see how I can take that journey safely."

The operation, which takes weeks and costs thousands of dollars, is run by a smuggler network that bribes Syrian soldiers to get people through checkpoints where they could be detained for draft-dodging or anti-government activism, then across the porous border into Lebanon, the migrants and smugglers said.

There, the migrants typically stay in crowded apartments in Beirut for about a week while awaiting expedited passports from the Syrian Embassy by way of a smuggler's middleman.

With passports in hand, they fly to Egypt, where Syrians can enter visa-free, then take another flight to Benghazi in war-torn Libya before embarking on the journey to Algeria through another network of smugglers.

"We went in vans and jeeps and they took us across Libya through Tripoli and the coastal road and we would switch cars every 500 kilometers or so," Mesko said.

During the journey across the desert, they had to cross checkpoints run by Libya's mosaic of armed groups.

"Some of the guards at checkpoints treated us horribly when they knew we were Syrian, taking our money and phones, or making us stand outside in the heat for hours," he said.

An armed group kidnapped the group of migrants who left before his and demanded \$36,000 for their release, Mesko said.

By the time they reached the Algerian city of Oran, Mesko was relieved to take refuge in an apartment run by the smugglers. While they waited for weeks, he and the other migrants spent most of their time indoors.

"We couldn't move freely around Oran, because security forces are all over and we did not cross into the country legally," Mesko said. "There were also gangs in the city or even on the coast who would try to mug migrants and take their money."

Human rights groups have accused the Algerian authorities of arresting migrants, and in some cases expelling them across land borders. According to the U.N. refugee agency, Algeria expelled over 13,000 migrants to neighboring Niger to its south in the first half of 2021.

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Despite his relief at arriving safely in Germany with a chance to bring his wife and girls there, Mesko feels remorse for leaving Kobani.

"I was always opposed to the idea of migrating or even being displaced," he said. "Whenever we had to move to another area because of the war, we'd come back to Kobani once we could."

Mesko spends much of his time at asylum interviews and court hearings, but says he's in good spirits knowing he's started a process he only dreamed of months ago. He hopes to be granted asylum status soon, so his wife and daughters can reunite with him in Europe.

"Syria has become an epicenter of war, corruption and terrorism," he said. "We lived this way for 10 years, and I don't want my children to live through these experiences, and see all the atrocities."

Today in History: December 19, Bill Clinton impeached

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Monday, Dec. 19, the 353rd day of 2022. There are 12 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On Dec. 19, 1998, President Bill Clinton was impeached by the Republican-controlled House for perjury and obstruction of justice. (Clinton was subsequently acquitted by the Senate.)

On this date:

In 1777, during the American Revolutionary War, Gen. George Washington led his army of about 11,000 men to Valley Forge, Pennsylvania, to camp for the winter.

In 1907, 239 workers died in a coal mine explosion in Jacobs Creek, Pennsylvania.

In 1946, war broke out in Indochina as troops under Ho Chi Minh launched widespread attacks against the French.

In 1950, Gen. Dwight D. Eisenhower was named commander of the military forces of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization.

In 1960, fire broke out on the hangar deck of the nearly completed aircraft carrier USS Constellation at the New York Naval Shipyard; 50 civilian workers were killed.

In 1972, Apollo 17 splashed down in the Pacific, winding up the Apollo program of manned lunar landings.

In 2001, the fires that had burned beneath the ruins of the World Trade Center in New York City for the previous three months were declared extinguished except for a few scattered hot spots.

In 2002, Secretary of State Colin Powell declared Iraq in "material breach" of a U.N. disarmament resolution.

In 2003, design plans were unveiled for the signature skyscraper — a 1,776-foot glass tower — at the site of the World Trade Center in New York City.

In 2008, citing imminent danger to the national economy, President George W. Bush ordered an emergency bailout of the U.S. auto industry.

In 2011, North Korea announced the death two days earlier of leader Kim Jong Il; North Koreans marched by the thousands to mourn their "Dear Leader" while state media proclaimed his youngest son, Kim Jong Un, a "Great Successor."

In 2016, a truck rammed into a crowded Christmas market in central Berlin, killing 12 people in an attack claimed by Islamic State. (The suspected attacker was killed in a police shootout four days later.) A Turkish policeman fatally shot Russian ambassador Andrei Karlov at a photo exhibit in Ankara. (The assailant was later killed in a police shootout.)

Ten years ago: Four State Department officials resigned under pressure, less than a day after a damning report blamed management failures for a lack of security at the U.S. diplomatic mission in Benghazi, Libya, where militants killed the U.S. ambassador and three other Americans. Park Geun-hye (goon-hay), daughter of late South Korean President Park Chung-hee, was elected the country's first female president.

Five years ago: A bus carrying cruise ship passengers on an excursion to Mayan ruins in southeastern Mexico flipped over on a narrow highway, killing 11 travelers and their guide and injuring about 20 others;

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eight Americans were among those killed. U.S. health officials approved the nation's first gene therapy for an inherited disease, a treatment that improves the sight of patients with a rare form of blindness. David Wright, a Massachusetts man who was convicted of leading a plot inspired by the Islamic State to behead conservative blogger Pamela Geller, was sentenced in Boston to 28 years in prison.

One year ago: Democratic Sen. Joe Manchin of West Virginia said he could not support his party's signature \$2 trillion social and environment bill, dealing a seemingly fatal blow to President Joe Biden's leading domestic initiative. (Congress would approve a smaller but still substantive compromise measure in August 2022.) The NHL and its players association temporarily clamped down on teams crossing the Canadian border and shut down operations of two more teams in hopes of salvaging the season as COVID-19 outbreaks spread across the league. Gabriel Boric, a leftist millennial who rose to prominence during anti-government protests, was elected Chile's next president. Despite rising concerns over the omicron variant, "Spider-Man: No Way Home" achieved the third best opening of all time; studio estimates showed that the Sony and Marvel blockbuster grossed \$253 million in ticket sales in North America.

Today's Birthdays: Actor Elaine Joyce is 79. Actor Tim Reid is 78. Musician John McEuen is 77. Singer Janie Fricke is 75. Jazz musician Lenny White is 73. Actor Mike Lookinland is 62. Actor Scott Cohen is 61. Actor Jennifer Beals is 59. Actor Robert MacNaughton is 56. Magician Criss Angel is 55. Rock musician Klaus Eichstadt (Ugly Kid Joe) is 55. Actor Ken Marino is 54. Actor Elvis Nolasco is 54. Actor Kristy Swanson is 53. Model Tyson Beckford is 52. Actor Amy Locane is 51. Pro Football Hall of Famer Warren Sapp is 50. Actor Rosa Blasi is 50. Actor Alyssa Milano is 50. Actor Tara Summers is 43. Actor Jake Gyllenhaal (JIH'-lihn-hahl) is 42. Actor Marla Sokoloff is 42. Rapper Lady Sovereign is 37. Journalist Ronan Farrow is 35. Actor Nik Dodani is 29.