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Groton Community Calendar

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.



"The color of springtime is in the flowers; the color of winter is in the imagination."

TERRI GUILLEMETS

Thursday, Dec. 22

Senior Menu: Beef stroganoff with noodles, lettuce salad with dressing, peaches, whole wheat bread.

School Breakfast: Muffins.

School Lunch: Hot dogs, chips.

End of Second Quarter

Elementary Christmas Concert, 1 p.m.

Boys Basketball at Roncalli, 6 p.m.

Wrestling Tri-angular at Redfield with Webster and Groton, 6 p.m.

Friday, Dec. 23

Senior Menu: Baked chicken, rice pilaf, cauliflower and pea salad, banana, whole wheat bread.

No School, Christmas Vacation begins

Common Cents Community Thrift Store, 10 a.m. to 1 p.m.

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

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

Conde National League

December 19 Team Standings: Tigers 31 winners of the first half, Braves 28, Pirates 27, Cubs 27, Mets 22, Giants 21

Men's High Games: Butch Farmen 219, Ryan Bethke 213, Russ Bethke 200

Men's High Series: Ryan Bethke 574, Butch Farmen 528, Russ Bethke 511

Women's High Games: Joyce Walter 161, Michelle Johnson 154, Vickie Kramp 148

Women's High Series: Joyce Walter 417, Vickie Kramp 404, Michelle Johnson 378

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



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

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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.

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**EXCEPTIONAL FINANCING
OFFERS AVAILABLE!**



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GDILIVE.COM

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

Lady Tigers hand Cavaliers first loss

Groton Area captured its first win of the season Tuesday night in Groton with a 41-24 win over the previously undefeated Aberdeen Roncalli Cavaliers.

The Tiger defense had 19 steals as the Cavaliers had 29 turnovers in the game to dominate the game. A 16-point rally in the second and third quarter put the Tigers on top, 30-12.

The first quarter was close with three lead changes and the game was tied twice resulting in a nine-all score after the first quarter. Groton Area then took a 26-12 lead at half time and a 32-17 lead into the fourth quarter.

Brooke Gengerke powered in three three-pointers and led the Tigers with 15 points, four rebounds, two assists and five steals. Sydney Leicht had one three-pointer and added nine points, had three rebounds, two assists and two steals. Jerica Locke was a defensive menace for the as she had seven steal and one block in addition to seven points, eight rebounds and four assists. Jaedyn Penning had four points, two rebounds and one steal. Faith Traphagen had four points, one rebound and one steal. Kennedy Hansen had two points, two rebounds, two assists and two steals. Aspen Johnson had five rebounds, one assist and three steals.

Groton Area made 11 of 30 two-pointers for 37 percent, five of 20 three-pointers for 25 percent, four of four free throws, had 2 rebounds, 22 turnovers, 10 assists, 19 steals, 12 fouls and one block.

McKenna O'Keefe led the Cavaliers with 11 points which included three three-pointers, Camryn Bain and two three-pointers for six points, Claire Crawford had a three-pointer and Maddie Huber and Ava Hanson each had two points.

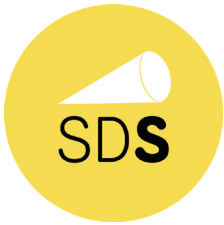
The Cavaliers made nine of 34 field goals for 26 percent, missed all three free throw attempts and had eight fouls.

Groton Area is now 1-2 on the season and the Cavaliers go to 2-1.

Groton Area won the junior varsity game, 32-1. Kennedy Hansen and Faith Traphagen each had six points, Laila Roberts, Elizabeth Fliehs and Rylee Dunker each had five points, Brooklyn Hansen had three points and Talli Wright added two points. The Tigers made 13 of 43 field goals for 30 percent, made two of five free throws and had 13 turnovers.

Reese Heinrich had the single point for the Cavaliers. Roncalli put up 23 shots, was one of two from the line and had 18 turnovers.

Ryan Tracy did the play-by-play of both games on GDILIVE.COM. Adam and Nicole Wright were the junior varsity sponsors. Varsity game sponsors were 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,



SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

Transformation Project calls termination of state contract 'unwarranted'

Transgender advocacy group had already hired new position when agreement was canceled

BY: MAKENZIE HUBER - DECEMBER 20, 2022 4:53 PM

A nonprofit advocacy organization for transgender South Dakotans says it has fulfilled its contractual obligations with the state and is calling the state's termination of the contract "unwarranted."

In a letter Friday, Gov. Kristi Noem's administration terminated its contract with The Transformation Project, alleging numerous contract violations committed by the group. Meanwhile, the governor's spokesman told the conservative media outlet that first reported on the letter that Noem does not support the group's efforts or "dividing our youth with radical ideologies."

Executive Director of the Transformation Project Susan Williams said in an open letter Tuesday that the group is seeking legal advice to remedy "the circumstance," adding that the organization has been under "intense scrutiny from online publications that peddle falsehoods about transgender people and perpetuate harm and discrimination against them."

"We are also deeply concerned by the appearance that the termination of this contract stems not from our actions, but as a result of the population we serve," Williams said.

Meanwhile, the secretary of the state Department of Health announced her retirement Monday amid unconfirmed speculation that the two events could be related.

The contract helped The Transformation Project hire a community health worker, using about \$136,000 in federal funds from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

A community health worker (CHW) is a frontline public health and social services worker who is "a trusted member" of the community served. A CHW helps connect South Dakotans to public services.

How the money has been used so far

The award to The Transformation Project aligned with one of the goals of the federal grant funding program's benchmarks. The LGBTQ community is among those listed as potential targets for assistance in the grant's documentation.

The state's online financial reporting system says The Transformation Project has received about \$23,000 in payments from the state so far this fiscal year.

The Transformation Project hired Jack Fonder this fall for the CHW position, Williams told South Dakota Searchlight.

Fonder, who is a member of the LGBTQ community, was hired to provide critical services like health system navigation, health promotion and coaching, and education to people The Transformation Project serves, including transgender, gender non-conforming and the broader LGBTQ+ and Two Spirit community.

"We are the entity they trust to help them navigate through the complexities of the health care and social services systems," Williams said in the open letter.

The Transformation Project has been an outspoken advocacy group for transgender youth in South Dakota, as the demographic faces discrimination and hostility, leading to depression, isolation and suicidal thoughts, experts say.

For example, 80% of LGBTQ youth report they've experience discrimination for their sexual orientation or gender identity, according to The Transformation Project. 53% of LGBTQ youth in South Dakota have seriously considered suicide in the past year; 19% report attempting suicide in the same timeframe, which

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is higher than overall South Dakota youth. About 75% of LGBTQ youth also report experiencing anxiety and 58% report symptoms of depression.

Transgender adults are four times as likely as cisgender heterosexual adults to report making at least one suicide attempt in their life.

Contesting alleged breaches of contract

Williams told South Dakota Searchlight that Fonder is still with The Transformation Project and graduated from a CHW program Tuesday — just days after the state terminated the contract. The state cited, among many other alleged breaches of contract, that the organization hadn't created a CHW program with "at least one certificate-level CHW."

The CHW certificate program at Southeast Technical College requires 16 credits, which is at least one semester of work.

The letter also alleged that the infrastructure for the CHW program wasn't set up, two quarterly reports weren't filed, program success stories hadn't been provided and that the organization didn't participate in the CHW Collaborative of South Dakota annual conference in April 2022, even though the contract began in June.

The position hadn't been hired until Sept. 6, Williams said, and the contract reveals that the document wasn't signed by both parties until September.

Noem spokesman Ian Fury said the Governor's Office could not respond to South Dakota Searchlight's request for comment because of "the threat of pending litigation."

Earlier this week, Fury provided a statement from Noem to The Daily Signal, a conservative media outlet. "South Dakota does not support this organization's efforts, and state government should not be participating in them," the statement said. "We should not be dividing our youth with radical ideologies. We should treat every single individual equally as a human being."

Fury added in his comments to The Daily Signal that the state is reviewing all Department of Health contracts and that the contract was signed without Noem's prior knowledge or approval.

South Dakota Voices for Peace and the Union Gospel Mission, both based in Sioux Falls, are among the other organizations that have CHW contracts with the state, but their leaders said they had not received calls from the Department of Health questioning their compliance with their contract requirements as of Monday.

Williams, of The Transformation Project, said the group is "reviewing all available options."

"To put it simply, we received a grant to establish a CHW program and we did just that," Williams said in the open letter. "We complied with all aspects of the contract and are heartbroken at what we believe are inaccurate descriptions of our work. We are further devastated because it is patently obvious that the transgender and broader LGBTQ2S community in South Dakota faces health disparities that could be improved under this grant — precisely what was intended in the first place."



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.

Ethics panel dismisses airplane complaint against Noem, citing no definition of 'state business'

BY: JOSHUA HAIAR - DECEMBER 20, 2022 3:52 PM

The state Government Accountability Board dismissed a complaint Tuesday regarding Gov. Kristi Noem's use of state aircraft, citing no sufficient legal definition of "state business."

The three retired judges on the board – minus an additional member who recused himself – called the definition necessary to determine if a legal or ethical violation took place.

Former Chief Justice of the South Dakota Supreme Court David Gilbertson recused himself from the complaint earlier this year, leaving retired Justice Lori Wilbur and retired Circuit Court Judges David Gienapp and Gene Paul Kean to consider the matter Tuesday during a meeting in Sioux Falls.

Gienapp made the announcement.

"A definition of the term 'state business' as referenced in SDCL 5-25-1.1 is necessary and it is not felt that the board has the authority to establish a definition of state business," Gienapp said.

Gienapp said that is the responsibility of the Legislature.

The board made the decision after reviewing a Division of Criminal Investigation (DCI) report about the complaint. The board said it will not make the report public.

The DCI report about Gov. Noem's use of state aircraft exists because of a vote the board took in August, when the board forwarded a complaint about Noem's aircraft usage to the DCI.

Attorney General Mark Vargo, appointed to the post by Noem after Jason Ravensborg's removal from office, recused himself from overseeing the DCI's investigation and transferred supervision of the case to Hughes County State's Attorney Jessica LaMie.

LaMie announced in October that she would not file charges against Noem, citing "no facts to support a criminal prosecution under current law." LaMie also concluded that a complaint on allegedly doctored flight logs was "frivolous."

Noem has faced scrutiny for a number of her uses of state aircraft, including flights from Custer and back again during the weekend of her daughter's 2019 wedding at Custer State Park. Noem has also used a state airplane to attend several political functions in other states.

State Sen. Reynold Nesiba, D-Sioux Falls, sent a complaint about Noem's airplane use to then-Attorney General Jason Ravensborg in 2021. Before Ravensborg was impeached and removed from office, Ravensborg sent the complaint to the Government Accountability Board. The board ultimately asked Vargo to investigate, and Vargo transferred the matter to LaMie.

Nesiba's role in the controversy is not limited to his filing of the complaint. He also helped lead a petition drive that resulted in a 2006 law saying state aircraft may only be used "in the conduct of state business." But as the Government Accountability Board pointed out Tuesday, the law does not include a definition of "state business."

The board's decision to dismiss the complaint is the final step in the process.

Another complaint to the board against Noem focuses on whether the governor abused her authority to help her daughter obtain an appraiser's license. That complaint – which was not on the board's agenda Tuesday – has been "partially dismissed and partially closed." That leaves open the possibility of a contested case hearing.



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.

TikTok ban for federal workers close to becoming law, following flurry of state bans

BY: JACOB FISCHLER - DECEMBER 20, 2022 5:15 PM

A ban on federal employees using TikTok on their government-issued phones is on track to become law after Congress included the provision in the year-end government funding bill released early Tuesday.

U.S. Sen. Josh Hawley's legislation barring the popular social media platform from federal devices was one of several bills attached to the spending measure, the last major action this Congress will take before new members are sworn in next month.

Federal employees would be barred from downloading TikTok, a widely used video-sharing platform owned by the Chinese technology firm ByteDance, on phones and other devices issued by the federal government. Exceptions would be allowed for intelligence gathering purposes.

Hawley, a Missouri Republican, and lawmakers from both parties have called the app a national security risk because users share location data and other personal information with the service. The Chinese government could easily access that data, critics say, because as a Chinese company, ByteDance is obligated to share the data it collects.

Congressional action comes after a flurry of activity at the state level.

More than a dozen governors have enacted similar bans for state devices, almost all of them coming in the last three weeks. Those states include South Dakota, Georgia, Idaho, Iowa, Maryland, Montana, New Hampshire, Tennessee and Virginia.

Louisiana Secretary of State Kyle Ardoin banned his department's employees from downloading the app and blocked the platform from the department's Wi-Fi networks on Monday.

Senate passage

The ban moved with unusual speed. The Senate unanimously passed Hawley's bill last week, but it needed to clear the House to become law. Inclusion in the \$1.7 trillion spending bill — likely the last piece of legislation Congress will consider this year and thus attracted a slew of policy riders — makes that overwhelmingly likely.

In a Twitter post Tuesday, Hawley called the inclusion of the TikTok measure in the spending bill a "win for national security."

Senate Democrats have also praised the measure.

U.S. Sen. Jon Tester, a Montana Democrat who chairs the Defense Appropriations Subcommittee, said in a statement that "eliminating opportunities for China to gather data and spy on the American government is a no-brainer."

Brooke Oberwetter, a spokesperson for TikTok, wrote in an email Tuesday that an ongoing review by the interagency Committee on Foreign Investment in the United States would have produced a better policy result. The company is on its way to implementing the committee's plans, which were developed with input from top national security agencies, she said.

"We're disappointed that Congress has moved to ban TikTok on government devices — a political gesture that will do nothing to advance national security interests — rather than encouraging the Administration to conclude its national security review," she wrote.

"The agreement under review by CFIUS will meaningfully address any security concerns that have been raised at both the federal and state level."

U.S. Sen. Marco Rubio, a Florida Republican, has introduced a bipartisan bill to ban TikTok from the country altogether.

Data sharing dangers

Like most phone apps and social media platforms, TikTok asks users for permission to access data stored on their phones such as location, contacts or calendar. To create accounts, users generally need to provide other information such as email address, phone number and real name.

That data collection, combined with information about users' interests, allows the platforms to build

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profiles of users, which can then be sold to advertisers.

The data can also be used by bad actors for phishing schemes and other scams, said Len Gonzales, a private cybersecurity expert who runs the Virginia-based Ally Cyber Investigations, LLC.

"All that data that you provide to TikTok — and, again, any other app — can be viewed by those who nefariously want to capture and use that data," Gonzales said.

And unlike most apps, which are usually owned by U.S.-based companies, data collected by TikTok contains another risk, especially for those with access to potentially sensitive government data: ByteDance's obligations to the Chinese government.

Lawmakers say the China-based tech company must share its data with the country's ruling Communist Party, which was part of the rationale they voiced for blocking government workers from installing it on their phones.

"TikTok is legally beholden to the Chinese Communist Party, and not only does it collect an alarming amount of information on users, but it could one day be used as a propaganda machine to sway the minds of Americans or spread misinformation," U.S. Sen. Mark Warner, a Virginia Democrat, said in a written statement.

"I certainly don't want to give the CCP access to our government employees any more than I would want to give them access to our military."

'Millions of lines of data'

A widely popular app — it has more than 12 million reviews on Apple's App Store alone — TikTok has collected "millions of lines of data," Gonzales said.

In the hands of a bad actor, that data could be used for espionage or blackmail, said Douglas C. Schmidt, a computer scientist at Vanderbilt University.

"If you're a government employee, and somebody can figure out you have access to some sensitive information or some sensitive budget things, and they can get blackmail information because they know what websites you look at or who you talk to," Schmidt said. "You can imagine people being more susceptible in those situations."

TikTok's offshore status may also make it more difficult for users to sue in the event of a data breach or some other misuse, Schmidt said.

Sharing data with platforms is the tradeoff for using mobile devices that make social networking, shopping and other activities easier, Schmidt said. That's true regardless of the specific platform, he said.

"People should be concerned in general," Schmidt said. "TikTok may have some extenuating circumstances that make it even more of an issue. But these are issues no matter what."

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

Child tax credit expansion left out of congressional omnibus package

BY: ASHLEY MURRAY - DECEMBER 20, 2022 5:10 PM

WASHINGTON — Any last hopes of resurrecting the expanded child tax credit as part of Congress' massive spending package were dashed early Tuesday when the 4,155-page bill was released without a mention of the tax benefit.

The temporary expanded child tax credit, part of a COVID-19 relief deal in 2021, allowed more low-income families, including those with no income at all, to claim up to \$3,600 for each child up to age 6, and up to \$3,000 per child ages 6 to 17. For the first time, families received the funds in monthly installments.

Democrats had hoped to partially restore the anti-poverty measure by including it in the \$1.7 trillion bill that will fund the government for the remainder of the fiscal year.

One idea floated, but never solidified: Democrats wanted to enhance the child tax credit in exchange for reviving a research and development corporate tax deduction that had been reduced under the Trump administration's 2017 tax overhaul.

In recent weeks, the White House quietly signaled it also would be open to attaching a work requirement to the child tax credit.

"But over the last few weeks, Republican leaders in Washington refused to even discuss a deal that would benefit America's kids and businesses," Sen. Michael Bennet, D-Colo., said in a statement Tuesday.

However, observers of recent tax debates point out that Democrats were already in favor of restoring the R&D tax break — separate and apart from a child tax credit expansion.

Still, Bennet maintained that the GOP "decided to send a lump of coal to America's children this year."

Last month, GOP members warned against permanently restoring the child tax credit to 2021 levels, saying the increase could cost taxpayers roughly \$1.4 trillion over the next decade, according to a Joint Committee on Taxation report.

Poverty markers found to decrease

Proponents of permanently expanding the benefit point to U.S. Census Bureau data and analyses by the D.C.-based Tax Policy Center that food insecurity and other poverty markers decreased for low-income families who received the monthly payments in 2021.

Bennet, along with Democratic Sens. Sherrod Brown of Ohio and Cory Booker of New Jersey, and Reps. Rosa DeLauro, D-Conn., Suzan DelBene, D-Wash., and Ritchie Torres, D-N.Y., made up the core group of lawmakers pushing for the low-income tax benefit.

"I am extremely disappointed that we were not able to extend the Child Tax Credit in this year's government funding bill. I remain committed to the position I took earlier this year: there can be no R&D without the CTC," House Appropriations Chair DeLauro, a Connecticut Democrat, said in a statement. "I hoped our Republican colleagues would understand how important the Child Tax Credit is to the financial stability of American families, but that has not come to pass."

Democrats tried last year to extend the enhanced benefits into 2022 when they made the policy a centerpiece of the Build Back Better reconciliation package. Sen. Joe Manchin III, D-W.Va., declined to support the proposal, citing concerns about inflation.

Families who meet certain income levels in 2022 will see a return to previous child tax credit levels — roughly \$2,000 per child. Those who made \$2,500 or less this past year will receive a partial refund or no benefit at all.

Roughly 19 million children will no longer be eligible for the full credit in 2022, according to the Tax Policy Center, a collaboration of the Urban Institute and the Brookings Institution.

The child tax credit has been around since 1998, and has been expanded numerous times.

Ashley Murray covers the nation's capital as a senior reporter for States Newsroom. Her coverage areas include domestic policy and appropriations.

Congress rolls out \$1.7 trillion spending deal in race to Friday deadline

BY: JENNIFER SHUTT - DECEMBER 20, 2022 12:17 PM

WASHINGTON — Congress unveiled a \$1.7 trillion spending package early Tuesday that would fund the federal government for the rest of the fiscal year, completing the annual process that began this spring when President Joe Biden sent lawmakers his budget request.

Biden's chief budget official in a statement urged Congress to speedily pass the massive measure before a Friday deadline and send it to the president. The omnibus, as it's known, is likely to be the last significant piece of legislation lawmakers will push through during the 117th Congress.

The package, which includes the dozen annual appropriations bills that fund everything from the Pentagon to national parks to the Agriculture Department, also includes:

A bipartisan bill, the Electoral Count Act, that would clarify how Congress certifies electoral votes for president;

- * \$40 billion to help communities recover from natural disasters;
- * \$45 billion in military and humanitarian assistance to Ukraine.
- * It would also allow — though not require — states to continue providing 12 months of postpartum care for women covered by Medicaid or the Children's Health Insurance Program. States that have been resistant to that policy would be able to opt out.

"It was no easy feat to piece this bill together," Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer said Tuesday morning, before rattling off several of the package's provisions.

The New York Democrat said the "funding bill is overflowing with very good news for our troops, for the Ukrainian brave fighters, for American jobs, for our families and for American democracy."

Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell said the package "is an impressive outcome for the Republican negotiators and more importantly it is the outcome that our country actually needs."

The Kentucky Republican urged his colleagues to back the measure, saying the choice between fully funding the government for the rest of the fiscal year or using another stopgap spending bill was "not a close call."

"The Senate should pass this bill," McConnell said.

Defense spending tops nondefense

Congress must pass the 4,155-page package before Friday at midnight when a one-week stopgap spending bill expires, or potentially begin a partial shutdown.

The omnibus package includes \$858 billion in defense spending, up from \$782 billion, and a significant increase from the \$730 billion approved during the last appropriations process for nondefense accounts, though the U.S. House and U.S. Senate were using different spending levels as of Tuesday morning.

Senate statements about the bill often said it would provide \$772.5 in nondefense spending while House Appropriations Chair Rosa DeLauro, a Connecticut Democrat, said the package included \$800 billion for nondefense programs.

Nondefense funds go toward the vast majority of federal departments and agencies, including Agriculture, Homeland Security, Interior, NASA, Transportation and Veterans Affairs. Funding for defense programs predominantly goes to the Pentagon through the Defense Appropriations bill, though some of the defense money goes to nuclear programs within the Energy Department.

GOP internal split

The measure, released Tuesday morning around 1:30 a.m., has the support of Democrats in both chambers and Senate Republicans. But House Republican leaders opted to exclude themselves from the negotiations, arguing that lawmakers should wait until their party controls that chamber to finish work for the fiscal year that began on Oct. 1.

Ten House Republicans and three members elect sent a letter to their GOP colleagues in the Senate

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late Monday, calling on them to use the legislative filibuster to block the omnibus from moving forward. The 13 wrote that they were "obliged to inform" Republican senators that "if any omnibus passes in the remaining days of this Congress, we will oppose and whip opposition to any legislative priority of those senators who vote for this bill — including the Republican leader."

They wrote that if their Senate colleagues didn't prevent the bill from moving forward "there is no point in pretending we are a united party, and we must prepare for a new political reality."

Arizona Rep. Andy Biggs, North Carolina Rep. Dan Bishop, Georgia Rep. Andrew Clyde, Arizona Rep-elect Eli Crane, Florida Rep. Byron Donalds, Florida Rep. Matt Gaetz, Virginia Rep. Bob Good, Florida Rep-elect Anna Paulina Luna, Tennessee Rep-elect Andy Ogles, Pennsylvania Rep. Scott Perry and Montana Rep. Matt Rosendale were among those who signed the letter.

Alabama Sen. Richard Shelby, the top Republican on the Appropriations Committee, said in a written statement that Congress should approve the package before the Friday midnight deadline.

"This process was far from perfect, but ultimately it allowed Republican redlines to be adhered to and because of that I will urge my colleagues to support this package," Shelby said, referring to GOP demands. "We need to do our job and fund the government."

White House budget Director Shalanda Young said in a written statement the bipartisan government funding agreement "is an important step forward, bringing both parties together to make progress on critical priorities for our country."

"As with any compromise, neither side got everything it wanted, but this legislation is good for our economy, our competitiveness, and our country, and I urge Congress to send it to the President's desk without delay," Young added.

Electoral Count Act, TikTok

The spending package includes several unrelated bills that lawmakers from both political parties have been working to get to Biden's desk for months or years, a common feature of omnibus spending packages.

The package would change the way Congress certifies electoral votes for president by reinforcing the vice president's role as ceremonial. The measure would raise the threshold for members' objection to certifying a state's electoral votes to one-fifth of the Senate and one-fifth of the House from the current threshold of one member of each chamber.

The U.S. House approved its version of the bill in September and the Senate Rules and Administration Committee overwhelmingly approved its version of the measure later that month.

Maine Republican Sen. Susan Collins and West Virginia Democratic Sen. Joe Manchin III said in a statement Tuesday that the electoral count bill "fixes the flaws of the archaic and ambiguous Electoral Count Act of 1887 and establishes clear guidelines for our system of certifying and counting electoral votes for President and Vice President."

The package would ban the popular social media app TikTok, or any apps from its parent company ByteDance Limited or an entity owned by ByteDance Limited, from government devices. Lawmakers added an exception for "law enforcement activities, national security interests and activities, and security researchers."

The U.S. Senate unanimously voted last week to send the House a bill by Missouri Republican Sen. Josh Hawley that would have banned federal employees from downloading TikTok on their phones amid concerns about how it tracks users' data and how much access the Chinese government has to that information.

Medicaid, CHIP

The bill includes provisions that would ensure for the first time that "every child in America who qualifies for Medicaid or CHIP will now be guaranteed at least one year of continuous health coverage," according to Schumer.

"This is a major change that will make a big difference in improving the health care for millions of kids," he said.

The measure would "permanently extend a policy from the American Rescue Plan that lets states give a full year of postpartum coverage for mothers on Medicaid and CHIP," Schumer said Tuesday.

"This is something huge, something I have so strongly believed in and fought for," Schumer said. "It's a

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major step to address America's crisis in maternal health and mortality."

Maryland-Virginia spat

The bill also continues the federal government's years-long search to select a location for the Federal Bureau of Investigation's new headquarters after a last-minute disagreement between members from suburban Maryland and Virginia about how the process should go.

The omnibus says that the General Services Administration administrator "shall conduct separate and detailed consultations with individuals representing the sites from the State of Maryland and Commonwealth of Virginia" in order to ensure GSA's criteria for selecting a site in the Washington, D.C. suburbs "is consistent with Congressional intent."

The legislation wouldn't expand the Child Tax Credit, a provision that Congress approved as part of its COVID-19 funding. The expansion, however, lapsed amid disagreements about whether to extend it and how exactly the expansion should be structured.

Negotiators didn't reach agreement to include legislation that would have allowed cannabis businesses in states where medical or recreational use is legal to access banking the way businesses recognized as legal under federal law can.

The bill doesn't include the roughly \$10 billion the Biden administration requested from Congress to continue addressing COVID-19.

The package does include billions in community project funding, or earmarks, requested by Democrats and Republicans in both chambers.

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

After substation shooting, federal regulator orders review of security standards

BY: ROBERT ZULLO - DECEMBER 20, 2022 12:03 PM

Less than two weeks after gunfire damaged two Duke Energy substations in Moore County, N.C., knocking out power to about 45,000 people, federal regulators ordered a review of security standards at electric transmission facilities and control centers.

The Federal Energy Regulatory Commission on Thursday ordered the North American Electric Reliability Corporation (NERC), which sets and enforces reliability standards for the bulk power system in the U.S., Canada and part of Mexico, to review existing "physical security" rules for the components of the power system.

The order, which requires NERC to deliver within 120 days its report on the effectiveness and applicability of current standards and whether improvements are necessary, comes amid reports of similar attacks at other sites across the country.

Earlier this year, three men in Ohio pleaded guilty to planning an attack on electric substations as part of a white supremacist plot. In November, shots were fired at an American Electric Power substation near Centerburg, Ohio, knocking out power, a local news outlet reported. The FBI is also investigating a string of attacks at substations that happened in Washington and Oregon, per The Seattle Times.

"One, it reminds us that we need to take physical security into account just as we do cyber security," FERC Chairman Richard Glick said last week at the commission meeting, cautioning that the motives for the Moore County attack and some similar incidents elsewhere remain murky and under investigation by local and state law enforcement.

"But in the meantime I think it's a good idea and this is a good step of trying to reassess our existing physical security standards and whether changes need to be made."

In 2014, following a sniper attack the year before on a Pacific Gas and Electric's Metcalf substation in California, FERC approved a physical security reliability standard for owners of electric transmission facilities. The standard requires utilities and other transmission owners to conduct regular risk assessments on transmission stations and substations "that, if rendered inoperable or damaged, could result in instability, uncontrolled separation or cascading within an interconnection," Mark Hegerle, director of FERC's Division of Operation and Planning Standards, told the commission.

That means facilities that could create hazards for the larger grid if they are knocked out, a risk not posed by the North Carolina outages, said Rachel Sherrard, a spokeswoman for NERC.

"The assets in North Carolina were not individually deemed critical to the grid and the recent attack did not create an uncontrolled or cascading outage, which is what the standards are designed to protect from," she said. "However, this does raise the question of the need to review an event that impacts several non-critical assets that collectively can have impact beyond any single asset failure."

Substations serve a variety of purposes, including stepping down voltage from the transmission system that transports electricity across long distances to the distribution wires that bring into homes and businesses. Asked if the shootings had made Duke re-examine how it protects substations, a spokeswoman said the company wouldn't discuss specific security measures.

"We have multiple layers of security across our system that allow us to monitor and protect critical infrastructure," the spokeswoman, Logan Kureczka, wrote in an email. "As the largest grid operator in the country, our responsibility to protect the power grid is paramount, and our security evolves as threats do."

In a statement earlier this month, the Electricity Subsector Coordinating Council, which describes itself as the "principal liaison between leadership in the federal government and in the electric power sector," said investor-owned electric companies, electric cooperatives and public power utilities "continuously monitor and prepare for threats to the grid and other infrastructure."

The organization, which coordinates efforts to guard against threats to critical infrastructure to improve the reliability and resilience of the grid, said it was working with law enforcement investigating the attacks.

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"Understanding what happened in North Carolina will be important to minimize future threats and to keep our industry's defenses at the forefront," the organization said.

FERC Commissioner Mark Christie, a former Virginia utility regulator, said attacks on transformers, the drum-shaped devices on utility poles that lower the voltage before electricity is delivered to residences and businesses, are relatively common.

"They're vulnerable to a drunk with a gun and an attitude. We have a lot of incidents of that. That's not unusual," he said. "The substations are a different ballgame. ... A transformer knocks out a block or two. A substation, several tens of thousands of people."

Noting that it was likely that NERC would come back with a recommendation to upgrade security standards, Christie said he hoped the Department of Energy would find a way to use grid resilience money from the bipartisan infrastructure law to lessen the blow for electric ratepayers.

"It's going to cost money and I hope this doesn't all flow through to ratepayers," he said.

Robert Zullo is a national energy reporter based in southern Illinois focusing on renewable power and the electric grid. Robert joined States Newsroom in 2018 as the founding editor of the Virginia Mercury. Before that, he spent 13 years as a reporter and editor at newspapers in Virginia, New Jersey, Pennsylvania and Louisiana. He has a bachelor's degree from the College of William and Mary in Williamsburg, Va. He grew up in Miami, Fla., and central New Jersey.

Mines in Minecraft: Student renders Rapid City university campus in video game

BY: SEARCHLIGHT STAFF - DECEMBER 20, 2022 9:58 AM

South Dakota Mines computer engineering major Jaxxen Cheney has built a model of the university campus inside the popular video game Minecraft, according to a news release from the university.

The game allows users to create worlds inside the platform with sets of digital building blocks.

"I've been playing Minecraft since I was a kid," Cheney said in the release. "It's not a difficult game to play and it's very accessible. I like that you can play it with many other people."

The Minecraft version of the Mines campus includes both inside and outside of buildings to scale. Cheney used Google Earth to help build the model and completed much of the university campus after graduating high school. He undertook the effort to help familiarize himself with the school he planned to attend.

"I didn't know the campus very well before I became a student. When I first arrived, I got lost all the time," he said. "Once you get yourself familiar with campus, it's easy to navigate. I think this could be a great tool for incoming freshmen to explore the campus before they come to school."

Cheney has opened the door for collaboration with other students who are adding their own details, including decorating insides of student housing common areas and filling in the insides of buildings such as the university's Museum of Geology. Some university alumni are even building virtual renditions of their own freshman dorms inside the platform. Cheney also used the campus he built in Minecraft as a project in one of his humanities classes.

Minecraft reports 93 million users worldwide. Cheney's effort follows other university students around the country who have replicated their own campuses in the platform including MIT, Boston University, UC Berkely and many others.



