

# Groton Daily Independent

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## Aberdeen Paper coming today

Sometime after noon, the Aberdeen American News should arrive in Aberdeen, then it will be delivered to the out-of-town carriers. Both Friday's and Saturday's paper will be delivered together. If you are an American News subscriber and would like to be notified of when the Groton city papers are delivered, text your name to Paul at 605-397-7460. If you are already getting the messages, you do not need to do this. You'll be notified!

## Groton Community Calendar

**Saturday, Dec. 24**

**Notice Time Change:** St. John's Christmas Eve service, 4 p.m.

Emmanuel Lutheran Christmas Eve service with communion, 7 p.m.

Groton United Methodist service, 5 p.m.

Conde United Methodist service, 7 p.m.

Groton CM&A Candlelight service, 5 p.m.

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

## Sunday, Dec. 25 - CHRISTMAS DAY

Groton CM&A: Worship Service at 10:45 a.m.

Zion worship, 9 a.m.

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



Emmanuel Lutheran worship with communion, 9 a.m.

No worship at United Methodist Churches

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

## Monday, Dec. 26

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

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

## Tuesday, Dec. 27

Senior Menu: Potato soup, ham salad sandwich, tomato spoon salad, pineapple tidbits.

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

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

## Wednesday, Dec. 28

Senior Menu: Roast beef, mashed potatoes and gravy, beets, peaches, dinner roll.

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

## OPEN: Recycling Trailer in Groton

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

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**There were a lot of people who were posting photos of the sundogs on their social media page. The cold temperature makes for the perfect sundogs. This photo was taken by Bruce Babcock at noon.**



**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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<sup>1</sup>Restrictions apply. See dealer or [cubcadet.com/en\\_US/financing](http://cubcadet.com/en_US/financing) for details.

<sup>†</sup>When compared to the same engine without IntelliPower™ technology. Improvements vary depending on engine models and specific operating conditions.

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

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

© 2022 Cub Cadet

**EXCEPTIONAL FINANCING  
OFFERS AVAILABLE!**





## 25 Days - Brown County Fair



**Clint Sombke**  
**Fair Board - 4 Years**

### Committees I have served on -

- *Buildings/Grounds, Carnival/Vendors, Livestock, Grandstand Events, & Rodeo*

### Favorite thing about the Holidays -

- *Family & Friends*

### Favorite thing about the Fair -

- *Seeing people enjoy all the hard work that goes into putting on the Fair.*

### If you could do anything or go anywhere -

- *Australia - I have always thought it would be a neat place to visit.*

### In 2023 -

- *Brown County Fair - The Place To Be In 2023!*



[www.BrownCountySDFair.com](http://www.BrownCountySDFair.com)



Clint Sombke of Groton was featured on the Brown County Fair facebook page.





## SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

### Rosebud Tribe struggles to clear roads as blizzard contributes to at least one death

**BY: SETH TUPPER AND JOSHUA HAIAR - DECEMBER 23, 2022 11:38 AM**

The situation is grim on the Rosebud Reservation after two rounds of severe winter weather pummeled the area, contributing to at least one death. Many people remain snowed-in and some have run out of propane for their furnaces, causing tribal residents to fear there may be more deaths from the cold.

Wayne Boyd, chief of staff for Rosebud Sioux Tribe President Scott Herman, said a 12-year-old with a medical condition died when the weather and impassable roads kept responders from reaching the child in time.

Boyd said the tribe is in need of big snowblowers and loaders to help clear the roads.

"The grocery store shelves are bare, there is hardly any food," Boyd said. "Everybody is working very hard, doing what we can. We're just going to need a lot of help when this is done."

A tribal council consultant and longtime voting-rights activist, O.J. Semans, said the tribe needs help now but also in the future to address a long-term funding shortage for road equipment.

The Rosebud Sioux Tribe and the eight other federally recognized tribes in South Dakota receive federal funding pursuant to treaties with the U.S. government that date to the 1800s. Without a local tax structure like the ones non-reservation communities use to fund public projects, tribes rely on federal funding to run their local governments.

Out on the open plains where South Dakota's reservations are located, extreme cold, heavy snow and howling winds combine to create tall and nearly immovable snowdrifts. The Rosebud Reservation is in south-central South Dakota.

"The first snow that we got, it was hard, and then it got cold, so then it kind of became almost like cement," Semans said. "So plows weren't going to do the job. We have to have front-end loaders."

The tribe's inability to clear the roads has made it difficult for propane haulers to reach homes. Many tribal residents rely on propane-fueled furnaces for heat, with outdoor propane tanks that need regular refilling.

Semans said tribal officials had a call scheduled Friday afternoon with representatives of the Federal Emergency Management Agency. Other help has come or is on the way from organizations such as Feeding South Dakota, which brought a truckload of supplies to the reservation this week. On Thursday night, Gov. Kristi Noem activated the South Dakota National Guard to haul firewood from the Black Hills National Forest to the reservation.

About 60 percent of reservation residents have wood-burning stoves, Semans estimates, so the firewood may help. But he said the Guard will have to bust its way through snowdrifts to access homes.

Meanwhile, the only thing Semans and many other reservation residents can do is wait. Semans still has electricity and supplies at his rural Mission home, but he's heard of others on the reservation who lack propane or have malfunctioning furnaces and frozen water pipes. He's also heard multiple reports of deaths from cold temperatures – which have dipped into double digits below zero – but verifiable information has been difficult to come by so far.

"I cannot remember a time where I've been home for 10 days in a row, where I haven't checked the mail, haven't went to the grocery store and got any food, haven't went and filled up with gas," Semans said. "I mean, being in your house without going anywhere for 10 days is something I don't think I've experienced in my lifetime."

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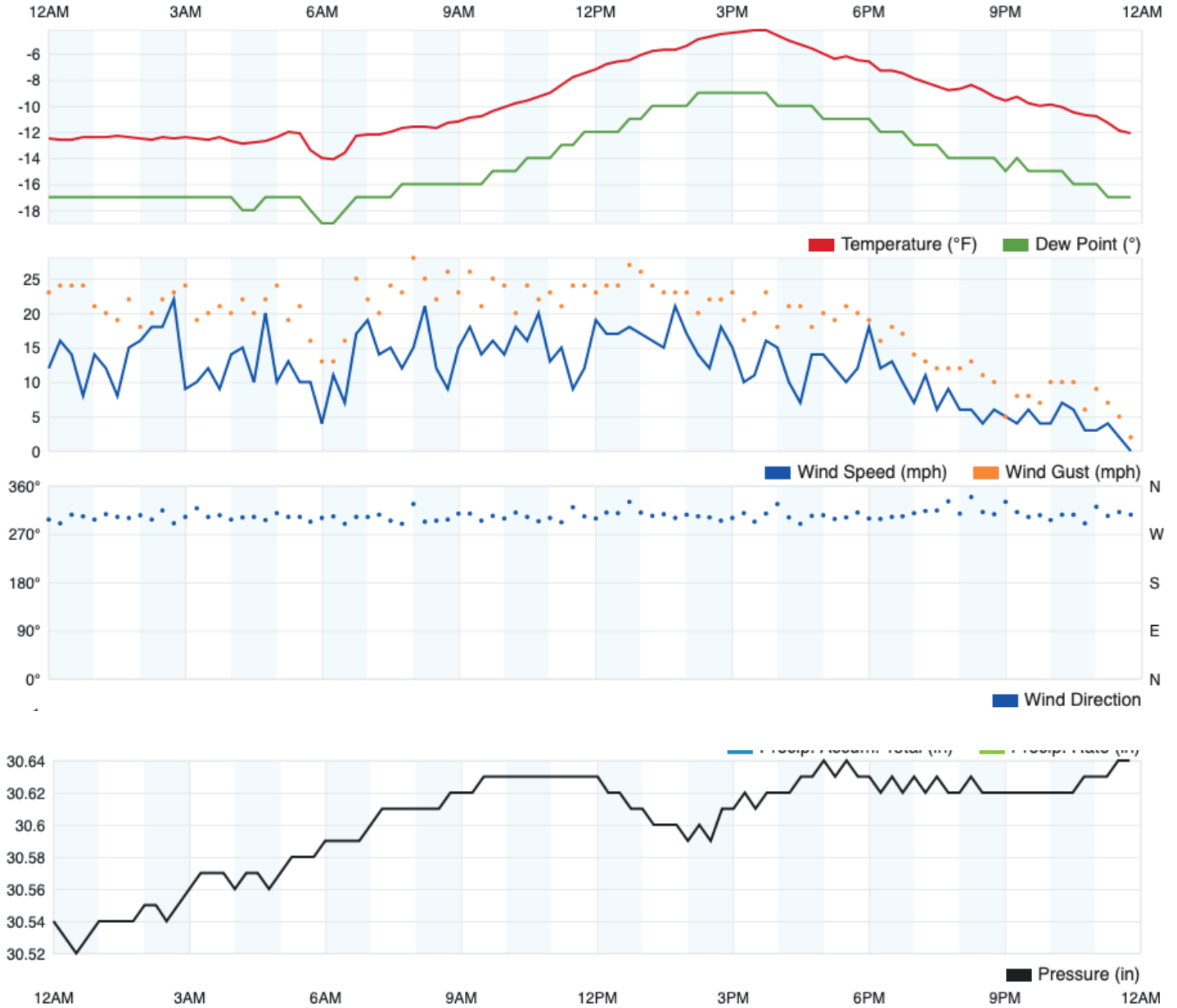
**Crews push their way through a massive snowdrift plugging an overpass at Indian Creek Service Road under I-90 and near Kadoka.** (Courtesy of State of South Dakota Highway Crew)



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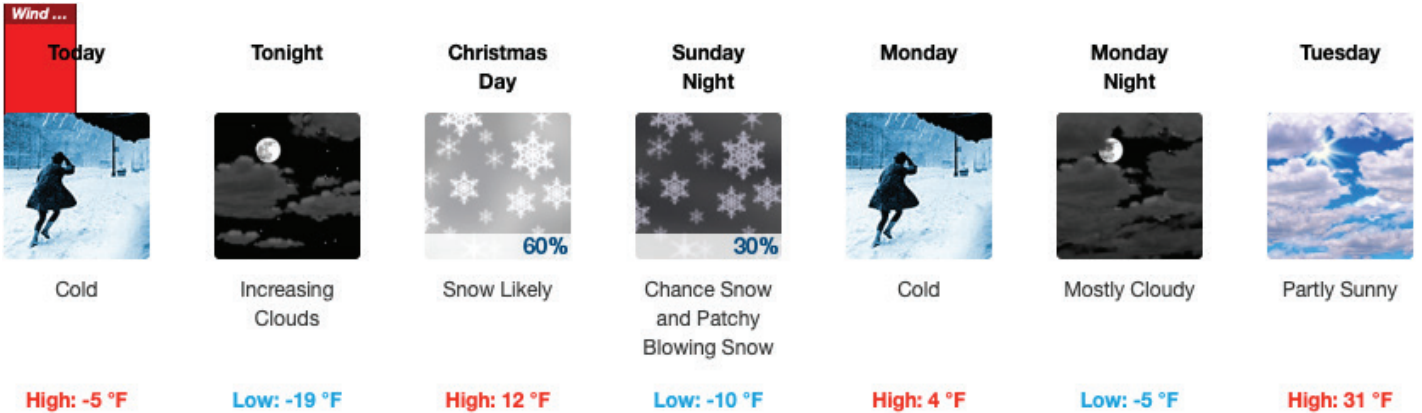
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## Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs

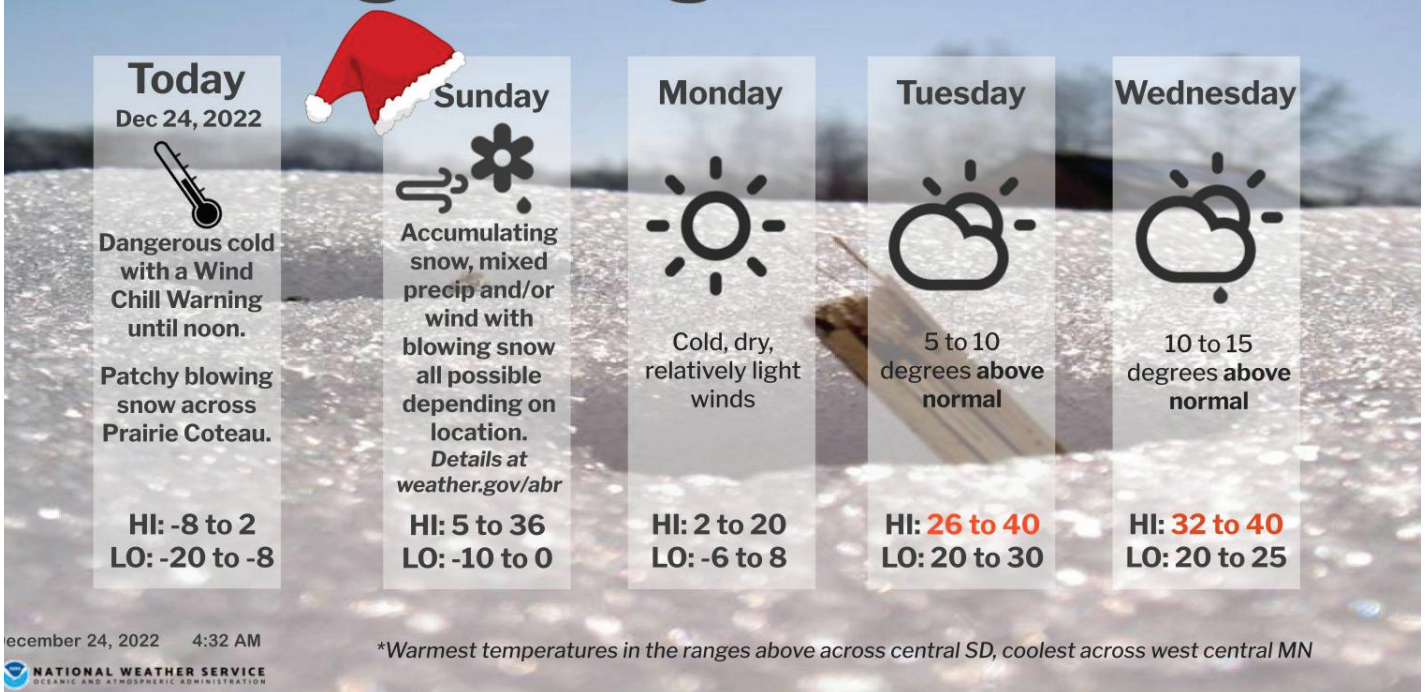


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## Warming Through the New Week



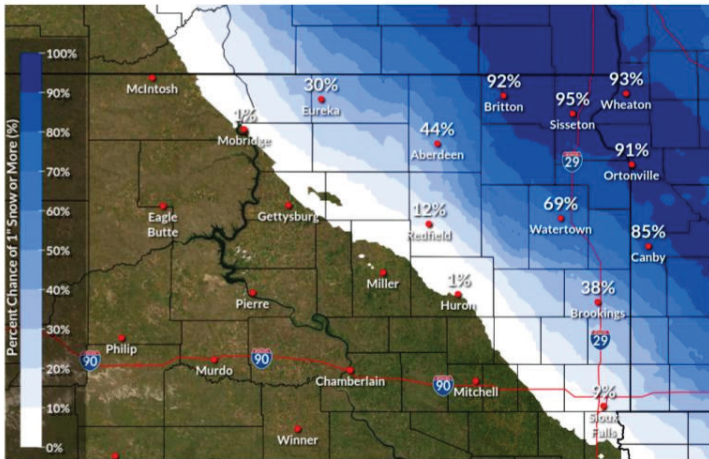
While still brutally cold today and tonight, warmer temperatures will eventually work into the region. A low pressure system may impact travel Christmas day with accumulating snow and slippery roads (ne SD and wc MN), and potential blowing snow due to strong winds (central SD).



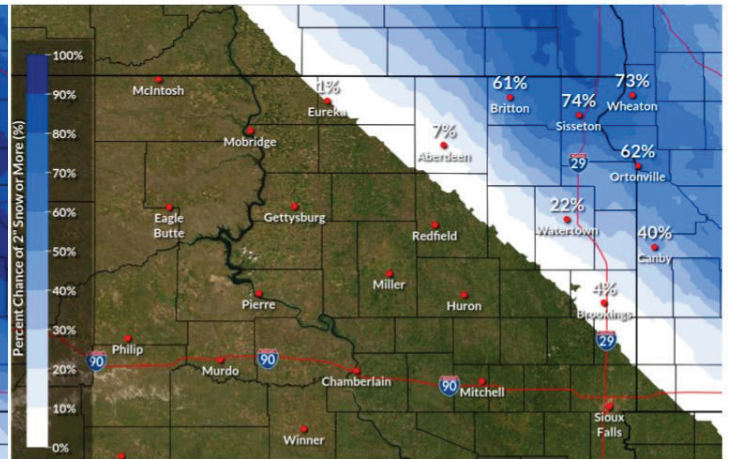
## ❁ Accumulating Snow Christmas Day

- Bulk of snow falls from noon to 6pm
- There is a  $\leq 5\%$  chance anyone receives 4 or more inches of snow with this system
- A slight shift in the low track, and thus probabilities, is still possible
- Light mixed precipitation is possible across central SD

Percent chance of 1" of snow or more Sunday



Percent chance of 2" of snow or more Sunday



 National Weather Service Aberdeen, SD

  Updated: December 24, 2022 4:37 AM

Generally 1 to 3 inches of snow is anticipated across portions of northeastern SD into west central MN on Sunday. Take extra time if traveling due to slippery or snow-covered roads. A light wintry mix could lead to slick surfaces across portions of central SD as well.

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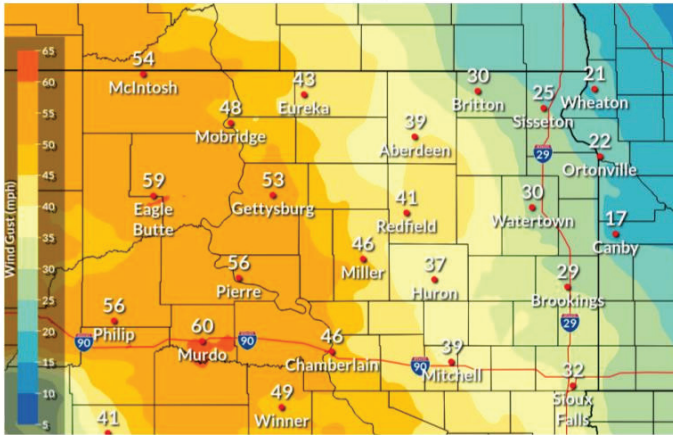
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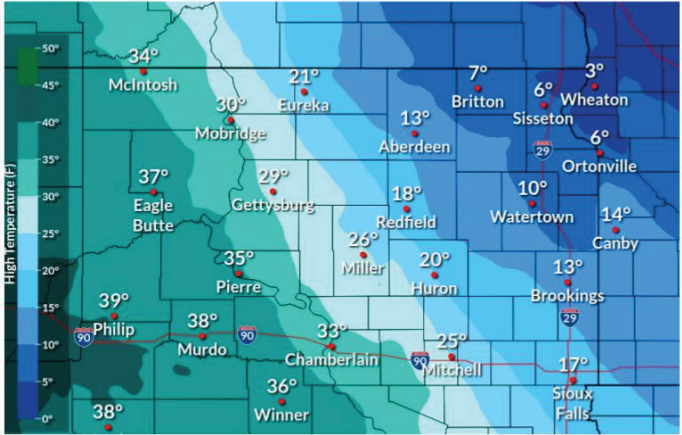
## Blowing Snow Potential Christmas Day

- A low pressure system brings snow, but also **windy conditions and warmer temperatures** Sunday
- Moderate to high uncertainty on high temperatures, which is an **important factor** for blowing snow potential.
  - **Significant visibility reductions from blowing snow are possible**, especially if high temperatures are cooler than currently forecast, which would lead to less/no crusting of the existing snow pack

Max wind gusts noon Sunday - 6am Monday



High temperatures Sunday



National Weather Service Aberdeen, SD

Updated: December 24, 2022 5:24 AM

While uncertainty exists, strong winds may lead to blowing snow with significant visibility reductions along and west of the James River Valley Sunday afternoon and evening. Stay tuned to the latest forecast for updates.

**Know Before You Go!**

Check the forecast & road conditions before you leave!

[www.511mn.org](http://www.511mn.org)  
[www.sd511.org](http://www.sd511.org)  
[weather.gov](http://weather.gov)

Local TV & Radio

511  
Mobile.weather.gov  
Cell phone apps

Traveling for the Holidays? Make sure to check the latest forecast and road conditions first!



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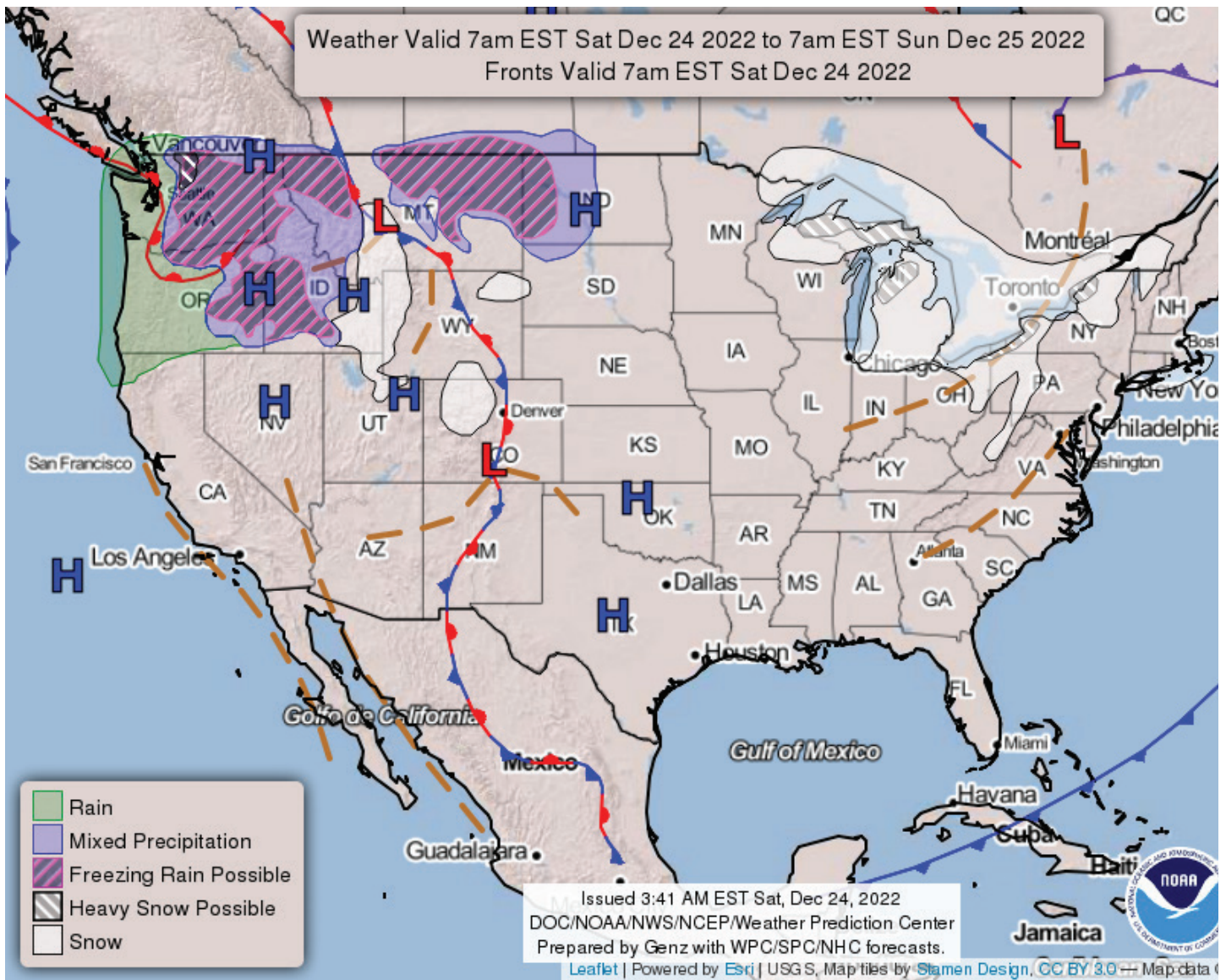
## Yesterday's Groton Weather