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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Groton City Financial Report

November 2022

Dacotah Bank Checking Acct	\$ 3,700,847.06
General Cash	\$ 300.00
SD FIT Acct	\$ 1,569,509.09
Dacotah Bank Water CD	\$ 85,379.54
Cemetery Perp Care CD	\$ 32,876.69
Total	\$ 5,388,912.38

Invested In		
Cash	\$ 300.00	0.01%
Dacotah Bank	\$ 3,819,103.29	70.87%
SD Fit	\$ 1,569,509.09	29.12%
Total	\$ 5,388,912.38	100.00%

	Beginning	Revenue	Expenses	Transfers	Ending
	Cash Balance				Cash Balance
General	\$ 1,142,330.95	\$ 220,815.31	\$ 91,709.93		\$ 1,271,436.33
Bed, Board, Booze Tax	\$ 146,772.28	\$ 2,410.76			\$ 149,183.04
Baseball Uniforms	\$ 1,710.20				\$ 1,710.20
Airport	\$ 38,367.26		\$ 13,981.26		\$ 24,386.00
**Debt Service	\$ (87,489.31)	\$ 10,412.15	\$ 660.00		\$ (77,737.16)
Cemetery Perpetual Care	\$ 34,756.69				\$ 34,756.69
Water	\$ 504,100.70	\$ 659,306.97	\$ 685,369.49		\$ 478,038.18
Electric	\$ 2,886,549.64	\$ 125,625.74	\$ 67,216.49		\$ 2,944,958.89
Wastewater	\$ 288,894.49	\$ 17,469.33	\$ 790.90		\$ 305,572.92
Solid Waste	\$ 54,457.34	\$ 11,080.44	\$ 10,216.11		\$ 55,321.67
Family Crisis	\$ 12,142.91	\$ 2,000.00			\$ 14,142.91
Sales Tax	\$ 9,538.33	\$ 8,118.06	\$ 8,506.65		\$ 9,149.74
Employment	\$ (2,274.99)		\$ 1,623.28		\$ (651.71)
Utility Prepayments	\$ 86,037.19	\$ (4,528.29)			\$ 81,508.90
Utility Deposits	\$ 94,111.34	\$ 1,844.14	\$ 920.02		\$ 95,035.46
Other	\$ 2,100.32				\$ 2,100.32
Totals	\$ 5,212,105.34	\$ 1,054,554.61	\$ 880,994.13	\$ -	\$ 5,388,912.38

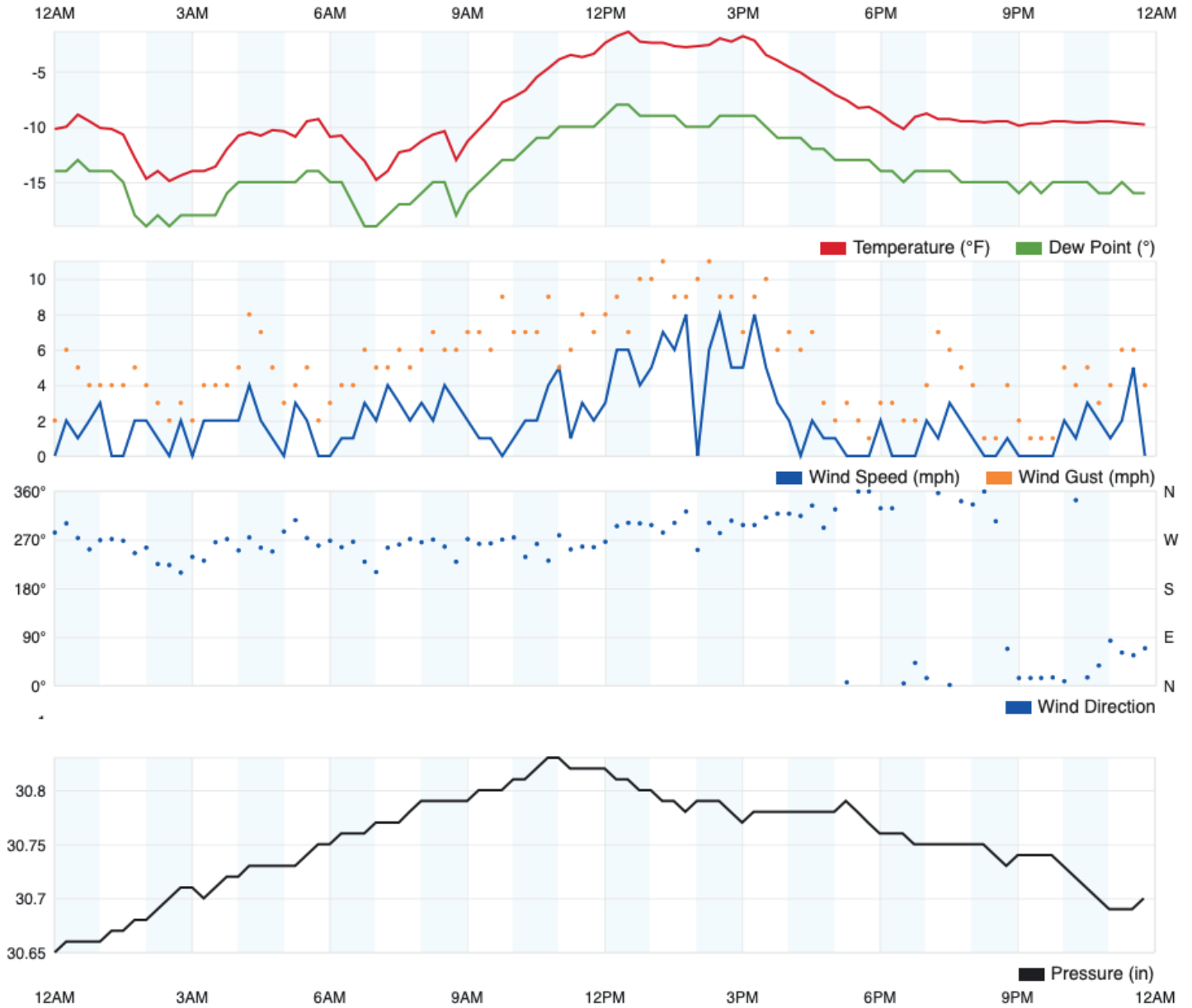
**Debt to be Paid	
**2015 Refinance	\$ 1,972,637.49 by 12/1/2035
Total Debt	\$ 1,972,637.49

\$266,747.00 ARPA GRANT (Received to General)
 \$89,223.86 Water tower loan payment

Groton Daily Independent

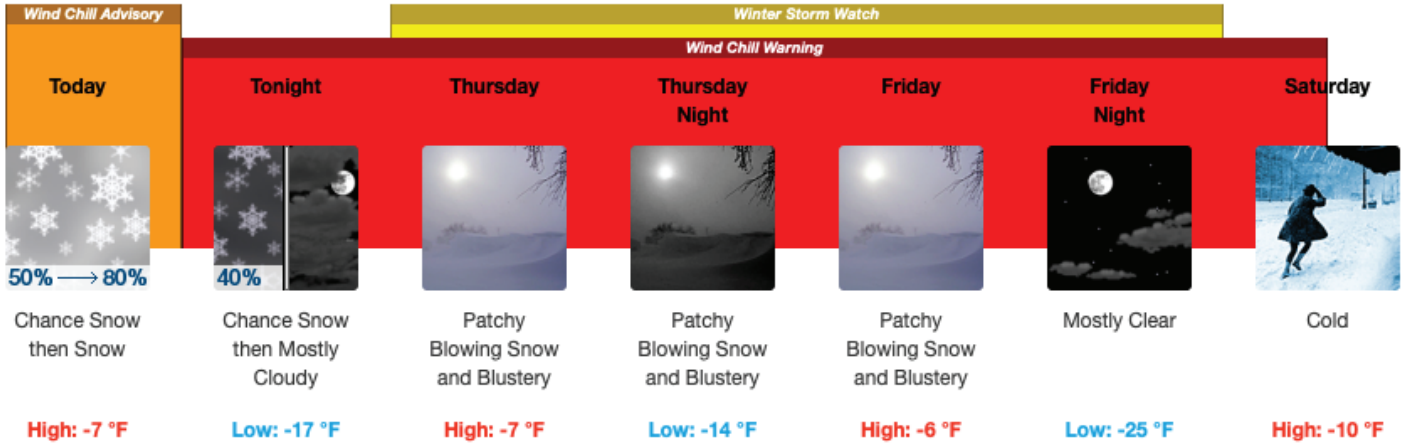
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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



Groton Daily Independent

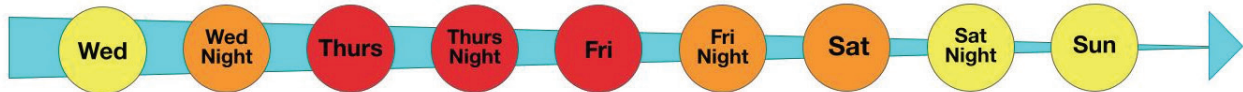
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Winter Storm Timeline

December 21, 2022
5:43 AM

Prepare Now for Potential Impacts



Stalled temperatures

Light fluffy snow & blowing snow

Winds increasing through the day

Arctic Blast!

Falling temperatures

Increasing winds

Ground Blizzard Possible

Dangerous wind chills

Threat of Frostbite & Hypothermia

Winds diminishing

Improving travel conditions

Dangerous cold lingers

Moderating temperatures

Light snow

Risk Levels

Little to None

Minor

Moderate

Major

Extreme



National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD

Several winter weather hazards are anticipated to impact the area through Saturday, including extreme cold, snow and blowing snow with potential blizzard conditions.

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Minimum Wind Chills

December 21, 2022
5:46 AM

Minimum Wind Chill Forecast

	12/21 Wed				12/22 Thu				12/23 Fri				12/24 Sat															
	6am	9am	12pm	3pm	6pm	9pm	12am	3am	6am	9am	12pm	3pm	6pm	9pm	12am	3am	6am	9am	12pm	3pm								
Aberdeen	-32	-30	-32	-32	-35	-37	-40	-41	-44	-42	-35	-33	-36	-36	-35	-37	-38	-38	-34	-32	-36	-38	-39	-39	-40	-39	-25	-23
Britton	-30	-30	-31	-33	-36	-37	-38	-41	-41	-37	-37	-35	-36	-37	-37	-38	-39	-37	-34	-34	-37	-39	-39	-39	-40	-37	-29	-25
Eagle Butte	-34	-38	-41	-43	-48	-51	-54	-55	-56	-55	-51	-49	-49	-45	-46	-47	-49	-49	-39	-34	-38	-42	-40	-34	-32	-31	-24	-19
Eureka	-36	-33	-34	-37	-40	-42	-45	-46	-49	-45	-39	-38	-41	-41	-42	-43	-45	-45	-40	-39	-43	-45	-45	-43	-42	-39	-26	-21
Gettysburg	-39	-37	-35	-39	-43	-47	-49	-49	-51	-49	-45	-43	-44	-44	-44	-46	-49	-48	-39	-37	-43	-44	-43	-40	-39	-36	-25	-18
Kennebec	-28	-25	-27	-32	-39	-45	-46	-49	-51	-49	-44	-42	-42	-42	-43	-43	-44	-44	-38	-30	-36	-38	-37	-36	-32	-32	-25	-16
McIntosh	-36	-39	-40	-42	-46	-47	-48	-49	-51	-50	-44	-43	-44	-46	-47	-47	-49	-49	-40	-35	-42	-44	-42	-40	-36	-34	-27	-20
Milbank	-28	-27	-25	-24	-33	-36	-37	-41	-42	-41	-37	-36	-37	-37	-37	-37	-39	-39	-35	-34	-36	-36	-36	-36	-35	-33	-26	-23
Miller	-29	-25	-26	-34	-40	-41	-45	-47	-48	-46	-40	-38	-41	-41	-41	-42	-44	-42	-36	-34	-38	-40	-39	-38	-35	-34	-21	-17
Mobridge	-33	-31	-31	-35	-39	-40	-41	-41	-43	-41	-36	-36	-38	-39	-38	-39	-41	-40	-32	-30	-34	-35	-33	-32	-31	-28	-19	-13
Murdo	-28	-29	-35	-37	-43	-49	-50	-52	-53	-51	-47	-45	-45	-44	-46	-45	-45	-45	-38	-34	-38	-40	-39	-37	-35	-34	-22	-18
Pierre	-26	-27	-31	-33	-38	-41	-43	-44	-45	-44	-40	-37	-38	-37	-37	-39	-41	-40	-34	-29	-31	-34	-32	-29	-26	-27	-20	-13
Redfield	-26	-23	-26	-33	-37	-41	-43	-47	-47	-45	-40	-37	-38	-38	-39	-40	-41	-41	-35	-33	-38	-40	-39	-39	-40	-37	-24	-19
Sisseton	-31	-28	-26	-30	-36	-36	-38	-41	-42	-38	-35	-34	-36	-36	-35	-37	-37	-37	-34	-34	-36	-37	-36	-36	-36	-33	-26	-25
Watertown	-28	-26	-24	-25	-32	-37	-40	-44	-47	-44	-40	-38	-40	-41	-41	-41	-43	-43	-38	-37	-38	-40	-39	-39	-39	-37	-28	-23
Webster	-31	-31	-27	-29	-36	-38	-41	-44	-46	-45	-41	-40	-40	-40	-40	-41	-44	-43	-39	-39	-40	-40	-41	-41	-40	-39	-31	-28
Wheaton	-27	-26	-24	-25	-31	-33	-35	-38	-40	-39	-37	-35	-36	-36	-36	-36	-36	-36	-35	-35	-37	-37	-38	-39	-38	-36	-30	-27



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

National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD

Wind Chill Advisory Winter Storm Watch Wind Chill Warning

URGENT - WINTER WEATHER MESSAGE
National Weather Service Aberdeen SD

...WIND CHILL ADVISORY REMAINS IN EFFECT UNTIL 6 PM CST THIS EVENING...

...WIND CHILL WARNING REMAINS IN EFFECT FROM 6 PM THIS EVENING TO NOON CST SATURDAY...

...WINTER STORM WATCH REMAINS IN EFFECT FROM THURSDAY MORNING THROUGH LATE FRIDAY NIGHT...

* WHAT...For the Wind Chill Warning, dangerously cold wind chills expected. Wind chills as low as 45 below zero. For the Wind Chill Advisory, very cold wind chills. Wind chills as low as 35 below zero. For the Winter Storm Watch, blizzard conditions possible. Winds could gust as high as 40 mph.

* WHERE...Brown and Spink Counties.

* WHEN...For the Wind Chill Warning, from 6 PM this evening to noon CST Saturday. For the Wind Chill Advisory, until 6 PM CST this evening. For the Winter Storm Watch, from Thursday morning through late Friday night.

* IMPACTS...Plan on slippery road conditions. Areas of blowing snow could significantly reduce visibility. The hazardous conditions could impact the morning or evening commute. The dangerously cold wind chills could cause frostbite on exposed skin in as little as 10 minutes.

* ADDITIONAL DETAILS...Pre-Holiday travel Thursday through Friday will be impacted. Stranded motorists will face the threat of frostbite, hypothermia and even life threatening exposure.

PRECAUTIONARY/PREPAREDNESS ACTIONS...

Avoid outside activities if possible. When outside, make sure you wear appropriate clothing, a hat, and gloves. Use caution while traveling outside. Wear appropriate clothing, a hat, and gloves. Prepare for possible blizzard conditions. Continue to monitor the latest forecasts for updates on this situation.

Groton Daily Independent

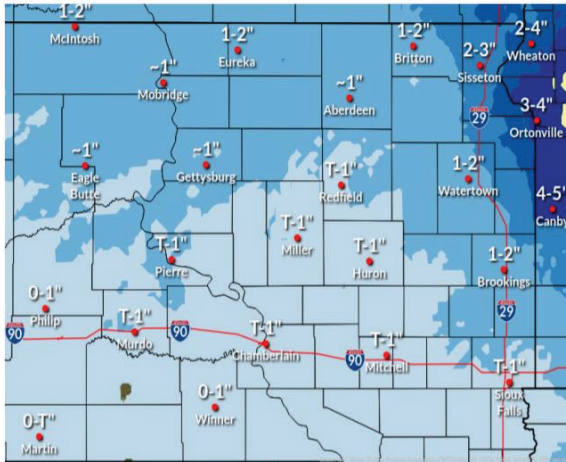
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Snowfall Accumulations & Timing

December 21, 2022
5:48 AM

Snow Totals Through Midnight



	Weather Forecast																	
	12/21 Wed																	
	6am	7am	8am	9am	10am	11am	12pm	1pm	2pm	3pm	4pm	5pm	6pm	7pm	8pm	9pm	10pm	11pm
Aberdeen	27%	25%	27%	33%	43%	49%	59%	61%	72%	76%	83%	65%	40%	35%	29%	22%	15%	
Britton	57%	60%	50%	47%	52%	67%	74%	81%	78%	81%	89%	66%	40%	41%	34%	26%	21%	15%
Eagle Butte	22%	33%	44%	56%	67%	77%	87%	79%	71%	65%	58%	45%	31%	24%				
Eureka			30%	41%	64%	78%	82%	81%	72%	66%	54%	35%	16%					
Gettysburg		17%	27%	28%	33%	38%	59%	80%	87%	82%	72%	52%	26%	22%	17%			
Kennebec				16%	21%	27%	29%	49%	71%	84%	80%	52%	29%	22%				
McIntosh	26%	39%	68%	92%	94%	64%	49%	35%	18%									
Milbank	84%	90%	83%	66%	67%	70%	62%	61%	64%	68%	72%	74%	70%	63%	52%	41%	32%	17%
Miller	18%	19%	20%	21%	22%	21%	21%	38%	66%	82%	81%	63%	33%	29%	22%			
Mobridge		21%	33%	48%	67%	78%	86%	78%	69%	58%	45%	31%						
Murdo			19%	23%	35%	44%	58%	69%	70%	75%	69%	50%	30%	21%				
Pierre		17%	21%	25%	30%	32%	45%	76%	81%	86%	81%	60%	36%	28%	18%			
Redfield	22%	22%	23%	24%	24%	24%	27%	41%	59%	79%	88%	71%	40%	34%	27%	19%		
Sisseton	69%	76%	74%	61%	57%	69%	73%	74%	74%	76%	81%	77%	62%	59%	46%	33%	27%	16%
Watertown	61%	52%	52%	47%	45%	45%	40%	44%	45%	50%	64%	67%	59%	52%	41%	29%	21%	15%
Webster	57%	51%	50%	43%	44%	55%	54%	56%	59%	70%	85%	73%	50%	48%	37%	25%	19%	
Wheaton	70%	89%	91%	81%	77%	83%	87%	81%	77%	72%	76%	82%	69%	64%	54%	44%	39%	20%

*Created: 9 am CST Wed 12/21/2022. Shows most impactful weather for the period beginning at the time shown. Weather symbols display where Probability of Precipitation > 15%.

- Snow +



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

National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD

Snowfall is anticipated this morning through this evening, with the highest accumulations of 2 to 4 inches across far northeastern South Dakota and west central Minnesota.

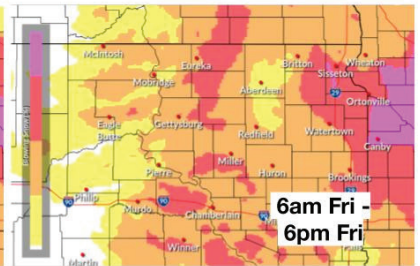
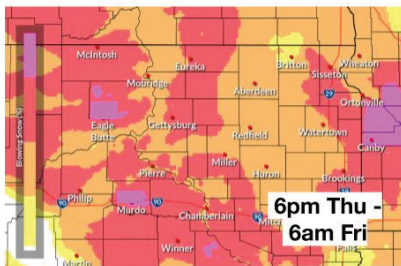
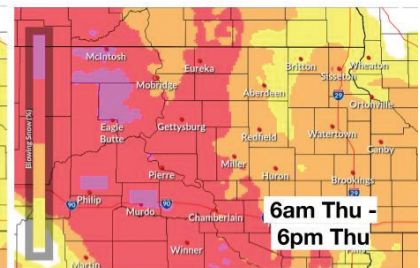
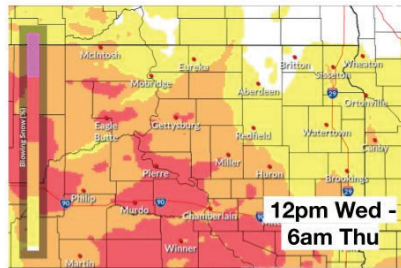


Blowing Snow Potential

December 21, 2022
5:50 AM

Key Messages

- Persistent northwest winds may significantly impact travel this afternoon into Christmas Eve Day.
- **RED** and **PINK** = Highest Likelihood of **Blizzard Conditions** (visibilities 1/4 mile or less). Blowing snow with significant visibility reductions still possible elsewhere.
- If you have travel plans for Wednesday night through Christmas Eve, monitor future forecasts and **start considering alternative travel plans!**



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

Minor ☁️ Patchy Blowing Snow with reduced visibilities expected	Moderate ☁️☁️ Areas of Blowing Snow with reduced visibilities expected	Significant ☁️☁️☁️ Widespread Blowing Snow and greatly reduced visibilities expected	Blizzard ☁️☁️☁️☁️ Significant Blowing Snow possible, travel may be impossible
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National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD

Blowing snow could cause significantly reduced visibility or blizzard conditions from late today through Friday, as northwesterly winds gust between 30 and 50 plus mph.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: -1 °F at 12:27 PM

Low Temp: -15 °F at 7:04 AM

Wind: 11 mph at 1:15 PM

Precip: : 0.00

Day length: 8 hours, 46 minutes

Today's Info

Record High: 50 in 1979

Record Low: -31 in 1916

Average High: 27°F

Average Low: 6°F

Average Precip in Dec.: 0.40

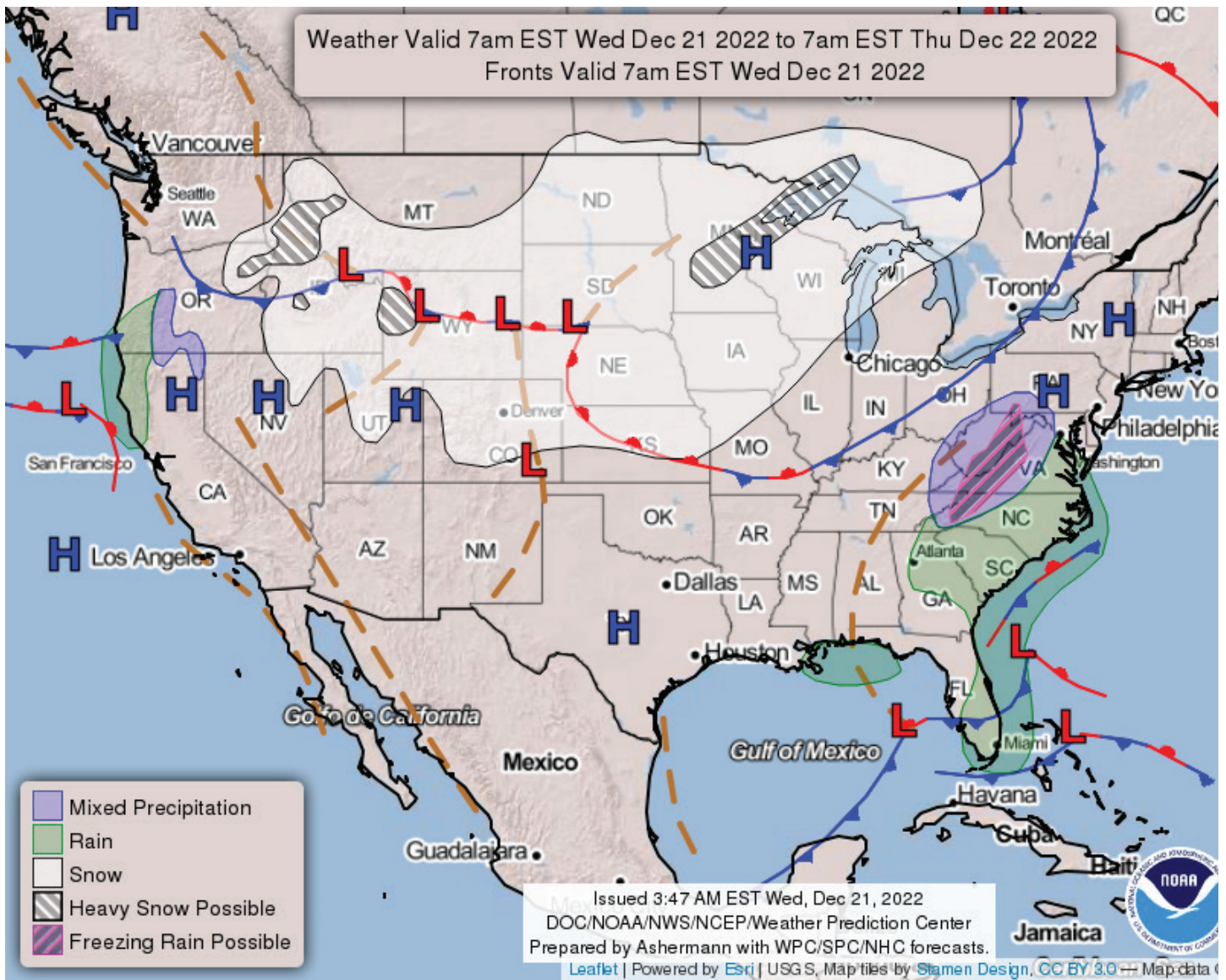
Precip to date in Dec.: 1.85

Average Precip to date: 21.61

Precip Year to Date: 19.35

Sunset Tonight: 4:53:40 PM

Sunrise Tomorrow: 8:07:59 AM



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Today in Weather History

December 21, 1968: A blizzard visited South Dakota and Minnesota on the 21st and 22nd. Snowfall during the storm was generally 1 to 2 inches in the western part of South Dakota, to 5 to 10 inches in Minnesota. More than 12 inches of snow was reported from Artichoke Lake in Big Stone County to the southeast in Minnesota and up to 18 inches in east-central and southeast South Dakota. The snowfall, on top of an already-existing deep snowpack, was whipped by 30-50 mph winds causing reduced visibility to near zero, created snowdrifts up to 10 feet or more. Almost all forms of traffic were blocked on highways for Sunday and blocked most of the secondary roads as well as some other roads for nearly a week.

Early blizzard warnings and the fact that the blizzard occurred late Saturday through Sunday, the highway patrol reported a minimum of accidents and stranded travelers. Most schools were closed, and other activities were curtailed. Many utility lines were down. Record December snowfall amounts were recorded for more than 40 locations in Minnesota. Artichoke Lake in Big Stone County received 16 inches of snow from this storm, by far its largest daily snowfall on record for any month of the year. Clear Lake, in Deuel County, measured 18 inches of snow, which also remains the most substantial daily snowfall on record for any month in that location. Watertown and Bryant received nine inches from this blizzard, while Castlewood reported seven inches.

1892: From December 21st to the 23rd, Portland, Oregon saw 26 inches of snow!

1929 - An exceptional storm produced snow from the Middle Rio Grande Valley of Texas to southern Arkansas. The storm produced 26 inches of snow at Hillsboro TX, 18 inches at El Dorado AR, and 14 inches at Bossier LA. (21st-22nd) (David Ludlum) (The Weather Channel)

1964 - A great warm surge from the Pacific Ocean across Oregon and northern California brought torrential rains on a deep snow cover resulting in record floods. (David Ludlum)

1967: An F4 tornado traveled 33 miles across Iron and Washington Counties in Missouri during an unusual time of day, 12:45 to 1:20 am. The tornado killed 3 and injured 52 others. Most of the intense damage occurred in the town of Potosi, about 55 miles southwest of St. Louis. The tornado swept through the business district, destroying City Hall, library, a large supermarket, and a shopping center complex. Northeast of town, two people were killed when their home was swept from its foundation. The Red Cross reported 24 homes and trailers, along with 14 businesses destroyed. 81 other houses and trailers were damaged.

1987 - High winds continued along the eastern slopes of the Rockies. During the morning hours winds gusted to 64 mph at Cheyenne WY, and reached 97 mph near Boulder CO. Gale force winds prevailed across the Great Lakes Region. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - Seven cities in the eastern U.S. reported record high temperatures for the date, including Charleston SC with a reading of 78 degrees. A storm in the northwestern U.S. produced 22 inches of snow at Idaho City ID in two days, and up to two feet of snow at Happy Camp CA. Ski resorts in Idaho reported three to six feet of snow on the ground. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 - Forty cities in the north central U.S., including thirteen in Iowa, reported record low temperatures for the date. Havre and Jordan, MT, tied for honors as the cold spot in the nation with morning lows of 43 degrees below zero, and the temperature remained close to 40 degrees below zero through the daylight hours. Dickinson ND reported a morning low of 33 degrees below zero and a wind chill reading of 86 degrees below zero. The high for the date of 16 degrees below zero at Sioux Falls SD was December record for that location. (The National Weather Summary)

1998 - Cold air spread into the southern San Joaquin Valley of California. For the next four nights, temperatures in the agricultural portions of Fresno, Tulare, and Kern counties dropped below 28 degrees for several hours at a time. In some locations, temperatures dipped into the teens. The California citrus industry suffered more than \$600 million in damages due to the extreme cold.

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Daily Devotionals

Seeds of Hope

CHRIST'S DAY

On Mother's Day, we focus all of our attention on our Mothers, recalling and remembering how much they struggled to raise us. Lovingly we shower gifts on them, purchase cards that describe her many sacrifices for us, and the unending care she gave to us. She deserves all of the attention and recognition we can give her.

On Father's Day, we turn our thoughts to "Dad" – what he has done for us and then express our gratitude to him for the time he spent with us. We recall his efforts to teach us to throw a ball, catch a pass, cast a fishing line or attend a special event. He, too, deserves all the attention and recognition we can give him.

We also give recognition and attention to our Grandparents, to brothers and sisters, aunts and uncles and friends and relatives on their special days.

But what will we do that is really special or unique to show our appreciation and gratitude for Jesus on His day this year?

Will there be an envelope under the tree with a special love-offering that recognizes His importance in our lives? Will it match the amount we gave others?

Will we sacrifice some of our time to show God's love by being with those who would otherwise be alone and lonely on His day?

Will we share a meal with someone who is hungry? Give some clothes to those who are cold and have little? Spend time reading His story to children?

"In as much as you have done it to the least of these, you have done it unto Me!"

Prayer: Take Your peace from us Father, until and unless we show others Your love on Your day. Why? "In as much as you have done to others, you did to Me." In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: Matthew 25:40 And the King will answer and say to them, "Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me."



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

SD Lottery

By The Associated Press undefined

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

Mega Millions

03-04-33-36-52, Mega Ball: 17, Megaplier: 4

(three, four, thirty-three, thirty-six, fifty-two; Mega Ball: seventeen; Megaplier: four)

Estimated jackpot: \$510,000,000

Powerball

Estimated jackpot: 170,000,000

Tuesday's Scores

The Associated Press

BOYS PREP BASKETBALL=

Aberdeen Christian 58, Mobridge-Pollock 48

Arlington 66, Oldham-Ramona/Rutland 56

Belle Fourche 49, Wall 47

Burke 57, Scotland 39

Canistota 58, Bridgewater-Emery 30

Canton 64, Alcester-Hudson 37

Castlewood 70, Flandreau 51

Centerville 65, Gayville-Volin 23

Chamberlain 60, Kimball/White Lake 54

Clark/Willow Lake 54, Florence/Henry 31

Elk Point-Jefferson 59, Viborg-Hurley 53

Freeman Academy/Marion 53, Tripp-Delmont/Armour 38

Gregory 58, North Central, Neb. 44

Harding County 50, Grant County/Mott-Regent, N.D. 43

Harrisburg 83, LeMars, Iowa 47

Highmore-Harrold 76, Wessington Springs 71

Howard 64, Colman-Egan 29

Iroquois/ Lake Preston Co-op 73, Estelline/Hendricks 64

Langford 60, Wilmot 50

Leola/Frederick 60, Potter County 27

Madison 76, Deubrook 42

McCook Central/Montrose 48, Chester 37

Pierre 64, Watertown 46

Redfield 39, Sisseton 36

Sioux Falls Jefferson 71, Sioux Falls Lincoln 57

Sioux Falls Washington 64, Huron 55

Sioux Valley 92, Beresford 49

South Border, N.D. 69, North Central Co-Op 20

Tiospa Zina Tribal 65, Webster 36

Tri-Valley 50, Vermillion 48

Wagner 62, Menno 44

Wolsey-Wessington 65, Faulkton 27

Wynot, Neb. 52, Irene-Wakonda 40

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POSTPONEMENTS AND CANCELLATIONS=
Sturgis Brown vs. Aberdeen Central, ppd. to Dec 20th.

GIRLS PREP BASKETBALL=

Belle Fourche 53, Wall 48
Canton 63, Alcester-Hudson 44
Centerville 54, Gayville-Volin 26
Dell Rapids St. Mary 67, Waverly-South Shore 15
Elkton-Lake Benton 48, Baltic 45
Florence/Henry 61, Clark/Willow Lake 41
Garretson 60, Dell Rapids 45
Gregory 41, North Central, Neb. 40
Hartington Cedar Catholic, Neb. 51, Dakota Valley 45
Hettinger/Scranton, N.D. 47, Harding County 46
Hot Springs 35, New Underwood 33
Howard 58, Colman-Egan 56
Jones County 53, Stanley County 25
Kimball/White Lake 59, Chamberlain 51
McCook Central/Montrose 61, Chester 55
Mobridge-Pollock 51, Aberdeen Christian 12
Mt. Vernon/Plankinton 42, Sanborn Central/Woonsocket 27
New England, N.D. 53, Lemmon 51, OT
Parkston 50, Parker 23
Pierre 51, Watertown 29
Potter County 52, Leola/Frederick 49
Rapid City Central 53, Douglas 18
Scotland 40, Burke 31
Sioux Falls Washington 62, Huron 31
Sioux Valley 60, Beresford 54
Sisseton 64, Redfield 34
St. Thomas More 58, Hill City 30
Tea Area 61, Sioux Falls Jefferson 55
Tripp-Delmont/Armour 42, Freeman/ Marion/ Freeman Academy Co-op 35
Vermillion 58, Tri-Valley 39
Viborg-Hurley 63, Elk Point-Jefferson 37
Wagner 70, Menno 17
Wessington Springs 58, Highmore-Harrold 39
Wolsey-Wessington 64, Faulkton 32
Wynot, Neb. 48, Irene-Wakonda 37
POSTPONEMENTS AND CANCELLATIONS=
Aberdeen Central vs. Sturgis Brown, ppd. to Dec 20th.

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

Jackley looks to take momentum into South Dakota AG's office

By STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press

SIoux FALLS, S.D. (AP) — South Dakota's next attorney general, Marty Jackley, is looking to build momentum as he prepares to be sworn into office, announcing his top staff picks on Tuesday and laying out a list of priorities for the upcoming legislative session.

Jackley, a Republican, previously held the attorney general's office for nearly a decade and mounted an effort to take his old job back in 2021, while former Attorney General Jason Ravnsborg faced impeachment over his role in a fatal car crash. After Jackley won the Republican nomination this year, he did not face an opponent in the election.

He is looking to bring experienced staff with him as he returns to the post as the state's top law enforcement officer. He announced Tuesday that his eight-member leadership team will include Mark Barnett, another former state attorney general and former judge. Barnett has also held a position as a state circuit court judge.

Jackley told The Associated Press that he is also looking to bolster the ranks of the Division of Criminal Investigation, as well as prosecutors with his office, after the Division of Criminal Investigation had roughly 17 positions unfilled following Ravnsborg's tenure.

"It's an experienced, dedicated group of men and women that are prepared to face the challenges in front of us," he said. "And those challenges certainly include addiction; they certainly include addressing some of the ongoing consumer and privacy issues that we face; it includes violent crime that's increasing, particularly in our larger municipalities."

Jackley said he will also be proposing legislation in next year's legislative session, including criminal penalties for violations of election law, protections for confidential records and enhanced penalties for crimes that threaten the life of law enforcement officers.

He also acknowledged he may be called into a debate in the Legislature over whether the state is statutorily required to reduce its sales tax percentage after Jackley in 2018 mounted a successful argument before the U.S. Supreme Court that online retailers had to collect state sales tax. Some Republican lawmakers have argued that the state must reduce its sales tax by a fraction of a percentage point once certain revenue thresholds from online retail tax are hit, but state law on the subject is vague.

Jackley said "that's a large legal question that would likely need to be triggered by a request for an attorney general opinion" from the Legislature. He added that he would form a committee in his office to research and debate the statute, and then he would make the final decision.

But that potential debate could also put him at the center of a political fight involving lawmakers and the governor over tax cuts. Jackley and Gov. Kristi Noem faced off in a hard-fought Republican primary in 2018, but they seemed to mend their relationship earlier this year by offering each other mutual endorsements.

And for now, Jackley would rather that decision be made by lawmakers. He said: "Whether or not those funds are returned to the taxpayers is really a legislative function."

Ethics board dismisses Noem plane case, says law is unclear

By STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — South Dakota's ethics board on Tuesday dismissed a complaint against Gov. Kristi Noem for using state government aircraft to attend events hosted by political organizations because state law does not define what is meant by "state business."

The three retired judges on the Government Accountability Board evaluating the complaint met for roughly 30 minutes in a closed-door meeting after they received the results of a Division of Criminal Investigation probe into trips the Republican governor took in 2019. They then unanimously voted to dismiss the complaint.

Former Judge David Gienapp, one of the board members, said "there may or may not have been actions contrary" to the state law that bars government aircraft from being used only while conducting "state business," but the law doesn't contain a definition of what that is.

"It is not felt that the board has authority to establish a definition of state business," he added and suggested that was the purview of the Legislature.

Noem, a potential 2024 White House contender, had used the state plane six times in 2019 to fly to out-of-state events hosted by political organizations, including the Republican Governors Association, Republican Jewish Coalition, Turning Point USA and the National Rifle Association. Raw Story, an online news site, first

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reported the trips, which the governor's office defended as part of her work as the state's "ambassador" to bolster the state's economy.

Noem that year had also blurred the lines between official travel and attending family events. Family members joined her on several trips, but her office has said that was keeping in line with a precedent set by former governors.

Noem's office did not immediately respond to a request for comment on the board's ruling Tuesday, but her office has previously derided the complaints as nothing more than an attempt at political retribution.