**High Temp:** -4.2 °F at 3:45 PM  
**Low Temp:** -14.1 °F at 6:15 AM  
**Wind:** 28 mph at 8:00 AM  
**Precip:** : 0.00

Day length: 8 hours, 46 minutes

## Today's Info

Record High: 50 in 1943  
Record Low: -24 in 1996  
Average High: 26°F  
Average Low: 5°F  
Average Precip in Dec.: 0.46  
Precip to date in Dec.: 1.85  
Average Precip to date: 21.67  
Precip Year to Date: 19.35  
Sunset Tonight: 4:55:20 PM  
Sunrise Tomorrow: 8:09:10 AM



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## Today in Weather History

December 24, 1985: Snow fell over western South Dakota on December 23, with the greatest amounts in the northern Black Hills. Strong winds gusting to 50-60 mph developed over the western part of the state on the evening of December 23rd and continued into the morning of the 24th, with gusts to above 40 mph in the east. The winds caused ground blizzard conditions in the northern and central sections of South Dakota, and many vehicles were reported in ditches. Many people were stranded for a time in Martin in Bennett County. Several roads were blocked entirely during this time, such as Highway 248 near Murdo in Jones County.

December 24, 1992: A deep area of low pressure traveled across the United States/Canada border, dragging a cold front southward across South Dakota and Minnesota by Christmas Day. Southerly winds gusted up to 50 mph over western Minnesota on the 23rd in advance of the storm, causing ground blizzard conditions. As the arctic cold front swept across the area, temperatures tumbled from the 20s and 30s to well below zero by Christmas morning. Wind gusts were up to 50 mph behind the front, causing ground blizzard conditions and wind chill readings from 40 to 60 degrees below zero. A church that was under construction in Litchfield in Meeker County, Minnesota, was destroyed by strong winds. Many motorists were stranded on Christmas Eve and spent the night at area homes and motels. Interstate 94 from Alexandria to Moorhead, MN, was closed for nearly eight hours. High winds gusted up to 55 mph in the Watertown, SD area, causing a steel frame building under construction to collapse sometime between 9 and 10 pm CST.

December 24, 2009: A broad upper-level low-pressure area over the Upper Midwest associated with an intense surface low-pressure area brought widespread heavy snow along with blizzard conditions to central and northeast South Dakota as well as west-central Minnesota. The storm was a slow mover and produced several rounds of snow over three days. Total snowfall amounts were from 7 to as much as 25 inches. The heavy snow combined with winds of 25 to 40 mph with gusts to 50 mph brought widespread blowing and drifting snow with visibilities frequently less than a quarter of a mile. This blizzard ranked in the top three for South Dakota snowfall with a state average of 15.4 inches. Most of the state received 10 inches of snow or more with many locations with 20 inches or more. Pollock in north-central South Dakota set an all-time high three-day snowfall total with 17 inches. Before the onset of the storm, the Governor declared a state of emergency for South Dakota. Large portions of both Interstates 29 and 90 across South Dakota were closed late on Thursday, December 24th. Both Interstates were closed through Christmas Day and into Saturday, December 26th. There were some stranded holiday travelers due to the road closings, along with a few rescues. Most roads were reopened by Sunday morning, December 27th. There were also several vehicle accidents with nothing serious. Several airports were also closed throughout the storm, along with a few spotty power outages occurring in Lyman County in central South Dakota. Total snowfall amounts over the three days predominantly ranged from 1 to 2 feet. Snowfall amounts with a foot or more included; 12 inches at Mobridge, Eureka, Waubay, and Eagle Butte; 13 inches at Highmore and Miller; 14 inches at

Castlewood, Summit, Watertown, Pierre, and Ree Heights; 15 inches at Groton, Gettysburg, Webster, Wilmot, Hayti, and McLaughlin; 16 inches at McIntosh, east of Hayes and east of Hosmer; 17 inches at Timber Lake, Britton, and Pollock; 18 inches near Victor; 20 inches near Keldron; 22 inches at Murdo; 23 inches at Sisseton and 25 inches at Kennebec. In west-central Minnesota Wheaton received 11 inches, Browns Valley received 15 inches with 16 inches at Ortonville and Artichoke Lake.

1851: The Library of Congress caught fire. About 35,000 of the Library's 55,000 volumes were destroyed.

1963: At 0326 CDT on December 24th, 1963, a new all-time low for Memphis occurred with a reading of -13°F. The record still stands today.

1968: The crew of Apollo 8 took this photo, later dubbed "Earthrise," on December 24th, 1968. During a broadcast that night, pilot Jim Lovell said: "The vast loneliness is awe-inspiring, and it makes you realize just what you have back there on Earth."



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Daily Devotionals

## Seeds of Hope

### JOSEPH'S DREAM

"...Mary, was engaged to be married to Joseph. But before the marriage took place, while she was still a virgin, she became pregnant through the power of the Holy Spirit. Joseph, her fiancé, was a good man and did not want to disgrace her publicly, so he decided to break the engagement quietly.

As he considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream. 'Joseph, son of David,' the angel said, 'do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife. For the child within her was conceived by the Holy Spirit. And she will have a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.'

All of this occurred to fulfill the Lord's message through his prophet: 'Look! The virgin will conceive a child! She will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel, which means "God is with us."'

When Joseph woke up, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded and took Mary as his wife."

When the Lord calls us to do His work, and we are faithful and obedient to Him, great things happen!

Prayer: Father, when You call us to do Your work in Your world, may we accept the challenge, knowing that great things will happen that will bless us and others, and Your Name glorified. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: Matthew 1:18-24 For the child within her was conceived by the Holy Spirit. And she will have a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.'



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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## The Groton Independent Printed & Mailed Weekly Edition

### Subscription Form

All prices listed include 6.5% Sales Tax

- Black & White ..... \$48.99/year
- Colored ..... \$79.88/year
- Colored ..... \$42.60/6 months
- E-Weekly\* ..... \$31.95/year

\* The E-Weekly is a PDF file emailed to you each week. It does not grant you access to the GDI/Video Archives.

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## Groton Daily Independent

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- 9 Months ..... \$42.60
- 12 Months ..... \$53.25

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## News from the Associated Press

### Wild winter storm envelops US, snarling Christmas travel

By HEATHER HOLLINGSWORTH and JILL BLEED Associated Press

MISSION, Kan. (AP) — A wild winter storm continued to envelop much of the United States on Saturday, bringing blinding blizzards, freezing rain, flooding and life-threatening cold that created mayhem for those traveling for the Christmas holiday.

The storm that arrived earlier in the week downed power lines, littered highways with piles of cars in deadly accidents and led to mass flight cancellations.

The storm was nearly unprecedented in its scope, stretching from the Great Lakes near Canada to the Rio Grande along the border with Mexico. About 60% of the U.S. population faced some sort of winter weather advisory or warning, and temperatures plummeted drastically below normal from east of the Rocky Mountains to the Appalachians, the National Weather Service said.

Freezing rain coated much of the Pacific Northwest in a layer of ice, while people in the Northeast faced the threat of coastal and inland flooding.

The frigid temperatures and gusty winds were expected to produce “dangerously cold wind chills across much of the central and eastern U.S. this holiday weekend,” the weather service said, adding that the conditions “will create a potentially life-threatening hazard for travelers that become stranded.”

“In some areas, being outdoors could lead to frostbite in minutes,” it said.

Adding to the woes were power outages that by late Friday were still affecting more than a million homes and businesses, according to the website PowerOutage, which tracks utility reports.

As millions of Americans were traveling ahead of Christmas, more than 5,700 flights within, into or out of the U.S. were canceled Friday, according to the tracking site FlightAware.

Multiple highways were closed and crashes claimed at least six lives, officials said. Four people died in a massive pileup involving some 50 vehicles on the Ohio Turnpike. A Kansas City, Missouri, driver was killed Thursday after skidding into a creek, and three others died Wednesday in separate crashes on icy northern Kansas roads.

In Canada, WestJet canceled all flights Friday at Toronto Pearson International Airport, as meteorologists there warned of a potential once-in-a-decade weather event. While in Mexico, migrants camped near the U.S. border in unusually cold temperatures as they awaited a U.S. Supreme Court decision on pandemic-era restrictions that prevent many from seeking asylum.

Forecasters said a bomb cyclone — when atmospheric pressure drops very quickly in a strong storm — had developed near the Great Lakes, stirring up blizzard conditions, including heavy winds and snow.

Even people in Florida were braced for unusually chilly weather as rare freeze warnings were issued for large parts of the state over the holiday weekend.

Activists were rushing to get homeless people out of the cold. Nearly 170 adults and children were keeping warm early Friday in Detroit at a shelter and a warming center that are designed to hold 100 people.

“This is a lot of extra people” but it wasn’t an option to turn anyone away, said Faith Fowler, the executive director of Cass Community Social Services, which runs both facilities.

Emergency weather shelters in Portland, Oregon, called for volunteers amid high demand and staffing issues as snow, freezing rain, ice and frigid temperatures descended upon the area.

South Dakota Gov. Kristi Noem said she was deploying the National Guard to haul timber to the Oglala Sioux and Rosebud Sioux tribes and help with snow removal.

“We have families that are way out there that we haven’t heard from in two weeks,” said Wayne Boyd, chief of staff to the Rosebud Sioux president.

On the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation, Harlie Young was huddled with five children and her father around a wood stove as 12-foot (3.6-meter) snow drifts blocked the house.

“We’re just trying to look on the bright side that they’re still coming and they didn’t forget us,” she said

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Friday.

Calling it a "kitchen sink storm," New York Gov. Kathy Hochul declared a state of emergency. In parts of New York City, tidal flooding inundated roads, homes and businesses Friday morning.

In Boston, rain combined with a high tide, flooded some downtown streets on Friday.

## SD Lottery

By The Associated Press undefined

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

Mega Millions

15-21-32-38-62, Mega Ball: 8, Megaplier: 4

(fifteen, twenty-one, thirty-two, thirty-eight, sixty-two; Mega Ball: eight; Megaplier: four)

Estimated jackpot: \$565,000,000

Powerball

Estimated jackpot: 186,000,000

## Massive winter storm brings rolling blackouts, power outages

By HEATHER HOLLINGSWORTH and JILL BLEED Associated Press

MISSION, Kan. (AP) — Tens of millions of Americans endured bone-chilling temperatures, blizzard conditions, power outages and canceled holiday gatherings Friday from a winter storm that forecasters said was nearly unprecedented in its scope, exposing about 60% of the U.S. population to some sort of winter weather advisory or warning.

More than 200 million people were under an advisory or warning on Friday, the National Weather Service said. The weather service's map "depicts one of the greatest extents of winter weather warnings and advisories ever," forecasters said.

Power outages have left about 1.4 million homes and businesses in the dark, according to the website PowerOutage, which tracks utility reports. The Tennessee Valley Authority, the nation's largest public utility, ended its rolling blackouts Friday afternoon but continued to urge homes and businesses to conserve power. In Georgia, hundreds of people in Atlanta and northern parts of the state were without power and facing the possibility of sub-zero wind chills without heat.

And nearly 5,000 flights within, into or out of the U.S. were canceled Friday, according to the tracking site FlightAware, causing more mayhem as travelers try to make it home for the holidays.

"We've just got to stay positive," said Wendell Davis, who plays basketball with a team in France and was waiting at O'Hare in Chicago on Friday after a series of flight cancellations.

The huge storm stretched from border to border. In Canada, WestJet canceled all flights Friday at Toronto Pearson International Airport, beginning at 9 a.m. as meteorologists in the country warned of a potential once-in-a-decade weather event.

And in Mexico, migrants waited near the U.S. border in unusually cold temperatures as they awaited a U.S. Supreme Court decision on whether and when to lift pandemic-era restrictions that prevent many from seeking asylum.

Forecasters said a bomb cyclone — when atmospheric pressure drops very quickly in a strong storm — had developed near the Great Lakes, stirring up blizzard conditions, including heavy winds and snow.

Multiple highways were closed and crashes claimed at least six lives, officials said. At least two people died in a massive pileup involving some 50 vehicles on the Ohio Turnpike. A Kansas City, Missouri, driver was killed Thursday after skidding into a creek, and three others died Wednesday in separate crashes on icy northern Kansas roads.

Michigan also faced a deluge of crashes, including one involving nine semitrailers.

Brent Whitehead said it took him 7.5 hours \_\_\_ instead of the usual six \_\_\_ to drive from his home near Minneapolis to his parents' home outside Chicago on Thursday in sometimes icy conditions.

"Thank goodness I had my car equipped with snow tires," he said.

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Activists also were rushing to get homeless people out of the cold. Nearly 170 adults and children were keeping warm early Friday in Detroit at a shelter and a warming center that are designed to hold 100 people.

"This is a lot of extra people" but it wasn't an option to turn anyone away, said Faith Fowler, the executive director of Cass Community Social Services, which runs both facilities.

In Chicago, Andy Robledo planned to spend the day organizing efforts to check on people without housing through his nonprofit, Feeding People Through Plants. Robledo and volunteers build tents modeled on ice-fishing tents, including a plywood subfloor.

"It's not a house, it's not an apartment, it's not a hotel room. But it's a huge step up from what they had before," Robledo said.

In Portland, Oregon, nearly 800 people slept at five emergency shelters on Thursday night, as homeless outreach teams fanned out to distributed cold-weather survival gear. Shelters called for volunteers amid high demand and staffing issues. Employees were laid low by flu or respiratory symptoms or kept from work by icy roads, officials said.

DoorDash and Uber Eats suspended delivery service in some states, and bus service was disrupted in places like Seattle.

The power ceased at Jaime Sheehan's Maryland bakery for about 90 minutes Friday, shutting off the convection oven and stalling the mixer she needed to make butter cream.

"Thankfully, all of the orders that were going out today already finished yesterday," she said a few moments before the power returned.

At about the same time, Corey Newcomb and his family were entering their sixth hour without power at their home in the small town of Phenix, Virginia.

"We are coping and that's about it," Newcomb said in a Facebook message.

South Dakota Gov. Kristi Noem said she was deploying the National Guard to haul timber to the Oglala Sioux and Rosebud Sioux tribes and help with snow removal.

"We have families that are way out there that we haven't heard from in two weeks," Wayne Boyd, chief of staff to the Rosebud Sioux president, said.

Fearing that some are running out of food, the tribe was hoping to get a helicopter on Saturday to check on the stranded.

The Oglala Sioux Tribe, meanwhile, was using snowmobiles to reach members who live at the end of miles-long dirt roads.

"It's been one heck of a fight so far," said tribal President Frank Star Comes Out.

On the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation, Harlie Young was huddled with five children and her 58-year-old father around a wood stove as 12-foot (3.6-meter) snow drifts blocked the house.

"We're just trying to look on the bright side that they're still coming and they didn't forget us," she said Friday, as the temperature plunged to frigid lows.

The weather service is forecasting the coldest Christmas in more than two decades in Philadelphia, where school officials shifted classes online Friday.

Atop New Hampshire's Mount Washington, the tallest peak in the Northeast, the wind topped 150 mph (241 kph).

In Boston, rain combined with a high tide, sent waves over the seawall at Long Wharf and flooded some downtown streets. It was so bad in Vermont that Amtrak canceled service for the day, and nonessential state offices were closing early.

"I'm hearing from crews who are seeing grown trees ripped out by the roots," Mari McClure, president of Green Mountain Power, the state's largest utility, said at a news conference.

Calling it a "kitchen sink storm," New York Gov. Kathy Hochul declared a state of emergency. In parts of New York City, tidal flooding inundated roads, homes and businesses Friday morning, with police trudging through knee-deep water to pull stranded motorists to safety in Queens.

In Iowa, sports broadcaster Mark Woodley became a Twitter sensation after he was called on to do live broadcasts outdoors in the wind and snow because sporting events were called off. By midday Friday, a



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compilation of his broadcasts had been viewed nearly 5 million times on Twitter.

"I've got good news and I've got bad news," he told an anchor. "The good news is that I can still feel my face right now. The bad news is, I kind of wish I couldn't."

## South Dakota governor expands National Guard help for tribes

By STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — Gov. Kristi Noem is expanding the state National Guard's mission to assist both the Oglala Sioux and the Rosebud Sioux Tribes with firewood and snow removal amid the relentless wind and life-threatening cold that have crippled their reservations in the southwestern corner of South Dakota.

Noem announced the deployment to haul firewood from the Black Hills Forest Service to the Rosebud Sioux Tribe late Thursday, and on Friday she said the Guard would assist the Oglala Sioux Tribe as well.

The Republican governor has had an often uneasy relationship with the tribes, and the cooperation to deploy the National Guard underscored the desperate situation in western South Dakota. Tribal officials say snow drifts have formed as high as 10 feet (3 meters), blocking roads and stranding families with dwindling supplies for heating and food.

The Oglala Sioux Tribe was using snowmobiles and other tracked vehicles to reach people, but said they are facing breakdowns and limited resources. Officials were considering using horses to deliver essentials to some homes on Friday.

"A lot of our membership lives in rural areas — getting to them has been a challenge," tribal President Frank Star Comes Out said. "They run out of fuel, propane, they run out of wood, we even had power outages."

Wayne Boyd, chief of staff to the Rosebud Sioux president, said that tribe was looking into reports of deaths. During the storm last week, a 12-year-old with a medical condition died after medical responders couldn't reach the home, Boyd said.

"We have families that are way out there that we haven't heard from in two weeks," Boyd said, adding that the tribe was hoping to get a helicopter on Saturday to check on stranded families.

"People are running out of food, houses are freezing up," he said.

## Company: Regulators OK reopening of Kansas pipeline segment

By JOHN HANNA Associated Press

TOPEKA, Kan. (AP) — The operator of a pipeline that spilled about 14,000 bathtubs' worth of heavy crude oil into a northeastern Kansas creek said Friday that it has permission from U.S. government regulators to reopen the repaired segment where the rupture occurred.

Canada-based TC Energy did not say exactly when it would reopen the section of its Keystone pipeline system from Steele City near the Nebraska-Kansas border to Cushing in northern Oklahoma. The company said it will have crews working through the Christmas holiday and also conducting "rigorous testing and inspections."

"This will take several days," the company said in a statement. "We will continue to prioritize the safety of people and the environment."

The Dec. 7 spill forced the company to shut down the Keystone system and dumped about 14,000 barrels of crude into a creek running through rural pastureland in Washington County, about 150 miles (240 kilometers) northwest of Kansas City. Each barrel is 42 gallons, the size of a household bathtub.

The company and government officials have said drinking water supplies were not affected, and no one was evacuated. However, Kansas City's KCUR-FM reported this week that the Kansas Department of Health and Environment found chemicals from the spill downstream past two earthen dams constructed to contain the oil, potentially endangering animals that ingest it.

TC Energy reopened most of the 2,700-mile (4,345-kilometer) Keystone system last week. The system carries crude oil extracted from tar sands in western Canada to the Gulf Coast, with a spur also moving crude to south-central Illinois.

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The Kansas spill was the largest onshore in nine years and larger than 22 previous spills on the Keystone system combined, according to U.S. Department of Transportation data. The company received permission to reopen the pipeline across Kansas and into northern Oklahoma from the Department of Transportation's pipeline safety arm.

Concerns that spills could pollute waterways spurred opposition to plans by TC Energy to build another crude oil pipeline in the same system, the 1,200-mile (1,900-kilometer) Keystone XL, across Montana, South Dakota and Nebraska. President Joe Biden's cancelation of a permit for the project led the company to pull the plug last year.

The company has not identified the Kansas spill's cause. Zack Pistora, who lobbies at the Kansas Statehouse for the Sierra Club, said the pipeline segment shouldn't reopen until the cause is known.

"Isn't the next spill just an accident waiting to happen?" he said in an interview Friday.

The company said it has removed the ruptured pipeline section and sent it to an independent lab for analysis. It also said it had recovered almost 7,600 barrels of oil, a little more than half of what was leaked.

Meanwhile, some Democrats in the Republican-controlled Legislature want to reconsider the state's policy of exempting companies from local property taxes for 10 years if they build pipelines through Kansas to spur energy development. Democratic Gov. Laura Kelly told The Topeka Capital-Journal in an interview this week that the policy was "a big mistake" and should have been reconsidered "a long time ago."

## Federal effort to boost election worker protections fizzles

By CHRISTINA A. CASSIDY Associated Press

ATLANTA (AP) — Federal proposals that would have significantly boosted security funding for election offices and heightened penalties for threatening their staff failed to advance this year, leaving state officials looking to their legislatures for support.

The massive budget bill that passed Congress on Friday will send \$75 million in election security grants to states, an amount that falls far short of what many officials had sought as state and local election workers have been targeted with harassment and even death threats since the 2020 presidential election. They also were disappointed that proposals to make such threats a federal crime with more severe penalties fizzled.

Absent federal action, several state election officials — many of whom have faced an unrelenting wave of attacks for two years — say they plan to push their lawmakers to increase protections for themselves, their staffs and those who run elections at the local level. Some of them were confronted by angry protesters in public and even outside their homes who were motivated by former President Donald Trump's false claims that his reelection had been stolen.

"We need to take care of the people that work in elections," said Cisco Aguilar, shortly after he won his midterms race to be Nevada's next secretary of state. "They shouldn't feel intimidated or harassed going to the car at the end of the day." He added: "We have to have their back."

Aguilar, a Democrat, said he plans to work with Nevada lawmakers to pass a bill making it a felony to harass or intimidate an election worker or volunteer. While Democrats kept control of the state Legislature, Republican Joe Lombardo was elected governor and his office declined to say whether he would support such an effort.