Former Attorney General Jason Ravensborg, a Republican, had filed the complaint on the plane to the state's Government Accountability Board as he faced pressure from the governor to resign over his conduct surrounding a 2020 fatal car crash. He was impeached and removed from office in June, but continued to pursue the allegations as a private citizen.

The board in August had requested the state's Division of Criminal Investigation to probe the governor's trips.

Hughes County State's Attorney Jessica LaMie, who oversaw the investigation, announced in October that they found "no basis" to pursue charges on the allegations that Noem had misused the state plane or that the plane's flight records had been altered.

The law regarding state plane use was passed as a ballot measure in 2006 in response to scrutiny of plane travel by then-Gov. Mike Rounds, who attended events such as his son's away basketball games while on trips for other official business. At the time, Rounds, now a U.S. senator, used political funds to reimburse the state for those trips, as well as travel to political events.

EXPLAINER: Undoing of Roe quickly shifts abortion in states

By GEOFF MULVIHILL Associated Press

Anti-abortion groups hoped and strategized for decades for a U.S. Supreme Court ruling that was delivered in June, ending a court-protected right to abortion after nearly 50 years.

The fallout was immediate and far-reaching — and it's not over yet.

The midyear ruling overturning the 1973 Roe v. Wade decision, which established the right to abortion, shaped the national political agenda for the rest of the year and put abortion access in flux. The shifts are expected to keep coming as lawmakers, voters and judges weigh in.

After the Dobbs v. Jackson ruling that left abortion up to the states, bans went into effect in some states. Elsewhere, officials enacted new protections for abortion.

With the bans, a generation of court battles has emerged over whether they square with state constitutions.

In a half-dozen statewide ballot measures this year, voters sided with abortion rights.

Here's a look at what has changed, what hasn't and what remains unclear six months after the landmark Dobbs v. Jackson decision.

THE BANS

Abortion is currently considered illegal at all stages of pregnancy, with various exceptions, in 13 states: Alabama, Arkansas, Idaho, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, Missouri, Oklahoma, South Dakota, Tennessee, Texas, West Virginia and Wisconsin.

In Georgia, it's banned once cardiac activity can be detected — around six weeks, which is before women often realize they're pregnant.

Some of the bans are in "trigger laws" that were passed years ago in anticipation of a ruling like Dobbs. Some are in laws that predate Roe v. Wade.

Lawmakers in Indiana and West Virginia adopted new bans after this year's ruling. Enforcement of Indiana's is on hold because of a legal challenge.

In both states, there was little question about whether bans would be adopted, but there were emotional debates over whether to include exceptions in the cases of rape and incest. Both states ultimately included those exceptions — and for abortions in the case of medical emergencies.

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Bans in Arizona, Montana, North Dakota, Ohio, South Carolina, Utah and Wyoming are also not in effect, at least for now, as courts decide whether they can be enforced in the future.

Even in places where lawmakers favor bans, debates remain about which exceptions should be included. So far, states have been allowing later abortions to protect the woman's physical health but not always her mental health.

THE PROTECTIONS

Before and soon after the Supreme Court ruling, Democratic-controlled state and local governments took steps to protect abortion access.

They have enacted laws and signed executive orders to protect those who provide abortions for out-of-state patients from extradition, bar state employees from helping abortion-related investigations from other states, pay for more security at abortion clinics and provide funding for abortion.

In November, voters in California, Michigan and Vermont approved ballot measures to declare that the right to abortion is protected by the state constitutions. Voters in Kansas — who went to the polls in August — and Kentucky rejected measures that would have done the opposite and found that the state constitutions did not ensure abortion rights. Montana voters rejected a ballot measure that would have forced medical workers to intercede in the rare case of a baby born after an attempted abortion.

In December, New Jersey officials announced a grant to train more medical professionals to provide abortions.

THE IMPACT

It will take time to assess the full impact of the Dobbs ruling through data, including the number of abortions and births.

The number of abortions has dropped nearly to zero in states with bans and risen in neighboring states, according to a survey conducted for the Society of Family Planning. Overall, the study found, the number of abortions fell.

But the survey does not include self-managed abortions received outside of clinics, medical offices, hospitals and virtual providers.

Doctors and researchers say that the number of requests for medication abortion pills increased dramatically after a draft version of the Dobbs ruling was leaked in May.

It won't be clear for at least several months, though, whether the number of births has changed since the ruling.

Getting abortions has become increasingly difficult for women who live in states with bans, in some cases resulting in increased medical complications and in others forcing residents to travel for hours or even days to reach a facility that can provide abortions legally.

The ruling also sparked other changes to life in the U.S.: For some medical students, it meant that residencies in liberal states became a priority. Teens and parents considered birth control anew. Democrats intent on protecting abortion rights fared better than expected in elections across the U.S. in November, even retaining control of the U.S. Senate.

And concerns that Supreme Court rulings could undo other court-mandated protections regarding marriage, sex and contraception and led to passage of a new federal law further protecting same-sex and interracial marriages.

THE ENFORCEMENT

There have been no well-publicized criminal charges alleging violations of abortion bans since they were put into place — and maybe none at all.

"It could be a situation where the fear of being prosecuted is going to be the bigger impact than actual prosecutions," said Mon Sahaf, a deputy director of Vera Institute of Justice.

Clinics in states with bans have closed or stopped providing abortions. Some have been extra cautious, halting abortions when the legality in the state in question was uncertain.

Sahaf says enforcement of abortion laws is tricky because it requires using medical records and could be seen as unfair in many communities.

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Prosecutors have expressed reluctance about taking on the cases. Ninety of them across the country pledged as Dobbs was announced that they would not enforce abortion bans. The group includes those in some of the most populous jurisdictions in states with bans or deep restrictions, including the district attorneys who oversee prosecutions in Birmingham, Alabama; Atlanta; Columbus, Ohio; Dallas; Milwaukee; and Nashville, Tennessee.

That doesn't mean there are no legal repercussions for those who seek or provide abortion.

The attorney general in Indiana last month asked the state's medical licensing board to discipline a doctor who spoke publicly about providing an abortion to a 10-year-old rape victim who traveled from Ohio after that state's abortion ban took effect.

THE ASSISTANCE

Abortion funds have been around for decades, largely as scrappy volunteer-run groups with small budgets trying to help women pay for abortions.

The Dobbs ruling inspired more contributions to the groups, but also brought them more challenges and a bigger political and legal role, including suing over abortion bans in Texas.

The groups are now helping women travel to other states for abortions, which increases transportation, lodging, child care and other costs.

"Rage giving" after the Supreme Court ruling helped make the groups less underfunded. Oaiaku Njoku, executive director of the National Network of Abortion Funds, said an influx of donations this year has allowed some funds to bring on their first paid staff members.

Destini Spaeth, director of the North Dakota WIN Abortion Access Fund, said enough money rolled in at the fund in May, when a version of the Dobbs ruling was leaked, and June, when the final decision was released, to provide a year's worth of services.

The fund, like others, pays for abortion care and related services such as transportation, lodging, medical testing and birth control.

At another fund, Atlanta-based ARC Southeast, interim Executive Director Jalessah Jackson said that because of bans in the region, her organization is getting fewer callers after Dobbs. But the costs for travel, child care and other services has risen largely from people needing to go farther for abortion care.

WHAT'S NEXT

With split partisan control in Washington, federal policy changes are unlikely in 2023. Even with Democrats in charge this year, President Joe Biden's administration's efforts to protect abortion hit roadblocks. Still, state lawmakers are looking to strengthen both abortion bans and protections.

Among bills already introduced for 2023 state legislative sessions are measures in Texas that would take tax incentives away from businesses that help employees obtain abortions and in Missouri and Montana to ban bringing pills used to induce abortion into the state.

On the other side, there are pushes in red states including South Carolina, South Dakota and Texas to amend the state constitutions to ensure a right to abortion and plans by Minnesota Democrats, who will control the legislature in January, to codify abortion protections in state law.

Holiday advice for home bartenders, plus 4 festive cocktails

By LOUISE DIXON Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — Looking to create a bit of winter luxury when tending bar at home this holiday season? London's top cocktail-makers have some tips.

"Christmas is a special time when you want to join with friends and family. And sometimes, the centerpiece of any happiness is to have a good drink," says Salvatore Calabrese, an Italian-born drinks expert and author who has been making cocktails at top hotels, bars and private clubs for over 40 years.

Currently at the cocktail bar Velvet, at London's five-star Corinthia hotel, Calabrese goes by the nickname "The Maestro."

And The Maestro's advice?

First, choose the right glassware.

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"The glass is the star. It's the canvas of the drink," he says. So if it looks elegant, things already feel festive.

Next, think about the quality of the ice and how it dilutes the drink.

"Remember, ice is like the heat for the chef when he is cooking," Calabrese says.

Cracked ice cubes that disintegrate in your palm are a no-go, as is crushed ice for Christmas. "It's not a Tiki night," he jokes. "It is about an elegant night, so make the effort and maybe you can make your own homemade ice."

Also, he advises, plan. Even prepare your cocktail in advance. Especially when a drink is a little complicated.

"Put it in the freezer or in the fridge, so it's nice and cold, so the only thing you have to do is to put it in a mixing glass or, to show off, put it in the shaker and shake," Calabrese says.

Jake Burger, co-owner of The Distillery, a 19th century pub and gin distillery in London's Notting Hill neighborhood, says that knowing when to shake and when to stir is something a lot of home mixologists get wrong.

"It's fun using a cocktail shaker, so people think we should shake everything," he jokes. But it's only really needed when using fruit juices, egg whites or cream, he says. Otherwise, stirring is best.

"As a general rule, if all the ingredients are alcoholic, you probably don't need to shake it," says Burger. "So as an Englishman, it pains me to say it, but James Bond got it wrong. A martini should definitely be stirred, not shaken."

Liana Oster, bar director at The NoMad Hotel London, suggests adding some seasonal luxury by decorating your glasses. She creates a peppermint-bark paint by melting equal parts cacao butter and white chocolate, with a few drops of peppermint essence added in. She then paints a swirl on one side of a cold glass, sprinkles some crushed-up candy cane on it, and then places it in the fridge until needed.

This works particularly well with a heavier cocktail with a lot of body, as it will "mellow it out" on the palate, Oster says.

Alex Girvan, brand ambassador for Masons of Yorkshire, has more ideas on garnishes. For his chocolate orange martini, Girvan explains how he creates simple yet delicious dipped-chocolate candied fruits.

First, dehydrate orange slices by placing them on a baking sheet, sprinkling them with a bit of brown or fine granulated sugar (known in Britain as caster sugar), and then putting them in the oven on low heat for about an hour, until dried out. Then melt some dark chocolate and dip the slices. Place them in the fridge until hard.

To serve, balance them on the side of the glass.

Girvan also suggests a sharing platter of garnishes, "almost like a charcuterie board." By laying out rosemary, orange peel and lemon zest on sticks, "everybody can just pick the one that they like and pop it into their drink, and maybe they'll try something that they've never had before," he says.

"Just make a little effort," Calabrese sums up, "because really, a great cocktail is a great journey from the beginning.

"And when you taste something nice and delicious, the world seems to be a better place."

Four cocktail recipes:

—

WINTERTIME NEGRONI, from The Distillery

1 ounce London Dry Gin

1 ounce Campari

0.5 ounces sweet vermouth

0.5 ounces sloe gin

Mix ingredients together over ice and stir. Serve over fresh ice and garnish with an orange wedge studded with cloves.

—

SCROOGE SOUR, from Common Decency, at The NoMad Hotel London

1 egg white

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0.75 ounces simple syrup
0.75 ounces lemon juice
2 ounces Irish whiskey
0.75 ounces of mulled wine

Pour the egg white into the larger tin of your shaker, and the simple syrup, the Irish whiskey and lemon juice into the smaller tin. Dry shake together in the shaker to emulsify the egg and the alcohol.

Then hard shake with ice and pour over a strainer into your glass.

Add 0.75 ounces mulled wine slowly into the corner of the glass, and then sprinkle edible gold dust over the half of the surface to cover and garnish.

—
TRUFFLE SAZERAC, from Velvet, at Corinthia London

0.8 ounces Bourbon
1 ounce Cognac

Homemade truffle syrup (you can make your own by heating a few drops of truffle oil with a teaspoon of sugar)

A few drops of orange bitters

Mix ingredients together over ice and stir. Serve over fresh ice and garnish with a slice of fresh truffle.

—
MASON'S CHOCOLATE ORANGE MARTINI

2 ounces chocolate vodka
1 ounce triple sec

Mix ingredients together over ice and stir. Serve in a martini glass and garnish with a chocolate-dipped, candied orange segment.

Zelenskyy to meet Biden, address Congress as war rages on

By ZEKE MILLER, LISA MASCARO and E. EDUARDO CASTILLO Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy was making his way to Washington on Wednesday for a summit with President Joe Biden and to address Congress in his first known trip outside the country since Russia's invasion began in February.

Zelenskyy said on his Twitter account that the visit was "to strengthen resilience and defense capabilities" of Ukraine and discuss cooperation between his country and the U.S with Biden.

The highly sensitive trip is taking place after 10 months of a brutal war that has seen tens of thousands killed and wounded on both sides of the conflict, along with devastation for Ukrainian civilians. It also comes as U.S. lawmakers are set to vote on a year-end spending package that includes about \$45 billion in emergency assistance to Ukraine and as the Pentagon prepares to send Patriot surface-to-air missiles to the country to defend itself.

Zelenskyy headed abroad after making a daring and dangerous trip Tuesday to what he called the hottest spot on the 1,300-kilometer (800-mile) front line of the conflict, the city of Bakhmut in Ukraine's contested Donetsk province. He praised Ukrainian troops for their "courage, resilience and strength" as artillery boomed in the background.

Poland's private broadcaster TVN24 said Zelenskyy crossed into Poland early Wednesday on his way to the U.S. The station showed footage of what appeared to be Zelenskyy arriving at a train station and being escorted to a motorcade. TVN24 said the video, which was partially blurred for security reasons, was shot Wednesday morning in Przemysl, a Polish border town that has been the arrival point for many refugees fleeing the war.

White House press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre, in a statement Tuesday night, said that Biden looks forward to Zelenskyy's visit and that the address to Congress will demonstrate "the strong, bipartisan support for Ukraine."

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"The visit will underscore the United States' steadfast commitment to supporting Ukraine for as long as it takes, including through the provision of economic, humanitarian, and military assistance," she said.

Zelenskyy was scheduled to meet with Biden at the White House in the afternoon and then join Biden for a news conference in the East Room. He was expected to address Congress in the evening.

In her invitation to Zelenskyy to address a joint meeting of Congress at the U.S. Capitol, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi said "the fight for Ukraine is the fight for democracy itself" and that lawmakers "look forward to hearing your inspiring message of unity, resilience and determination."

U.S. and Ukrainian officials have made clear they don't envision an imminent resolution to the war and are preparing for fighting to continue for some time. Biden has repeated that while the U.S. will arm and train Ukraine, American forces will not be directly engaged in the conflict.

Biden and Zelenskyy first discussed the idea of a visit to Washington during their most recent phone call, on Dec. 11, and a formal invitation followed three days later, said a senior U.S. administration official, briefing reporters on the condition of anonymity because of the sensitive nature of the visit. Zelenskyy accepted the invitation on Friday and it was confirmed on Sunday, when the White House began coordinating with Pelosi to arrange the congressional address.

The White House consulted with Zelenskyy on security for his departure from Ukraine and travel to Washington, including the risk of Russian action while Zelenskyy was briefly out of the country, the official added, declining to detail the measures taken to safeguard the Ukrainian leader. The official said the U.S. expected Russia to continue its attacks on Ukrainian forces and civilian infrastructure targets despite the trip.

The tranche of U.S. funding pending before Congress would be the biggest American infusion of assistance yet to Ukraine — even more than Biden's \$37 billion emergency request — and is meant to ensure that support flows to the war effort for months to come.

On Wednesday, the U.S. was also set to announce that it will send a major package of \$1.8 billion in military aid to Ukraine that will for the first time include a Patriot missile battery and precision guided bombs for its fighter jets, U.S. officials said.

The aid signals an expansion by the U.S. in the kinds of advanced weaponry it will send to Ukraine to bolster its air defenses against what has been an increasing barrage of Russian missiles in recent weeks. The package will include about \$1 billion in weapons from Pentagon stocks and \$800 million in funding through the Ukraine Security Assistance Initiative, officials said.

The decision to send the Patriot battery comes despite threats from Russia's Foreign Ministry that the delivery of the advanced surface-to-air missile system would be considered a provocative step and that the Patriot battery and any crews accompanying it would be a legitimate target for Moscow's military.

It's unclear when the Patriot battery would arrive on the front lines in Ukraine, since U.S. troops will have to train Ukrainian forces on how to use the high-tech system. The training could take several weeks and is expected to be done in Germany. To date, all training of Ukraine's forces by the U.S. and its Western allies has taken place in European countries.

The visit comes at an important moment as the White House braces for greater resistance when Republicans take control of the House in January and give more scrutiny to aid for Ukraine. GOP leader Kevin McCarthy has said his party's lawmakers will not write a "blank check" for Ukraine.

Biden and Zelenskyy frequently have talked by phone as the White House arranges new tranches of military assistance for Ukraine. The calls have been mostly warm, with Biden praising Ukraine for remaining steadfast against the Russians and Zelenskyy thanking the U.S. president for support.

The one exception was a June phone call soon after Biden notified Zelenskyy that an additional \$1 billion package was headed to Ukraine. Zelenskyy didn't miss a beat in ticking off the additional assistance he said Ukraine needed.

That irked Biden, who underscored to Zelenskyy the American people's generosity. But the brief moment of tension hasn't caused any lasting difficulty, according to officials familiar with the episode.

Pelosi, who visited Zelenskyy earlier this year in Kyiv, encouraged lawmakers to be on hand for Wednesday evening's address by the Ukrainian leader.

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"We are ending a very special session of the 117th Congress with legislation that makes progress for the American people as well as support for our Democracy," Pelosi wrote Tuesday in a letter to colleagues. "Please be present for a very special focus on Democracy Wednesday night."

Later at the Capitol she said of Ukrainians, "They are fighting for democracy for all of us."

Russia's invasion, which began Feb. 24, has lost momentum. The illegally annexed provinces of Donetsk, Kherson, Luhansk and Zaporizhzhia remain fiercely contested.

With the fighting in the east at a stalemate, Moscow has used missiles and drones to attack Ukraine's power equipment, hoping to leave people without electricity as freezing weather sets in.

In a video released by his office from the Bakhmut visit, Zelenskyy was handed a Ukrainian flag and alluded to delivering it to U.S. leaders.

"The guys handed over our beautiful Ukrainian flag with their signatures for us to pass on," Zelenskyy said in the video. "We are not in an easy situation. The enemy is increasing its army. Our people are braver and need more powerful weapons. We will pass it on from the boys to the Congress, to the president of the United States. We are grateful for their support, but it is not enough. It is a hint — it is not enough."

For his part, Putin on Tuesday hailed the "courage and self-denial" of his forces in Ukraine — but he did so at a ceremony in an opulent and glittering hall at the Kremlin in Moscow, not on the battlefield.

At the Kremlin ceremony, Putin presented awards to the Moscow-appointed heads of the four illegally annexed regions of Ukraine. In a video address honoring Russia's military and security agencies, he praised the security personnel deployed to the four regions, saying that "people living there, Russian citizens, count on being protected by you."

Putin acknowledged the challenges faced by the security personnel.

"Yes, it's difficult for you," he said, adding that the situation in the regions is "extremely difficult."

1 woman's story of rape convinced all Weinstein trial jurors

By ANDREW DALTON AP Entertainment Writer

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Most of the jurors at Harvey Weinstein's Los Angeles trial were ready to convict him of crimes related to three of the four women he was charged with raping or sexually assaulting.

Yet after weeks of deliberation the eight men and four women voted unanimously to convict him of crimes against only one: a Russian-born model and actor known as Jane Doe 1. She lived in Rome and was visiting California for a film festival at age 34 in 2013, when she said the now-disgraced film mogul appeared uninvited at her Los Angeles hotel room door in the middle of the night.

The jurors were released from service and allowed to talk publicly after more than two months Tuesday, when they could not reach a unanimous decision on two aggravating factors that might have made for a higher sentence. Their deliberations took nine days spanning more than two weeks, but those who spoke to reporters said the talks were never contentious.

Weinstein was found guilty of one count of rape and two counts of sexual assault against Jane Doe 1. He now faces up to 18 years in prison in California to go with a 23-year sentence for a rape and sexual assault conviction in New York.

Jurors said that Jane Doe 1's composure, and the fact that she did not contact Weinstein after he raped her, allowed the divided group to reach consensus on her accusations.

"I thought Jane Doe 1 was very convincing in her story," said one juror, a 62-year-old man who works in banking and only provided his first name, Michael, because he sought to maintain privacy amid the publicity surrounding the case.

The physical and technical evidence surrounding Jane Doe 1 was some of the thinnest at the trial, but jurors were told that under the law, if they found an accuser's story credible, that alone could be enough to convict.

They acquitted Weinstein on a count of sexual battery against a massage therapist. They were deadlocked, with 10 of 12 voting for guilt, on a count of sexual battery against model Lauren Young; and voting 8-4 in favor of conviction on rape and sexual assault counts involving Jennifer Siebel Newsom, a documentary

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filmmaker and wife of California Gov. Gavin Newsom.

Jane Doe 1 only one among them who had no further direct dealings with Weinstein or his representatives after the incident. She testified she had barely known who he was, having been introduced only briefly at the film festival, and wanted nothing from him. Others, including Siebel Newsom, had friendly email exchanges with Weinstein or sought out future meetings after their incidents, a point the defense pounded in their cross-examinations and closing arguments.

That resonated with some jurors.

Michael said he voted to convict on the Jane Doe 1 counts, but reluctantly voted to acquit on the counts involving Siebel Newsom. The difference, he said, was the women's "subsequent action."

"In a 2 1/2 year period she had sent Mr. Weinstein over 35 emails," he said of Siebel Newsom. "She wanted access to Harvey Weinstein. It sounded like she wanted access to a lot of his resources. It raised a reasonable doubt in my mind."

Weinstein has repeatedly denied engaging in any non-consensual sex. His lawyers called some of the encounters in the charges consensual and others flat-out fabricated, including the story told by Jane Doe 1. They pointed out that prosecutors had not even produced independent evidence to place Weinstein at her hotel.

"Jane Doe 1 is lying. Period," Weinstein lawyer Alan Jackson said in his closing argument.

One juror suggested that the broad statement was undermined by defense arguments that engaged with the details of Jane Doe 1's account.

"I think Jackson's last comment where Harvey just wasn't there, hurt him," said the juror, Arnold Esqueda, who works as director of security for the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power. "They were defending all these things, and then they just say he's not there. Well they should have just said he's not there."

He said he and other jurors made that point to a "very old school" man on the jury who who "decided that he was going vote guilty on that one. He stayed pretty much not guilty on the rest."

While tearful at times, Jane Doe 1's testimony was restrained and straightforward in comparison to some that followed. She spoke slowly with a Russian accent, and made nearly no use of a translator on hand.

Esqueda said the intensely emotional testimony of Siebel Newsom, who was screaming through tears at times during her testimony, might have been too much for some fellow jurors. The panel was divided 6-6 on the counts involving her when he suggested getting a read-back of her testimony from the court reporter.

"She had a little drama," Esqueda said. "So I suggested let's re-read it, and I think after we read it it switched a couple of people in her favor, without the drama."

Changes over time in the massage therapist's story helped lead jurors to acquit on that count, Michael said.

The Associated Press does not typically name people who have said they were sexually abused, unless they come forward publicly or have given consent through their attorneys, as Young and Siebel Newsom have.

Judge Lisa Lench tentatively scheduled Weinstein's sentencing for Jan. 9 after his attorneys asked that it be done promptly.

But Lench said it might not happen so quickly given the issues surrounding the case, including prosecutors' pending decision on whether or not to retry the deadlocked counts.

"We'll need to consult the victims first and foremost," Deputy District Attorney Paul Thompson said.

He asked the judge if other Weinstein accusers, including some who testified against him at trial but were not part of the charges, and the women whose counts were deadlocked, might give victim impact statements at the sentencing.

Lench promptly rejected the idea.

"I'm not going to make this an open forum on all of the allegations that were presented in this trial," she said.

"So it'll just be Jane Doe 1 then," Thompson replied.

Afghan women weep as Taliban fighters enforce university ban

KABUL, Afghanistan (AP) — Taliban security forces in the Afghan capital on Wednesday enforced a higher education ban for women by blocking their access to universities, with video obtained by The Associated Press showing women weeping and consoling each other outside one campus in Kabul.

The country's Taliban rulers a day earlier ordered women nationwide to stop attending private and public universities effective immediately and until further notice. The Taliban-led administration has not given a reason for the ban or reacted to the fierce and swift global condemnation of it.

Journalists saw Taliban forces outside four Kabul universities Wednesday. The forces stopped some women from entering, while allowing others to go in and finish their work. They also tried to prevent any photography, filming and protests from taking place.

Rahimullah Nadeem, a spokesman for Kabul University, confirmed that classes for female students had stopped. He said some women were allowed to enter the campus for paperwork and administrative reasons, and that four graduation ceremonies were held Wednesday.

Members of an activist group called the Unity and Solidarity of Afghanistan Women gathered outside the private Edrak University in Kabul on Wednesday morning, chanting slogans in Dari.

"Do not make education political!" they said. "Once again university is banned for women, we do not want to be eliminated!"

Despite initially promising a more moderate rule respecting rights for women's and minorities, the Taliban have widely implemented their strict interpretation of Islamic law, or Sharia, since they seized power in August 2021.

They have banned girls from middle school and high school, barred women from most fields of employment and ordered them to wear head-to-toe clothing in public. Women are also banned from parks and gyms.

A letter shared by the spokesman for the Ministry of Higher Education, Ziaullah Hashmi, on Tuesday told private and public universities to implement the ban as soon as possible and to inform the ministry once the ban is in place.

The move is certain to hurt efforts by the Taliban to win recognition from potential international donors at a time when Afghanistan is mired in a worsening humanitarian crisis. The international community has urged Taliban leaders to reopen schools and give women their right to public space.

U.S. Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken said late Tuesday that no other country in the world bars women and girls from receiving an education.

"The Taliban cannot expect to be a legitimate member of the international community until they respect the rights of all in Afghanistan," he warned. "This decision will come with consequences for the Taliban."

Afghan political analyst Ahmad Saeedi said that the latest decision by the Taliban authorities may have closed the door to winning international acceptance.

"The issue of recognition is over," he said. "The world is now trying to find a alternative. The world tried to interact more but they (the Taliban) don't let the world talk to them about recognition."

Saeedi said he believes most Afghans favor female education because they consider learning to be a religious command contained in the Quran.

He said the decision to bar women from universities was likely made by a handful of senior Taliban figures, including the leader Hibatullah Akhunzada, who are based in the southwestern city of Kandahar, the birthplace of the Taliban movement.

He said the main center of power is Kandahar, rather than the Taliban-led government in Kabul, even if the ministers of justice, higher education and virtue and vice would also have been involved in the decision to ban women from universities.

U.N. experts said last month that the Taliban's treatment of women and girls in Afghanistan may amount to a crime against humanity and should be investigated and prosecuted under international law.

They said the Taliban actions against females deepened existing rights violations — already the "most draconian globally" — and may constitute gender persecution, which is a crime against humanity.

The Taliban authorities have rejected the allegation.

Tens of thousands wait at border for asylum limits to end

By MORGAN LEE, GIOVANNA DELL'ORTO and REBECCA SANTANA Associated Press

EL PASO, Texas (AP) — Migrants along the U.S. border with Mexico sought shelter from the cold early Wednesday as restrictions that prevented many from seeking asylum in the U.S. remained in place beyond their anticipated end.

The U.S. government asked the Supreme Court on Tuesday not to lift the limits before Christmas, in a filing a day after Chief Justice John Roberts issued a temporary order to keep the pandemic-era restrictions in place. Before Roberts issued that order, they had been slated to expire Wednesday.

Just after midnight, when Title 42 was supposed to be lifted, all was quiet on the banks of Rio Grande in El Paso where the Texas National Guard was posted. Hundreds of migrants had gathered by the concertina wire put up by the Texas National Guard but left earlier in the evening after being told by US officials to go to a gate to be processed in small groups.

First Sergeant Suzanne Ringle said one woman went into labor in the crowd on the riverbank and was assisted by Border Patrol agents. She added many children were among the crowd.

In the Mexican city of Juarez, across the border from El Paso, hundreds of migrants remained in line hoping that the restrictions would be lifted and they would be let through.

In Tijuana, which has an estimated 5,000 migrants staying in more than 30 shelters and many more renting rooms and apartments, the border was quiet Tuesday night as word spread among would-be asylum seekers that nothing had changed. Layered, razor-topped walls rising 30 feet along the border with San Diego make the area daunting for illegal crossings.

Under the restrictions, officials have expelled asylum-seekers inside the United States 2.5 million times, and turned away most people who requested asylum at the border, on grounds of preventing the spread of COVID-19 under a public health rule called Title 42. Both U.S. and international law guarantee the right to claim asylum.

The federal government also asked the Supreme Court to reject a last-minute effort by a group of conservative-leaning states to maintain the measure. It acknowledged that ending the restrictions will likely lead to "disruption and a temporary increase in unlawful border crossings," but said the solution is not to extend the rule indefinitely.

With the decision on what comes next going down to the wire, pressure is building in communities along both sides of the U.S.-Mexico border.

In El Paso, Democratic Mayor Oscar Leeser warned that shelters across the border in Ciudad Juárez were packed to capacity, with an estimated 20,000 migrants prepared to cross into the U.S.

At one point late Tuesday, some migrants were allowed to enter in batches through a gate in the border wall between two bridges that connect downtown El Paso with Ciudad Juarez, which is not uncommon at this spot on the border. Word that the gate was opening sent hundreds of people scrambling along the concrete banks of the Rio Grande, leaving smoldering campfires behind.

The city rushed to expand its ability to accommodate more migrants by converting large buildings into shelters, as the Red Cross brings in 10,000 cots. Local officials also hope to relieve pressure on shelters by chartering buses to other large cities in Texas or nearby states, bringing migrants a step closer to relatives and sponsors in coordination with nonprofit groups.

"We will continue to be prepared for whatever is coming through," Leeser said.

Texas National Guard members, deployed by the state to El Paso this week, used razor wire to cordon off a gap in the border fence along a bank of the Rio Grande that became a popular crossing point for migrants who waded through shallow waters to approach immigration officials in recent days. They used a loudspeaker to announce in Spanish that it's illegal to cross there.

Texas said it was sending 400 National Guard personnel to the border city after local officials declared a state of emergency. Leeser said the declaration was aimed largely at protecting vulnerable migrants,

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while a statement from the Texas National Guard said the deployment included forces used to “repel and turn-back illegal immigrants.”

In San Diego, a sense of normalcy returned to the nation’s busiest border crossing despite uncertainty leading up to Roberts’ decision. The San Ysidro Chamber of Commerce said it learned from U.S. Customs and Border Protection that the more modern, western half of the airport-sized pedestrian crossing would reopen to U.S.-bound travelers Wednesday at 6 a.m. The lanes, which lead to an upscale outlet mall, have been closed to almost all migrants since early 2020 to accommodate Title 42 processing.

The reopening comes “just in time for last-minute shoppers, visiting family members and those working during the holidays,” the chamber wrote to members. It said it didn’t know when the area would reopen to travelers going to Mexico from the United States.

Immigration advocates have said that the Title 42 restrictions, imposed under provisions of a 1944 health law, go against American and international obligations to people fleeing to the U.S. to escape persecution, and that the pretext is outdated as coronavirus treatments improve. They sued to end the use of Title 42; a federal judge sided with them in November and set the Dec. 21 deadline.

Conservative-leaning states appealed to the Supreme Court, arguing that an increased numbers of migrants would take a toll on public services such as law enforcement and health care and warned of an “unprecedented calamity” at the southern border. They said the federal government has no plan to deal with an increase in migrants.

The federal government opposed the appeal, and told the court Tuesday that it has marshaled more resources to the southern border in preparation for the end of Title 42. That includes more Border Patrol processing coordinators, more surveillance and increased security at ports of entry, according to President Joe Biden’s administration.

About 23,000 agents are currently deployed to the southern border, according to the White House.

“The solution to that immigration problem cannot be to extend indefinitely a public-health measure that all now acknowledge has outlived its public-health justification,” the Biden administration wrote in its brief to the Supreme Court.

Yet the government also asked the court to give it some time to prepare if it decides to allow the restrictions to be lifted. Should the Supreme Court act before Friday, the government wants the restrictions in place until the end of Dec. 27. If the court acts on Friday or later, the government wants the limits to remain until the second business day following such an order.

At a church-affiliated shelter in El Paso a few blocks from the border, the Rev. Michael Gallagher said local faith leaders have been trying to pool resources and open up empty space. On Tuesday, a gym at Sacred Heart Church gave shelter to 200 migrants — mostly women and children. Outside the church early Wednesday, dozens of people slept on the street.

Title 42 allows the government to expel asylum-seekers of all nationalities, but it’s disproportionately affected people from countries whose citizens Mexico has agreed to take: Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador and, more recently Venezuela, in addition to Mexico.

On the holidays, efforts to distract Ukrainian kids from war

By HANNA ARHIROVA Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — In a carpeted meeting room of what used to be a posh hotel, Ukrainian children are screaming with happiness at a performance put on for them and the joy of opening presents.

In a country where children have seen the horrors of a nearly 10-month war, there are people trying to bring some peace and happiness to them, at least for a moment during this holiday season in Ukraine.

The upscale Venice hotel on the outskirts of Kyiv is now a rehabilitation center housing children who have experienced the horrors of the Russian invasion.

“When it’s a holiday, it’s easier,” said Ksenia, a 12-year-old girl from Bakhmut, a city in eastern Ukraine that has been the epicenter of a fierce battle between the Russian and Ukrainian armies.

“We forget about the war. It’s easier to distract,” she added after a performance by actors, some dressed

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as Disney characters. The center's authorities asked not to use any child's last name for security reasons.

Ksenia was among the 62 children, between 6 and 12, celebrating Saint Nicholas' day on Monday. It's a traditional date when Ukrainian kids get presents and that marks the beginning of the winter holiday season.

"Why do our soldiers fight? For the sake of the future because without it, there will be nothing. And children are our future," said Artem Tatarinov, the director of the rehabilitation center. Here, he said, they have received children who instead of playing had to hide in a shelter to escape bombs and who have discovered grief when their relatives were killed.

UNICEF estimates that of the around 7 million Ukrainian children, at least 1.2 million are currently displaced within the country because of the war.

This center houses children for two weeks, and during that period they get therapeutic lessons and have sessions with psychologists to try to process the trauma of the war. "It is like a temporary rehabilitation from the war," said Alevtyna, a tutor, who refused to give her last name for security reasons.

She works with the children around the clock, sacrificing her own life, but also finding a safe place for herself. Like other mentors in the center, Alevtyna comes from eastern Ukraine, which is now under constant fire. Her native Kostyantynivka is just 23 kilometers (14 miles) from Bakhmut.

For children, Alevtyna said, the center can be a sort of an island of happiness, but it's not easy for them. "They often talk about the war, cry," she said. "Children are afraid to fall asleep, are afraid to turn off the light."

Over the past six months, the center has received more than 1,300 children from across the country.

"It is difficult to work like this when you see children who do not smile, when their childhood was taken away," Tatarinov, the center's director said. He mentioned that once he met a 12-year-old boy who discovered the headless body of his brother, 10 meters away from their house, after a mortar strike.

"This is impossible to forget, but we do everything we can," added Tatarinov.

That's why this week, he and the tutors tried to focus on the holidays. On Monday, the the performance brought cheer to the children for a little while.

"At least for an hour, but they can believe in miracles again, believe in goodness again, where fairy-tale heroes come," said Tetiana Hraban, head of the Golda Meir Institute of Civil Society, who helped to organize the performance.

The actors on the stage asked the children what they want for this holiday. The heartbreaking replies were shouted over each other: "A generator," "a power bank," "a house."

"Victory!," said one child, and all the others repeated it in a single shout, followed by applause.

'We will find you:' Russians hunt down Ukrainians on lists

By ERIKA KINETZ Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Three days after the first Russian bombs struck Ukraine, Andrii Kuprash, the head of a village north of Kyiv, walked into a forest near his home and began to dig. He didn't stop until he had carved out a shallow pit, big enough for a man like him. It was his just-in-case, a place to lie low if he needed.

He covered it with branches and went back home.

A week later, Kuprash got a call around 8 a.m. from an unknown number. A man speaking Russian asked if he was the village head. Something was amiss.

"No, you've got the wrong number," Kuprash lied. "We will find you anyway," the man responded. "It's better to cooperate with us." Kuprash grabbed some camping kit and his warmest coat and headed for his hole in the woods.

Kuprash — and others The Associated Press spoke with — had been quietly warned that they were targets for advancing Russian forces. Word went round in circles of influential Ukrainians: Don't sleep in your own home. Get rid of your phone. Get out of Ukraine.

The hunt was on.

In a deliberate, widespread campaign, Russian forces systematically targeted influential Ukrainians,

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nationally and locally, to neutralize resistance through detention, torture and executions, an Associated Press investigation has found. The strategy appears to violate the laws of war and could help build a case for genocide.

Russian troops hunted Ukrainians by name, using lists prepared with the help of their intelligence services. In the crosshairs were government officials, journalists, activists, veterans, religious leaders and lawyers.

The AP documented a sample of 61 cases across Ukraine, drawing on Russian lists of names obtained by Ukrainian authorities, photographic evidence of abuse, Russian media accounts and interviews with dozens of victims, family and friends, and Ukrainian officials and activists.

Some victims were held at detention sites, where they were interrogated, beaten and subjected to electric shocks, survivors said. Some ended up in Russia. Others died.

In three cases, Russians tortured people into informing on others. In three other cases, Russians seized family members, including a child, to exert pressure. The pattern was similar across the country, according to testimonies AP collected from occupied and formerly occupied territories around Kyiv, Kherson, Zaporizhzhia, Chernihiv and Donetsk regions.

"Clearly what you have here is the playbook of an authoritarian regime that wants to immediately decapitate the area and eliminate the leadership," said Stephen Rapp, a former U.S. ambassador-at-large for war crimes issues who is advising Ukraine on prosecutions.

The lists are part of growing evidence that shows much of the violence in Ukraine was planned rather than random. Russia has used brutality as a strategy of war, conceived and implemented within the command structures of its military and intelligence services. The Associated Press has also documented patterns of violence against civilians, including lethal "cleansing operations" along a front of the war commanded by a Russian general implicated in war crimes in Syria.

Led by the Federal Security Service (FSB), Russian intelligence spent months compiling hit lists before the Feb. 24 invasion, according to leaked U.S. intelligence and U.K. national security analysts.

Ukrainian intelligence indicates that the division of Russia's spy agency tasked with planning the subjugation and occupation of Ukraine — the Ninth Directorate of the FSB's Fifth Service — scaled up sharply in the summer of 2021. Agents categorized influential Ukrainians as either potential collaborators or unreliable elements to be intimidated or killed, according to the Royal United Services Institute, a prominent defense think tank in London.

"This political strategy of targeted killings was directed from a very high level within the Kremlin," said Jack Watling, a senior research fellow at RUSI.

This story is part of an AP/FRONTLINE investigation that includes the War Crimes Watch Ukraine tracker and the documentary "Putin's Attack on Ukraine: Documenting War Crimes," on PBS.

Those pre-war lists were just the beginning.

Russian leaders who had expected to sweep into Ukraine and seize control of a docile population quickly discovered they were wrong. One list begat another as Russia expanded its dragnet to ever-wider swaths of Ukrainian society, incorporating additional names from collaborators and seized government records and torturing captives into giving up other people.

AP obtained copies of five lists of 31 people Russians were hunting in Mykolaiv and Kherson regions. They offer a highly localized accounting — eight soldiers, seven veterans, seven apparent civilians and nine people accused of helping the Ukrainian military or intelligence services.

One man accused of having anti-Russian views and carrying out anti-Russian propaganda was on the list. So was a man who helped his son evacuate to Ukrainian territory in a motorboat. The lists, which were undated, included full names, as well as some nicknames, dates of birth and addresses.

The Kremlin declined to respond to AP's requests for comment, though a spokesman earlier called leaked U.S. intelligence about kill lists "absolute fiction."

It is not currently possible to document the full scale of abductions. The Center for Civil Liberties, a

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Ukrainian NGO that won the Nobel Peace Prize this year, has amassed more than 770 cases of civilian captives since Russia's February invasion.

Oleksandra Matviichuk the head of the group, emphasizes that these are the tip of the iceberg. Matviichuk recorded similar targeting of local elites by Russian-backed forces in Crimea and Ukraine's eastern Donbas region dating back to 2014.

But this time, as she documented more cases, she realized something had changed. Suddenly and surprisingly, even people who weren't influential leaders were being taken.

"Everybody can be a target. It shocked me," she said. "We were prepared for political persecution...We weren't prepared for terror."

DIG YOUR GRAVE

While Kuprash hid in his hole in the woods, more than a dozen Russian soldiers ransacked his house and held a knife to the throat of his 15-year-old son. They threatened to tear out his guts if he didn't give up his dad.

Father and son had set up a code: Call me "Tato" — dad — if everything is OK. Call me "Andrii" if there is trouble.

Surrounded by soldiers, his son went out to the garden and hollered "Andrii! Andrii! Andrii!" as loud as his voice would carry.

Three weeks later, Russians again came for Kuprash at his home. A commander sat him down at his kitchen table and, at gunpoint, promised him "a great life" in exchange for information about Ukrainian positions, as well as names of Ukrainian veterans and patriots. Kuprash insisted he didn't have access to that information.

Dozens of locals from Babyntsi village had gathered outside. Kuprash thought maybe the crowd had saved him.

Next time, he wouldn't be so lucky.

On March 30, three Russian vehicles pulled up to the town hall.

"Who's the village head?" the soldiers demanded.

"I am," Kuprash said, stepping forward.

"Andrii?" they asked.

"Yes."

"We found you," one soldier said. "You are dead."

The soldiers hit Kuprash in the head with a rifle, threw him in the back of the car and drove towards a cemetery in the forest. One of the Russians pulled out a long knife and held it against Kuprash's throat.

"This knife killed nine people. You'll be the tenth," he said.

They accused him of sending Russian troop positions to Ukrainian authorities, which Kuprash told AP he had been doing. Under the laws of war, Russians could detain spotters like Kuprash in humane conditions, but never disappear or torture them, human rights lawyers say.

Kuprash kept insisting he was a civilian. He thought of his children. "I said goodbye in my mind," he said.

When they got to the forest cemetery, dozens of Russian soldiers forced Kuprash to strip and shoved him around in a circle, jeering and insulting him, he said. The commander pointed at another man being beaten near a tree, who he said had fingered Kuprash as the head of the local Territorial Defense, a volunteer military group. Kuprash denied it.

The Russians handed Kuprash a shovel. As he hunched over in his underwear, they ordered him to dig himself a grave in the frozen earth.

THE ROAD TO RUSSIA

Ukrainians hunted by Russia didn't all stay in Ukraine, like Kuprash. Some were sucked into an opaque network of filtration and detention centers that extended from occupied territories into Russia itself.

Oleksii Dibrovskiy's journey began on March 25, when a Russian soldier pulled out his gun and held it to his mother's head.

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"What is more precious to you: Your phone or your mother's life?" the soldier demanded.

Dibrovskiy, a deputy of the Polohy City Council, in Zaporizhzhia region, looked at his mother and handed over his phone and password.

On his phone was a screenshot of Google maps with a Russian checkpoint circled in red. Dibrovskiy told AP that he had been sending information about Russian troop positions to the Ukrainian military.

The Russians wanted the names of other spotters. They told him their friends had died because of people like him.

Soldiers hauled Dibrovskiy to a basement, then to a garage, and then to a detention center near a military airport. They stuck a gun in his mouth and shot their rifles close to his ears. He said he was blindfolded and beaten so badly he urinated on himself.

One morning near the end of March, his captors led him to an old Soviet-style metal safe and told him to get in.

The space inside the safe was so small Dibrovskiy couldn't sit. He curled his body into the shape of a question mark. The door swung shut.

Total blackness.

Dibrovskiy struggled to breathe.

Inside the safe, Dibrovskiy began to sweat. As the hours passed, condensation formed on the walls and he pressed his lips to the droplets, desperate with thirst. Vivid pictures emerged from the darkness: Water. White light, like bright souls descending. "I thought angels were taking me to the sky," he said.

A few weeks later, he said, he was taken to a filtration center in Olenivka, in Russian-controlled Donetsk region, where men curled their knees to their chests so they could squash in two to a bed.

The logic Russians used to sort people at the filtration center was never fully clear to Dibrovskiy. Those who made it through were searched, interrogated, photographed, fingerprinted and allowed to leave.

Dibrovskiy didn't make it.

On April 14, he was herded on a Russian KAMAZ truck with 90 other people who had failed filtration. They drove through the night. In the morning, they boarded an airplane.

When they arrived at Pre-Trial Detention Center Number One, in Kursk, Russia, Dibrovskiy and the others squatted down and folded their hands behind their heads. They were videotaped, searched for tattoos, and stripped. Once naked, the beatings began.

"It was like a storm. It was endless. I was naked, beaten from left, right side, on back and my ears, legs -- constant beatings," he said. "They kicked us. Many boys had their genitals hurt."

Some men were unable to sit after the beatings, and others got broken ribs. A man boxed Dibrovskiy's ears so hard he fainted. He got a wound on his forehead from kneeling and pressing his head to the cold, humid ground. Every morning, they had to belt out the Russian national anthem.

"After torture, I was given paper and a pen. I was told to write down what they say," Dibrovskiy said. "I realized only later what I had signed."

His captors had tried to trick him into being a Russian spy.

THE FUTURE IS HISTORY

Russia's targeting of local leaders like Dibrovskiy and Kuprash is not new. The security forces of the Soviet Union had a long history of drawing up lists of "subversives" in Russia and beyond to be detained, disappeared, sent to labor camps or executed.

Andrei Soldatov, an investigative journalist and expert on Russian security services, said old techniques included kill lists that Stalin's secret service used to pacify Western Ukraine during World War II.

"It's the bloodiest example of pacifying a territory by Stalin's secret service," he said. "It's still taught at the academy of the secret service for how to pacify people when they are hostile."

Excising the parts of society that shape and guide a nation can have long-term impacts. When the Soviet Union occupied Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia in World War II, they murdered or deported tens of thousands of people.

"The sort of people who were selected for this were those who were community leaders, teachers, clergy-

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men — anyone with a political background,” Jānis Kažociņš, the national security advisor to the president of Latvia, told AP. “Society doesn’t have any compass any longer. It’s been deprived of its leaders.”

Data suggests that Russia has been doing the same thing in Ukraine. Regional authorities in Zaporizhzhia and Kherson as well as the United Nations all found that local leaders were disproportionately targeted in the early months of the invasion.

For example, local authorities, activists, journalists and religious leaders accounted for 40 percent of the 508 cases of arbitrary detention and enforced disappearances the United Nations Human Rights Monitoring Mission in Ukraine recorded between February and early December. In Kherson alone, nearly a third of the 230 civilian abductions regional authorities had registered by July involved local authorities and government employees.

Evidence of targeting could help prosecutors argue that Russia intends to destroy Ukrainian society in whole or in part.

“This is where the investigation of genocide should start,” said Wayne Jordash, director of Global Rights Compliance, a law firm and NGO, who helps lead the work of the Atrocity Crimes Advisory Group, a multi-national effort to support Ukrainian war crimes prosecutors. “It’s how the Russians intended to take over and extinguish identity.”

On the day Russia invaded Ukraine, Jordash got a call from a person with access to British intelligence who warned him that the Russians had lists of Ukrainian politicians and his wife — Svitlana Zalishchuk, a former member of parliament — was not safe. They left.

As Ukraine claws back more territory from Russia, the accounting of the disappeared grows. Russian forces set up at least nine detention centers in Kherson city, where people were tortured, said Jordash, who is now back in Ukraine. Ukrainian prosecutors estimated from meticulous lists the Russians left behind that more than 800 people from the largest center alone had been taken into Russian-held territory or killed, Jordash said.

Finding them and bringing them home is not easy. One of Kherson’s disappeared was Serhii Tsyhipa, a blogger, activist and military veteran. He vanished March 12 and reappeared six weeks later on pro-Russian television, thin and hollow-eyed, regurgitating Russian propaganda. Ukrainian police analyzed the video and told AP he was clearly under duress.

Tsyhipa’s family has spoken with lawyers, NGOs, international organizations, Ukrainian intelligence and journalists. Nothing has brought him home.

His wife Olena takes herbal pills to manage the constant anxiety. “I need strength,” she said. “My brain is constantly working on how to help or free him.”

‘PLEASE COME, MOMMY’

Some people who knew they were being hunted went into hiding, conjuring memories of World War II. Others risked everything to slip away.

When Russia invaded Ukraine, Lidiia, an editor-in-chief, shut the small newspaper she ran and spent two weeks huddled with her two daughters in a basement outside Mariupol. She read them the Russian version of *The Wizard of Oz*. As they listened to the fury of artillery above, her children kept asking her to repeat the part when the wicked witch Gingema sends a hurricane to the city.

Lidiia did not want her full name or image published because family members in Russian-held territory remain at risk.

She managed to get a ride to her sister’s house in Donetsk, a city in eastern Ukraine that has been under de-facto Russian control since 2014.

At the last checkpoint before her sister’s home, they were routed to a filtration point where their phones were searched. They were fingerprinted, photographed and questioned for three hours. Lidiia was allowed through. Somehow, they hadn’t noticed she was a journalist.

A few weeks later, she got a call from another journalist who told her the administration of the Donetsk People’s Republic — Russia’s name for a swath of Ukraine’s eastern Donetsk region -- was looking for her.

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That night at 6:30 p.m., Lidiia missed a call from an unknown number on the messaging app Viber. Four minutes later, a message popped up, written in formal Russian, from a woman named Nataliya: "Good evening...I'm an employee of the head of the administration of the Republic. I need to talk to you about resuming the publication of the newspaper. I'd be very grateful if you call me back."

"My first thought was: 'Where to run?'" Lidiia said.

Lidiia called Nataliya back and told her that she couldn't work because she had to take care of her kids.

"If you need work, we will always help you," Nataliya assured Lidiia.

A week later, Lidiia's husband, who had stayed behind, called. "Tomorrow they will come talk to you," he said in an odd voice. Later, she learned that armed state security officials from the so-called Donetsk People's Republic had come to their home looking for her and forced him to call her.

"I understood it was dangerous," she said. "I was getting ready for the worst -- for arrest, or to be forced psychologically because of my children...I was afraid I'd be forced to collaborate."

Lidiia scrambled to gather the paperwork she needed to leave: a certificate that she'd cleared filtration, new identity papers for her children. Each day, she waited for a knock on the door.

The frontline of the war lay to the west, cutting her off from Kyiv. She realized there was only one route out: East, through Russia.

She booked tickets — 350 euros (\$373) for her, 125 euros for each child — on a bus that would take them on a three-day journey through Russia, across Latvia, Lithuania, Poland and finally to Kyiv.

On May 24, Lidiia and her girls crammed on a bus with 50 people. When they reached the Russian border, her children passed through passport control first. Then it was Lidiia's turn.

The man who checked her documents saw that she had worked for a newspaper in Ukraine.

"You have to wait here," he told her. "Someone will come for you."

Now Lidiia's children were in Russia, and she was in Ukraine.

Another busload of people arrived, and she was afraid she'd lose her girls in the chaos. She strained to keep her eyes on her children as they sat, alone, in enemy territory.

"I was waving at them so they wouldn't be afraid, to let them know I was still there," she said.

Her children kept trying to call her, but they couldn't get a connection with their Ukrainian SIM card. Her younger daughter began to cry.

They sent messages: "Please come, mommy."

"Mom, where you are? She is crying."

The messages were never delivered.

Lidiia's head buzzed with panic. "What will happen to my kids if I am detained and cannot leave?" she asked herself. "Should I look for an orphanage for my kids?"

Lidiia was escorted to a room by a man she said worked for the FSB. "He asked if she wanted to smoke. She told him she didn't want cigarettes, she wanted her kids.

They walked her children back from the other side of passport control. She put her bags and her daughters on a bench in a waiting room filled with strangers and followed him into an interrogation room.

He asked her who she worked for. A newspaper, she said.

"Ah," the man said, stretching his arms wide. "One day and one night won't be enough for us to talk to you."

THE ONES WHO GOT AWAY

Kuprash, Dibrovskiy and Lidiia are among the lucky: They survived.

Kuprash can't be sure why the commander changed his mind about life and death. What he does know is that after the grave he dug was about a foot deep, the commander threw his clothes back at him and told him to have a cigarette.

They headed back towards the village. The commander cursed Russian President Vladimir Putin and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy. Kuprash kept his mouth shut and prayed.

They stopped in front of the town hall. Kuprash climbed off.

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"Live," the commander said. He turned and drove away.

On the morning of April 18, Dibrovskiy was taken from his cell. He said his retinas were scanned and his skull measured with a device he didn't recognize. Samples were taken of his nails, hair and blood.

His wounds were photographed, and he was forced to make a video saying that he had been treated well and his injuries were from a fall.

Dibrovskiy and other prisoners were flown from Kursk to a detention center in Russian-held Crimea, stopping in Belgorod, Voronezh, Rostov and Taganrog to collect more prisoners along the way, he said.

Early the next morning, Dibrovskiy waited as 59 names were called out. His was last, the 60th name. They all climbed onto KAMAZ trucks and headed north.

Around 3 p.m., Dibrovskiy saw a Ukrainian flag. He began to cry. One by one, Russian prisoners were exchanged for Ukrainians.

Dibrovskiy spent ten days in the hospital. His wrists, arms and head bore signs of torture, medical records show. He couldn't sleep.

Dibrovskiy called his wife from his hospital bed. She didn't recognize him.

"Alosha, is it you?" she said.

They sat together in silence on the phone, unable to speak.

Still stuck at the Russian border, Lidiia went through two rounds of interrogation. When she finally explained – falsely but in excruciating detail -- that she was headed for her aunt's house in Moscow, the man handed back her passport and said, "OK, that's it."

"Am I free?" Lidiia asked. She couldn't believe it. She walked out of the room and whisked her waiting children back to the bus.

For an hour, things seemed fine. Then Lidiia realized with a shock of dread that she'd left her documents back at the border.

Lidiia began to weep. "My stress resistance ended there," she said. "I realized at that moment anything could happen to me."

The driver called her a taxi. She left her girls on the bus with a woman who promised to look after them. Lidiia left one of her phones behind, stocked with contact numbers of relatives to call in case she didn't make it back.

She headed back to the border.

When Lidiia returned, documents in hand, the bus erupted with applause.

"As we crossed the border to Europe – that's it," Lidiia said. "The spirit of freedom."

Lidiia left just in time. In July, Russians conducted another purge of her city and arrested people, she said.

"I was also on their lists. They asked other people about me," she said. "The fact that I left earlier probably saved me."

EXPLAINER: How Trump ignored advisers, spread election lies

By NICHOLAS RICCARDI Associated Press

The executive summary of the House Jan. 6 committee's report documents how then-President Donald Trump was repeatedly warned by those closest to him — Cabinet members, campaign officials and even family members — that claims he had lost his reelection due to fraud were false. But Trump spread those lies anyway.

"This was not him hearing this from Joe Biden's spokesman on MSNBC," David Becker, co-author of "The Big Truth," a book about the damage of Trump's election lies, said in an interview.

Trump's lies about his loss in the 2020 presidential election sparked the attack on the U.S. Capitol on Jan. 6 and have helped fuel millions of dollars in donations to the Republican former president. Here are details showing he was told the truth about his loss and chose instead to lie about it.

PLANNING THE LIE AHEAD OF TIME

The Jan. 6 committee has made clear that Trump long planned to claim victory, whether he actually won or not. His allies were boasting of how they could try to fool the public to make it seem that he had

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won reelection. The committee cites correspondence from Tom Fitton of the conservative group Judicial Watch to the White House in October 2020 in which Fitton urges Trump to say after polls close: "We had an election. I won."

The committee also obtained a recording of Trump adviser Steve Bannon, who told associates the week before the election that "what Trump's gonna do is just declare victory, right? He's gonna declare victory. But that doesn't mean he's a winner. He's just gonna say he's a winner."

Trump had spent months demonizing mail voting, which swelled in popularity during the COVID-19 pandemic. The then-president also insisted the only way he would lose the election would be by massive voter fraud. When Trump did declare victory early in the morning the day after Election Day, he exploited a quirk in vote counting in which in-person votes, which leaned GOP, were tallied first, putting him temporarily ahead. He demanded that local election officials stop counting outstanding ballots, which leaned Democratic.

"President Trump's decision to declare victory falsely on election night and, unlawfully, to call for the vote counting to stop, was not a spontaneous decision," the committee wrote in the executive summary for its report. "It was premeditated."

LIES ABOUT VOTING MACHINES

By Nov. 7, when those outstanding Democratic votes had been tallied and most news organizations had called the race for Joe Biden, Trump's own campaign knew he had lost.

"The group that went over there outlined, you know, my belief and chances for success at this point," his campaign manager, Bill Stepien, testified before the committee. "And then we pegged that at, you know, 5, maybe 10 percent based on recounts."

Stepien added that Trump believed him: "He was pretty realistic with our viewpoint, in agreement with our viewpoint of kind of the forecast and the uphill climb we thought he had."

Still, Trump continued to insist he had won. His legal team largely walked away from the case, and was replaced by former New York Mayor Rudolph Giuliani and litigator Sidney Powell, who began to make wild fraud allegations, to the dismay of White House attorneys, who warned Trump they were false.

The president grabbed hold of a development in a rural, conservative county in Michigan, where voting machines had initially undercounted his margin of victory. Human error turned out to be the cause. When the paper ballots were tallied and run back through the machine, they were counted correctly.

Trump knew this, the committee says, because Attorney General William Barr told him so on Dec. 1, 2020. Barr testified that he told the president that the paper ballot tally matched the final results. Yet the next day, Trump said in a speech: "In one Michigan county, as an example, that used Dominion systems, they found that nearly 6,000 votes had been wrongly switched from Trump to Biden, and this is just the tip of the iceberg."

Barr and others in the administration kept telling Trump that there was nothing suspicious in Michigan or with Dominion, a major vendor of voting machinery. Barr and Deputy Attorney General Jeffrey Rosen told Trump there were no apparent problems, and even Trump's national security adviser, Robert O'Brien, rebutted a wild conspiracy theory about Dominion being connected to hostile foreign governments. But, the committee said, between November 2020 and Jan. 6, 2021, Trump tweeted about Dominion nearly three dozen times.

LIES ABOUT DEAD VOTERS, NUMBERS

Trump fanned other conspiracy theories, too, despite being told they were false. He claimed that more than 5,000 dead people voted in Georgia, a state he lost by more than 11,000 votes. But Georgia Secretary of State Brad Raffensperger, a Republican, corrected him during a Jan. 2 phone call, saying local election officials had researched the question, cross-referencing obituaries and other data.

"The actual number were two," Raffensperger told the president. "Two. Two people that were dead that voted. So that's wrong."

Four days later, during his speech at the Jan. 6 rally before his supporters stormed the Capitol, Trump declared: "Over 10,300 ballots in Georgia were cast by individuals whose names and dates of birth match Georgia residents who died in 2020 and prior to the election."

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Raffensperger also corrected other Trump claims about Georgia, including that 18,325 voters were registered at vacant addresses and that 4,925 voters from out of state cast ballots there. But Trump repeated them in the run-up to Jan. 6 and during his rally.

Trump put out more bad numbers after being told they were false.

"The President then continued, there are 'more votes than voters,'" Richard Donoghue told the committee of a Dec. 27, 2020, conversation with Trump when Donoghue was the acting deputy attorney general. Donoghue said he told the president that he was comparing 2016 voter registration with 2020 voting numbers, which was inaccurate because more people were registered to vote during Trump's reelection year. He later specifically warned against using a Pennsylvania number.

But on the ellipse on Jan. 6, Trump declared: "In Pennsylvania, you had 205,000 more votes than you had voters."

FALSE ATTACKS ON ELECTION WORKERS

Trump also baselessly claimed election workers were committing fraud, despite warnings from his own law enforcement officers that they were doing nothing wrong. Rosen recounted to the committee a Dec. 15 conversation in which Trump asked about a video that purported to show Georgia election workers receiving a suitcase of ballots.

"We said, 'It wasn't a suitcase. It was a bin. That's what they use when counting ballots,'" Rosen recalled. "It's benign."

One week later, the report says, Trump declared: "There is even security camera footage from Georgia that shows officials telling poll watchers to leave the room before pulling suitcases of ballots out from under the tables and continuing to count for hours."

Trump complained about purported misbehavior by election workers in the security camera footage to Raffensperger during the Jan. 2 call. Raffensperger warned the president off the recording.

"I think that's extremely unfortunate that Rudy Giuliani or his people, they sliced and diced that video and took it out of context," the secretary of state told Trump.

Raffensperger offered to send Trump a link from a local television station that debunked the lies. "I don't need a link," Trump replied.

The next day, he complained that Raffensperger was "unwilling, or unable, to answer questions such as the 'ballots under the table' scam, ballot destruction, out of state 'voters,' dead voters and more. He has no clue!"

Long-cut phones ring again in Ethiopia's Tigray, bring grief

By CARA ANNA Associated Press

NAIROBI, Kenya (AP) — For a year and a half, phone calls to people trying to survive one of the world's worst wars didn't go through. Now, as phone lines start to be restored to parts of Ethiopia's Tigray region after a fragile peace deal, some Tigrayans are relieved while others grieve.

"I have been dreading receiving phone calls," said a Tigrayan living in Norway, who like others spoke with The Associated Press on condition of anonymity out of fear of reprisals against his relatives. "You want to speak to your family, but you don't know what kind of stories you will hear, in terms of who is still alive."

The conflict between Ethiopian and allied forces against the Tigray side is estimated to have killed hundreds of thousands of people since late 2020, according to the United Nations and the United States, citing academic research. The U.N. secretary-general has said more people have died in this conflict than in Ukraine's.

Only now are many Tigrayans starting to learn the fate of loved ones as phone lines are reconnected in some areas that have returned to the control of Ethiopia's federal government.

On Dec. 10, the Tigrayan in Norway spoke with his father and siblings in the central town of Adwa for the first time since June 2021.

"I didn't know if they were still alive, so it was a shock to hear their voices," he said. "I didn't know where to start. I had to hang up and call them back later. ... It was really special."

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Yet the call also brought painful news: His family told him seven neighbors in their home village 30 kilometers (18 miles) south of Adwa had been killed after Ethiopian and allied forces from neighboring Eritrea took control of the area in October, just days before the peace deal was signed.

In recent days, social media has been flooded by posts from Tigrayans who say they have learned of the deaths of loved ones. The most prominent was World Health Organization director-general Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus.

"I was informed that my uncle was murdered by the Eritrean army," he told journalists last week. "I spoke to my mother, and she was really devastated because he was the youngest from their family and he was almost the same age as me, a young uncle."

Tigray's phone, internet and banking services were first cut for the region of more than 5 million people when the conflict began. They were restored in some areas in early 2021 as the federal government attempted to assert control but cut again when Tigray forces recaptured most of the region in June 2021.

The communications blackout is "the world's longest uninterrupted shutdown," according to internet rights group Access Now. Ethiopia's government, which has barred journalists from traveling to Tigray, asserts that the shutdown is necessary for security.

Human rights experts have said the blackout has helped fuel abuses by troops confident their crimes will not reach the outside world. All sides have been accused of atrocities, notably Eritrea's forces, who waged a campaign of killings, gang rapes and enforced starvation and remain in parts of Tigray. Eritrea was not a party to the peace deal and remains a major challenge to its implementation.

The terms of the deal signed in South Africa on Nov. 2 commit Ethiopia's government to restoring basic services to Tigray. Humanitarian aid is again arriving after months of restrictions, and several places have been reconnected to the national power grid. Limited banking services returned in some places this week.

But areas under Tigray forces' control, like the regional capital of Mekele, are still cut off by phone from the outside world. And even in areas where phone lines have been restored, the connection is unstable, with calls often not going through.

A Tigrayan living in Ethiopia's capital, Addis Ababa, said he spoke with his father in the Tigray town of Shire last Friday. It was the first time they had spoken since May 2021.

"We were very worried about our families, so talking to him was very good," he said. "At the same time, we are very sad to hear some of our relatives died in the war. It is not full happiness. I found out two people had died from my father. One could not find medicine, the other he didn't tell me. It was very difficult to ask him that."

Meanwhile, Tigrayans with family in areas still under Tigray forces' control are still waiting to hear from relatives, with anticipation mixed with dread.

"The peace is good, but I still haven't been able to talk to my parents," said a Tigrayan civil servant in Addis Ababa. "They live around Adigrat and Zalambessa. There were many Eritrean troops there, so I fear what happened to them during the recent fighting."

The AP Interview: Vermont Sen. Leahy ponders his legacy

By WILSON RING Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Sen. Patrick Leahy lingered on a narrow balcony on the west side of the U.S. Capitol, soaking in a panoramic view of the National Mall, the Washington Monument and, beyond, the Lincoln Memorial.

"Now this I will miss," he said.

As Leahy closes out a Senate career that has spanned 48 years, the Vermont senator is saying goodbye to Washington with a mix of resignation and resolve, lamenting the hyperpartisanship that now grips Congress while expressing hope that the institution as he once knew it can someday return.

"If we don't get back to it, this country is going to be severely damaged," he said. "We're the wealthiest, most powerful nation on Earth. And we have over 300 million Americans. We have responsibility to the Americans. We have a responsibility to the rest of the world."

Leahy, 82, is president pro tempore of the Senate and third in line to the presidency. He reflected on

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his career during a wide-ranging interview Monday with The Associated Press in his office at the Capitol, recalling how when he first joined the Senate in 1975, colleagues with starkly different views could still find ways to get things done.

"I think then, most of (the senators) knew there were basic things the Senate should do, basic things the country needed, and we should find a way to come together," Leahy said.

"Now, there are too many people who think, 'What can I say that will get me on the evening news or give me a sound bite or get me on this Twitter account,' or something else. They don't care about the country. They care about their political ambitions."

The willingness to work across the aisle isn't gone entirely. Leahy, who shapes federal spending as chairman of the Senate Appropriations Committee, pointed to this week's unveiling of a compromise \$1.7 trillion government funding package. It's a capstone of sorts to Leahy's career, and one he helped negotiate largely in private.

"I never called a press conference during that time, nor did the other senators in there," he said. "We just tried to work. There is so much legislation that doesn't get passed but it should because everybody's running out trying to get their spin on it, and say, 'See, I'm the only one who knows what I'm doing.' But you're not."

Leahy will officially leave office on Jan. 3, when his successor — Vermont's Democratic Rep. Peter Welch — will be sworn into office. After that Leahy is planning to return to Vermont and work out of an office at the University of Vermont in Burlington, which will become home to his Senate records. The first in his family to go to college, Leahy said he wants to help young people from rural areas obtain higher education.

With tearful colleagues gathered in the chamber, Leahy gave his final address to the Senate on Tuesday, exhorting his colleagues to carry on the work.

"What a journey. What an abiding hope that someday after I've gone, the Senate in both parties will come back together to be the conscience of the nation," he said in his address. "Together, you can build a Senate defined not by soundbites, but one strengthened when women and men with a sense of history insist that our republic move forward."

During his eight terms in the Senate, Leahy racked up a lengthy list of accomplishments, chairing or serving as the top member of the opposing party on the Senate Appropriations, Judiciary and Agriculture committees, among others. He's currently the longest-serving senator and third in line to the presidency as president pro tempore. He's the fourth-longest serving senator in history and has cast nearly 17,000 votes.

Leahy has been active on judicial, criminal justice, gay rights, human rights, privacy and environmental issues. After the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, he led the Senate's negotiations with the Bush administration on the Patriot Act, the sweeping anti-terrorism bill responding to the attacks.

One of his first significant votes in 1975 was against continued funding for the Vietnam War. In 2002 he voted against authorizing the use of force in Iraq.

He helped establish what is now the nearly \$60 billion organic food industry. He helped bring about the world's first ban on the export of antipersonnel landmines, and he's helped bring hundreds of jobs to Vermont and millions of dollars to help clean up his beloved Lake Champlain.

Leahy took office when Vermont was still considered a largely Republican bastion. Now it's considered by many to be among the most progressive places in the country.

"We changed. We have become more diverse and that's better for Vermont," he said. "What we have to do now is rely not just on rhetoric, but do the hard work to create real jobs, housing for people (so they) can stay in Vermont."

After the 1997 shooting deaths of two New Hampshire state troopers, a judge and a newspaper editor in Colebrook, New Hampshire — violence that spilled over into Vermont — Leahy began a push to fund bulletproof vests for police officers. Since then, 1.4 million vests have been distributed nationwide under the Patrick Leahy Bulletproof Vest Partnership Act.

Known as an accomplished photographer, Leahy has used his proximity to power to take his camera into areas where others couldn't. He captured candid images of President George H.W. Bush in a goofy hat and Sen. Joe Biden and his wife, Jill, on a bench near the Eiffel Tower during a NATO meeting.

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Among his favorite photos, which hangs in his office, is a haunting image taken in a Central American refugee camp in the 1980s. The photo shows an older man, with white hair and stubble.

"What I read in his face is, 'You don't know me. You can't speak my language. I can never do anything to help you. What do you do to help people like me?'" Leahy said. "Every day I've looked at that conscience picture and thought, how do I make life better for Vermonters, for our country, but for the rest of the world."

Leahy has a quirky side. He's a lover of Batman comic books — he's made cameo appearances in five Batman movies and did the voice for a character in an animated Batman movie — and the Grateful Dead. He could have fun in the Senate, too, remembering how he once parachuted with the Army's Golden Knights skydiving team.

Asked how he wanted to be remembered, he responded: "I want the legacy (to be) that I kept my word," he said, adding that he sought solutions to the problems of the nation, the world and his home state of Vermont.

Later, giving a tour of his favorite spots around the Capitol, Leahy paused in the Rotunda, with its immense domed ceiling, paintings and statues. It's at the heart of American democracy, the place where former presidents and national heroes lay in state.

"I was in awe the first time I came in here as a teenager with my parents," Leahy said. "Every time I walk through here I'm as lost as the tourists are, and I still am today. And I'll walk out of here my last day looking at it again."