In Georgia, Republican Secretary of State Brad Raffensperger, who faced an onslaught of threats as he withstood pressure from Trump to "find" enough votes to cancel President Joe Biden's win in the state, said he also would like to see penalties increased on those who threaten election workers. It's not clear whether that will be a priority for the Legislature, where Republicans control both chambers.

Michigan Secretary of State Jocelyn Benson, a Democrat, has said she plans to call on the newly elected Democratic majority in the Legislature to allocate \$100 million annually to local election offices after clerks complained about being underfunded. She also wants to make it a felony to threaten election workers and heighten penalties for those who spread misinformation, especially related to voting rights.

She said tactics used in the 2020 election could be attempted again during the next presidential election unless lawmakers enact tougher countermeasures.



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"We are looking to turn back the tide on misinformation and the violence that's come into our political discourse," said Jake Rollow, a spokesman for the Michigan Department of State. "We need that era to be put behind us, both in Michigan and as a country, because it's not safe. It's not what America's about."

Conspiracy theories surrounding the 2020 election prompted a surge in threats and harassment of state and local election officials that persists two years later. The threats have contributed to an exodus of election officials across the country, particularly at the local level, raising concerns about a loss of expertise in running elections heading into the 2024 presidential cycle.

The threats have drawn the attention of federal law enforcement, which established a task force in mid-2021 to review cases for possible prosecution. Last October, one of the cases resulted in an 18-month prison sentence for a Nebraska man who made online threats against Colorado's top state election official. A federal grand jury on Dec. 14 indicted an Ohio man for making recent threats against an official in the Arizona secretary of state's office.

But the number of prosecutions remains small overall as federal authorities must meet a legal standard of proving a "serious expression of intent to commit an act of unlawful violence," which can be a challenge.

Experts say it's critical that those making threats are held accountable and that strong protections are in place to deter future attacks. A survey of local election officials commissioned by the Brennan Center for Justice in 2021 found one in three felt unsafe because of their job and one in six said they had been threatened.

"Many have cited this as an important contributor to why they are leaving office," said Liz Howard, a former Virginia state election official now with the Brennan Center. "We don't have to guess why — they are telling us."

Various proposals introduced by Democratic Sens. Amy Klobuchar and Jon Ossoff and Republican Sen. Susan Collins to boost protections did not gain enough support to pass the chamber and were not in the \$1.7 trillion government spending bill. Klobuchar said she would continue to seek money for election offices and noted that she and Republican Sen. Roy Blunt had pushed to allow election officials to use previous federal funding for security upgrades.

Sen. Alex Padilla, a Democrat who previously served as California's secretary of state, called election workers the "backbone of our democracy" and said more must be done to ensure their safety.

"In the wake of escalating attacks on our electoral institutions, I'm disappointed that my Republican colleagues did not come to the table this year to protect the thousands of election workers who safeguard our democracy," he said in a statement.

Some states have acted on their own. Since 2020, California, Colorado and Maine have passed legislation increasing protections for election workers. In California, this meant allowing them to keep their home addresses confidential.

In Colorado, Secretary of State Jena Griswold worked with state lawmakers on legislation known as the Election Official Protection Act, which establishes election workers as a protected class against doxing — the release online of someone's personal information. It makes the practice a misdemeanor and allows election workers to remove their personal information from online records. It also makes threatening an election official a misdemeanor under state law.

"Congress must act to protect election officials and workers who are critical to administering free and fair elections," Griswold said. "But in the absence of federal action, states should pass laws like the Election Official Protection Act."

## **Packed ICUs, crowded crematoriums: COVID roils Chinese towns**

By DAKE KANG Associated Press

BAZHOU, China (AP) — Yao Ruyan paced frantically outside the fever clinic of a county hospital in China's industrial Hebei province, 70 kilometers (43 miles) southwest of Beijing. Her mother-in-law had COVID-19 and needed urgent medical care, but all hospitals nearby were full.

"They say there's no beds here," she barked into her phone.

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As China grapples with its first-ever national COVID-19 wave, emergency wards in small cities and towns southwest of Beijing are overwhelmed. Intensive care units are turning away ambulances, relatives of sick people are searching for open beds, and patients are slumped on benches in hospital corridors and lying on floors for a lack of beds.

Yao's elderly mother-in-law had fallen ill a week ago with the coronavirus. They went first to a local hospital, where lung scans showed signs of pneumonia. But the hospital couldn't handle COVID-19 cases, Yao was told. She was told to go to larger hospitals in adjacent counties.

As Yao and her husband drove from hospital to hospital, they found all the wards were full. Zhuozhou Hospital, an hour's drive from Yao's hometown, was the latest disappointment.

Yao charged toward the check-in counter, past wheelchairs frantically moving elderly patients. Yet again, she was told the hospital was full, and that she would have to wait.

"I'm furious," Yao said, tearing up, as she clutched the lung scans from the local hospital. "I don't have much hope. We've been out for a long time and I'm terrified because she's having difficulty breathing."

Over two days, Associated Press journalists visited five hospitals and two crematoriums in towns and small cities in Baoding and Langfang prefectures, in central Hebei province. The area was the epicenter of one of China's first outbreaks after the state loosened COVID-19 controls in November and December. For weeks, the region went quiet, as people fell ill and stayed home.

Many have now recovered. Today, markets are bustling, diners pack restaurants and cars are honking in snarling traffic, even as the virus is spreading in other parts of China. In recent days, headlines in state media said the area is "starting to resume normal life."

But life in central Hebei's emergency wards and crematoriums is anything but normal. Even as the young go back to work and lines at fever clinics shrink, many of Hebei's elderly are falling into critical condition. As they overrun ICUs and funeral homes, it could be a harbinger of what's to come for the rest of China.

The Chinese government has reported only seven COVID-19 deaths since restrictions were loosened dramatically on Dec. 7, bringing the country's total toll to 5,241. On Tuesday, a Chinese health official said that China only counts deaths from pneumonia or respiratory failure in its official COVID-19 death toll, a narrow definition that excludes many deaths that would be attributed to COVID-19 in other places.

Experts have forecast between a million and 2 million deaths in China next year, and the World Health Organization warned that Beijing's way of counting would "underestimate the true death toll."

At Baoding No. 2 Hospital in Zhuozhou on Wednesday, patients thronged the hallway of the emergency ward. The sick were breathing with the help of respirators. One woman wailed after doctors told her that a loved one had died.

The ICU was so crowded, ambulances were turned away. A medical worker shouted at relatives wheeling in a patient from an arriving ambulance.

"There's no oxygen or electricity in this corridor!" the worker exclaimed. "If you can't even give him oxygen, how can you save him?"

"If you don't want any delays, turn around and get out quickly!" she said.

The relatives left, hoisting the patient back into the ambulance. It took off, lights flashing.

In two days of driving in the region, AP journalists passed around thirty ambulances. On one highway toward Beijing, two ambulances followed each other, lights flashing, as a third passed by heading in the opposite direction. Dispatchers are overwhelmed, with Beijing city officials reporting a sixfold surge in emergency calls earlier this month.

Some ambulances are heading to funeral homes. At the Zhuozhou crematorium, furnaces are burning overtime as workers struggle to cope with a spike in deaths in the past week, according to one employee. A funeral shop worker estimated it is burning 20 to 30 bodies a day, up from three to four before COVID-19 measures were loosened.

"There's been so many people dying," said Zhao Yongsheng, a worker at a funeral goods shop near a local hospital. "They work day and night, but they can't burn them all."

At a crematorium in Gaobeidian, about 20 kilometers (12 miles) south of Zhuozhou, the body of one



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82-year-old woman was brought from Beijing, a two-hour drive, because funeral homes in China's capital were packed, according to the woman's grandson, Liang.

"They said we'd have to wait for 10 days," Liang said, giving only his surname because of the sensitivity of the situation.

Liang's grandmother had been unvaccinated, Liang added, when she came down with coronavirus symptoms, and had spent her final days hooked to a respirator in a Beijing ICU.

Over two hours at the Gaobeidian crematorium on Thursday, AP journalists observed three ambulances and two vans unload bodies. A hundred or so people huddled in groups, some in traditional white Chinese mourning attire. They burned funeral paper and set off fireworks.

"There's been a lot!" a worker said when asked about the number of COVID-19 deaths, before funeral director Ma Xiaowei stepped in and brought the journalists to meet a local government official.

As the official listened in, Ma confirmed there were more cremations, but said he didn't know if COVID-19 was involved. He blamed the extra deaths on the arrival of winter.

"Every year during this season, there's more," Ma said. "The pandemic hasn't really shown up" in the death toll, he said, as the official listened and nodded.

Even as anecdotal evidence and modeling suggests large numbers of people are getting infected and dying, some Hebei officials deny the virus has had much impact.

"There's no so-called explosion in cases, it's all under control," said Wang Ping, the administrative manager of Gaobeidian Hospital, speaking by the hospital's main gate. "There's been a slight decline in patients."

Wang said only a sixth of the hospital's 600 beds were occupied, but refused to allow AP journalists to enter. Two ambulances came to the hospital during the half hour AP journalists were present, and a patient's relative told the AP they were turned away from Gaobeidian's emergency ward because it was full.

Thirty kilometers (19 miles) south in the town of Baigou, emergency ward doctor Sun Yana was candid, even as local officials listened in.

"There are more people with fevers, the number of patients has indeed increased," Sun said. She hesitated, then added, "I can't say whether I've become even busier or not. Our emergency department has always been busy."

The Baigou New Area Aerospace Hospital was quiet and orderly, with empty beds and short lines as nurses sprayed disinfectant. COVID-19 patients are separated from others, staff said, to prevent cross-infection. But they added that serious cases are being directed to hospitals in bigger cities, because of limited medical equipment.

The lack of ICU capacity in Baigou, which has about 60,000 residents, reflects a nationwide problem. Experts say medical resources in China's villages and towns, home to about 500 million of China's 1.4 billion people, lag far behind those of big cities such as Beijing and Shanghai. Some counties lack a single ICU bed.

As a result, patients in critical condition are forced to go to bigger cities for treatment. In Bazhou, a city 40 kilometers (25 miles) east of Baigou, a hundred or more people packed the emergency ward of Langfang No. 4 People's Hospital on Thursday night.

Guards worked to corral the crowds as people jostled for positions. With no space in the ward, patients spilled into corridors and hallways. Sick people sprawled on blankets on the floor as staff frantically wheeled gurneys and ventilators. In a hallway, half a dozen patients wheezed on metal benches as oxygen tanks pumped air into their noses.

Outside a CT scan room, a woman sitting on a bench wheezed as snot dribbled out of her nostrils into crumpled tissues. A man sprawled out on a stretcher outside the emergency ward as medical workers stuck electrodes to his chest. By a check-in counter, a woman sitting on a stool gasped for air as a young man held her hand.

"Everyone in my family has got COVID," one man asked at the counter, as four others clamored for attention behind him. "What medicine can we get?"

In a corridor, a man paced as he shouted into his cellphone.

"The number of people has exploded!" he said. "There's no way you can get care here, there's far too

many people.”

It wasn't clear how many patients had COVID-19. Some had only mild symptoms, illustrating another issue, experts say: People in China rely more heavily on hospitals than in other countries, meaning it's easier for emergency medical resources to be overloaded.

Over two hours, AP journalists witnessed half a dozen or more ambulances pull up to the hospital's ICU and load critical patients to sprint to other hospitals, even as cars pulled up with dozens of new patients.

A beige van pulled up to the ICU and honked frantically at a waiting ambulance. "Move!" the driver shouted. "Let's go, let's go!" a panicked voice cried. Five people hoisted a man bundled in blankets out of the back of the van and rushed him into the hospital. Security guards shouted in the packed ward: "Make way, make way!"

The guard asked a patient to move, but backed off when a relative snarled at him. The bundled man was laid on the floor instead, amid doctors running back and forth. "Grandpa!" a woman cried, crouching over the patient.

Medical workers rushed over a ventilator. "Can you open his mouth?" someone shouted.

As white plastic tubes were fitted onto his face, the man began to breathe more easily.

Others were not so lucky. Relatives surrounding another bed began tearing up as an elderly woman's vitals flatlined. A man tugged a cloth over the woman's face, and they stood, silently, before her body was wheeled away. Within minutes, another patient had taken her place.

## **Kurds, anti-racism groups gather after deadly Paris shooting**

By JEFFREY SCHAEFFER and ANGELA CHARLTON Associated Press

PARIS (AP) — Kurdish activists, left-wing politicians and anti-racism groups demonstrated Saturday in Paris after three people were killed at a Kurdish cultural center in an attack that prosecutors say was racially motivated.

The shooting in a bustling neighborhood of central Paris also wounded three people, and stirred up concerns about hate crimes against minority groups at a time when far-right voices have gained prominence in France and around Europe in recent years.

The suspected attacker was wounded and is in custody. He is a 69-year-old Parisian who was charged last year with attacking migrants and was released earlier this month. He is facing potential charges of murder and attempted murder with a racist motive, the Paris prosecutor's office said Saturday.

Thousands gathered Saturday at the Place de la Republique in eastern Paris, waving a colorful spectrum of flags representing Kurdish rights groups, political parties and other causes. The gathering was largely peaceful, though some youths threw projectiles and skirmished with police firing tear gas. Some protesters shouted slogans against the Turkish government.

Most demonstrators were ethnic Kurds of varying generations who came together to mourn the three people who were killed, share concerns that they don't feel safe, and ask how could this kind of attack happen in the center of Paris.

The shooting shook the Kurdish community in the French capital and put police on extra alert for the Christmas weekend.

The Paris police chief met Saturday with members of the Kurdish community to try to allay their fears ahead of Saturday's rally.

France's Interior Ministry reported a 13% rise in race-related crimes or other violations in 2021 over 2019, after an 11% rise from 2018 to 2019. The ministry did not include 2020 in its statistics because of successive pandemic lockdowns that year. It said a disproportionate number of such crimes target people of African descent, and also cited hundreds of attacks based on religion.

Friday's attack took place at the cultural center and a nearby Kurdish restaurant and Kurdish hair salon. Interior Minister Gerald Darmanin said the suspect was clearly targeting foreigners, and had acted alone and was not officially affiliated with any extreme-right or other radical movements. The suspect had past

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convictions for illegal arms possession and armed violence.

Kurdish activists said they had recently been warned by police of threats to Kurdish targets.

In 2013, three women Kurdish activists, including Sakine Cansiz, a founder of the Kurdistan Workers' Party, or PKK, were found shot dead at a Kurdish center in Paris.

Turkey's army has been battling against Kurdish militants affiliated with the banned PKK in southeast Turkey as well as in northern Iraq. Turkey's military also recently launched a series of air and artillery strikes against Syrian Kurdish militant targets in northern Syria.

## Bethlehem rebounds from pandemic, lifting Christmas spirits

By MAYA ALLERUZZO Associated Press

BETHLEHEM, West Bank (AP) — The biblical town of Bethlehem marked what was shaping up to be a merry Christmas on Saturday, with thousands of visitors expected to descend upon the traditional birthplace of Jesus as it rebounds from the coronavirus pandemic.

Tourism is the economic lifeblood of this town in the occupied West Bank, and for the past two years, the pandemic kept international visitors away. This year, visitors are back, hotels are full and shopkeepers have reported a brisk business in the runup to the holiday.

"We are celebrating Christmas this year in a very much different way than last year," said Palestinian Tourism Minister Rula Maayah. "We're celebrating Christmas with pilgrims coming from all over the world."

At midafternoon, hundreds of people packed the Christmas Eve celebrations in Manger Square.

Marching bands pounding on drums and playing bagpipes paraded through the area, and foreign tourists meandered about and snapped selfies with the town's large Christmas tree behind them. Cool gray weather, along with an occasional rain shower, did little to dampen spirits.

Daisy Lucas, a 38-year-old Filipina who works in Israel, said it was a dream come true to mark the holiday in such an important place.

"As a Christian walking in the places in the Bible, it's so overwhelming," she said. "This is the birthplace of Jesus Christ. As a Christian, that's one achievement that's on my bucket list."

Latin Patriarch Pierbattista Pizzaballa, the top Roman Catholic clergyman in the Holy Land, arrived from Jerusalem through a checkpoint in Israel's West Bank separation barrier.

"We are living in very difficult challenges," he said, noting the war in Ukraine and a recent wave of Israeli-Palestinian violence. "But the message of Christmas is a message of peace."

"It's possible to change things," he added. "We will be very clear in what we have to do and what we have to say in order to preserve the importance of unity and reconciliation among all."

Pizzaballa walked through Manger Square, waving to well-wishers. Later, he was to celebrate Midnight Mass in the nearby Church of the Nativity, built on the spot where Christians believe Jesus was born.

Billions of Christians were ushering in the holiday, wrapping up a tumultuous year characterized by conflict and violence in many parts of the world.

In war-ravaged Ukraine, the glitzy lights normally spread over over Kyiv's Sophia Square are missing due to restrictions and power cuts. Instead, a modest tree decorated with blue and yellow lights barely break the gloom of the square. Mayor Vitali Klitschko has called it the "Tree of Invincibility."

In the United States, a wild winter storm continued to envelop much of the country, bringing blinding blizzards, freezing rain, flooding and life-threatening cold that created mayhem for those traveling for the holiday.

Present-day reality was visible at Manger Square as banners showing photos of Palestinian prisoner Nasser Abu Hamid were prominently displayed. The veteran prisoner died of cancer last week in an Israeli prison clinic after spending some 20 years behind bars for his conviction in the deaths of seven Israelis.



## Shells pummel Ukraine's Kherson; 7 dead, 58 wounded

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Russian shells pummeled the southern Ukrainian city of Kherson on Saturday, killing seven people and injuring 58 more in the city that Moscow's forces were forced to abandon last month.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, just back from his quick trip to Washington, posted photos of the wreckage on his social media accounts. He noted the destruction came as Ukrainians were beginning Christmas celebrations that for many Orthodox Christians will culminate in the traditional celebration Jan. 7.

"This is not sensitive content — it's the real life of Kherson," Zelenskyy tweeted. The images showed cars on fire, bodies on the street and building windows blown out.

The deputy head of the presidential office, Kyrylo Tymoshenko, said seven people were killed in the shelling of Kherson on Saturday and 58 were injured, at least 16 of them seriously.

Saturday marks 10 months since the start of the Russian invasion.

Ukraine has faced a blistering onslaught of Russian artillery fire, missiles, shelling and drone attacks since early October, much of it targeting the energy infrastructure in a bid to cut electricity and heating services as the freezing winter advances. The shelling has been especially intense in Kherson since Russian forces withdrew and Ukraine's army reclaimed the southern city in November.

Earlier Saturday, the Donetsk regional governor, Pavlo Kyrylenko, said two people were killed and five wounded in shelling there over the past day. The deaths were in Kurakhove, a town of about 20,000 that is 30 kilometers west of Russian-controlled Donetsk city.

About 60 shells in total hit three communities during the night in the area of Nikopol, said the Dnipropetrovsk regional governor, Valentyn Reznichenko.

Stepne, a settlement on the outskirts of Zaporizhzhia, was also hit by shelling but there were no details on casualties, according to the governor, Oleksander Starukh,

Zelenskyy has returned to Kyiv following his trip to Washington, in which he secured a nother \$1.8 billion military aid package.

On Friday, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said the war would end at the negotiating table once the "special military operation" achieves Russia's goals. He said no reported Ukrainian peace plan can succeed without taking into account "the realities of today that can't be ignored" — a reference to Moscow's demand that Ukraine recognize Russia's sovereignty over the Crimean Peninsula, which was annexed in 2014, as well as other territorial gains.

## Wild winter storm envelops US, snarling Christmas travel

By HEATHER HOLLINGSWORTH and JILL BLEED Associated Press

MISSION, Kan. (AP) — A wild winter storm continued to envelop much of the United States on Saturday, bringing blinding blizzards, freezing rain, flooding and life-threatening cold that created mayhem for those traveling for the Christmas holiday.

The storm that arrived earlier in the week downed power lines, littered highways with piles of cars in deadly accidents and led to mass flight cancellations.

The storm was nearly unprecedented in its scope, stretching from the Great Lakes near Canada to the Rio Grande along the border with Mexico. About 60% of the U.S. population faced some sort of winter weather advisory or warning, and temperatures plummeted drastically below normal from east of the Rocky Mountains to the Appalachians, the National Weather Service said.

Freezing rain coated much of the Pacific Northwest in a layer of ice, while people in the Northeast faced the threat of coastal and inland flooding.

The frigid temperatures and gusty winds were expected to produce "dangerously cold wind chills across much of the central and eastern U.S. this holiday weekend," the weather service said, adding that the conditions "will create a potentially life-threatening hazard for travelers that become stranded."

"In some areas, being outdoors could lead to frostbite in minutes," it said.

Adding to the woes were power outages that by late Friday were still affecting more than a million homes

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and businesses, according to the website PowerOutage, which tracks utility reports.

As millions of Americans were traveling ahead of Christmas, more than 5,700 flights within, into or out of the U.S. were canceled Friday, according to the tracking site FlightAware.

Multiple highways were closed and crashes claimed at least six lives, officials said. Four people died in a massive pileup involving some 50 vehicles on the Ohio Turnpike. A Kansas City, Missouri, driver was killed Thursday after skidding into a creek, and three others died Wednesday in separate crashes on icy northern Kansas roads.

In Canada, WestJet canceled all flights Friday at Toronto Pearson International Airport, as meteorologists there warned of a potential once-in-a-decade weather event. While in Mexico, migrants camped near the U.S. border in unusually cold temperatures as they awaited a U.S. Supreme Court decision on pandemic-era restrictions that prevent many from seeking asylum.

Forecasters said a bomb cyclone — when atmospheric pressure drops very quickly in a strong storm — had developed near the Great Lakes, stirring up blizzard conditions, including heavy winds and snow.

Even people in Florida were braced for unusually chilly weather as rare freeze warnings were issued for large parts of the state over the holiday weekend.

Activists were rushing to get homeless people out of the cold. Nearly 170 adults and children were kept warm early Friday in Detroit at a shelter and a warming center that are designed to hold 100 people.

“This is a lot of extra people” but it wasn’t an option to turn anyone away, said Faith Fowler, the executive director of Cass Community Social Services, which runs both facilities.

Emergency weather shelters in Portland, Oregon, called for volunteers amid high demand and staffing issues as snow, freezing rain, ice and frigid temperatures descended upon the area.

South Dakota Gov. Kristi Noem said she was deploying the National Guard to haul timber to the Oglala Sioux and Rosebud Sioux tribes and help with snow removal.

“We have families that are way out there that we haven’t heard from in two weeks,” said Wayne Boyd, chief of staff to the Rosebud Sioux president.

On the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation, Harlie Young was huddled with five children and her father around a wood stove as 12-foot (3.6-meter) snow drifts blocked the house.

“We’re just trying to look on the bright side that they’re still coming and they didn’t forget us,” she said Friday.

Calling it a “kitchen sink storm,” New York Gov. Kathy Hochul declared a state of emergency. In parts of New York City, tidal flooding inundated roads, homes and businesses Friday morning.