Taliban bar women from university education in Afghanistan

KABUL, Afghanistan (AP) — Afghanistan's Taliban rulers on Tuesday banned female students from attending universities effective immediately in the latest edict cracking down on women's rights and freedoms.

Despite initially promising a more moderate rule respecting rights for women's and minorities, the Taliban have widely implemented their strict interpretation of Islamic law, or Sharia.

They have banned girls from middle school and high school, restricted women from most employment and ordered them to wear head-to-toe clothing in public. Women are also banned from parks and gyms.

The Taliban were ousted in 2001 by a U.S.-led coalition for harboring al-Qaida leader Osama bin Laden and returned to power after America's chaotic departure last year.

The decision was announced after a government meeting. A letter shared by the spokesman for the Ministry of Higher Education, Ziaullah Hashmi, told private and public universities to implement the ban as soon as possible and to inform the ministry once the ban is in place.

Hashmi tweeted the letter and confirmed its contents in a message to The Associated Press without giving further details.

The decision is certain to hurt efforts by the Taliban to win recognition from potential international donors at a time when the country is mired in a worsening humanitarian crisis. The international community has urged Taliban leaders to reopen schools and give women their right to public space.

The university ban comes weeks after Afghan girls took their high school graduation exams, even though they have been banned from classrooms since the Taliban took over the country last year.

"I can't fulfill my dreams, my hopes. Everything is disappearing before my eyes and I can't do anything about it," said a third-year journalism and communication student at Nangarhar University. She did not want to be identified for fear of reprisals.

"Is being a girl a crime? If that's the case, I wish I wasn't a girl," she added. "My father had dreams for me, that his daughter would become a talented journalist in the future. That is now destroyed. So, you tell me, how will a person feel in this situation?"

She added that she had not lost all hope yet.

"God willing, I will continue my studies in any way. I'm starting online studies. And, if it doesn't work, I will have to leave the country and go to another country," she said.

U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres condemned the decision, calling it another "broken promise" from the Taliban and a "very troubling" move.

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"It's difficult to imagine how a country can develop, can deal with all of the challenges that it has, without the active participation of women and the education," Guterres said.

Robert Wood, the deputy U.S. ambassador to the United Nations, said the Taliban cannot expect to be a legitimate member of the international community until they respect the rights of all Afghans.

U.S. National Security Council spokesperson Adrienne Watson said the United States also condemned the move by the Taliban.

"This deplorable decision is the latest effort by Taliban leadership to impose additional restrictions on women and girls in Afghanistan and prevent them from exercising their human rights and fundamental freedoms," Watson said.

"As a result of this unacceptable stance to hold back half of the population of Afghanistan, the Taliban will be further alienated from the international community and denied the legitimacy they desire," she added.

Afghanistan's U.N. seat is still held by the previous government led by former President Ashraf Ghani, despite the Taliban's request to represent the country at the United Nations, which was recently deferred again.

Afghanistan's charge d'affaires Naseer Ahmed Faiq said at the U.N. that the announcement "marks a new low in violation of most fundamental and universal human rights for all of humanity."

US to send \$1.8 billion in aid, Patriot battery, to Ukraine

By LOLITA C. BALDOR and TARA COPP Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The U.S. will send \$1.8 billion in military aid to Ukraine in a massive package that will for the first time include a Patriot missile battery and precision guided bombs for their fighter jets, U.S. officials said Tuesday, as the Biden administration prepares to welcome Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy to Washington.

U.S. officials described details of the aid on condition of anonymity because it has not yet been announced. The aid signals an expansion by the U.S. in the kinds of advanced weaponry it will send to Ukraine to bolster the country's air defenses against what has been an increasing barrage of Russian missile strikes.

The package, which was expected to be announced Wednesday, will include about \$1 billion in weapons from Pentagon stocks and another \$800 million in funding through the Ukraine Security Assistance Initiative, which funds weapons, ammunition, training and other assistance, officials said.

Zelenskyy and other Ukraine officials have pressed Western leaders to provide more advanced weapons, including the Patriots, to help their country in its war with Russia. The Patriot would be the most advanced surface-to-air missile system the West has provided to Ukraine to help repel Russian aerial attacks. The timing of the military aid announcement — as Zelenskyy makes his first trip out of Ukraine since the war began — sends a strong message of continued U.S. support for Ukraine as the war drags on.

The aid comes as Congress is poised to approve another \$44.9 billion in assistance for Ukraine as part of a massive spending bill. That would ensure that U.S. support will continue next year and beyond as Republicans take control of the House in January. Some GOP lawmakers have expressed wariness about the assistance.

During the quick trip, Zelenskyy is expected to meet with Biden at the White House, take questions from the press, and deliver an address before Congress. White House officials said the visit, which will come 10 months after the Russian invasion, is meant to help underscore Biden's message that the U.S. will be there for Ukraine for as long as it takes to repel Russian forces.

Biden and Zelenskyy spoke about the possibility of the visit during their Dec. 11 call and the White House formally extended the invitation three days later.

The decision to send the Patriot battery comes despite threats from Russia's Foreign Ministry that the delivery of the advanced surface-to-air missile system would be considered a provocative step and that the Patriot and any crews accompanying it would be a legitimate target for Moscow's military.

But the White House is pushing back against the notion that delivery of the Patriot amounts to an escalation of U.S. involvement on behalf of Ukraine. A senior administration official, who briefed reporters on

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the condition of anonymity, said that Biden has been clear that his administration would "lean forward" in supporting Ukraine but it is "not seeking to engage in direct war with Russia."

It's not clear exactly when the Patriot would arrive on the front lines in Ukraine, since U.S. troops will have to train Ukrainian forces on how to use the high-tech system. The training could take several weeks, and is expected to be done at the Grafenwoehr training area in Germany. To date, all training of Ukraine forces by the U.S. and the West has taken place in European countries.

Also included in the package will be an undisclosed number of Joint Direct Attack Munitions kits, or JDAMs, officials said. The kits will be used to modify massive bombs by adding tail fins and precision navigation systems so that rather than being simply dropped from a fighter jet onto a target, they can be released and guided to a target.

U.S. fighter and bomber aircraft use the JDAMs, and the Pentagon has been working to modify them so they can be used by Ukraine.

The U.S. so far has been reluctant to provide Ukraine with American fighter jets. Russia has warned the the advanced aircraft would be considered provocative, and the U.S. to date has said other weaponry would be a better fit, citing the significant maintenance and training needs for those warplanes.

So instead of providing Ukraine those U.S. aircraft, the Pentagon is helping Kyiv find innovative ways to upgrade its fleet with the same capabilities it would get with a U.S. fighter jet.

The aid package will also include an undisclosed number of rockets for the High Mobility Artillery Rocket System, thousands of artillery and mortar rounds, trucks, and HARM air-to-surface anti-radiation missiles.

According to officials, the urgent pleadings of Ukrainian leaders and the devastating destruction of the country's civilian infrastructure, including loss of electricity and heat during winter, ultimately overcame U.S. reservations about supplying the Patriots.

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

U.S. officials had balked at providing the Patriots to Ukraine because they could be considered a escalation that would trigger a response from Moscow. In addition, there were concerns about the significant training that would be required and questions about whether U.S. troops would have been required to operate it. Biden has flatly rejected sending any U.S. combat troops to Ukraine.

One Patriot battery routinely includes up to eight launchers, each of which can hold four missiles. It would be coming from Pentagon training stocks in the U.S..

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

Tens of thousands without power after California earthquake

By ADAM BEAM and JOHN ANTCZAK Associated Press

RIO DELL, Calif. (AP) — Tens of thousands of homes and businesses along the Northern California coast remained without power Tuesday evening, nearly a day after a powerful earthquake jolted people awake and shook homes off foundations, injuring at least 12 and leaving many without water.

"It felt like my roof was coming down," Cassondra Stoner said. "The only thing I could think about was, 'Get the freaking kids.'"

When the ground stopped moving, Stoner's family was fine — a daughter even slept through the racket. But when she showed up to work at Dollar General, she found tiles had fallen from the ceiling, shelves were toppled and the contents of the discount store she manages were scattered on the floor.

The magnitude 6.4 earthquake occurred at 2:34 a.m. near Ferndale, a small community about 210 miles (345 kilometers) northwest of San Francisco and close to the Pacific coast. The epicenter was just offshore at a depth of about 10 miles (16 kilometers). Numerous aftershocks followed.

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Pacific Gas & Electric had restored power to about 40,000 customers — more than half of the original 72,000 that had been affected — by late Tuesday. The utility said it expected electricity to be fully restored within 24 hours.

Residents in the area known for its redwood forests, scenic mountains and the three county Emerald Triangle's legendary marijuana crop are accustomed to earthquakes. But many said this was more violent and unnerving than the usual rolling motion they experience.

"You could see the floor and walls shaking," said Araceli Huerta, who was still rattled some 10 hours later. "It sounded like a freight train was going through my house."

Damage to buildings and infrastructure was still being assessed. Two Humboldt County hospitals lost power and were running on generators, but the scale of the damage appeared to be minimal compared to the strength of the quake, according to Brian Ferguson, a spokesperson for the California Governor's Office of Emergency Services.

Gov. Gavin Newsom proclaimed a state of emergency for Humboldt County on Tuesday evening.

Approximately 12 people were reported as suffering injuries, including a broken hip and head wound, the Humboldt County Sheriff's Office said at a news conference interrupted by a jarring aftershock. Two people died — an 83-year-old and a 72-year-old — because they couldn't get timely care for "medical emergencies" during or just after the quake.

Damage was mostly focused on the small communities of Rio Dell, Ferndale and Fortuna, Emergency Services Director Mark Ghilarducci said during a news conference in Sacramento.

In Rio Dell, a hamlet of about 3,000 people where destruction was worst, at least 15 homes were severely damaged and deemed uninhabitable and 18 others were moderately damaged, officials said after a partial assessment. They estimated that 30 people were displaced and said that number could rise to 150 after a full tally of damage.

The city's water system was shut down for repairs for as long as two days because of leaks. Portable toilets were set up at City Hall and water was being handed out at the fire house.

A bridge over the Eel River built in 1911 that is the main route into Ferndale was damaged and closed to traffic, requiring a longer detour through the mountains to reach the quaint Victorian town, where all of Main Street is on the National Register of Historic Places.

Caroline Titus, former owner of the Ferndale Enterprise newspaper, said the quake only broke a few windows on storefronts. At her 140-year-old home, plants were knocked over, her coffee bar crashed to the floor, pictures fell off the wall and books tumbled from shelves.

"It's all just pain-in-the-butt type of damage," Titus said.

Since a magnitude 7.2 quake in the area in 1992 injured hundreds, sparked fires and destroyed many homes, building codes have required retrofits to make structures much more resilient to the shaking, Titus said.

Still, she said, each strong quake evokes the same fear: "Is this the one. Is this the nine-pointer?"

In an echo of the 1992 quake, the volunteer Rio Dell Fire Department was initially delayed in responding to some 60 calls that included two fires because the garage doors were off the hinges and had to be pried open, Chief Shane Wilson said. Three decades ago, homes in nearby Petrolia burned because the firehouse garage door jammed and trapped the engines inside.

The power outage involved the main transmission line that runs into the region and Pacific Gas & Electric's restoration work was slowed because rain prevented use of a helicopter to assess damage, said state Sen. Mike McGuire, who represents the area.

Humboldt County has about 136,000 residents and is in a part of the state that has a long history of large earthquakes, including a magnitude 7.0 in 1980 and a 6.8 in 2014, according to the California Earthquake Authority.

Dennis Leonardi drove through the night from the San Francisco Bay Area to get back to his dairy farm in Ferndale, and then had to take a lengthy detour because the bridge was out.

Leonardi spent two hours cleaning up glass after the temblor shook nearly every drawer in his house

open, knocked over a dresser and yanked furniture and appliances from where they were anchored to the wall for earthquake safety. A glass cabinet with mementos, ornaments and family photos "walked itself" away from a wall and a refrigerator and freezer "shimmied its way across" the garage.

"The cows were just dancing to some rock and roll today," he said, noting that his herd appeared to be OK but were probably spooked by the din of everything "bouncing around."

Larkin O'Leary, 41, of Santa Rosa, traveled to spend her anniversary with her husband in Ferndale, where they had been jolted by an earthquake last year. They decided to try again and booked the romance package at a historic inn, the same spot as a year ago.

O'Leary said she woke at 2:30 a.m. with an eerie feeling and tried to go back to sleep.

"I laid back down again and it was almost as if someone jumped on the bed," she said. "It was so terrifying. ... It shook in a way I had never experienced. It was up, down, all around."

The couple quickly got out of Ferndale and returned to their home.

"Never again," O'Leary said.

The earthquake occurred in an area known as the Mendocino Triple Junction, where three tectonic plates meet.

"We're in this moment of geologic time where the most exciting, dynamic area of California happens to be Humboldt County and the adjacent offshore area," said Lori Dengler, professor emeritus of geology at Cal Poly Humboldt.

The quake triggered a massive response by the West Coast's warning system that detects the start of a quake and sends alerts to cellphones in the affected region that can give people notice to take safety precautions in the seconds before strong shaking reaches them.

The system pushed out alerts to some 3 million people in Northern California early Tuesday, officials said.

The earthquake came just days after a small magnitude 3.6 earthquake struck the San Francisco Bay Area, waking up thousands of people before 4 a.m. Saturday and causing minor damage.

US asks court to end asylum limits, with a short delay

By MORGAN LEE, GIOVANNA DELL'ORTO and REBECCA SANTANA Associated Press

EL PASO, Texas (AP) — Texas dispatched National Guard troops to the border, and San Diego businesses anticipated a wave of Christmas shoppers from Mexico, as tens of thousands of asylum-seekers at the border waited for a Supreme Court ruling that could allow them to enter the United States.

The U.S. government asked the Supreme Court not to lift the limits before Christmas, in a filing a day after Chief Justice John Roberts issued a temporary order to keep the pandemic-era restrictions in place. Before Roberts issued that order, they had been slated to expire Wednesday.

Under the restrictions, officials have expelled asylum-seekers inside the United States 2.5 million times, and turned away most people who requested asylum at the border, on grounds of preventing the spread of COVID-19 under a public health rule called Title 42. Both U.S. and international law guarantee the right to claim asylum.

The federal government also asked the court to reject a last-minute effort by a group of conservative-leaning states to maintain the measure. It acknowledged that ending the restrictions will likely lead to "disruption and a temporary increase in unlawful border crossings," but said the solution is not to extend the rule indefinitely.

With the decision on what comes next going down to the wire, pressure is building in communities along both sides of the U.S.-Mexico border.

In El Paso, Democratic Mayor Oscar Leeser warned that shelters across the border in Ciudad Juárez were packed to capacity, with an estimated 20,000 migrants prepared to cross into the U.S.

At one point late Tuesday, some migrants were allowed to enter in batches through a gate in the border wall between two bridges that connect downtown El Paso with Ciudad Juarez, which is not uncommon at this spot on the border. Word that the gate was opening sent hundreds of people scrambling along the concrete banks of the Rio Grande, leaving smoldering campfires behind.

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The city rushed to expand its ability to accommodate more migrants by converting large buildings into shelters, as the Red Cross brings in 10,000 cots. Local officials also hope to relieve pressure on shelters by chartering buses to other large cities in Texas or nearby states, bringing migrants a step closer to relatives and sponsors in coordination with nonprofit groups.

"We will continue to be prepared for whatever is coming through," Leeser said.

Texas National Guard members, deployed by the state to El Paso this week, used razor wire on Tuesday to cordon off a gap in the border fence along a bank of the Rio Grande that became a popular crossing point for migrants who waded through shallow waters to approach immigration officials in recent days. They used a loudspeaker to announce in Spanish that it's illegal to cross there.

Texas said it was sending 400 National Guard personnel to the border city after local officials declared a state of emergency. Leeser said the declaration was aimed largely at protecting vulnerable migrants, while a statement from the Texas National Guard said the deployment included forces used to "repel and turn-back illegal immigrants."

In San Diego, a sense of normalcy returned to the nation's busiest border crossing despite uncertainty leading up to Roberts' decision. The San Ysidro Chamber of Commerce said it learned from U.S. Customs and Border Protection that the more modern, western half of the airport-sized pedestrian crossing would reopen to U.S.-bound travelers Wednesday at 6 a.m. The lanes, which lead to an upscale outlet mall, have been closed to almost all migrants since early 2020 to accommodate Title 42 processing.

The reopening comes "just in time for last-minute shoppers, visiting family members and those working during the holidays," the chamber wrote to members. It said it didn't know when the area would reopen to travelers going to Mexico from the United States.

Immigration advocates have said that the Title 42 restrictions, imposed under provisions of a 1944 health law, go against American and international obligations to people fleeing to the U.S. to escape persecution, and that the pretext is outdated as coronavirus treatments improve. They sued to end the use of Title 42; a federal judge sided with them in November and set the Dec. 21 deadline.

Conservative-leaning states appealed to the Supreme Court, arguing that an increased numbers of migrants would take a toll on public services such as law enforcement and health care and warned of an "unprecedented calamity" at the southern border. They said the federal government has no plan to deal with an increase in migrants.

The federal government opposed the appeal, and told the court Tuesday that it has marshaled more resources to the southern border in preparation for the end of Title 42. That includes more Border Patrol processing coordinators, more surveillance and increased security at ports of entry, according to President Joe Biden's administration.

About 23,000 agents are currently deployed to the southern border, according to the White House.

"The solution to that immigration problem cannot be to extend indefinitely a public-health measure that all now acknowledge has outlived its public-health justification," the Biden administration wrote in its brief to the Supreme Court.

Yet the government also asked the court to give it some time to prepare if it decides to allow the restrictions to be lifted. Should the Supreme Court act before Friday, the government wants the restrictions in place until the end of Dec. 27. If the court acts on Friday or later, the government wants the limits to remain until the second business day following such an order.

At a church-affiliated shelter in El Paso a few blocks from the border, the Rev. Michael Gallagher said local faith leaders have been trying to pool resources and open up empty space. On Tuesday, a gym at Sacred Heart Church gave shelter to 200 migrants — mostly women and children.

Title 42 allows the government to expel asylum-seekers of all nationalities, but it's disproportionately affected people from countries whose citizens Mexico has agreed to take: Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador and, more recently Venezuela, in addition to Mexico.

Arizona judge to consider Kari Lake's stolen election claims

By JONATHAN J. COOPER and JACQUES BILLEAUD Associated Press

PHOENIX (AP) — Kari Lake has claimed for weeks that her loss in the race for Arizona governor was illegitimate.

The former television anchor gets her long-sought opportunity to make her case to a judge this week during a two-day trial scheduled to begin on Wednesday. She'll have a chance to inspect ballots, call witnesses and introduce evidence in a bid to prove she was the rightful winner of the race, which Democrat Katie Hobbs won by just over 17,000 votes.

She faces extremely long odds. Maricopa County Superior Court Judge Peter Thompson said she must prove not only that misconduct occurred, but also that it was intended to deny her victory and did in fact result in the wrong woman being declared the winner.

"We have a chance to show the world that our elections are truly corrupt and we won't take it anymore," Lake said Tuesday at an event for Turning Point USA, a conservative youth group.

There is no jury. Thompson will make a ruling on the evidence presented, which the losing side is likely to appeal to the Arizona Supreme Court. Lake is asking the judge to either declare her the winner or order a revote in Maricopa County. The new governor takes office Jan. 2.

Lawyers for Hobbs say the trial will be a spectacle and an opportunity for Lake to spread outlandish theories about election misconduct.

"The court should not indulge this kind of a show that plaintiffs want to put on," Hobbs attorney Abha Khanna told the judge Monday, urging him to dismiss the case in its entirety before the trial. "The court is not a theater."

Thompson on Monday dismissed eight of the 10 claims Lake raised in her lawsuit, including Lake's allegation that Hobbs, in her capacity as secretary of state, and Maricopa County Recorder Stephen Richer engaged in censorship by flagging social media posts with election misinformation for possible removal by Twitter. He also dismissed her claims of discrimination against Republicans and that mail-in voting procedures are illegal.

Thompson, who was appointed to the bench by former Republican Gov. Jan Brewer, took no position on the merits of Lake's two surviving claims, but he wrote that the law allows her to make her case.

Lake was among the most vocal 2022 Republicans promoting former President Donald Trump's election lies, which she made the centerpiece of her campaign. While most of the other election deniers around the country conceded after losing their races, Lake has not.

She has zeroed in on problems with ballot printers at some polling places in Maricopa County, home to more than 60% of voters. The defective printers produced ballots that were too light to be read by the on-site tabulators at polling places. Lines backed up in some areas amid the confusion.

Affected ballots were taken to the more sophisticated counters at the elections department headquarters in downtown Phoenix. County officials say everyone had a chance to vote and all ballots were counted. Officials have said they're investigating why some of the Oki brand printers failed when used with the same settings as prior elections, but it appears to have been an issue with the fuser, which heats the toner to imprint it on the paper.

Lake's second claim is that the chain of custody for ballots was broken at an off-site facility, where a contractor scans mail ballots to prepare them for processing. She claims that workers at the facility put their own mail ballots into the pile, rather than returning them through normal channels, and also that paperwork documenting the transfer of ballots is missing.

The county disputes the claim.

For both the printer and chain of custody claims, Lake will have to prove that people intentionally interfered to steal the election from her and succeeded. The Arizona Supreme Court ruled nearly a century ago that mistakes by election officials, even big ones, are not sufficient on their own to overturn an election; the losing candidate must show the mistakes affected the result.

Meanwhile, a judge in conservative Mohave County ruled Tuesday that Republican Abraham Hamadeh

can proceed with his lawsuit challenging the results of the election for attorney general, which he lost to Democrat Kris Mayes by 511 votes. Hamadeh's lawsuit raises the same printer issues from Lake's suit and also alleges his race was affected by improper handling of ballots that were duplicated or adjudicated by humans because they could not be read by tabulators.

Judge Lee Jantzen said Hamadeh can inspect ballots in Maricopa, Pima and Navajo counties before a trial scheduled for Friday. The results of an automatic recount of the race were scheduled to be released on Thursday but will now be delayed until Hamadeh's lawsuit is resolved.

Trump tax audits required by IRS were delayed, panel says

By JOSH BOAK, BRIAN SLODYSKO, LISA MASCARO and MEG KINNARD Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The IRS failed to pursue mandatory audits of Donald Trump on a timely basis during his presidency, a congressional panel found on Tuesday, raising questions about statements by the former president and leading members of his administration who claimed he could not release his tax filings because of the ongoing reviews.

A report released by the Democratic majority on the House Ways and Means Committee indicated the Trump administration may have disregarded an IRS requirement dating back to 1977 that mandates audits of a president's tax filings. The IRS only began to audit Trump's 2016 tax filings on April 3, 2019, more than two years into Trump's presidency and just months after Democrats took control of the House. That date coincides with Rep. Richard Neal, the panel chairman, asking the IRS for information related to Trump's tax returns.

There was no suggestion that Trump, who has announced a third presidential run, sought to directly influence the IRS or discourage the agency from reviewing his tax information. But the report found that the audit process was "dormant, at best."

The 29-page report was published just hours after the committee voted along party lines to release Trump's tax returns in the coming days, raising the potential of additional revelations related to the finances of the onetime businessman who broke political norms by refusing to voluntarily release his returns as he sought the presidency. The vote was the culmination of a yearslong fight between Trump and Democrats that has played out everywhere from the campaign trail to the halls of Congress and the Supreme Court.

Democrats on the tax-writing Ways and Means Committee argued that transparency and the rule of law were at stake, while Republicans countered that the release would set a dangerous precedent with regard to the loss of privacy protections.

"This is about the presidency, not the president," Neal, D-Mass., told reporters.

Texas Rep. Kevin Brady, the panel's top GOP member, said, "Regrettably, the deed is done."

"Over our objections in opposition, Democrats in the Ways and Means Committee have unleashed a dangerous new political weapon that overturns decades of privacy protections," he told reporters. "The era of political targeting, and of Congress's enemies list, is back and every American, every American taxpayer, who may get on the wrong side of the majority in Congress is now at risk."

Trump spent much of Tuesday evening releasing statements on his social media platform that were unrelated to his tax returns. The IRS didn't immediately respond to a request for comment.

But an accompanying report released by Congress' nonpartisan Joint Committee on Taxation also found repeated faults with the IRS's approach toward auditing Trump and his companies.

IRS agents in charge of the audits repeatedly did not bring in specialists with expertise assessing the complicated structure of Trump's holdings. They frequently determined that a limited examination was warranted because Trump hired a professional accounting firm that they assumed would make sure Trump "properly reports all income and deduction items correctly."

"We must express disagreement with the decision not to engage any specialists when facing returns with a high degree of complexity," the tax committee report states. "We also fail to understand why the fact that counsel and an accounting firm participated in tax preparation ensures the accuracy of the returns."

The reports released Tuesday renewed scrutiny on one of the biggest questions that has surrounded

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Trump since he shifted from a reality television star to an unlikely presidential candidate: Why did he abandon the post-Watergate tradition of White House hopefuls releasing their tax returns? Trump and those around him have consistently said that IRS audits prevented him from doing so.

"I would love to give them, but I'm not going to do it while I'm under audit," Trump said on April 10, 2019, before boarding the presidential helicopter.

There are no laws that would have barred Trump from voluntarily releasing his returns even if they were being audited. But when Trump spoke of being audited, it's unclear whether he was referring to the mandatory process specifically aimed at presidents or prior reviews that are more typical for wealthy individuals.

The New York Times found that before he entered the White House, Trump was facing an IRS audit potentially tied to a \$72.9 million tax refund arising from \$700 million in losses he claimed in 2009. The documents released Tuesday indicate that Trump continued to collect tax benefits from those losses through 2018.

"What happened?" said Steven Rosenthal, senior fellow at the Urban-Brookings Tax Policy Center. "If it was not resolved, the IRS stalled. If it was resolved in Trump's favor, then maybe the IRS rolled over and played dead. That's what we have to find out."

The report raised multiple red flags about aspects of Trump's tax filings, including his carryover losses, deductions tied to conservation and charitable donations, and loans to his children that could be taxable gifts.

In response to the findings, the Ways and Means Committee is proposing legislation to beef up the IRS's approach, requiring an initial report no later than 90 days from the filing of a president's tax returns. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi said the chamber would "move swiftly" to advance the legislation.

Democrats argue that the IRS is ill-equipped to audit high-income, complex tax returns, and instead targets filers in lower-income brackets — something they have tried to remedy with their work on the panel.

"Because of the dismantling of funding to the IRS, they have not been unable to do their job," said Rep. Steven Horsford, D-Nev. "They did not have the specialized staff to do it for that high-income category — not just this person, but people who fall into that category."

But Republicans have vowed to cut a recent influx of funding for more IRS agents. That's the first bill they will consider upon taking the House majority in less than two weeks.

The committee's move represents yet another challenge for Trump. Just a day earlier, the House Jan. 6 committee voted to make a criminal referral to the Justice Department for Trump's role in sparking the violent insurrection at the U.S. Capitol. He's also facing an intensifying investigation in Atlanta for efforts to overturn the 2020 election results in Georgia. And he's the subject of growing criticism from fellow Republicans for contributing to the party's underwhelming performance in last month's midterms.

Trump's family business, The Trump Organization, was convicted earlier this month on tax fraud charges for helping some executives dodge taxes on company-paid perks such as apartments and luxury cars.

Manhattan district attorney Alvin Bragg told The Associated Press in an interview last week that his office's investigation into Trump and his businesses continues.

"We're going to follow the facts and continue to do our job," Bragg said.

Trump has argued there is little to learn from his tax returns even as he has fought to keep them private.

"You can't learn much from tax returns, but it is illegal to release them if they are not yours!" he complained on his social media network last weekend.

Policy, climate, war make 2022 'pivot year' for clean energy

By SIBI ARASU Associated Press

BENGALURU, India (AP) — For renewable energy companies in India, it's a good time to be in business.

One of India's largest renewable energy firms, Renew Power, will be among the corporations big and small hoping for a piece of a \$2.6 billion government scheme that encourages the domestic manufacturing of components required to produce solar energy. It's the biggest such incentive in India's history.

Renew Power's CEO Sumant Sinha said the government funds for clean energy send "a strong signal"

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that the country wants “to become a manufacturing location for renewable energy equipment and a global alternative to China eventually.”

“We are excited to be a part of this journey,” he said.

The company has over 100 clean energy projects across India and has become the world’s tenth largest solar and wind energy company in just over a decade.

Other major governments around the world have been green lighting ambitious renewable energy policies this past year that aim for major expansions of wind and solar energies, along with development of technologies like carbon capture, which captures carbon dioxide, a central cause of climate change, and stores it in the ground. Some of the policies also include tax credits to buy electric vehicles, heat pumps or energy efficient materials for construction.

The United States signed into law the Inflation Reduction Act, the most ambitious climate legislation in U.S. history, the European parliament passed the REPower EU plan to reduce dependence on Russian fossil fuels and fast forward the transition to clean energy and China announced ambitious schemes to enable the country to meet its 2030 clean energy goals five years ahead of schedule.

Experts say the task is now to build on this momentum in 2023, strengthen energy grid infrastructure and resolve backend issues which slow down the distribution and transmission of clean energy.

“From an energy perspective, 2022 will go down as a pivot year. For the first time, we have discernible proof that fossil fuel demand after 200 years of growth had reached a peak in 2019 and we are now bumping along a plateau before an inevitable decline,” said Kingsmill Bond, an energy strategist at the Rocky Mountain Institute, a clean energy non-profit group.

RMI’s research has found that global energy demand grew by around six additional exajoules in 2022 — enough energy for around 6 million transatlantic flights. This is less than usual year-on-year growth as energy use is getting more efficient, the report said. Solar and wind supply growth this year was also calculated to be about six exajoules.

Bond added that the price of clean energy was getting closer to that of fossil fuels and in some cases it was cheaper.

A report by the International Energy Agency said that oil prices rose well above \$100 per barrel in mid-2022 and high gas and coal prices accounted for electricity cost hikes around the world. But increased use of clean energy saved Asian countries, including China and India, a total of \$34 billion in the past year, a separate report found.

Energy analysts say that the global energy crisis triggered by the Russian invasion of Ukraine and increasing climate threats such as the disastrous floods in Pakistan have accelerated the clean energy policies and big tickets investments that are needed to transition to renewable energy, especially wind and solar energy, around the world.

The sudden lack of access to fossil fuels and supply chain crunches were also other key reasons for the aggressive tilt towards cleaner energy. For example, Russia’s sale of gas to Europe was reduced to a trickle.

The invasion “had the effect of making it apparent that clean energy is the solution,” said Lauri Myllyvirta, a lead analyst at the Centre for Research on Energy and Clean Air.

Despite the positive momentum towards clean energy, there were some pitfalls too.

“Knee jerk reactions saw some places shift back to fossil fuels even if its at a higher price to the taxpayer,” said Vibhuti Garg, a New Delhi-based energy economist at the Institute for Energy Economics and Financial Analysis.

India’s coal production increased by about 17% from April to November 2022. Bangladesh increased its imports of natural gas and went ahead with opening thermal powerplants in the country. Germany, a strong advocate of clean energy, turned to coal and oil to address its short term power needs.

“It was a good year for renewable energy but sadly, not a bad year for fossil fuels either,” Garg added.

But spurred by momentum from previous years the clean energy sector worldwide nevertheless took off this year.

“You know, 20 years ago, renewables became the cleanest forms of energy and then in the last few

years, renewables become the cheapest form of energy," said Dave Jones, an energy analyst at London-based environmental think-tank, Ember. "Only this year, they've become the most secure form of energy."

Another report by the IEA said that developments in 2022 triggered unprecedented momentum behind renewables, with the world set to add as much renewable power in the next five years as it did in the past 20.

"There is still a lot that needs to be done but I think 2022 will be remembered as the year in which for the first time, renewables have ticked all the boxes," Jones said.

There's acknowledgement from those in the sector that more work needs to be done to overcome the scale of the transition.

Sinha of Renew Power hopes that government policies in 2023 focus on dealing with the bottlenecks that prevent clean energy growth.

"Currently the power sector is designed around fossil fuels and suddenly you have all this clean energy coming into the grid," said Sinha.

"We need more proactive policies that find ways to make room for renewables." ____

Follow Sibi Arasu on Twitter at @sibi123

Musk says he'll be Twitter CEO until a replacement is found

SAN FRANCISCO (AP) — Elon Musk said Tuesday that he plans on remaining as Twitter's CEO until he can find someone willing to replace him in the job.

Musk's announcement came after millions of Twitter users asked him to step down in an unscientific poll the billionaire himself created and promised to abide by.

"I will resign as CEO as soon as I find someone foolish enough to take the job!" Musk tweeted. "After that, I will just run the software & servers teams."

Since taking over San Francisco-based Twitter in late October, Musk's run as CEO has been marked by quickly issued rules and policies that have often been withdrawn or changed soon after being made public.

He has also alienated some investors in his electric vehicle company Tesla who are concerned that Twitter is taking too much of his attention.

Some of Musk's actions have unnerved Twitter advertisers and turned off users. They include laying off half of Twitter's workforce, letting go contract content moderators and disbanding a council of trust and safety advisors that the company formed in 2016 to address hate speech, child exploitation, suicide, self-harm and other problems on the platform.

Musk, who also helms the SpaceX rocket company, has previously acknowledged how difficult it will be to find someone to take over as Twitter CEO.

Bantering with Twitter followers last Sunday, he said that the person replacing him "must like pain a lot" to run a company that he said 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.

As things stand, Musk would still retain overwhelming influence over platform as its owner. He fired the company's board of directors soon after taking control.

How will asylum work after Title 42 ends? No one knows yet

By ELLIOT SPAGAT Associated Press

SAN DIEGO (AP) — Show up at a border crossing with Mexico and ask a U.S. official for asylum? Sign up online? Go to a U.S. embassy or consulate?

The Biden administration has been conspicuously silent about how migrants who plan to claim should enter the United States when Trump-era limits end, fueling rumors, confusion and doubts about the government's readiness despite more than two years to prepare.

"I absolutely wish that we had more information to share with folks," said Kate Clark, senior director for immigration services at Jewish Family Service of San Diego, which has facilitated travel within the United States for more than 110,000 migrants released from custody since October 2018.

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Migrants have been denied rights to seek asylum under U.S. and international law 2.5 million times since March 2020 on grounds of preventing COVID-19 under a public-health rule that was scheduled to expire Wednesday until U.S. Supreme Court Chief Justice John Roberts ordered a temporary hold. Title 42 has been applied disproportionately to those from countries that Mexico agrees to take back: Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador and more recently Venezuela, in addition to Mexico. People from those countries are expected to drive an anticipated increase in asylum claims once the rule is lifted.

Many expect the government to use CBPOne, an online platform for appointment registration that was introduced in 2020. The U.S. Customs and Border Protection mobile app has had limited use for people applying for travel permits and for those tracking U.S. immigration court hearings under the now-defunct "Remain in Mexico" policy.

It's expected migrants using the app would make appointments to seek asylum in the United States, but would have to remain outside the country until their slotted time and date.

CBPOne, which some advocacy groups oppose over data privacy concerns, may be impractical for migrants without internet access or language skills. The agency also must get the word out.

Nicolas Palazzo, an attorney with Las Americas Immigrant Advocacy Center in El Paso, Texas, said he worries scammers will charge migrants to sign them up and that CBP's limited processing capacity will result in intolerable waits.