In Boston, rain combined with a high tide, flooded some downtown streets on Friday.

## Tunisia’s political experiment threatens economic collapse

By BARBARA SURK Associated Press

NICE, France (AP) — Tunisia’s increasingly authoritarian president appears determined to upend the country’s political system. The strategy is not only threatening a democracy once seen as a model for the Arab world, experts say it is also sending the economy toward a tailspin.

The International Monetary Fund has frozen an agreement meant to help the government get loans to pay public sector salaries and fill budget gaps aggravated by the COVID-19 pandemic and the fallout from Russia’s war in Ukraine.

Foreign investors are pulling out of Tunisia, and ratings agencies are on alert. Inflation and joblessness are on the rise, and many Tunisians, once proud of their country’s relative prosperity, now struggle to make ends meet.

An election debacle a week ago has made matters worse: Just 11% of voters took part in a first-round vote for a new parliament meant to replace a legislature disbanded last year by President Kais Saied. Opposition figures, including from the popular Islamist movement Ennahdha, are demanding that he step down, and unions are threatening a general strike.

Saied himself designed the elections to replace and reshape the parliament, as part of broad reforms

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that bolster his powers and that he says will solve Tunisia's multiple crises. But voter disillusionment with the ruling class amid dire economic troubles contributed to a near-boycott of the election.

Tunisia's Western allies, like the United States and France, have expressed concern and urged the president to forge an inclusive political dialogue that would benefit the sluggish economy. Tunisia was the birthplace of Arab Spring democratic uprisings 12 years ago.

Saied rejected criticism over the low voter turnout, saying what really matters is the second round of voting Jan. 19. He says his reforms are needed to rid the country of the corrupt political class and Tunisia's foreign enemies. He lashed out at his political foes in the Ennahdha party, which had the largest number of lawmakers in the previous parliament, and ordered the arrest this week of its vice-president and former Prime Minister Ali Larayedeh on terrorism-related charges.

"Saied seems impervious to criticism and intent on bulldozing his way to a new political system no matter how few Tunisians are engaged in the process," said Monica Marks, a Tunisia expert and professor of Middle East politics at the New York University in Abu Dhabi.

"No Tunisian asked Saied to reinvent the wheel of Tunisian politics, to write a new constitution and revamp the election law," Marks said. "What Tunisians have been asking for is a more respectful government that meets their bread-and-butter needs and gives them economic dignity."

Saied's promises to stabilize the economy helped ensure his landslide victory in the 2019 presidential election.

But he has yet to present an economic recovery plan or strategy for his deeply indebted government to secure funds to pay for food and energy subsidies. The president has sidelined economists in state institutions, stalling the country's budget and souring the environment for foreign investors.

Tunisians have been hit with soaring food prices and shortages of fuel and basic staples like sugar, vegetable oil and rice in recent months. Inflation has reached 9.1%, the highest in three decades, according to the National Institute of Statistics, and unemployment is at 18% percent, according to the World Bank.

"President Saied naively seems to think that if only he can complete his political roadmap, the economy will fix itself," said Geoff Porter, a New York City-based North Africa risk assessment analyst, in a recent brief.

Tunisia reached a preliminary agreement with the IMF on a \$1.9 billion loan in October. It would enable the heavily indebted Tunisian government to access loans from other donors over a four-year period in return for sweeping economic reforms that include shrinking the public administration sector — one of the world's largest — and a gradual lifting of subsidies.

The agreement was subject to the IMF executive board's approval, scheduled for Dec. 19. The state news agency TAP reported that "the government and the IMF have agreed to postpone" the final decision on the loan to give Tunisian officials "more time to present a new reform plan for the country's sluggish economy."

Tunisia desperately needs access to the special drawing rights in order to avoid defaulting on external debt and to stabilize the economy, Porter said. He added: "Without the IMF funds, Tunisia's economic freefall will accelerate."

Foreign investors operating in Tunisia are worried.

Pharmaceutical manufacturers Novartis, Bayer and GlaxoSmithKline are leaving the country because they are not getting paid by the insufficiently funded state pharmaceutical distributor.

Royal Dutch Shell, which operates two gas fields that accounted for 40% of Tunisia's domestic production, announced in November it will exit Tunisia by year's end. Despite hype over the country's hydrogen sector, nothing has been done to attract investors as the country's regulatory institutions are paralyzed by Saied's political moves, Porter said.

The president has also lost the tentative support of the country's powerful trade union, the UGTT, for the IMF-prescribed reform plan in exchange for a bailout.

UGTT leader Nouredine Taboubi agreed with the government in August to discuss a new "social contract" to help Tunisians in financial distress, the state TAP news agency reported. But Taboubi, whose influential



union represents 67% of Tunisia's work force, mainly employed in the public sector, recently pulled back on his commitment. He renewed his opposition to the IMF's main demands to receive a loan program: a public sector wage freeze and restructuring of state-owned enterprises.

## South Africa marks holidays despite nationwide power cuts

By SEBABATSO MOSAMO and ANDREW MELDRUM Associated Press

JOHANNESBURG (AP) — Christmas lights twinkle, holiday music plays and Johannesburg's popular Rosebank mall bustles with shoppers.

Then the lights go out. The shops are pitch dark. "Hold on to your wallets," calls out a customer to rueful chuckles.

A long minute later the distant hum of a generator can be heard. The lights and music flicker back on and clerks resume ringing up purchases.

South Africa's Christmas 2022 is a start/stop affair, with the country's nationwide power cuts hitting just about every aspect of the holiday. Businesses and families are coping with rolling outages of electricity totaling seven to 10 hours per day.

The chugging of diesel generators can be heard at stores and restaurants from posh areas to townships. Patrons know to walk far around them to avoid the noxious fumes.

The festive calendar of celebrations with family and friends is now a meticulous dance around the daily schedule of power cuts. Holiday baking and video streaming are planned for when there will be power.

Most South African households now have a ready supply of solar lights, kerosene lamps and candles to keep from being in total darkness.

South Africa's state utility, Eskom, has battled to meet the demand for electricity in the continent's most industrialized economy for more than 10 years but the problem has become acute this year. A major problem is that the power company relies on an array of older coal-fired power plants that experience frequent breakdowns. Adding to the woes is a shortage of skilled technicians and corruption.

Eskom said this week that it has been forced to enforce its highest level of power cuts so far — Stage 6 — over the holiday period because of breakdowns at eight generating units. This is particularly surprising because there is reduced demand for electricity over the Christmas and New Year period as many factories and mines close during the holidays.

The power company's failure to supply adequate electricity has put a damper on economic growth for years. Amid worsening power cuts, the chief of Eskom announced his resignation this month. President Cyril Ramaphosa's failure to solve the country's power problems was one of the most pointed criticisms of him last week at the national conference of his ruling party, the African National Congress.

At the busy Sandton City mall in Johannesburg, many shoppers watched the time so that they could be home in time to cook while they still had power.

"We have to look at the schedule ... and then we can do everything that needs to be cooked. Or we use a gas stove. And we can lay the table outside, do the candlelights and it's going to be beautiful," said an optimistic Molalo Mishapo.

Natasha Singh, visiting Johannesburg from Durban, said she is fortunate not to feel the effects of the power cuts because the hotel where she is staying is equipped with generators.

"So we're not feeling it that much at the hotel, fortunately for that," she said. "But we ... switch off and switch on about three or four times a day. That's a bit hectic."

Although 2022 has been a challenging year due to rising prices and continuous power cuts, it's important for people to celebrate being healthy after living through the COVID-19 pandemic, said Cindy Naidoo.

"Coming from COVID ... it's a blessing, I think, just to be happy and healthy," she said. "Forget about the lights and just live."

## LA jury convicts Tory Lanez of shooting Megan Thee Stallion

By ANDREW DALTON AP Entertainment Writer

LOS ANGELES (AP) — In a courtroom that turned chaotic after a trial that seethed with tension, a Los Angeles jury on Friday found rapper Tory Lanez guilty of three felonies in the 2020 shooting of hip-hop star Megan Thee Stallion. The attack left her wounded with bullet fragments in her feet and Lanez' conviction could send him to prison for more than 20 years.

Lanez, who was put in handcuffs and led to jail while wearing a powder pink coat with matching pants, showed no visible reaction as the verdict was read.

But moments later, after the jury was escorted out, his father, Sonstar Peterson, leapt up and shouted "This wicked system stands judged before God almighty!" as deputies closed in on him.

Peterson then pointed to the two prosecutors and yelled "You two are evil, wicked people. You know exactly what you did."

With considerable effort, deputies wrestled him from the courtroom, where he shouted in the hallway.

The jury of seven women and five men deliberated since Thursday before convicting the 30-year-old Canadian rapper, whose legal name is Daystar Peterson, of assault with a semiautomatic firearm, having a loaded, unregistered firearm in a vehicle and discharging a firearm with gross negligence.

Jurors also agreed that there were aggravating factors in the attack, meaning Lanez could face up to 22 years in prison and deportation when he is sentenced on Jan 25.

Three young children, including Lanez' son, sat in the front row of the courtroom while the verdict was read. A young girl cried and was hugged by Lanez's stepmother, who was also tearful before she began shouting along with her husband.

Others in the audience shouted agreement, and one woman shouted "we love you Tory" as he was led away.

Supporters of Megan and Lanez gathered outside the courthouse for most of the eight-day trial and crowded the courtroom and the hallway. The scene was tense at times, but remained mostly peaceful until the verdict was read.

Megan Thee Stallion, whose legal name is Megan Pete, testified during the trial that Lanez fired a handgun at the back of her feet and shouted for her to dance as she walked away from an SUV in which they had been riding in the Hollywood Hills in the summer of 2020. She said the two had gotten into a dispute that became especially heated when she started insulting his music.

She needed surgery to remove bullet fragments from her feet.

After the verdict, her lawyer, Alex Spiro said "the jury got it right" and said he was "thankful there is justice for Meg."

Lanez' lawyer George Mgdesyan said they were "shocked by the verdict."

"There was not sufficient evidence to convict Mr. Peterson," Mgdesyan said in a statement. "We believe this case was not proven beyond a reasonable doubt. We will be exploring all options including an appeal."

The shooting set off a storm of cultural issues and arguments that peaked during the trial, including the reluctance of Black victims to speak to police, the protection of Black women, gender politics in hip-hop, and online toxicity.

In closing arguments, prosecutors emphasized the courage it took for Megan come forward and the vitriol the 27-year-old faced for it. They said she had no incentive to tell anything but the truth.

After the verdict, District Attorney George Gascón praised her.

"You showed incredible courage and vulnerability with your testimony despite repeated and grotesque attacks that you did not deserve," Gascón said in a statement. "You faced unjust and despicable scrutiny that no woman should ever face."

Lanez' lawyer alleged in his closing argument that the shots were actually fired by Megan's then-best friend Kelsey Harris in a jealous fight over Lanez, who tried to stop the shooting. The attorney, George Mgdesyan, argued Megan created a more sympathetic narrative by pinning the shooting on Lanez.

"Megan Pete is a liar. She lied about everything in this case from the beginning," Mgdesyan said. "She

lied under oath here.”

Harris denied being the shooter and previously identified Lanez as the one holding the gun. Her attorney, in an email, declined to comment on her involvement.

Lanez began releasing mixtapes in 2009 and saw a steady rise in popularity, moving on to major-label albums. His last two reached the top 10 on Billboard’s charts.

Megan Thee Stallion was already a major rising star at the time of the shooting, and her prominence has surged since.