"Unless they plan to ramp that up significantly, someone applying for admission on CBPOne is going to be given a date that is like a year out," Palazzo said. "Realistically, can they tell me with a straight face that they expect people to wait that long?"

Mohamad Reza Taran, 56, left Iran on Nov. 26 after converting to Christianity and flew to Tijuana, Mexico, where U.S. border inspectors at a San Diego crossing turned him away when he asked for asylum.

The computer technician planned to wait to see if he would get in immediately after Title 42 is lifted and, if not, said he would cross the border illegally, perhaps by climbing the border wall in San Diego or walking across flat desert in Yuma, Arizona. He has family in Los Angeles and sees the United States as his only option.

"I have nothing here," Taran said in an interview outside a church in Tijuana, where he was searching for people who could instruct him on U.S. policies.

U.S. Rep. Henry Cuellar, a Texas Democrat, said CBP officials told him last week they hoped to funnel asylum-seekers through official crossings and turn back to Mexico anyone who crosses the border illegally to the greatest possible extent. Doing so would likely be challenged in court because asylum law says people who enter illegally are entitled to seek protection.

No one disputes that the Border Patrol is woefully ill-equipped for processing — even while Title 42 kept a lid on numbers.

The Border Patrol paroled nearly 450,000 migrants in the United States through October — including 68,837 in October and 95,191 in September — sparing its agents the time-consuming work of issuing orders to appear in immigration court. According to a Government Accountability Office report, it typically takes at least two hours to prepare a court case, compared to a half-hour to release someone on parole.

Migrants paroled by Border Patrol agents are allowed to move freely within the United States and told to report to an U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement offices at their final destinations, typically in two months.

The GAO report, released in September, details how the processing work dumped on ICE has hamstrung employees. As of March, ICE scheduled 15,100 appointments for families to complete processing as far out as March 2024. One ICE office reported up to 500 people a day showing up in person, most without appointments.

After families get a court appearance, they contend with a court system that is backlogged by more than 2 million cases, resulting in waits of several years for judges to reach decisions.

Waiting two years to just get on the court docket reflects a "totally collapsed" system, said Theresa Cardinal Brown, managing director of immigration and cross-border policy for the Bipartisan Policy Center.

Online registration using CBPOne would be "antithetical to the whole concept of asylum" because it could force people to wait in unsafe places, said Melissa Crow, litigation director for the Center for Gender &

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Refugee Studies at the University of California Hastings College of the Law.

Crow and others believe CBP could process far more people than they have been.

Earlier this year, the agency processed up to about 1,000 Ukrainians a day at San Diego's San Ysidro border crossing, about three times its custody capacity.

Since the pandemic, migrants released in San Diego have been housed in motels until leaving, usually on a flight to family and friends east of the Mississippi River, Clark said. To prepare for the end of Title 42, Jewish Family Service opened a building for families to snack, watch television and play in a courtyard after they book travel, freeing up motel rooms for new arrivals. Clark likens it to an "airport lounge."

CBP has been releasing more migrants to Jewish Family Service through exemptions to the asylum limits — about 200 to 250 a day, Clark said. Others are housed by the Catholic Charities Diocese of San Diego.

"It's a day we've been working toward for some time," Clark said Monday, having heard nothing from CBP about how migrants will be processed after asylum limits end. She anticipates more releases but doesn't know how many.

Zelenskyy preparing to visit DC, after tour of war's front

By LISA MASCARO, NOMAAN MERCHANT, E. EDUARDO CASTILLO and ZEKE MILLER Associated Press WASHINGTON (AP) — Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy is preparing to visit Washington on Wednesday, according to three AP sources, in his first known trip outside the country since Russia's invasion began in February.

Two congressional sources and one person familiar with the matter confirmed plans for the visit. They spoke on the condition of anonymity because of the highly sensitive nature of the trip. They said Zelenskyy's visit, while expected, could still be called off at the last minute due to security concerns.

The visit to Washington is set to include an address to Congress on Capitol Hill and a meeting with President Joe Biden. It comes as lawmakers are set to vote on a year-end spending package that includes about \$45 billion in emergency assistance to Ukraine and as the U.S. prepares to send Patriot surface-to-air missiles to the country to help stave off Russia's invasion.

The visit comes a day after Zelenskyy made a daring and dangerous trip to what he called the hottest spot on the 1,300-kilometer (800-mile) front line, the city of Bakhmut in Ukraine's contested Donetsk province, where he praised Ukrainian troops for their "courage, resilience and strength" as artillery boomed in the background.

The Ukrainian leader told the troops he passed through Sloviansk, Kramatorsk and Druzhkivka to reach Bakhmut in an unannounced trip that appeared designed to show Moscow's failure to capture the city and dishearten the Russians trying to surround it.

"Bakhmut Fortress. Our people. Unconquered by the enemy. Who with their bravery prove that we will endure and will not give up what's ours," he wrote on his Telegram channel, thanking the troops for "the courage, resilience and strength shown in repelling the enemy attacks.

"Since May, the occupiers have been trying to break our Bakhmut, but time goes by and Bakhmut is already breaking not only the Russian army, but also the Russian mercenaries who came to replace the wasted army of the occupiers," he said.

Russia's invasion, which began Feb. 24, has lost momentum. The illegally annexed provinces of Donetsk, Kherson, Luhansk and Zaporizhzhia remain fiercely contested. Capturing Bakhmut would sever Ukraine's supply lines and open a route for Russian forces to press on toward cities that are key Ukrainian strongholds in the Donetsk province.

In a video released by his office from the Bakhmut visit, Zelenskyy was handed a Ukrainian flag and alluded to delivering it to U.S. leaders.

"The guys handed over our beautiful Ukrainian flag with their signatures for us to pass on," Zelenskyy said in the video. "We are not in an easy situation. The enemy is increasing its army. Our people are braver and need more powerful weapons. We will pass it on from the boys to the Congress, to the president of the United States. We are grateful for their support, but it is not enough. It is a hint — it is not enough."

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The latest tranche of U.S. funding would be the biggest American infusion of assistance yet to Ukraine, above even Biden's \$37 billion emergency request, and ensure that funding flows to the war effort for months to come.

On Wednesday, the U.S. was also set to announce that it will send \$1.8 billion in military aid to Ukraine in a major package that will for the first time include a Patriot missile battery and precision guided bombs for its fighter jets, U.S. officials said.

The aid signals an expansion by the U.S. in the kinds of advanced weaponry it will send to Ukraine to bolster its air defenses against what has been an increasing barrage of Russian missiles in recent weeks. The package will include about \$1 billion in weapons from Pentagon stocks and \$800 million in funding through the Ukraine Security Assistance Initiative, officials said.

The decision to send the Patriot battery comes despite threats from Russia's Foreign Ministry that the delivery of the advanced surface-to-air missile system would be considered a provocative step and that the Patriot and any crews accompanying it would be a legitimate target for Moscow's military.

It's not clear exactly when the Patriot would arrive on the front lines in Ukraine, since U.S. troops will have to train Ukrainian forces on how to use the high-tech system. The training could take several weeks, and is expected to be done in Germany. To date, all training of Ukraine's forces by the U.S. and its Western allies has taken place in European countries.

Also included in the package will be an undisclosed number of Joint Direct Attack Munitions kits, or JDAMs. The kits will be used to modify massive bombs by adding tail fins and precision navigation systems so that rather than being simply dropped from a fighter jet onto a target, they can be released and guided to a target.

The visit comes at an important moment as the White House braces for greater resistance from a Republican-controlled House that's signaled it will put more scrutiny on aid for Ukraine in the new Congress. GOP leader Kevin McCarthy has said his party's lawmakers will not write a "blank check" for Ukraine.

Biden and Zelenskyy frequently have held phone calls in coordination with the White House announcing new tranches of military assistance for Ukraine. The calls have been mostly warm, with Biden praising Ukraine for remaining steadfast against the Russians and Zelenskyy thanking the U.S. president for support.

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, who visited Zelenskyy earlier this year in Kyiv, encouraged lawmakers to be on hand for Wednesday evening's session.

"We are ending a very special session of the 117th Congress with legislation that makes progress for the American people as well as support for our Democracy," Pelosi wrote Tuesday in a letter to colleagues. "Please be present for a very special focus on Democracy Wednesday night."

Later at the Capitol, Pelosi said of Ukrainians, "They are fighting for democracy for all of us."

For his part, Russian President Vladimir Putin on Tuesday hailed the "courage and self-denial" of his forces in Ukraine — but he did so at a ceremony in an opulent and glittering hall at the Kremlin in Moscow, not on the battlefield.

Mercenaries from the Wagner Group, a shadowy Russian military contractor, are reported to be leading the charge in Bakhmut. Unverified videos on a popular Russian social media platform showed the Wagner Group's leader, Yevgeny Prigozhin, standing near an artillery piece and saying he was ready to meet Zelenskyy in Bakhmut.

At the Kremlin ceremony, Putin presented awards to the Moscow-appointed heads of the four illegally annexed regions of Ukraine.

"Our country has often faced challenges and defended its sovereignty," Putin said. "Now Russia is again facing such a challenge. Soldiers, officers and volunteers are showing outstanding examples of courage and self-denial on the front line."

In a video address honoring Russia's military and security agencies, he praised the security personnel deployed to the four regions, saying that "people living there, Russian citizens, count on being protected by you."

Putin acknowledged the challenges faced by the security personnel.

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"Yes, it's difficult for you," he said, adding that the situation in the regions is "extremely difficult."

British authorities, meanwhile, gave a bleak assessment of how the war is going for Russia.

Some 100,000 Russian troops were "dead, injured or have deserted" in the invasion, U.K. Defense Secretary Ben Wallace said. Wallace didn't give a figure for Ukrainian casualties, but the U.S. military recently put the estimated number of Ukrainian troops killed and wounded at about 100,000.

Losses in Russia's military command have also taken a toll, as has the destruction of equipment. "Not one single operational commander then in place on Feb. 24 is in charge now," Wallace told lawmakers in the House of Commons. "Russia has lost significant numbers of generals and commanding officers."

"Russian capability has been severely hampered by the destruction of more than 4,500 armored and protected vehicles, as well as more than 140 helicopters and fixed wing aircraft," Wallace said.

Ukraine's counteroffensive has succeeded in recapturing large swaths of land. After 300 days of war, the U.K. Ministry of Defense tweeted, Ukraine has liberated about 54% of the maximum amount of extra territory Russia seized in the invasion. It didn't say what portion of Ukrainian territory Russia controlled at the peak of its gains.

Russia now controls about 18% of internationally recognized areas of Ukraine, including those parts of the eastern Donbas and the Crimean Peninsula seized in 2014.

With the fighting in the east at a stalemate, Moscow has used missiles and drones to attack Ukraine's power equipment, hoping to leave people without electricity as freezing weather sets in.

Life in the Ukrainian capital took a minor but welcomed step toward normality with the reopening of two of Kyiv's main subway stations for the first time since the war began. The key hubs of Maidan Nezalezhnosti and Khreschatyk, like the capital's other underground stations, have served as air raid shelters.

"It's the feeling that despite everything, we are returning to a routine that we were used to," said 24-year-old passenger Denys Kapustin. "This is very important."

AP sources: YouTube TV front-runner for NFL "Sunday Ticket"

By JOE REEDY AP Sports Writer

YouTube TV has emerged as the favorite to land the NFL's "Sunday Ticket" package of out-of-market games, but the sides have not finalized a deal, two people with knowledge of the negotiations said Tuesday evening.

A deal could be announced as soon as Wednesday, according to the people, who spoke to The Associated Press on condition of anonymity because they weren't authorized to discuss financial matters and the contract is still being negotiated.

The Wall Street Journal was the first to report that YouTube TV, owned by Google, was the front-runner for the package that allows fans to watch any Sunday afternoon game.

"Sunday Ticket" has been on DirecTV since 1994. The satellite provider has paid \$1.5 billion per year on an eight-year contract that expires at the end of this season.

Viewers pay around \$300 a season for "Sunday Ticket," which averages 2 million subscribers. As of August, DirecTV had a total of 13.9 million subscribers.

It would be the second time in less than two years that the NFL has partnered with a streaming service to air games. The league's 11-year contract with Amazon Prime Video for Thursday night games started this season.

Besides Amazon, Apple and ESPN were believed to be contenders for "Sunday Ticket."

Google said in June that YouTube TV, which was launched in 2017, had surpassed 5 million accounts and was the biggest internet-based pay TV service in the U.S. That number includes users on free promotional trials.

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Millions jam Buenos Aires streets to celebrate World Cup win

By DANIEL POLITI and ALMUDENA CALATRAVA Associated Press

BUENOS AIRES, Argentina (AP) — A parade to celebrate the Argentine World Cup champions was abruptly cut short Tuesday as millions of people poured onto thoroughfares, highways and overpasses in a chaotic attempt to catch a glimpse of the national team that won one of the great World Cup finals of all time.

So many jubilant, flag-waving fans swarmed the capital that the players had to abandon the open-air bus transporting them to Buenos Aires and board helicopters for a capital flyover that the government billed as an aerial parade.

"The world champions are flying over the whole route on helicopters because it was impossible to continue by land due to the explosion of people's happiness," Gabriela Cerruti, the spokesperson for President Alberto Fernández, wrote on social media.

After flying over key points of Buenos Aires where fans had gathered, the helicopters returned to the headquarters of the Argentine Football Association outside the capital.

Some fans continued celebrating in the streets, while others headed out of Buenos Aires with long faces, complaining they were unable to pay their respects to the team that brought home the country's first World Cup trophy since 1986.

"We're angry because the government didn't organize this properly so we could all celebrate," said Diego Benavidez, 25, who had been waiting since early morning to see the team. "They stole the World Cup from us."

Others, however, took it in stride.

"I'm not disappointed, we lived the party," said Nicolás López, 33, who was in downtown Buenos Aires with his 7-year-old daughter.

The parade was suspended shortly after two people jumped from a bridge onto the open-top bus carrying the players. One made it inside the bus, the other fell onto the pavement.

Football association head Claudio Tapia blamed law enforcement for the changeup of plans. "The same security organisms that were escorting us are not allowing us to move forward," Tapia wrote on social media. "I apologize in the name of all the champion players."

Toward nightfall, when most of the fans had already poured out of downtown Buenos Aires, there were isolated clashes between a few stragglers and law enforcemen. At least eight people were injured, according to local media reports.

The incidents began when firefighters went to the Obelisk, the iconic Buenos Aires landmark that is the traditional site of celebrations, to evict a few people who had broken their way inside the monument.

The bus had been moving at a snail's pace for more than four hours through the throngs of humanity before the overland parade was cut short. Team Captain Lionel Messi and the rest of the players waved at the massive crowd as they carried the World Cup trophy aloft after securing the country's third title.

"This is madness, it's indescribable," said Brian Andreassi, 23, as he walked downtown wearing the team's jersey. "There are no words."

The World Cup and the success of the Messi-led squad brought much-needed good news for a country stuck for years in economic doldrums and suffering one of the world's highest inflation rates, with nearly 4-in-10 people living in poverty.

"There's an immense union among all Argentines — unity, happiness. It's as if you can breathe another air, there's another energy in the air," said Victoria Roldán. "My body and heart are about to burst."

Carrying a World Cup replica, the 32-year-old and her 36-year-old sister, Mariana, were eager to catch a glimpse of the team and in particular its captain, Messi.

"We're dying to see him," Roldán said. "Seeing him with that immense smile, with those bright eyes filled with hope, it really fills our heart with joy and happiness. ... I think that Leo has deserved it for years, and this was his moment."

The players were all smiles as they watched the multitudes hostling to get as close as possible to the bus. An estimated 4 million people were in the streets by Tuesday afternoon, according to local media

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citing police sources.

"I celebrate the way the people took to the streets to honor our squad," President Alberto Fernández wrote on social media after the parade was cut short.

Celebrating fans took over highways, avenues and the access routes into the capital as temperatures climbed to 30 degrees Celsius (86 degrees Fahrenheit).

Thousands had set up camp since early Tuesday morning at the Obelisk.

The Argentine president declared a national holiday Tuesday so the country could celebrate the World Cup victory.

The song "Muchachos," which was written by a fan and became a popular unofficial anthem for the Argentine team at the World Cup, filled the streets as fans joined in singing it over and over again.

Some fans also paid tribute to Argentine soccer legend Diego Maradona, the captain of the 1986 squad that won the World Cup and who died two years ago, with flags bearing his name and face. "This is for Diego, who's seeing it from heaven," fans chanted.

"This is a party. The last time Argentina was a champion I was 3 years old, I don't remember anything," said Yael Torchinsky, 39. "I want to live this intensely because the Argentine people need this happiness."

By mid-afternoon, fans started filling up Plaza de Mayo in front of Government House, amid rumors the players might go there for a reprise of the festivities for Argentina's 1986 World Cup victory that were held there. Fernández's administration had offered the palatial mansion, popularly known as the Casa Rosada, or Pink House, according to Security Minister Aníbal Fernández.

The raucous welcome for the team began before dawn as thousands of fans lined up upon their return from Qatar.

The players were beaming as they descended from their plane in Ezeiza, outside Argentina's capital, shortly before 3 a.m. onto a red carpet. Messi was the first one out, carrying the World Cup trophy, flanked by coach Lionel Scaloni, who put his arm around the captain as they walked past a sign that read, "Thank you, champions."

The team was welcomed by rock band La Mosca singing "Muchachos," and several players, including Messi, could be seen singing the words as they boarded the bus taking them to the Argentine Football Association headquarters.

It took the bus an hour to travel the 11 kilometers (6.8 miles) from the airport to AFA headquarters, where the players were welcomed with fireworks, and then spent the night. In the morning, Messi posted a photo on social media showing him hugging the World Cup trophy next to him while he slept.

Peru Congress opens door to early elections amid unrest

By DAVID PEREDA Associated Press

LIMA, Peru (AP) — Peru's Congress tentatively endorsed a plan on Tuesday to hold early elections in an attempt to defuse a national political crisis marked by deadly unrest after lawmakers ousted President Pedro Castillo.

The proposal, approved by 91 of the legislature's 130 members, would push up to April 2024 elections for president and congress originally scheduled for 2026. The plan — which seeks to add one article to Peru's constitution — must be ratified by another two-thirds majority in the next annual legislative session for it to be adopted.

The measure has the backing of caretaker President Dina Boluarte, who took over from Castillo after the former schoolteacher tried to dissolve Congress on Dec. 7 — a move widely condemned by even his leftist supporters though it touched off deadly nationwide protests that continue. After the failed move, Castillo was swiftly arrested.

The early elections proposal failed to muster enough votes last week after leftist lawmakers abstained, conditioning their support on the promise of a constitutional assembly to overhaul Peru's political charter — something that conservatives denounce as putting Peru's free market economic model at risk. On Tuesday, they dropped that demand.

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"Don't be blind," Boluarte said over the weekend, slamming lawmakers for not listening to voters' demands. "Look at the people and take action in line with what they are asking."

But even as Boluarte seeks to restore order, her caretaker government is being buffeted by fellow leftists. Chief among them is Mexican President Andrés Manuel López Obrador, who has sharply criticized Peru's conservative media and business establishment for the classist, sometimes bigoted way it portrayed Castillo during his 17-month presidency.

On Tuesday, Boluarte's government expelled Mexico's ambassador, giving him 72 hours to leave the country, in protest of what it said was López Obrador's repeated and "unacceptable interference" in Peru's internal affairs.

"The statements by the Mexican president are especially grave considering the violence in our country, which is incompatible with the legitimate right of every individual to protest peacefully," Peru's foreign ministry said in a statement.

The Peruvian statement was issued hours after López Obrador's government said it was granting asylum to Castillo's family, which took refuge at Mexico's embassy in Lima and is awaiting safe passage out of the country.

Castillo, a political novice who lived in a two-story adobe home in the Andean highlands before moving to the presidential palace, eked out a narrow victory in elections last year that rocked Peru's political establishment and laid bare the deep divisions between residents of the vibrant capital, Lima, and the long-neglected countryside.

Castillo's attempts to break a stalemate with hostile lawmakers by trying to dissolve Congress only deepened those tensions. Within hours of his attempted power grab, he was ousted by Congress and jailed facing a criminal investigation, accused of trying to usurp power in violation of the constitution.

Mexico's president has reiterated his willingness to grant asylum to Castillo, who was intercepted by protesters and security forces while trying to flee to the Mexican Embassy in Lima after his bid to shutter Congress backfired.

On Monday, he said that if lawmakers reject early elections and cling to power, and the president stays, then "everything will have to be achieved by force and repression, leading to a great deal of suffering and instability for the people."

Boluarte, who has the backing of U.S. President Joe Biden's administration and fluently speaks the native Quechua language of many protesters, has struggled to restore order since Castillo's arrest.

In several parts of the country, protesters who voted for her and Castillo's ticket last year have defied a 30-day state of emergency and taken to the streets to demand her immediate resignation.

The death toll from the unrest rose to 26 on Monday after security forces firing tear gas dispersed thousands of wildcat miners who cut off the Pan-American Highway at two vital chokepoints for more than a week, forcing truckers to dump spoiled food and fish bound for market. Hundreds have been injured.

Should lawmakers decide to push up elections, they would in essence be throwing themselves out of work. Under Peru's constitution, the 130 members of Congress are entitled to serve only a single term.

Police seize on COVID-19 tech to expand global surveillance

By GARANCE BURKE, JOSEF FEDERMAN, HUIZHONG WU, KRUTIKA PATHI and ROD McGUIRK Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — Majd Ramlawi was serving coffee in Jerusalem's Old City when a chilling text message appeared on his phone.

"You have been spotted as having participated in acts of violence in the Al-Aqsa Mosque," it read in Arabic. "We will hold you accountable."

Ramlawi, then 19, was among hundreds of people who civil rights attorneys estimate got the text last year, at the height of one of the most turbulent recent periods in the Holy Land. Many, including Ramlawi, say they only lived or worked in the neighborhood, and had nothing to do with the unrest. What he didn't know was that the feared internal security agency, the Shin Bet, was using mass surveillance technol-

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ogy mobilized for coronavirus contact tracing, against Israeli residents and citizens for purposes entirely unrelated to COVID-19.

In the pandemic's bewildering early days, millions worldwide believed government officials who said they needed confidential data for new tech tools that could help stop coronavirus' spread. In return, governments got a firehose of individuals' private health details, photographs that captured their facial measurements and their home addresses.

Now, from Beijing to Jerusalem to Hyderabad, India, and Perth, Australia, The Associated Press has found that authorities used these technologies and data to halt travel for activists and ordinary people, harass marginalized communities and link people's health information to other surveillance and law enforcement tools. In some cases, data was shared with spy agencies. The issue has taken on fresh urgency almost three years into the pandemic as China's ultra-strict zero-COVID policies recently ignited the sharpest public rebuke of the country's authoritarian leadership since the pro-democracy protests in Tiananmen Square in 1989.

For more than a year, AP journalists interviewed sources and pored over thousands of documents to trace how technologies marketed to "flatten the curve" were put to other uses. Just as the balance between privacy and national security shifted after the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks, COVID-19 has given officials justification to embed tracking tools in society that have lasted long after lockdowns.

"Any intervention that increases state power to monitor individuals has a long tail and is a ratcheting system," said John Scott-Railton, a senior researcher at the Toronto-based internet watchdog Citizen Lab. "Once you get it, is very unlikely it will ever go away."

CODE RED

In China, the last major country in the world to enforce strict COVID-19 lockdowns, citizens have been required to install cell-phone apps to move about freely in most cities. Drawing from telecommunications data and PCR test results, the apps produce individual QR codes that change from green to yellow or red, depending on a person's health status.

The apps and lockdowns are part of China's sweeping pandemic prevention policies that have pushed the public to a breaking point. When an apartment fire in Urumqi last month left at least 10 dead, many blamed zero-tolerance COVID policies. That sparked demonstrations in major cities nationwide, the largest display of defiance in decades, after which the government announced it would only check health codes in "special places," such as schools, hospitals and nursing homes.

Last week, the government went further, saying it would shut down a national-level health code to ease travel between provinces. But cities and provinces have their own codes, which have been more dominant. In Beijing last week, restaurants, offices, hotels and gyms were still requiring local codes for entry.

Over the past few years, Chinese citizens have needed a green code to board domestic flights or trains, and in some cities even to enter the supermarket or to get on a bus. If they were found to have been in close contact with someone who tested positive for COVID-19, or if the government imposed a local quarantine, the code would turn red, and they were stuck at home.

There's evidence that the health codes have been used to stifle dissent.

This story, supported by the Pulitzer Center on Crisis Reporting, is part of an ongoing Associated Press series, "Tracked," that investigates the power and consequences of decisions driven by algorithms on people's everyday lives.

In early September, former wealth manager Yang Jiahao bought a train ticket to Beijing, where he planned to lodge various complaints with the central government. The night before, a woman he described as a handler invited him to dinner. Handlers are usually hired by state security as part of "stability maintenance" operations and can require people to meet or travel when authorities worry they could cause trouble. Yang had a meal with the handler, and the next morning Guangzhou health authorities reported a COVID-19 case less than a kilometer from where they dined, he said.

Based on city regulations, Yang's code should have turned yellow, requiring him to take a few COVID

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tests to show he was negative.

Instead, the app turned red, even though tests showed that he didn't have COVID. Yang was ordered to quarantine and a paper seal was placed on his door.

"They can do whatever they want," he said.

An officer at the Huangcun station of the Guangzhou police referred comment to city-level authorities on Yang's case, saying he required proof that the caller was from the AP. Guangzhou's Public Security Bureau and the city's Center for Disease Control and Prevention did not respond to faxed requests for comment.

In another show of how the apps can control lives, in June, a group of bank customers were effectively corralled by the health codes when they tried going to Henan's provincial capital in Zhengzhou to protest being unable to access their online bank accounts.

A notice said the problem was due to a system upgrade. But the customers soon found out the real reason: a police investigation into stockholders in the parent bank had rendered 40 billion yuan in funds inaccessible, according to local media reports. Frustrated after months of complaints, a group of customers decided to hold a protest in Zhengzhou at the provincial banking commission.

Customer Xu Zhihao uploaded his itinerary to get the Henan province health code after he tested negative for COVID-19 in his coastal city of Tianjin, just south of Beijing. As he got off the train in Zhengzhou, Xu was asked to scan his QR code at the station, and immediately it turned red. The train station employee called security and took him to a police booth.

Xu said police took him to the basement to quarantine. Three other people joined him, and all four realized that they had come to get their money back.

"They had set the net in place, waiting for us," Xu said.

From a group chat, Xu and others learned that many protesters had met a similar fate, at the high-speed rail train station, at the airport and even on the highway. A government inquiry later found that red codes were given to 1,317 people, many of whom had planned to protest.

China's National Health Commission, which has led the COVID response, did not reply to a fax requesting comment. The Henan provincial government did not respond either.

Even after China ends lockdowns, some dissidents and human rights activists predict the local-level health codes will stay on as a technological means of social control. Early on, provinces didn't share data, but in the past few years, that has changed.

Some provincial governments have created local apps that can link health, location and even credit information, which leaves open the possibility for these apps or the national databases they draw from to be used to monitor people in the future, according to an AP review of procurement documents, research and interviews. Xu and Yang, for instance, were both stopped in their tracks by local health codes.

In February, police in northeastern Heilongjiang province sought to upgrade their local health code so they could search PCR test results for anyone in China, in real time, according to procurement documents provided exclusively by ChinaFile, a digital magazine published by the Asia Society. A company whose parent is government-owned won the non-competitive bid to connect that app to a national database of PCR data run by the State Council, China's Cabinet, fulfilling a national directive, the documents show. The same company, Beijing Beiming Digital Technology, also claims on its website that it has developed more than 30 pandemic apps.

"It's the governance model, the philosophy behind it is to strengthen social control through technology. It's strengthened by the health app, and it's definitely going to stay after COVID is over," said Yaqiu Wang, a senior researcher with Human Rights Watch. "I think it's very, very powerful."

"THERE ARE TWO SETS OF LAWS"

In Jerusalem's Old City, tourists sipping fresh pomegranate juice, worshippers and locals taking a shortcut home are all monitored by Israeli security forces holding automatic weapons. The labyrinth of cavernous pathways is also lined with CCTV cameras and what authorities have described as "advanced technologies."

After clashes in May 2021 at the Al-Aqsa Mosque helped trigger an 11-day war with Hamas militants in the Gaza Strip, Israel experienced some of the worst violence in years. Police lobbed stun grenades into the disputed compound known to Jews as the Temple Mount, home to Al-Aqsa, Islam's third-holiest site,

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as Palestinian crowds holed up inside hurling stones and firebombs at them.

By that time, Israelis had become accustomed to police showing up outside their homes to say they weren't observing quarantine and knew that Israel's Shin Bet security agency was repurposing phone surveillance technology it had previously used to monitor militants inside Palestinian territories. The practice made headlines at the start of the pandemic when the Israeli government said it would be deployed for COVID-19 contact tracing.

A year later, the Shin Bet quietly began using the same technology to send threatening messages to Israel's Arab citizens and residents whom the agency suspected of participating in violent clashes with police. Some of the recipients, however, simply lived or worked in the area, or were mere passers-by.

Ramlawi's coffeeshop sits in the ornate Cotton Merchant's Market outside the mosque compound, an area lined with police and security cameras that likely would have identified the barista had he participated in violence.

Although Ramlawi deleted the message and hasn't received a similar one since, he said the thought of his phone being used as a monitoring tool still haunts him.

"It's like the government is in your bag," said Ramlawi, who worries that surveillance enabled to stop COVID-19 poses a lasting menace for east Jerusalem residents. "When you move, the government is with you with this phone."

The Shin Bet's domestic use of the technology has generated an uproar over privacy and civil liberties within Israel, as well as questions about its accuracy. The Ministry of Communications, which oversees Israel's telecommunications companies, refused a request seeking further details submitted for the AP by the Movement for Freedom of Information, a nonprofit that frequently works with media organizations.

Gil Gan-Mor, an attorney with the nonprofit Association for Civil Rights in Israel, estimates that hundreds of Arabs in Jerusalem received the threatening message during the unrest and said the mass text message blast was unprecedented.

"You cannot just say to people, 'We are watching you ... and we will get revenge,'" he said. "You cannot use this tool to frighten people. If you have something against someone, you can put them on trial."

After Gan-Mor's organization sued, Shin Bet made no apologies.

"There was a clear security need to send an urgent message to a very large number of people, all of whom had a credible suspicion of being involved in performing violent crimes," the agency said in a legal filing last year. The filing, signed by "Daniella B.," the Shin Bet's legal adviser for the Jerusalem district, also acknowledged that "lessons were learned."

In February, Israel's attorney general upheld the continued use of the technology, saying it was a legitimate security tool, while acknowledging glitches in the system and that messages were distributed to a small number of unintended targets. Israel's Supreme Court is now reviewing the matter.

Sami Abu Shehadeh, a former Arab lawmaker who served in Israel's parliament at the time Shin Bet sent its warning texts, said the messages demonstrate the broader struggles of Israel's 20% Arab minority.

"The state does not deal with us as citizens," he said. "There are two sets of laws -- one for Jews and one for Arabs."

'360 DEGREE SURVEILLANCE'

Technologies designed to combat COVID-19 were redirected by law enforcement and intelligence services in other democracies as governments expanded their digital arsenals amid the pandemic.

In India, facial recognition and artificial intelligence technology exploded after Prime Minister Narendra Modi's right-wing Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party swept into power in 2014, becoming a tool for police to monitor mass gatherings. The country is seeking to build what will be among the world's largest facial recognition networks.

As the pandemic took hold in early 2020, state and central governments tasked local police with enforcing mask mandates. Fines of up to \$25, as much as 12 days' pay for some laborers and unaffordable for the nearly 230 million people estimated to be living in poverty in India, were introduced in some places.

In the south-central city of Hyderabad, police started taking pictures of people flaunting the mask mandate or simply wearing masks haphazardly.

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Police Commissioner C.V. Anand said the city has spent hundreds of millions of dollars in recent years on patrol vehicles, CCTV cameras, facial recognition and geo-tracking applications and several hundred facial recognition cameras, among other technologies powered by algorithms or machine learning. Inside Hyderabad's Command and Control Center, officers showed an AP reporter how they run CCTV camera footage through facial recognition software that scans images against a database of offenders.

"When (companies) decide to invest in a city, they first look at the law-and-order situation," Anand said, defending the use of such tools as absolutely necessary. "People here are aware of what the technologies can do, and there is wholesome support for it."

By May 2020, the police chief of Telangana state tweeted about his department rolling out AI-based software using CCTV to zero-in on people not wearing masks. The tweet included photos of the software overlaying colored rectangles on the maskless faces of unsuspecting locals.

More than a year later, police tweeted images of themselves using hand-held tablets to scan people's faces using facial recognition software, according to a post from the official Twitter handle of the station house officer in the Amberpet neighborhood.

Police said the tablets, which can take ordinary photographs or link them to a facial recognition database of criminals, were a useful way for officers to catch and fine mask offenders.

"When they see someone not wearing a mask, they go up to them, take a photo on their tablet, take down their details like phone number and name," said B Guru Naidu, an inspector in Hyderabad's South Zone.

Officers decide who they deem suspicious, stoking fears among privacy advocates, some Muslims and members of Hyderabad's lower-caste communities.

"If the patrolling officers suspect any person, they take their fingerprints or scan their face – the app on the tablet will then check these for any past criminal antecedents," Naidu said.

S Q Masood, a social activist who has led government transparency campaigns in Hyderabad, sees more at stake. Masood and his father-in-law were seemingly stopped at random by police in Shahrani market, a predominantly Muslim area, during a COVID-19 surge last year. Masood said officers told him to remove his mask so they could photograph him with a tablet.

"I told them I won't remove my mask. They then asked me why not, and I told them I will not remove my mask." He said they photographed him with it in place. Back home, Masood went from bewildered to anxious: Where and how was this photo to be used? Would it be added to the police's facial recognition database?

Now he's suing in the Telangana High Court to find out why his photo was taken and to limit the wide-spread use of facial recognition. His case could set the tone for India's growing ambition to combine emerging technology with law enforcement in the world's largest democracy, experts said.

India lacks a data protection law and even existing proposals won't regulate surveillance technologies if they become law, said Apar Gupta, executive director of the New Delhi-based Internet Freedom Foundation, which is helping to represent Masood.

Police responded to Masood's lawsuit and denied using facial recognition in his case, saying that his photograph was not scanned against any database and that facial recognition is only used during the investigation of a crime or suspected crime, when it can be run against CCTV footage.

In two separate AP interviews, local police demonstrated both how the TSCOP app carried by police on the street can compare a person's photograph to a facial recognition database of criminals, and how from the Command and Control Center police can use facial recognition analysis to compare stored mugshots of criminals to video gathered from CCTV cameras.

Masood's lawyers are working on a response and awaiting a hearing date.

Privacy advocates in India believe that such stepped-up actions under the pandemic could enable what they call 360 degree surveillance, under which things like housing, welfare, health and other kinds of data are all linked together to create a profile.

"Surveillance today is being posed as a technological panacea to large social problems in India, which has brought us very close to China," Gupta said. "There is no law. There are no safeguards. And this is

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general purpose deployment of mass surveillance.”

‘THE NEW NORMAL’

What use will ultimately be made of the data collected and tools developed during the height of the pandemic remains an open question. But recent uses in Australia and the United States may offer a glimpse.

During two years of strict border controls, Australia’s conservative former Prime Minister Scott Morrison took the extraordinary step of appointing himself minister of five departments, including the Department of Health. Authorities introduced both national and state-level apps to notify people when they had been in the vicinity of someone who tested positive for the virus.

But the apps were also used in other ways. Australia’s intelligence agencies were caught “incidentally” collecting data from the national COVIDSafe app. News of the breach surfaced in a November 2020 report by the Inspector-General of Intelligence and Security, which said there was no evidence that the data was decrypted, accessed or used. The national app was canceled in August by a new administration as a waste of money: it had identified only two positive COVID-19 cases that wouldn’t have been found otherwise.

At the local level, people used apps to tap their phones against a site’s QR code, logging their individual ID so that if a COVID-19 outbreak occurred, they could be contacted. The data sometimes was used for other purposes. Australian law enforcement co-opted the state-level QR check-in data as a sort of electronic dragnet to investigate crimes.

After biker gang boss Nick Martin was shot and killed at a speedway in Perth, police accessed QR code check-in data from the health apps of 2,439 drag racing fans who attended the December 2020 race. It included names, phone numbers and arrival times.

Police accessed the information despite Western Australia Premier Mark McGowan’s promise on Facebook that the COVID-related data would only be accessible to contact-tracing personnel at the Department of Health. The murder was eventually solved using entirely traditional policing tactics, including footprint matching, cellphone tracking and ultimately a confession.

Western Australia police didn’t respond to requests for comment. Queensland and Victoria law enforcement also sought the public’s QR check-in data in connection with investigations. Police in both states did not address AP questions regarding why they sought the data, and lawmakers in Queensland and Victoria have since tightened the rules on police access to QR check-in information.

In the U.S., which relied on a hodge-podge of state and local quarantine orders to ensure compliance with COVID rules, the federal government took the opportunity to build out its surveillance toolkit, including two contracts in 2020 worth \$24.9 million to the data mining and surveillance company Palantir Technologies Inc. to support the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services’ pandemic response. Documents obtained by the immigrant rights group Just Futures Law under the Freedom of Information Act and shared with the AP showed that federal officials contemplated how to share data that went far beyond COVID-19.

The possibilities included integrating “identifiable patient data,” such as mental health, substance use and behavioral health information from group homes, shelters, jails, detox facilities and schools. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control does not use any of that individual-level information in the platform CDC now manages, said Kevin Griffis, a department spokesman. Griffis said he could not comment on discussions that occurred under the previous administration.

The protocols appeared to lack information safeguards or usage restrictions, said Paromita Shah, Just Futures Law’s executive director.

“What the pandemic did was blow up an industry of mass collection of biometric and biographical data,” Shah said. “So, few things were off the table.”

Last year, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control purchased detailed cellphone location data revealing people’s daily whereabouts, nationwide. “Mobility insights” data from at least 20 million devices could be used to “project how much worse things would have been without the bans,” such as stay-at-home orders and business closures, according to a July 2021 contract obtained by the nonprofit group Tech Inquiry and shared with the AP.

The contract shows data broker Cuebiq provided a “device ID,” which typically ties information to indi-

vidual cell phones. The CDC also could use the information to examine the effect of closing borders, an emergency measure ordered by the Trump administration and continued by President Joe Biden, despite top scientists' objections that there was no evidence the action would slow the coronavirus.

CDC spokeswoman Kristen Nordlund said the agency acquired aggregated, anonymous data with extensive privacy protections for public health research, but did not address questions about whether the agency was still using the data. The CDC could still access aggregate, county-level mobile phone data through October, several months after its contract ended, Cuebiq spokesman Bill Daddi said on Tuesday. He added that before then, the CDC also could have analyzed privacy-protected individual mobile phone data, but chose not to.

For Scott-Railton, that sets a dangerous precedent.

"What COVID did was accelerate state use of these tools and that data and normalize it, so it fit a narrative about there being a public benefit," he said. "Now the question is, are we going to be capable of having a reckoning around the use of this data, or is this the new normal?"

US braces for dangerous blast of cold, wind and snow

By MARGARET STAFFORD, JOSH FUNK and JUAN LOZANO Associated Press

KANSAS CITY, Mo. (AP) — A large swath of the U.S. braced for a dangerous mix of sub-zero temperatures, howling winds and blizzard conditions expected to disrupt plans for millions of holiday travelers.

The blast of frigid weather began hammering the Pacific Northwest Tuesday morning, and is expected to move to the northern Rockies, then grip the Plains in a deep-freeze and blanket the Midwest with heavy snowfall, forecasters say. By Friday, the arctic front is forecast to spread bone-chilling cold as far south as Florida.

Authorities across the country are worried about the potential for power outages and warned people to take precautions to protect the elderly, the homeless and livestock — and, if possible, to postpone travel.

The northern-most regions of the U.S. could see wind chills approaching 70 degrees below zero (minus 57 Celsius) — cold enough to leave exposed skin frostbitten in a matter of minutes.

Even warm-weather states are preparing for the worst. Texas officials are hoping to avoid a repeat of the February 2021 storm that left millions without power, some for several days. Temperatures were expected to dip to near freezing as far south as central Florida by the weekend.

The drop in temperatures will be precipitous. In Denver, the high on Wednesday will be around 50 degrees (10 degrees Celsius); by Thursday, it is forecast to plummet to around zero (minus 18 Celsius).

The heaviest snow is expected in Idaho, Montana and Wyoming, according to the National Weather Service, and frigid wind will be fierce across the country's mid-section.

"I would not be surprised if there are lots of delays due to wind and also a lot of delays due to the snow," said Bob Oravec, lead forecaster for the National Weather Service in College Park, Maryland.

The Northwest was already experiencing the effects by Tuesday. In Vancouver, Canada, authorities at the city's YVR airport said the conditions have resulted in an "unprecedented number of cancelled flights," adding that cancellations and delays "will persist for the majority of scheduled flights" and that de-icing operations will continue to be necessary. In Seattle, a combination of snow, rain and low visibility caused nearly 200 flight cancellations at Seattle-Tacoma International Airport. Greyhound cancelled bus service between Seattle and Spokane, Washington.

In Oregon, one person died Tuesday after a semi-truck collided with an SUV. Police said a thin layer of ice on the highway may have been a contributing factor.

Nearly 113 million Americans were expected to travel 50 miles or more from home this holiday season, up 4% from last year but still short of the record 119 million in 2019, according to AAA. Most were planning to travel by car; around 6% were planning to fly.

Several inches of snow were expected from Chicago through the Great Lakes region by Friday. Snow also was forecast in the lower Midwest. With the storm approaching, Delta, American, United and Southwest airlines said they were waiving change fees for people traveling through affected airports.

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The National Weather Service predicted wind-chill levels in Montana that could approach 60 degrees below zero (minus 51 Celsius) by Thursday morning. Almost impossibly, the forecast was even worse for parts of Wyoming. The 1,500-resident town of Lusk could see wind chills of 70 degrees below zero (minus 57 Celsius.)

"Please take precautions: Check on elderly/vulnerable, protect pets, shelter livestock, cover exposed skin!" the local branch of the National Weather Service said on Twitter.

Karina Jones' family raises about 400 head of cattle in north-central Nebraska near Broken Bow, where wind chills as low as 50 below zero (minus 46 Celsius) are expected Thursday and Friday mornings. She said Nebraska cattle ranchers are "a hearty bunch," but the bitter cold is rough.

Ranchers "lie awake at night praying that you did everything you could for your livestock," Jones said.

In Kansas, where up to 4 inches of snow is expected to accompany wind chills dipping to 40 degrees below zero (minus 40 Celsius), Shawn Tiffany runs three feedlots with about 35,000 cattle combined. He's worried about keeping 40 employees safe and warm.

"Every conversation I've had for the last four days has consisted of 'Are you prepared and are you ready?' Everybody is taking it very seriously," Tiffany said.

In Texas, where the temperature is expected to drop to around 11 degrees (minus 12 Celsius), the state's power grid will be put to the test once again.

A historic freeze in February 2021 led to one of the biggest power outages in U.S. history, knocking out electricity to 4 million customers in Texas and leading to hundreds of deaths.

The Electric Reliability Council of Texas, which manages the state's power grid, said last week it expects to have sufficient generation to meet anticipated electricity demand during this week's winter blast. The council said it has implemented reforms to increase reliability, including bringing more generation online sooner if needed and purchasing more reserve power.

But a report on the power grid that ERCOT published last month said that Texans could still face possible power outages this winter if an extreme storm prompted very high demand for electricity.

In Jackson, Mississippi, where dangerously cold weather is expected by the weekend, all eyes are on the capital city's troubled water system. A cold snap in 2021 left tens of thousands of people without running water after pipes froze, and Mayor Chokwe Antar Lumumba said Monday that the water distribution system remains a "huge vulnerability."

The deep-freeze will be particularly dangerous for people without homes. Salt Lake City will make 95 additional shelter beds available after five died in recent days amid sub-freezing temperatures, Mayor Erin Mendenhall, a Democrat, said.

In Kansas City, Missouri, emergency shelters are opening for anyone needing warmth, food or safety. Organizers warn, though, that capacity is limited overnight.

"We're going to get in as many as we can," said Karl Ploeger, chief development officer for City Union Mission, a Christian nonprofit.

If the shelters are over-capacity at night, the mission works with other organizations to try and find alternatives for people.

Northern Florida cities such as Tallahassee may see temperatures in the low 20s (minus 3 Celsius) on Friday, Christmas Eve and Christmas nights. The forecast calls for temperatures to drop to near freezing as far south as Tampa.

Ukraine's Zelenskyy preparing to visit DC on Wednesday

By LISA MASCARO, NOMAAN MERCHANT and ZEKE MILLER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy is preparing to visit Washington on Wednesday, according to three AP sources, in his first known trip outside the country since Russia's invasion began in February.

Two congressional sources and one person familiar with the matter confirmed plans for the visit. They spoke on the condition of anonymity because of the highly sensitive nature of the trip. They said Zelen-

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skyy's visit, while expected, could still be called off at the last minute due to security concerns.

The visit to Washington is set to include an address to Congress on Capitol Hill and a meeting with President Joe Biden. It comes as lawmakers are preparing to vote on a year-end spending package that includes about \$45 billion in emergency assistance to Ukraine and as the U.S. prepares to send Patriot surface-to-air missiles to help stave off Russia's invasion.

The latest tranche of U.S. funding would be the biggest American infusion of assistance yet to Ukraine, above even Biden's \$37 billion emergency request, and would ensure that funding flows to the war effort for months to come.

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi encouraged lawmakers to be on hand for Wednesday evening's session.

"We are ending a very special session of the 117th Congress with legislation that makes progress for the American people as well as support for our Democracy," Pelosi wrote Tuesday in a letter to colleagues. "Please be present for a very special focus on Democracy Wednesday night."

Zelenskyy has — almost daily — addressed various parliaments and international organizations by video and he has sent his wife to foreign capitals to drum up assistance.

On Tuesday, he made a daring and dangerous trip to what he called the hottest spot on the 1,300-kilometer (800-mile) front line, the city of Bakhmut in Ukraine's contested Donetsk province. In a video released by his office from the Bakhmut visit, Zelenskyy was handed a Ukrainian flag and alluded to delivering it to U.S. leaders.

"The guys handed over our beautiful Ukrainian flag with their signatures for us to pass on," Zelenskyy said in the video. "We are not in an easy situation. The enemy is increasing its army. Our people are braver and need more powerful weapons. We will pass it on from the boys to the Congress, to the president of the United States. We are grateful for their support, but it is not enough. It is a hint — it is not enough."

The U.S. has committed almost \$20 billion in security assistance to Ukraine since Russia launched its invasion on Feb. 24, according to figures from the Pentagon. The U.S. is also providing intelligence to Ukrainian forces and helping Ukraine fend off Russian cyberattacks and efforts at sabotage, American and Ukrainian officials have said.

The visit comes at an important moment as the White House braces for greater resistance from a Republican-controlled House that's signaled it will put more scrutiny on aid for Ukraine in the new Congress. GOP leader Kevin McCarthy has said his party's lawmakers will not write a "blank check" for Ukraine.

Biden and Zelenskyy frequently have held phone calls in coordination with the White House announcing new tranches of military assistance for Ukraine. The calls have been mostly warm, with Biden praising Ukraine for remaining steadfast against the Russians and Zelenskyy thanking the U.S. president for support.

The one exception was a June phone call soon after Biden notified Zelenskyy an additional \$1 billion package was headed to Ukraine. Zelenskyy didn't miss a beat in listing additional assistance he said Ukraine needed. That irked Biden, who underscored to Zelenskyy the American people's generosity.

The brief moment of tension hasn't caused any lasting difficulty, according to officials familiar with the episode.

Earlier this month, several Ukrainian officials — including Foreign Relations Committee Deputy Chairwoman Maria Mezentseva and parliament members Olena Khomenko and Lesia Zburanna — traveled to Washington to meet with U.S. lawmakers to thank them for American assistance and emphasize the need to keep the money flowing.

Zelenskyy addressed Congress by video link in March. Wearing an army green T-shirt with the Ukrainian flag behind him, he argued that the U.S. and Ukraine shared common dreams and goals.

"Democracy, independence, freedom and care for everyone, for every person, for everyone who works diligently, who lives honestly, who respects the law," he said then. "We in Ukraine want the same for our people. All that is normal part of your own life."

His visit comes in the final days of Pelosi's House speakership. Republicans will take control of the House in January, while Democrats retain power in the Senate. While Republicans set to chair key national-security committees push for continued support of Ukraine, there are growing concerns among the GOP rank-and-

file about the cost and duration of the effort.

Pelosi, who visited Zelenskyy earlier this year in Kyiv, said it was “overwhelming” to see the Ukrainians’ commitment to democracy.

“They are fighting for democracy for all of us.”

News of Zelenskyy’s visit was first reported by Punchbowl News.

Review: The silent film era roars again in ‘Babylon’

By JAKE COYLE AP Film Writer

“Perhaps the ballyhoo meant nothing,” Kevin Brownlow wrote in his defining history of the silent film era, “The Parade’s Gone By...”

It’s probably true that even avid moviegoers have increasingly drifted away from the films of what Brownlow called, with good reason, “the richest in cinema’s history.” In 1952, the Sight and Sound poll of critics had seven silents in the top 10 films of all time. The recent, much debated Sight and Sound list had just one.

In “Babylon,” Damien Chazelle’s feverish and sprawling celebration of those halcyon Hollywood days and their abrupt termination, the director of “La La Land” has, with orgiastic zeal, sought to bring back the ballyhoo.

Yet Chazelle’s three-plus hour extravaganza isn’t the dutiful, nostalgic ode you might expect of such a Tinseltown period piece. It’s much messier and more interesting than that. In resurrecting the silent era and the onset of the talkies, “Babylon,” like Stanley Donen’s “Singin’ in the Rain” before it, has trained its focus on a transitional moment in moving images, painting a picture of how technological progress doesn’t always equal improvement.

Here, in unrelenting excess and hedonism, is the manic, madcap energy of the movies and the crushing maw of the medium’s perpetual evolution. That early freewheeling frenzy is snuffed out (ironically) by the advent of sound and other forces that seek to domesticate the movies. In that way, “Babylon” may be most addressed to our current movie era.

Today’s film industry is similarly wracked by forces of change that may be sapping its big-screen verve. “Babylon” is about how the movies are always reborn, but brutally so. Though it may be a chaotic shamble, Chazelle’s film makes this one point brilliantly clear: Cinema will be tamed for only so long; the parade will go on.

This is, to be sure, not a strictly accurate history. Chazelle has taken a “print the legend” approach to ‘20s Hollywood, drawing partly from the pre-code scandals and myths of Kenneth Anger’s “Hollywood Babylon.” His film, a romp and tragedy at once, is sometimes enthrallingly, often exhaustingly played at a manic pitch, careening from set piece to set piece. Striving to impress the wildness of the time, “Babylon” overdoes it, striking a cartoonish over-the-top note from the start, and then, for three hours, trying vainly to sustain its drug-fueled fever dream of bygone Hollywood. That makes for an overstuffed and — especially by the increasingly wayward third act — meandering film.

But it’s also an insistently alive one that’s hard to look away from, with flashes of brilliance. For a director known for more tasteful and sentimental excursions, “Babylon” is a lurid descent into debauchery. Sometimes it’s an unnatural fit. It’s too showy and too long. But Chazelle’s film is something to reckon with, and the kind of ambitious swing that a young director of talent deserves credit for daring.

We start in Bel Air, which in 1926 is almost comically rural. In long groves of trees a fixer named Manny (Diego Calva, an arresting breakthrough) is cajoling workers to help him get an elephant up the hill for a mammoth party to be thrown by a movie mogul (Jeff Garlin). A spot on the guest list (“I heard something about Garbo,” Manny says to a policeman) is all he needs for most favors. In the film’s first opening minutes — an avalanche of elephant excrement that cakes even the camera lens; at the mansion in the hills, a bacchanal of sex and cocaine — exist both the indulgence and grotesqueness of Hollywood.

The party scene seems designed to match or better Martin Scorsese’s “The Wolf of Wall Street” for extravagance. There’s a riff here on the Fatty Arbuckle-Virginia Rappe scandal, but in the heady swirl, the

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only things that really register are Manny, a Mexican immigrant with dreams of rising in the industry, and Nellie La Roy (Margot Robbie, in an echo of her performance in "Once Upon a Time ... in Hollywood"), a young actress trying to break into the movies. She's sure of it. "You don't become a star," she tells Manny. "You either are one or you ain't."

In its ecstatic early scenes, "Babylon" throbs with their almost primal showbiz aspirations. "To be part of something bigger," Manny says. They're quickly on their way. Nellie is cast as a last-minute fill-in while Jack Conrad (Brad Pitt), a silent star in the Douglas Fairbanks mold, brings Manny along with him the next day to set. Each will make their nimble way up, with a widespread cast of characters swirling around, including a Black band leader (Jovan Adepo), a tuxedo-clad chanteuse named Lady Fay Zhu (a bewitching Li Jun Li) and gossip reporter Elinor St. John (Jean Smart, fabulous).

Nothing is quite as vivid in "Babylon" as its teeming studio of outdoor sets (care of production designer Florencia Martin) where Nellie and Manny each find themselves the day after the party. There is so much more to come after these scenes: the epochal arrival of "The Jazz Singer;" Nellie's farcical first try on a sound stage; a nighttime dance with a poisonous snake; Jack's painful slide out of the limelight, followed by his come-to-Jesus moment with Elinor ("It's bigger than you," she tells him of the movies); a late mis-judged plunge into a dark Los Angeles underworld with a mob boss played creepily by Tobey Maguire; a leap ahead to a 1950s movie theater playing "Singin' in the Rain." Some of these scenes (the sound stage, Elinor's moment) are terrific. Much is overcooked. "Babylon" is never quite rooted in either Nellie or Manny, whose arcs feel increasingly dictated by the film's real narrative engine, Hollywood history.

But the best of "Babylon" is there, a couple hours earlier, at the carnivalesque Kinoscope lot in the desert. It's a mad moviemaking nirvana, with films being shot all over and many of the participants women or people of color — a reminder that the early days of film were in some ways more open and inclusive than the Hollywood eras that came later. A Dorothy Azner-like filmmaker directs Nellie, who proves a natural. Up the hill, Manny strives to assist the sprawling sand-and-sword epic that's desperate to get one last shot before losing the light. "Babylon" is never so exhilarating as when sweat, luck and a chance butterfly conspire to make a moment of movie magic that's sealed with those divine words: "We got it."

"Babylon" a Paramount Pictures release, is rated R by the Motion Picture Association for strong and crude sexual content, graphic nudity, bloody violence, drug use, and pervasive language. Running time: 189 minutes. Three stars out of four.

Millions to lose Medicaid coverage under Congress' plan

By AMANDA SEITZ Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Millions of people who enrolled in Medicaid during the COVID-19 pandemic could start to lose their coverage on April 1 if Congress passes the \$1.7 trillion spending package leaders unveiled Tuesday.

The legislation will sunset a requirement of the COVID-19 public health emergency that prohibited states from booting people off Medicaid. The Biden administration has been under mounting pressure to declare the public health emergency over, with 25 Republican governors asking the president to end it in a letter on Monday, which cited growing concerns about bloated Medicaid enrollment.

"This is a positive for states in terms of planning, however, this will come at the cost of some individuals losing their health care," said Massey Whorley, a principal at health consulting firm Avalere.

Millions are expected to be bumped from the program, which grants health care coverage to nearly 80 million low-income people throughout the country. The federal government will also wind down extra funds given to states for the added enrollees over the next year under the proposal.

Many will be eligible for health insurance coverage through employers, the Affordable Care Act or, in the case of kids, the Children's Health Insurance Program.

Advocates have raised concerns about how states will notify enrollees if they are being kicked off the program and what their options are. The effort will be particularly challenging for some of the country's poorest people, who may not have stable home address or access to internet or phone services to check

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their status. If passed, the spending package would allow states to start kicking people off the program as early as April, but require them to notify enrollees first.

People who are on Medicaid should make sure their contact information is up to date on their accounts and that they check the mail frequently to keep an eye on their eligibility status as that April 1 date nears, said Robin Rudowitz, the director of Medicaid at Kaiser Family Foundation.

"There is likely to be people who fall through the cracks," she said.

The move will free up additional funds, however, to pay for more stable health insurance coverage for children in low-income households by requiring states to keep those children on Medicaid for at least a year once they've enrolled. A push require states to extend Medicaid to new mothers for a 12-month period after giving birth, however, failed to make the cut. The District of Columbia and 27 states currently extend coverage for a 12-month period for postpartum mothers.

The spending package also extends the telehealth flexibilities that were introduced during the COVID-19 pandemic and led health care systems around the country to overhaul their approach to deliver care by smartphone or computer more frequently.

Under the proposal, the restrictions that once tightly governed telehealth care under Medicare will stay loosened through the end of 2024.

That will give Congress more time to study telehealth and how widespread fraud is in this program, said Andrew Hu of the Bipartisan Policy Center, a Washington think tank, which has studied the use of telehealth during the pandemic.

"We can get some more time to assess where the benefits are with telehealth," Hu said.

The Senate is expected to vote on the spending bill first, and Democrats are looking for support from at least 10 Republican senators to pass the measure before sending to the House for consideration.

Review: 'Puss in Boots: The Last Wish' is purrfectly fun

By LINDSEY BAHR AP Film Writer

Quick, without looking, guess how long it's been since there's been a Shrek movie or even a Shrek-adjacent one. Over a decade seems too long for such a popular franchise, right? And yet here we are, 11 years later, welcoming back Antonio Banderas's swashbuckling feline in "Puss in Boots: The Last Wish," which opens in theaters Wednesday.

No wonder he's forced to think about his own mortality in this one — certain segments of the audience will be too when they realize how much time has passed. It wasn't for lack of trying, but things were happening behind the scenes with various directors coming and going. then Universal acquired DreamWorks and they went back to the drawing board under new leadership. Somehow television spinoffs kept coming.

The good news is that the character is evergreen. And as soon as Banderas starts speaking, and singing, as his playfully egotistic character, it'll feel like hardly any time has gone by at all. In "The Last Wish," the ever-confident Puss in Boots is shaken to discover that he's used up eight of his nine lives and, for the first time, has started worrying about his own death.

It might seem a little dour for a children's animated comedy, but when you start to think about other kids' movies, it's actually a quite common theme. Are they the anxieties of the middle-aged creators creeping out or an empathy machine for kids to think about the adults in their lives? Both? Does it matter? It's a device to rattle our hero, who has a bounty on his head and a big, bad wolf (Wagner Moura) on his tail.

First he tries out retirement life in a home with Mama Luna (Da'Vine Joy Randolph), in which he's forced to behave like a cat — using a litter box ("so this is where dignity goes to die," he says) and eating cat food as opposed to his stovetop cooking as a cover of The Doors' "The End" plays in the background. But he gets a lifeline in the legend of a single wish in a star that's fallen to earth and is waiting to be granted, sending him, Kitty Softpaws (Salma Hayek Pinault) and a gratingly earnest dog (Harvey Guillén) on an adventure to get said wish.

This is where the movie really finds its groove, with the introduction of Goldilocks (Florence Pugh) who is a kind of crime lord to her family of bears, Mama (Olivia Colman), Papa (Ray Winstone) and Baby (Samson

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Kayo), and, separately, a no longer little Little Jack Horner (John Mulaney) who are all after the wishing star too.

The vocal cast is an embarrassment of riches, especially Pugh, Colman, Winstone, who are right out of a PG-rated Guy Ritchie movie and should get their own spinoff. Mulaney, too, is a perfect adult brat, bitter about his origin being just a nursery rhyme and not a full fairy tale. He's another kind of crime brute, collecting and stealing famous fairy tale items to compensate for his own lack of magical powers and uses them to fun ends.

Directed by Joel Crawford, with Januel Mercado as co-director, "Puss in Boots: The Last Wish" has enough good jokes (script by Paul Fisher and story by Tommy Swerdlow and Tom Wheeler) to keep anyone amused for an afternoon at the movies. The animation is exactly what you need it to be too and avoids too much of the frenetic anarchy of a lot of kids movies that mistake chaos for excitement.

Ultimately, it doesn't matter how much time has lapsed, Banderas is welcome back as the "leche-whisperer" whenever he wants.

"Puss in Boots: The Last Wish," a Universal Pictures release in theaters Wednesday, is rated PG by the Motion Picture Association for "rude humor, language, action/violence and some scary moments." Running time: 102 minutes. Three stars out of four.

Racers, mechanics, tinkerers converting classic cars to EVs

By THOMAS PEIPERT Associated Press

DENVER (AP) — When Kevin Erickson fires up his 1972 Plymouth Satellite, a faint hum replaces what is normally the sound of pistons pumping, gas coursing through the carburetor and the low thrum of the exhaust.

Even though it's nearly silent, the classic American muscle car isn't broken. It's electric.

Erickson is among a small but expanding group of tinkerers, racers, engineers and entrepreneurs across the country who are converting vintage cars and trucks into greener, and often much faster, electric vehicles.

Despite derision from some purists about the converted cars resembling golf carts or remote-controlled cars, electric powertrain conversions are becoming more mainstream as battery technology advances and the world turns toward cleaner energy to combat climate change.

"RC cars are fast, so that's kind of a compliment really," said Erickson, whose renamed "Electrolite" accelerates to 0-60 mph (0-97 kph) in three seconds and tops out at about 155 mph (249 kph). It also invites curious stares at public charging stations, which are becoming increasingly common across the country.

At the end of 2019, Erickson, a cargo pilot who lives in suburban Denver, bought the car for \$6,500. He then embarked on a year-and-a-half-long project to convert the car into a 636-horsepower electric vehicle (475 kW), using battery packs, a motor and the entire rear subframe from a crashed Tesla Model S.

"This was my way of taking the car that I like — my favorite body — and then taking the modern technology and performance, and mixing them together," said Erickson, who has put about \$60,000 into the project.

Jonathan Klinger, vice president of car culture for Hagerty, an insurance company and automotive lifestyle brand that specializes in collector vehicles, said converting classic cars into EVs is "definitely a trend," although research on the practice is limited.

In May, the Michigan-based company conducted a web-based survey of about 25,000 self-identified automobile enthusiasts in the United States, Canada and the United Kingdom. About 1% had either partially or fully converted their classic to run on some sort of electrified drivetrain.

The respondents' top three reasons for converting their vehicles were for faster acceleration and improved performance, for a fun and challenging project, and because of environmental and emissions concerns. About 25% of respondents said they approve of classic vehicles being partially or fully converted to EVs.

"Electric vehicles deliver some pretty astonishing performance just by the nature of the mechanics of how they work," Klinger said. So it's not surprising to him that a small percentage of people converting classic cars to EVs are interested in improving performance. He compared the current trend to the hot-

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rod movement of the 1950s.

But Klinger, who owns several vintage vehicles, said he doesn't think electric motors will replace all internal combustion engines — especially when considering historically significant vehicles.

"There's something satisfying about having a vintage car that has a carburetor," he said, because it's the same as when the car was new. Some enthusiasts want to preserve the sound and rumble of older cars' original engines.

Other barriers to converting cars include the knowledge it takes to delve into such a complicated project, as well as safety concerns about tinkering with high-voltage components, the availability of parts, and the time it takes to realize a positive, environmental impact. Because classic vehicles are driven for fewer than 1,500 miles (2,414 kilometers) a year on average, it takes longer to offset the initial carbon footprint of manufacturing the batteries, Klinger said.

And then there's the price.

Sean Moudry, who co-owns Inspire EV, a small conversion business in suburban Denver, recently modified a 1965 Ford Mustang that was destined for the landfill. The year-and-a-half-long project cost more than \$100,000 and revealed several other obstacles that underscore why conversions are not "plug-and-play" endeavors.

Trying to pack enough power into the pony car to "smoke the tires off of it" at a drag strip, Moudry and his partners replaced the underpowered six-cylinder gas engine with a motor from a crashed Tesla Model S. They also installed 16 Tesla battery packs weighing a total of about 800 pounds (363 kilograms).

Most classic vehicles, including the Mustang, weren't designed to handle that much weight — or the increased performance that comes with a powerful electric motor. So the team had to beef up the car's suspension, steering, driveshaft and brakes.

The result is a Frankenstein-like vehicle that includes a rear axle from a Ford F-150 pickup and rotors from a Dodge Durango SUV, as well as disc brakes and sturdier coil-over shocks in the front and rear.

Although Ford and General Motors have or are planning to produce standalone electric "crate" motors that are marketed to classic vehicle owners, Moudry says it's still not realistic for a casual car tinkerer to have the resources to take on such a complicated project. Because of this, he thinks it will take a while for EV conversions to become mainstream.

"I think it's going to be 20 years," he said. "It's going to be a 20-year run before you go to a car show and 50 to 60% of the cars are running some variant of an electric motor in it."

But that reality could be coming sooner than expected, according to Mike Spagnola, president and CEO of the Specialty Equipment Market Association, a trade group that focuses on aftermarket vehicle parts.

He said that during SEMA's annual show in Las Vegas this fall, some 21,000 square feet (1,951 square meters) of convention space was dedicated to electric vehicles and their parts. That was up from only 2,500 square feet (232 square meters) at the 2021 show.

Companies are developing universal parts, as well as lighter, smaller and more powerful battery packs. They're also creating wiring components that are easier to install and myriad other innovations. Some are even building vehicle frames with the electric motor, batteries and components already installed. Buyers can just install the body of a classic vehicle on top of the platform.

"The early adopters of this would take a crashed Tesla and pull the motor and harnesses and batteries and all that out of the vehicle and find a way to shoehorn it into whatever vehicle they wanted to build," Spagnola said. "But today there are many manufacturers now starting to make components. ... We're really excited about it."

Analysis: Musk and Trump, 2 disrupters face reckoning

By CALVIN WOODWARD Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Elon Musk and Donald Trump share bestride-the-colossus egos, an incessant desire to be the center of attention and a platform to showcase their eccentricities and erraticism.

Both the Tesla CEO and the former president have used that platform, Twitter, as a sword and a shield

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— a soapbox to rouse the passions (and tap the pocketbooks) of tens of millions of followers and repulse the other side.

Trump weaponized Twitter before he was banned after the Jan. 6, 2021, attack on the U.S. Capitol. Musk was a persistent Twitter poster, taunting stock market regulators and railing against his version of conformity in numerous tweets. Then he decided to buy the platform.

Now both face a reckoning this week brought on at least in part by their use of Twitter to advance their agendas and feed their outside id.

Trump is confronted with a select congressional committee's unanimous recommendation to the Justice Department on Monday that he be criminally prosecuted for his part in the Jan. 6 assault on the Capitol by supporters stirred to action that day by his public remarks, on and off social media.

Right behind that could come the release Tuesday of Trump tax returns, now in the hands of another House panel, that he has spent years fighting to keep private.

After firing about half the Twitter workforce and sowing chaos with impulsive and ever-changing policies, Musk essentially asked users whether he should fire himself. In an unscientific poll he set up, a majority of the 17.5 million respondents said he should step down as Twitter chief. No word yet whether he will honor the result as promised.

The tribulations of these two June babies, born 25 years and continents apart, may be unlike anything thrown at them before.

"The biggest thing they have in common is little experience with true failure, that is, failure with consequences," said Eric Dezenhall, a consultant to companies beset by crisis.

"Even though Trump has failed multiple times, he's always been protected by family money and amazing luck," Dezenhall said. "While Musk is a genius, he's had the good fortune to have built multiple businesses on government funding rather than in the bruising free market.

"Given their life experiences, how could these guys not feel invincible?"

Kindred spirits at least in part, Musk invited Trump back on Twitter shortly after he bought it. So far, Trump is sticking with his own platform, Truth Social, which has miniscule reach in comparison.

Musk's invitation was a selective exercise of the right to free speech, as he also suspended a variety of mainstream journalists from Twitter and banned links to "prohibited" social media sites like Facebook, before relenting to some degree on both fronts.

Musk was until recently the world's richest man, with the amount verified by the worth of his stock. Trump has often argued he should be considered among the wealthiest, though behind that claim was a mirage.

Both have operated from a sense that things begin and end by CEO fiat. But Musk has also built viable companies and genuine wealth, in contrast with Trump's record of self-branding, fraught real estate deals and dubious enterprises regarding steaks, vodka or even his own real estate investor "university."

Musk registers 120 million Twitter followers; Trump, a Republican, had 88 million when he was barred from the platform after the Jan. 6 insurrection. The site has vastly amplified both their voices, in a way that has benefited Musk's businesses and Trump's political career over the years, though at a cost to their reputations.

"A hater hellscape," Musk called Twitter in 2017. But it also was a siren's call to him.

"On Twitter, likes are rare & criticism is brutal," he tweeted in 2018. "So hardcore.

"It's great."

On that platform, Musk comes across less as the visionary engineer who made electric vehicles hot, builds reusable rockets and cares deeply about climate change than as a petty settler of personal scores who can sink into right-wing conspiracy theories and misogyny.

A month ago, teasing Trump for holding out just after Twitter agreed to let him back in, Musk posted a depiction of a woman naked from the waist down, with the Twitter logo covering her genitals and Trump, as Jesus, looking on. "And lead us not into temptation," said Musk's post.

Both men have used Twitter to assail the mainstream media, spread misinformation, push the limits of what's acceptable in social media and engage in provocations that can make it hard to look away.

But of the two, only Trump held the power of office. For all his spacecraft, Musk's universe is much

smaller. In the public-opinion influence game, it's made up mostly of tweets and corporate policy about how to manage them.

Their politics don't match — Musk's right-wing and libertarian beliefs come with a devotion to controlling global warming, for example, and Trump's don't. Their personalities differ in some respects, too — Musk admits error and even apologizes on occasion; Trump doesn't.

Their work ethic bears no resemblance to each other.

Trump, a 76-year-old from Queens in New York City, spends most of his time at his Mar-a-Lago resort in Palm Beach, Florida, after a presidency notable for ample time on the golf links. Musk, a 51-year-old native of South Africa who lived in Canada as a young man, is known for working insane hours, hands on, these days in Twitter's San Francisco headquarters.

But as disrupters, they might as well be twins separated at birth.

"Both of these guys are free-stylers," said Dezenhall. "There is never a plan, never a strategy, just a collection of on-the-fly tactics. This has worked out very well for them.

"It wouldn't be the case for the rest of us."

Wartime Ukraine erasing Russian past from public spaces

By JAMEY KEATEN Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — On the streets of Kyiv, Fyodor Dostoevsky is on the way out. Andy Warhol is on the way in.

Ukraine is accelerating efforts to erase the vestiges of Soviet and Russian influence from its public spaces by pulling down monuments and renaming hundreds of streets to honor its own artists, poets, soldiers, independence leaders and others — including heroes of this year's war.

Following Moscow's invasion on Feb. 24 that has killed or injured untold numbers of civilians and soldiers and pummeled buildings and infrastructure, Ukraine's leaders have shifted a campaign that once focused on dismantling its Communist past into one of "de-Russification."

Streets that honored revolutionary leader Vladimir Lenin or the Bolshevik Revolution were largely already gone; now Russia, not Soviet legacy, is the enemy.

It's part punishment for crimes meted out by Russia, and part affirmation of a national identity by honoring Ukrainian notables who have been mostly overlooked.

Russia, through the Soviet Union, is seen by many in Ukraine as having stamped its domination of its smaller southwestern neighbor for generations, consigning its artists, poets and military heroes to relative obscurity, compared with more famous Russians.

If victors write history, as some say, Ukrainians are doing some rewriting of their own — even as their fate hangs in the balance. Their national identity is having what may be an unprecedented surge, in ways large and small.

President Volodymyr Zelenskyy has taken to wearing a black T-shirt that says: "I'm Ukrainian."

He is among the many Ukrainians who were born speaking Russian as a first language. Now, they shun it — or at least limit their use of it. Russian has traditionally been spoken more in the eastern and southern parts of the country. Western Ukraine, farther away from Russia, was quicker to shed Russian and Soviet imagery.

Other parts of the country are now catching up. The eastern city of Dnipro on Friday pulled down a bust of Alexander Pushkin — like Dostoevsky, a giant of 19th century Russian literature. A strap from a crane was unceremoniously looped under the statue's chin.

This month, Kyiv Mayor Vitali Klitschko announced about 30 more streets in the capital will be rechristened.

Volodymyr Prokopiv, deputy head of the Kyiv City Council, said Ukraine's "de-Communization" policy since 2015 had been applied in a "soft" way so as not to offend sensitivities among the country's Russian-speaking and even pro-Moscow population.

"With the war, everything changed. Now the Russian lobby is now powerless — in fact, it doesn't exist," Prokopiv said in an interview with The Associated Press in his office overlooking Khreschatik Street, the

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capital's main thoroughfare. "Renaming these streets is like erasing the propaganda that the Soviet Union imposed on Ukraine."

During the war, the Russians have also sought to stamp their culture and domination in areas they have occupied.

Andrew Wilson, a professor at University College London, cautioned about "the dangers in rewriting the periods in history where Ukrainians and Russians did cooperate and build things together: I think the whole point about de-imperializing Russian culture should be to specify where we have previously been blind — often in the West."

Wilson noted that the Ukrainians "are taking a pretty broad-brush approach."

He cited Pushkin, the 19th century Russian writer, who might understandably rankle some Ukrainians.

To them, for example, the Cossacks — a Slavic people in eastern Europe — "mean freedom, whereas Pushkin depicts them as cruel, barbarous, antiquated. And in need of Russian civilization," said Wilson, whose book "The Ukrainians" was recently published in its fifth edition.

In its program, Kyiv conducted an online survey, and received 280,000 suggestions in a single day, Prokopiv said. Then, an expert group sifted through the responses, and municipal officials and street residents give a final stamp of approval.

Under the "de-Communization" program, about 200 streets were renamed in Kyiv before this year. In 2022 alone, that same number of streets have been renamed and another 100 are scheduled to get renamed soon, Prokopiv said.

A street named for philosopher Friedrich Engels will honor Ukrainian avant-garde poet Bohdan-Ihor Antonych. A boulevard whose name translates as "Friendship of Peoples" — an allusion to the diverse ethnicities under the USSR — will honor Mykola Mikhnovsky, an early proponent of Ukrainian independence.

Another street recognizes the "Heroes of Mariupol" — fighters who held out for months against a devastating Russian campaign in that Sea of Azov port city that eventually fell. A street named for the Russian city of Volgograd is now called Roman Ratushnyi Street in honor of a 24-year-old civic and environmental activist who was killed in the war.

A small street in northern Kyiv still bears Dostoevsky's name but soon will be named for Warhol, the late Pop Art visionary from the United States whose parents had family roots in Slovakia, across Ukraine's western border.

Valeriy Sholomitsky, who has lived on Dostoevsky Street for nearly 40 years, said he could go either way.

"We have under 20 houses here. That's very few," Sholomitsky said as he shoveled snow off the street in front of a fading address sign bearing the name of the Russian writer. He said Warhol was "our artist" — with heritage in eastern Europe:

Now, "it will be even better," he said.

"Maybe it is right that we are changing many streets now, because we used to name them incorrectly," he added.

Wells Fargo to pay \$3.7B over consumer law violations

By KEN SWEET AP Business Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — Consumer banking giant Wells Fargo agreed to pay \$3.7 billion to settle charges that it harmed customers by charging illegal fees and interest on auto loans and mortgages, as well as incorrectly applying overdraft fees against savings and checking accounts.

Wells was ordered to repay \$2 billion to consumers by the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau, which also enacted a \$1.7 billion penalty against the San Francisco bank Tuesday. It's the largest fine ever leveled against a bank by the CFPB and the largest yet against Wells, which has spent years trying to rehabilitate its image after a series of scandals tied to its sales practices.

Regulators made it clear, however, that they believe Wells Fargo has further to go on that front.

"Put simply: Wells Fargo is a corporate recidivist that puts one out of three Americans at risk for potential harm," said CFPB Director Rohit Chopra, in a call with reporters.

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The bank's pattern of behavior has made it necessary for regulators to take additional actions against Wells Fargo that go beyond the \$3.7 billion in fines and penalties, Chopra said.

The violations impacted more than 16 million customers, the bureau said. In addition to improperly charging auto loan customers with fees and interest, the bank wrongfully repossessed vehicles in some cases. The bank also improperly denied thousands of mortgage loan modifications for homeowners.

Wells Fargo has been sanctioned repeatedly by U.S. regulators for violations of consumer protection laws going back to 2016, when employees were found to have opened millions of accounts illegally in order to meet unrealistic sales goals. Since then, executives have repeatedly said Wells is cleaning up its act, only for the bank to be found in violation of other parts of consumer protection law, including in its auto and mortgage lending businesses.

Wells paid a \$1 billion penalty in 2018 for widespread consumer law violations, the largest against a bank for such violations at the time.

The bank had signaled to its investors that it anticipated additional fines and penalties from regulators and aside \$2 billion in the third quarter for that reason.

Wells remains under a Federal Reserve order forbidding the bank from growing any larger until the Fed deems that its problems are resolved. That order, originally enacted in 2018, was expected to last only a year or two.

CEO Charles Scharf said in a prepared statement Tuesday that the agreement with the CFPB is part of an effort to "transform operating practices at Wells Fargo and to put these issues behind us."

While Wells Fargo tried to frame the agreement with the CFPB as a resolution of established bad behavior, CFPB officials said some of the violations cited in Tuesday's order took place this year.

"This should not be seen as Wells Fargo has moved past its problems," Chopra said.

Krasinski's 'Jack Ryan' returns to TV after 3-year wait

By ALICIA RANCILIO Associated Press

Season three of "Tom Clancy's Jack Ryan," starring John Krasinski, returns to Amazon Prime Video with a storyline that may feel familiar.

We meet Ryan, now stationed in Rome, as he discovers an underground plot by Russia to invade surrounding countries and recreate the Soviet empire.

The episodes were written three years ago, and production wrapped long before Russia invaded Ukraine.

Filming "Jack Ryan" was delayed when the pandemic forced everything to shut down. Krasinski turned his focus to a weekly homemade newscast called "Some Good News," sharing positive stories during a dark time. Like many, he wasn't focused on diet and exercise while in quarantine.

Krasinski jokes his "Some Good News" shape was ideal because you never saw him standing up as he was always seated like a newscaster. "You didn't even see the bottom half of me. That's where I felt most comfortable," he said.

When it was time to buckle down, Krasinski said he was motivated by the idea that the show would be a reason for many to finally resume working after months of waiting.

"It was actually a very cleansing thing," said Krasinski, who is also an executive producer and helps write the episodes. "I took a great responsibility with all these hundreds of people who were brave enough to put their lives on the line to bring back our industry in some small way.

"It was almost like getting into my best possible shape and self, both physically and mentally, to prepare for something that we knew would be much more different and much more harrowing, but hopefully that much more worth it."

In the new episodes, which begin streaming on Wednesday, Ryan's attempts to alert the CIA to his discovery about Russia result in the the agency turning on him and issuing a Red Notice calling for his arrest and extradition back to the U.S. to face charges. Ryan's former boss James Greer (played by Wendell Pierce) assists as much as he can from the inside, and Ryan seeks out his old pal Mike November (Michael Kelly), who left the agency at the end of season two, to help thwart Russia's plan.

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Krasinski and Kelly's relationship on screen provides some moments of levity, amid all the action and looming catastrophe. Kelly, who is known for serious roles such as "House of Cards," says it's a fun departure to have those lighter on-screen moments.

"John will write a lot of those one-liners for me on the day and I'm so grateful I get to have the humor. To get to play something a little closer to myself was such a treat," said Kelly.

"Jack Ryan" has also made Kelly appreciative of the dedication of those who protect us on a daily basis "from the Navy SEALs all the way to Port Authority police officers." He says many are fans of the show and like to talk to him about the realities of the job.

"I tell my kids all the time, '(When) we pass a police officer, say thank you... You see someone in the armed services. You say thank you.' Our veterans, they come home and are so underserved in this country. We need to be doing more and we need to be saying thank you more."

For Pierce, the role has given him a fresh perspective into his own brother who served as a military attaché in Belarus.

"I realized there was so much that he did that I did not know about, and he didn't share with the family. I just wanted to make sure he knew that he could share with me now that he's out of the military, the impact that it has. It gives me a lot of food for thought. And really the study of human behavior is what acting is all about."

"Tom Clancy's Jack Ryan" will conclude with its fourth season, which has already finished filming. Its release date has not yet been announced.

EXPLAINER: Undoing of Roe quickly shifts abortion in states

By GEOFF MULVIHILL Associated Press

Anti-abortion groups hoped and strategized for decades for a U.S. Supreme Court ruling that was delivered in June, ending a court-protected right to abortion after nearly 50 years.

The fallout was immediate and far-reaching — and it's not over yet.

The midyear ruling overturning the 1973 Roe v. Wade decision, which established the right to abortion, shaped the national political agenda for the rest of the year and put abortion access in flux. The shifts are expected to keep coming as lawmakers, voters and judges weigh in.

After the Dobbs v. Jackson ruling that left abortion up to the states, bans went into effect in some states. Elsewhere, officials enacted new protections for abortion.

With the bans, a generation of court battles has emerged over whether they square with state constitutions.

In a half-dozen statewide ballot measures this year, voters sided with abortion rights.

Here's a look at what has changed, what hasn't and what remains unclear six months after the landmark Dobbs v. Jackson decision.

THE BANS

Abortion is currently considered illegal at all stages of pregnancy, with various exceptions, in 13 states: Alabama, Arkansas, Idaho, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, Missouri, Oklahoma, South Dakota, Tennessee, Texas, West Virginia and Wisconsin.

In Georgia, it's banned once cardiac activity can be detected — around six weeks, which is before women often realize they're pregnant.

Some of the bans are in "trigger laws" that were passed years ago in anticipation of a ruling like Dobbs. Some are in laws that predate Roe v. Wade.

Lawmakers in Indiana and West Virginia adopted new bans after this year's ruling. Enforcement of Indiana's is on hold because of a legal challenge.

In both states, there was little question about whether bans would be adopted, but there were emotional debates over whether to include exceptions in the cases of rape and incest. Both states ultimately included those exceptions — and for abortions in the case of medical emergencies.

Bans in Arizona, Montana, North Dakota, Ohio, South Carolina, Utah and Wyoming are also not in effect,

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at least for now, as courts decide whether they can be enforced in the future.

Even in places where lawmakers favor bans, debates remain about which exceptions should be included. So far, states have been allowing later abortions to protect the woman's physical health but not always her mental health.

THE PROTECTIONS

Before and soon after the Supreme Court ruling, Democratic-controlled state and local governments took steps to protect abortion access.

They have enacted laws and signed executive orders to protect those who provide abortions for out-of-state patients from extradition, bar state employees from helping abortion-related investigations from other states, pay for more security at abortion clinics and provide funding for abortion.

In November, voters in California, Michigan and Vermont approved ballot measures to declare that the right to abortion is protected by the state constitutions. Voters in Kansas — who went to the polls in August — and Kentucky rejected measures that would have done the opposite and found that the state constitutions did not ensure abortion rights. Montana voters rejected a ballot measure that would have forced medical workers to intercede in the rare case of a baby born after an attempted abortion.

In December, New Jersey officials announced a grant to train more medical professionals to provide abortions.

THE IMPACT

It will take time to assess the full impact of the Dobbs ruling through data, including the number of abortions and births.

The number of abortions has dropped nearly to zero in states with bans and risen in neighboring states, according to a survey conducted for the Society of Family Planning. Overall, the study found, the number of abortions fell.

But the survey does not include self-managed abortions received outside of clinics, medical offices, hospitals and virtual providers.

Doctors and researchers say that the number of requests for medication abortion pills increased dramatically after a draft version of the Dobbs ruling was leaked in May.

It won't be clear for at least several months, though, whether the number of births has changed since the ruling.

Getting abortions has become increasingly difficult for women who live in states with bans, in some cases resulting in increased medical complications and in others forcing residents to travel for hours or even days to reach a facility that can provide abortions legally.

The ruling also sparked other changes to life in the U.S.: For some medical students, it meant that residencies in liberal states became a priority. Teens and parents considered birth control anew. Democrats intent on protecting abortion rights fared better than expected in elections across the U.S. in November, even retaining control of the U.S. Senate.

And concerns that Supreme Court rulings could undo other court-mandated protections regarding marriage, sex and contraception and led to passage of a new federal law further protecting same-sex and interracial marriages.

THE ENFORCEMENT

There have been no well-publicized criminal charges alleging violations of abortion bans since they were put into place — and maybe none at all.

"It could be a situation where the fear of being prosecuted is going to be the bigger impact than actual prosecutions," said Mon Sahaf, a deputy director of Vera Institute of Justice.

Clinics in states with bans have closed or stopped providing abortions. Some have been extra cautious, halting abortions when the legality in the state in question was uncertain.

Sahaf says enforcement of abortion laws is tricky because it requires using medical records and could be seen as unfair in many communities.

Prosecutors have expressed reluctance about taking on the cases. Ninety of them across the country

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pledged as Dobbs was announced that they would not enforce abortion bans. The group includes those in some of the most populous jurisdictions in states with bans or deep restrictions, including the district attorneys who oversee prosecutions in Birmingham, Alabama; Atlanta; Columbus, Ohio; Dallas; Milwaukee; and Nashville, Tennessee.

That doesn't mean there are no legal repercussions for those who seek or provide abortion.

The attorney general in Indiana last month asked the state's medical licensing board to discipline a doctor who spoke publicly about providing an abortion to a 10-year-old rape victim who traveled from Ohio after that state's abortion ban took effect.

THE ASSISTANCE

Abortion funds have been around for decades, largely as scrappy volunteer-run groups with small budgets trying to help women pay for abortions.

The Dobbs ruling inspired more contributions to the groups, but also brought them more challenges and a bigger political and legal role, including suing over abortion bans in Texas.

The groups are now helping women travel to other states for abortions, which increases transportation, lodging, child care and other costs.

"Rage giving" after the Supreme Court ruling helped make the groups less underfunded. Oaiaku Njoku, executive director of the National Network of Abortion Funds, said an influx of donations this year has allowed some funds to bring on their first paid staff members.

Destini Spaeth, director of the North Dakota WIN Abortion Access Fund, said enough money rolled in at the fund in May, when a version of the Dobbs ruling was leaked, and June, when the final decision was released, to provide a year's worth of services.

The fund, like others, pays for abortion care and related services such as transportation, lodging, medical testing and birth control.

At another fund, Atlanta-based ARC Southeast, interim Executive Director Jalessah Jackson said that because of bans in the region, her organization is getting fewer callers after Dobbs. But the costs for travel, child care and other services has risen largely from people needing to go farther for abortion care.

WHAT'S NEXT

With split partisan control in Washington, federal policy changes are unlikely in 2023. Even with Democrats in charge this year, President Joe Biden's administration's efforts to protect abortion hit roadblocks.

Still, state lawmakers are looking to strengthen both abortion bans and protections.

Among bills already introduced for 2023 state legislative sessions are measures in Texas that would take tax incentives away from businesses that help employees obtain abortions and in Missouri and Montana to ban bringing pills used to induce abortion into the state.

On the other side, there are pushes in red states including South Carolina, South Dakota and Texas to amend the state constitutions to ensure a right to abortion and plans by Minnesota Democrats, who will control the legislature in January, to codify abortion protections in state law.

GOP's usual embrace of Trump muted after criminal referral

By STEVE PEOPLES Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — The Republican Party quickly and forcefully rallied behind Donald Trump in the hours after federal agents seized classified documents from his Florida estate this summer.

Four months later, that sense of intensity and urgency was missing — at least for now — after the Jan. 6 House committee voted to recommend the Justice Department bring criminal charges against him. Leading Republicans largely avoided the historic criminal referral Monday, while others pressed to weigh in offered muted defenses — or none at all.

Republican Senate leader Mitch McConnell called for "an immediate and thorough explanation" after the FBI executed the August search warrant at Mar-a-Lago. On Monday, he told reporters he had only one "immediate observation" about the criminal referral: "The entire nation knows who is responsible for that day." Sen. Josh Hawley, R-Mo., who called for Attorney General Merrick Garland's resignation in the wake

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of the search, was silent on the committee's referral, focusing instead on alleged FBI missteps.

Maryland Gov. Larry Hogan, a Trump critic who suggested the former president likely benefited — politically, at least — from the FBI's summertime search, said Trump was at least partly responsible for the deadly attack on the Capitol.

"No man is above the law," Hogan told The Associated Press shortly before the committee's vote.

The divergent responses are a sign of how quickly the political landscape has shifted for Trump as he faces a new legal threat and mounts a third bid for the presidency. It's a marked change for a party that has been defined, above all, by its unconditional loyalty to Trump under any and all circumstances for the last six years.

Monday's hearing of the Jan. 6 House committee, composed of seven Democrats and two Republican Trump critics, likely marks Congress' final attempt to hold the former president accountable for the attack on the U.S. Capitol by hundreds of his loyalists as elected officials worked to certify Democrat Joe Biden's 2020 presidential election victory. The criminal referral, which is nonbinding, is the culmination of a yearlong investigation that included more than 1,000 witnesses, 10 televised public hearing and over 1 million documents.

The committee, which Republican House leader Kevin McCarthy boycotted and dismissed as a "sham process," will formally disband on Jan. 3 as Republicans take over the House majority.

Ever defiant, Trump predicted the criminal referral would ultimately help him.

"These folks don't get it that when they come after me, people who love freedom rally around me. It strengthens me. What doesn't kill me makes me stronger," Trump said in a statement posted on his social network, condemning the criminal referral as "a partisan attempt to sideline me and the Republican Party."

This week's vote comes just one month after Trump formally launched his 2024 White House campaign. He had hoped that his status as an announced candidate might give him new leverage in his many legal entanglements while warding off potential Republican primary challengers.

Such hopes have yet to materialize. Early polls suggest the 76-year-old former president is no lock to win the 2024 nomination as emboldened Republican rivals prepare to line up to run against him.

Already weakened, Trump is also bracing for the potential release of his tax returns, which he has worked for years to keep out of the public eye. The House Ways and Means Committee on Tuesday was scheduled to consider the release of six years of Trump's taxes, as well as those related to his businesses, although it wasn't immediately clear when any documents might be available to the public.

Trump's greatest liability heading into the next presidential election may have little to do with his legal challenges, however. Republicans are increasingly worried about his ability to win.

The GOP's concerns about Trump's electability intensified after the November midterm elections, when Trump's hand-picked candidates in several high-profile contests were defeated. The setbacks followed deeper Republican losses in the two previous national elections under Trump's leadership.

Indeed, the initial weeks of Trump's third presidential campaign are going so poorly that some Trump allies are privately wondering whether he's serious about his 2024 ambitions at all.

Trump faced Republican demands to apologize for his decision last month to share a private meal with noted white supremacist Nick Fuentes. Days later, Trump called for the "termination" of parts of the Constitution over his lie that the 2020 election was stolen. And days after that, his hand-picked candidate in Georgia's high-stakes Senate race, former football star Herschel Walker, lost his runoff election.

Trump has not held a campaign event. Last week, after previewing a "MAJOR ANNOUNCEMENT," he unveiled a line of digital trading cards depicting him as a superhero.

At the same time, Trump's legal challenges are mounting.

Garland last month appointed a special counsel to oversee the Department of Justice's investigation into the presence of classified documents at Trump's Florida estate as well as key aspects of a separate probe involving the insurrection and efforts to undo the 2020 election. The Fulton County, Georgia, district attorney is separately investigating attempts to overturn that state's 2020 election results.

It's impossible to predict how much longer the investigations will last or whether the DOJ will take the unprecedented step of indicting a former president and current candidate. But Trump is no longer shielded

from prosecution the way he was as president.

And his party is becoming less willing to stand behind him.

The Republican National Committee announced it would stop paying some of Trump's legal bills after he launched his 2024 presidential campaign.

Former Vice President Mike Pence, a 2024 presidential prospect himself who aggressively condemned the FBI after it seized classified documents from Trump's estate, offered somewhat muted criticism of the Jan. 6 committee when given the chance.

"As I wrote in my book, the president's actions and words on Jan. 6 were reckless. But I don't know that it's criminal to take bad advice from lawyers," Pence told Fox News Channel. He added, "When it comes to the Justice Department's decision about bringing charges in the future, I would hope that they would not bring charges against the former president."

Arkansas Gov. Asa Hutchinson, who is also considering a 2024 White House campaign, acknowledged Trump's role in Jan. 6 but said the criminal referral "isn't helpful" to the DOJ's investigation.

"The record is clear that former Pres. Trump is responsible for what happened on January 6, but accountability is most likely to come from the American people who are ready for our country to move beyond the events of January 6," he tweeted.

So far, only a handful of members of Congress have endorsed Trump's 2024 bid.

One of them, No. 3 House Republican Rep. Elise Stefanik, called the Democratic-led committee "unconstitutional and illegitimate." She said Trump was well positioned heading into the 2024 presidential contest.

"As of today — he announced a few weeks ago at this point — the only candidate is Donald Trump, and he is winning significantly against the field," Stefanik told The Associated Press on Monday. "So, we'll see what happens. But I think he's in a very strong position."

Survivor found from Thai navy ship that sank Sunday

By TASSANEE VEJPONGSA and CHALIDA EKVITTHAYAVECHNUKUL Associated Press

BANGKOK (AP) — Rescuers found a survivor and recovered five bodies from a Thai warship that sank over the weekend in the Gulf of Thailand, navy officials said Tuesday, as hopes faded for two dozen people still missing. Officials acknowledged there were not enough life jackets for all those aboard.

The HTMS Sukhothai, a corvette in service for 35 years, sank Sunday night in rough seas with 105 people aboard. The navy said an earlier tally of 106 people on board was incorrect because one sailor failed to join the journey.

Navy commander Adm. Chongchai Chomchongpat said initially at a news conference in Bangkok that two people had been rescued on Tuesday, but later said he had received updated information that only one person was alive and that five bodies had been recovered. According to those figures, 76 people have now been rescued, five have been found dead and 24 are still unaccounted for.

Navy Chief of Staff Adm. Chonlathis Navanugraha said the survivor and the bodies, along with some debris, were found about 60 kilometers (37 miles) from where the ship sank. He said the United States, Britain and Malaysia have offered to help in the search.

The survivor, identified as Chananyu Kansriya, was found floating in the sea at about 3 p.m. and was picked up by a passing cargo ship, Chonlathis said. A navy frigate was bringing him back to shore.

Vice Adm. Pichai Lorachusakul, commander of the 1st Naval Area Command, told reporters that Chananyu was in weak condition and would receive medical treatment on the frigate, which has facilities akin to a mobile hospital.

He was quoted by the Thai Rath newspaper as saying search efforts had been accelerated, but the missing could not be expected to survive in the sea for longer than two days.

Chonlathis was slightly more optimistic. "We still have hope," he said. "Judging from the direction of the water and the wind, it is blowing toward the beach. That is good luck. We continue to search with hope."

The navy has deployed four large ships, two maritime patrol aircraft, two helicopters and a drone, and the air force has contributed one plane and one helicopter. Small boats could not be used because the

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sea remained extremely choppy, navy officers said.

The search is gradually moving south to take into account the currents, Capt. Kraipich Korawee-Paparwit, commander of one of the rescue ships, told Thai PBS television.

Strong winds and high waves caused seawater to enter the ship on Sunday evening, knocking out its electrical system and making control of the ship virtually impossible. Other naval vessels rushed to the scene, about 20 miles (32 kilometers) offshore, to try to assist the stricken vessel but could not do much because of the poor sea conditions. Because the ship could not be controlled, more water entered, 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. It suggested that all ships "proceed with caution" and warned small craft not to go to sea until Tuesday.

Survivors interviewed by Thai television said there were not enough life jackets because the ship was carrying guests in addition to its normal crew, which the navy website said was 87 sailors and officers.

Navy Commander Cherngchai said about 30 people from the Marine Corps and Air and Coastal Defense Command were aboard the ship, resulting in the shortage of life jackets. He said 18 people without life jackets had been rescued.

Cherngchai said all aspects of the sinking and the provision of life jackets will be investigated.

Earlier Tuesday, Vice Admiral Pichai was confronted at one of the rescue centers by a woman who said she was the mother of one of the missing sailors.

"My son called me with his friend's phone when the ship started to sink," the woman said in an exchange captured on video. "He said he did not get a life jacket and only a life buoy. As a parent, when I heard this, my heart was broken. If there were not enough life jackets, how much hope can you give me?"

Easy, pull-together appetizer ideas for holiday entertaining

By KATIE WORKMAN Associated Press

Now's that time of the year when it feels like someone has pressed the time-lapse button and everything is moving at triple speed. Many of us are feeling the pinch: not having enough hours in the day yet also wanting to slow down and spend time with people we love (or at least like a lot).

And then there is the meal planning. And maybe the party planning. And perhaps houseguests, or family members returning home for the holidays.

Anyway, you don't need me to tell you how busy you are. So... how can we do some light entertaining, without a whole lot of fuss or time?

A little appetizer spread is just the thing. Simple bites you can put out while the main meal is being prepared. Or maybe the appetizers are the whole of it, a nice chance to clink glasses with the neighbors or some old friends passing through town.

But appetizers can be tricky. They SEEM like a simpler alternative to a full meal, but if you aren't careful, they can become toilsome.

Let's start with the easiest option — the cheese platter. If you take a few extra minutes and add a few extra ingredients, you can pull together a cheese (or charcuterie or grazing) board that looks photo-worthy.

Plan on a few different types of cheese; play around with hard and soft cheeses, cow's milk vs. goat vs. sheep, mild mixed with pungent. Layer in some crackers or sliced baguette, fresh and dried fruit, olives, nuts, a condiment or two (think preserves, tapenades and so on). Take a moment to make the board or platter feel lush and abundant. Done!

Don't for a moment be hesitant about putting out store-bought nibbles. In fact, take a beat and check out the prepared foods section at your grocery store, or explore a prepared food market. Look for things like grilled artichoke hearts, stuffed pepperoncini, cooked shrimp, cheese straws, savory tartlets, focaccias or little phyllo pastries.

Stock the pantry for last-minute spreads and surprise guests. High-end nut mixes (check on allergies

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first), jarred bruschetta, pestos, stuffed olives, marinated and pickled vegetables, stuffed grape leaves, gourmet crackers. If you tuck away a little supply of these special items, you can pull them out at a moment's notice.

And stock the freezer! There are loads of precious little frozen appetizers available. Yes, pigs in a blanket, but also spanakopita, cheese puffs, mini quiches, crab cakes, bacon wrapped scallops, empanadas, dumplings, mini pizzas, jalapeno poppers and so on.

Also, many frozen appetizers can be made in the air fryer, so if you've been looking for ways to put that appliance to work, now's the time.

Keep a well-wrapped, good bread in the freezer too, and some sort of bruschetta or crostini is waiting to happen. Bread defrosts very quickly.

Some ideas for pull-together appetizers:

— Spread baguette slices with softened butter mixed with sea salt and minced fresh dill. Drape a piece of smoked salmon over the top, add a few capers and serve with lemon wedges and dill sprigs.

— A quick, fresh herb dip. I always have extra fresh herbs around, especially during the holidays, left over from one recipe or another. Make the easiest herb dip ever by mixing ½ cup mayonnaise, ½ cup sour cream and ½ cup chopped mixed fresh herbs like basil, oregano, thyme, marjoram, chervil and parsley. Add kosher salt and freshly ground pepper to taste. Serve with cut-up raw vegetables (crudité) or baby roasted potatoes or pita chips for dipping. Or, spread the dip over toasted Italian bread slices and top with slices of roast beef or turkey.

— Roasted Chickpeas. Toss a can of rinsed and drained chickpeas with a tablespoon of olive oil and some kosher salt. Add some dried herbs or spices if you like, like chili powder, cumin, garlic powder, Italian seasoning. Spread on a rimmed baking sheet and bake in a preheated 375 degree F oven for about 20 minutes, until they turn golden brown. Serve warm or at room temp.

— Quick Guacamole: Mix together 2 diced ripe avocados with half a minced onion; 1 medium tomato, seeded and chopped; kosher salt and pepper; and the juice of a lime. Add some minced jalapeno and chopped cilantro if you like. Serve with lots of tortilla chips.

— Cheddar Popcorn: Make some homemade popcorn, and when it's hot and freshly cooked, drizzle some hot melted butter over it, and add a couple of handfuls of finely grated sharp cheddar cheese, a bit of salt and maybe dried oregano or paprika. Toss well.

— Keep some sparkling water, wine (regular and sparkling), beer and soft drinks on hand.

Also, let's remind ourselves that our family and friends came over to see us – the food is secondary!

—

Five more easy appetizers:

Deviled Eggs

Baked Chicken Quesadillas

Parmesan Feta Spinach Dip

Baked Brie en Croute with Raspberry Jam

Hummus

Today in History: December 21, Pilgrims go ashore

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Wednesday, Dec. 21, the 355th day of 2022. There are 10 days left in the year. Winter begins at 4:48 p.m. EST.

Today's Highlight in History:

On Dec. 21, 1864, during the Civil War, Union forces led by Maj. Gen. William T. Sherman concluded their "March to the Sea" as they captured Savannah, Georgia.

On this date:

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In 1620, Pilgrims aboard the Mayflower went ashore for the first time at present-day Plymouth, Massachusetts.

In 1891, the first basketball game, devised by James Naismith, is believed to have been played at the International YMCA Training School in Springfield, Massachusetts. (The final score of this experimental game: 1-0.)

In 1913, the first newspaper crossword puzzle, billed as a "Word-Cross Puzzle," was published in the New York World.

In 1914, the U.S. government began requiring passport applicants to provide photographs of themselves.

In 1945, U.S. Army Gen. George S. Patton, 60, died in Heidelberg, Germany, 12 days after being seriously injured in a car accident.

In 1976, the Liberian-registered tanker Argo Merchant broke apart near Nantucket Island off Massachusetts almost a week after running aground, spilling 7.5 million gallons of oil into the North Atlantic.

In 1988, 270 people were killed when a terrorist bomb exploded aboard a Pam Am Boeing 747 over Lockerbie, Scotland, sending wreckage crashing to the ground.

In 1991, eleven of the 12 former Soviet republics proclaimed the birth of the Commonwealth of Independent States and the death of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics.

In 1995, the city of Bethlehem passed from Israeli to Palestinian control.

In 2009, the Obama administration imposed a 3-hour limit on how long airlines can keep passengers waiting inside planes delayed on the ground.

In 2015, the nation's three-decade-old ban on blood donations from gay and bisexual men was formally lifted, but major restrictions continued to limit who could give blood in the U.S.

In 2020, President-elect Joe Biden received his first dose of the coronavirus vaccine on live television as part of a growing effort to convince the American public the inoculations were safe. The Vatican declared it "morally acceptable" for Roman Catholics to receive COVID-19 vaccines based on research that used fetal tissue from abortions.

Ten years ago: The National Rifle Association said guns and police officers were needed in all American schools to stop the next killer "waiting in the wings," taking a no-retreat stance in the face of growing calls for gun control after the Newtown, Connecticut, shootings that claimed the lives of 26 children and school staff. President Barack Obama nominated Sen. John Kerry as his next secretary of state.

Five years ago: The U.N. General Assembly voted overwhelmingly to denounce President Donald Trump's recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's capital, largely ignoring Trump's threat to cut off aid to any country that went against him. Papa John's announced that founder John Schnatter would step down as CEO; the company had apologized for his comments criticizing the NFL leadership over protests by players who knelt during the national anthem.

One year ago: In an effort to fight the omicron coronavirus variant surging through the country, President Joe Biden announced that the government would provide 500 million free rapid home-testing kits, increase support for hospitals under strain and redouble vaccination and boosting efforts. Chicago Mayor Lori Lightfoot said the nation's third-largest city would start requiring proof of coronavirus vaccination at restaurants, bars, gyms and other indoor venues. Figures released by the U.S. Census Bureau showed that U.S. population growth dipped to its lowest rate since the nation's founding during the first year of the pandemic.

Today's Birthdays: Talk show host Phil Donahue is 87. Actor Jane Fonda is 85. Actor Larry Bryggman is 84. Singer Carla Thomas is 80. Musician Albert Lee is 79. Conductor Michael Tilson Thomas is 78. Actor Josh Mostel is 76. Actor Samuel L. Jackson is 74. Rock singer Nick Gilder is 72. Movie producer Jeffrey Katzenberg is 72. Actor Dennis Boutsikaris is 70. International Tennis Hall of Famer Chris Evert is 68. Actor Jane Kaczmarek is 67. Country singer Lee Roy Parnell is 66. Former child actor Lisa Gerritsen is 65. Actor-comedian Ray Romano is 65. Former Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin is 60. Country singer Christy Forester (The Forester Sisters) is 60. Rock musician Murph (The Lemonheads; Dinosaur Jr.) is 58. Actor-comedian Andy Dick is 57. Rock musician Gabrielle Glaser is 57. Actor Michelle Hurd is 56. Actor

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Kiefer Sutherland is 56. Actor Karri Turner is 56. Actor Khristyne Haje is 54. Country singer Brad Warren (The Warren Brothers) is 54. Actor Julie Delpy is 53. Contemporary Christian singer Natalie Grant is 51. Actor Glenn Fitzgerald is 51. Singer-musician Brett Scallions is 51. World Golf Hall of Famer Karrie Webb is 48. Rock singer Lukas Rossi (Rock Star Supernova) is 46. French President Emmanuel Macron is 45. Actor Rutina Wesley is 44. Rock musician Anna Bulbrook (Airborne Toxic Event) is 40. Country singer Luke Stricklin is 40. Actor Steven Yeun is 39. Actor Kaitlyn Dever is 26.