She won a Grammy for best new artist in 2021, and had No. 1 singles on the Billboard Hot 100 with her own song “Savage,” featuring Beyoncé, and as a guest on Cardi B’s “WAP.”

## Police: 19-year-old killed in shooting at Mall of America

By ABBIE PARR and STEFANIE DAZIO Associated Press

BLOOMINGTON, Minn. (AP) — A teenager was killed during a shooting at the Mall of America on Friday that sent frightened customers at the nation’s largest shopping center racing into a lockdown just before the holiday weekend, police said.

Bloomington Police Chief Booker Hodges said the victim was a 19-year-old man. A bystander’s jacket was also grazed by a bullet during the shooting at the mall’s Nordstrom location.

There appeared to be some type of altercation between two groups and at one point, someone pulled out a gun and shot the victim multiple times, the chief said. The entire incident lasted about 30 seconds.

Hodges urged the gunman and the others involved in the fight to turn themselves into police.

“We are going to catch you, we are going to lock you up and you are going to get an orange jumpsuit,” he said. “It’s just a matter of when it’s going to happen.”

He also warned people against aiding the suspects in avoiding arrest.

“If anybody helps these people — I mean so much as buy them a Happy Meal, give them a ride,” the visibly upset chief said. “We’re going to lock you up with them.”

The mall is expected to reopen Saturday but the Nordstrom store will remain closed, Hodges said.

Since it opened in 1992, the mall has been a tourist destination and community gathering spot. It bans guns on the premises but shoppers have generally not been required to pass through metal detectors. The mall said in October it was testing a “weapons detection system” at one of its entrances.

Hodges said the mall is continuously evaluating its security measures, including the possibility of adding metal detectors. Still, the chief added, “if we have an incident where someone decides they want to pull out a gun and shoot somebody with a complete lack of respect for human life, then I still don’t know what we can do to stop that.”

Police did not identify the man who was killed but Hodges said he and Bloomington Mayor Tim Busse spoke to the victim’s relatives on Friday night.

“The family here — I really feel bad for them,” Hodges said. “Their last week before Christmas and now they’re having to bury one of their loved ones.”

Mall video surveillance showed the altercation between the two groups — estimated as five to nine people — erupt into a fistfight before one person pulled out a gun and opened fire, the chief said.

“W don’t know why it happened or what happened,” Hodges said.

A nearby Bloomington police officer — one of 16 stationed at the mall Friday — heard the gunshots around 7:50 p.m. The officer tried life-saving measures but the victim died.

The lockdown lasted for about an hour before the mall tweeted that shoppers were being sent outside. Videos posted on social media show shoppers hiding in stores, and an announcement in the mall warned people to seek shelter. Some videos show shoppers running for cover after a loud bang is heard.

The reported shooting comes as shopping centers and malls across the U.S. see an influx of customers just days before Christmas.

Jenny Hefty of Sioux Falls, South Dakota, and her 16-year-old daughter had just gotten off the escalator up to the mall’s second floor, in front of the Nordstrom store, when people started running toward them



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and screaming. Her daughter thought she heard gunshots, although Hefty did not.

"At first we thought they were just messing around," she told The Associated Press on Friday night. "It was like 'why are all these kids running by us?'"

Retailers began shutting their doors and her husband told them to run as armed guards rushed toward Nordstrom, where Hefty had been trying perfume about 20 minutes earlier.

The trio raced to their hotel in the mall complex and frantically tried to reach the couple's 18-year-old daughter, 21-year-old son and their friends on their cellphones. They had been shut inside stores or whisked into safer spots as the mall locked down.

The family, which often travels the four hours to the mall, was in town for the Minnesota Vikings football game against the New York Giants on Saturday.

"Of course we wanted to come early and do some Christmas shopping," Hefty said.

The Giants were staying at a hotel adjacent to the mall. Pat Hanlon, the team's executive vice president of communications, said he believes some players were in the mall at the time of the shooting.

"Everyone is back in the hotel and accounted for now," Hanlon said Friday night.

The mall was placed on lockdown in August after a reported shooting at the suburban Minneapolis shopping complex sent some shoppers running for cover and two people were wounded last New Year's Eve during an apparent altercation.

Representatives from the city of Bloomington and Nordstrom did not immediately return requests for comment.

## Georgia special grand jury wraps up probe of Trump, allies

By KATE BRUMBACK Associated Press

ATLANTA (AP) — A special grand jury investigating whether then-President Donald Trump and his allies illegally tried to overturn his defeat in the 2020 election in Georgia appears to be wrapping up its work, but many questions remain.

The investigation is one of several that could result in criminal charges against the former president as he asks voters to return him to the White House in 2024.

Fulton County District Attorney Fani Willis, who began investigating nearly two years ago, has said she will go where the facts lead. It would be an extraordinary step if she chooses to bring charges against Trump himself.

"Even if he's acquitted by a jury, for him to face trial and to have a public trial with evidence on the record would be an epic thing for American history," Georgia State University law professor Clark Cunningham said.

Here's what we know as the special grand jury appears to be winding down:

### WHAT'S THE LATEST?

Over about six months, the grand jurors have considered evidence and heard testimony from dozens of witnesses, including high-profile Trump associates and top state officials. A prosecutor on Willis' team said during a hearing in November that they had few witnesses left and didn't anticipate the special grand jury continuing much longer.

The grand jurors are expected to produce a final report with recommendations on potential further action. Fulton County Superior Court Judge Robert McBurney, who's supervising the panel, will review the report and recommend to the court's chief judge that the special grand jury be dissolved. The judges of the county Superior Court will then vote on whether to let the special grand jurors go or whether more investigation is necessary.

The special grand jury cannot issue indictments. Willis will decide whether to go to a regular grand jury to pursue criminal charges.

### WHAT HAVE WE LEARNED ABOUT THE INVESTIGATION?

For more than a year after opening the investigation, Willis revealed little. But, ironically, once the special grand jury began meeting in June, its proceedings shrouded in mandatory secrecy, hints about where the investigation was headed began to come out.

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That's because whenever Willis wanted to compel the testimony of someone who lives outside Georgia, she had to file paperwork in a public court docket explaining why that person was a "necessary and material witness." Additionally, anyone fighting a summons had to do so in public court filings and hearings.

In the paperwork Willis filed seeking to compel testimony from some Trump associates, she said she wanted to know about their communications with the Trump campaign and others "involved in the multi-state, coordinated efforts to influence the results of the November 2020 election in Georgia and elsewhere."

Prominent Trump allies whose testimony was sought included former New York mayor and Trump attorney Rudy Giuliani, U.S. Sen. Lindsey Graham of South Carolina, former White House chief of staff Mark Meadows and former national security adviser Michael Flynn, as well as John Eastman and other lawyers who participated in Trump's attempts to stay in power.

"We learned from the identity of the witnesses that this is a far-ranging conspiracy that she's looking at," said Norm Eisen, who served as special counsel to the House Judiciary Committee during the first Trump impeachment and co-wrote a Brookings Institution report analyzing the "reported facts and applicable law" in the Fulton County investigation.

## HAVE THERE BEEN SETBACKS?

A number of Trump advisers and allies fought Willis' attempts to bring them in for testimony, but Willis prevailed in most cases.

"I think that augurs well for the pretrial skirmishing to come if she charges," Eisen said.

Willis had a notable misstep when she hosted a fundraiser for a Democratic candidate for lieutenant governor even as her investigation zeroed in on the state's fake electors, including Burt Jones, the Republican nominee for lieutenant governor. McBurney said that created "a plain — and actual and untenable — conflict" and ruled that Willis could not question or pursue charges against Jones, who won election in November.

## WHAT'S BEEN THE FOCUS OF THE INVESTIGATION?

The information that has come out publicly has indicated that Willis was looking at the following:

- Phone calls by Trump and others to Georgia officials in the wake of the 2020 election
- A group of 16 Georgia Republicans who signed a certificate in December 2020 falsely stating that Trump had won the state and that they were the state's "duly elected and qualified" electors
- False allegations of election fraud made during meetings of state legislators at the Georgia Capitol in December 2020
- The copying of data and software from election equipment in rural Coffee County by a computer forensics team hired by Trump allies
- Alleged attempts to pressure Fulton County elections worker Ruby Freeman into falsely confessing to election fraud
- The abrupt resignation of the U.S. attorney in Atlanta in January 2021

## WHAT ABOUT THAT INFAMOUS PHONE CALL?

In a Jan. 2, 2021, phone call between Trump and Georgia Secretary of State Brad Raffensperger, the president suggested that the state's top elections official, a fellow Republican, could "find" the votes needed to overturn his narrow loss in the state to Democrat Joe Biden.

A month later, Willis sent letters to Raffensperger and other top state officials instructing them to retain records because she was investigating "attempts to influence the administration of the 2020 Georgia General Election."

Trump told Raffensperger he needed 11,780 votes, one more than Biden won. That was a mistake, Cunningham said, because the specific and transactional nature of that comment makes it hard to say he was just generally urging Raffensperger to look into alleged fraud.

But other legal experts have said prosecutors could struggle to prove criminal intent, which requires showing that actions were taken purposely, knowingly, recklessly or negligently.

## WHAT CHARGES MIGHT BE CONSIDERED?

In her February 2021 letters to state leaders, Willis said she was looking into potential crimes that included "solicitation of election fraud, the making of false statements to state and local governmental bodies, conspiracy, racketeering, violation of oath of office and any involvement in violence or threats related

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to the election's administration."

Many believe Willis will pursue charges under the state Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations statute, commonly known as RICO. In a high-profile prosecution when she was an assistant district attorney, she used that law successfully to secure charges against Atlanta educators in a test cheating scandal. She has also used it more recently to target alleged gang activity.

The state RICO law, which is broader than the federal version, requires prosecutors to prove a pattern of criminal activity by an enterprise, which could be a single person or a group of associated individuals. It allows prosecutors to assert involvement in a pattern of criminality without having to prove that each person participated in every act.

Eisen said RICO seems "most commensurate with the nature of the people testifying and the questions that she wanted to ask."

As the special grand jury was working, Willis informed some people that they were targets of the investigation, including Giuliani and the state's 16 fake electors. It's possible others received similar notifications but haven't disclosed that publicly.

## WHAT HAS TRUMP SAID?

The former president has consistently called his phone call with Raffensperger "perfect" and has dismissed the Fulton County investigation as a witch hunt.

Criminal defense attorney Drew Findling, part of Trump's legal team in Georgia, in August said the focus on Trump "is clearly an erroneous and politically driven persecution."

Trump allies have also denied any wrongdoing.

## After Jan. 6: Congress born of chaos ends in achievement

By LISA MASCARO AP Congressional Correspondent

WASHINGTON (AP) — The 117th Congress opened with the unfathomable Jan. 6, 2021, mob siege of the Capitol and is closing with unprecedented federal criminal referrals of the former president over the insurrection — all while conducting one of the most consequential legislative sessions in recent memory.

Lawmakers are wrapping up the two-year session having found surprisingly common ground on big bills, despite enduring bitter political divisions that haunt the halls, and the country, after the bloody Capitol attack by supporters of the defeated president, Donald Trump, that threatened democracy.

The Congress passed monumental legislation — including a bill making one of the most substantial infrastructure investments in a generation and another federally protecting same-sex and interracial marriages. It rallied the U.S. to support Ukraine in the war against Russia. Senators confirmed the nation's first Black woman, Justice Ketanji Brown Jackson, to the Supreme Court.

Among the rare moments of agreement: passage of the Emmett Till Anti-Lynching Act, making lynching a federal hate crime, after more than 120 years and some 200 failed efforts to pass such legislation.

In many ways, the chaos of the Capitol attack created a new coalition in Congress — lawmakers who want to show America can govern. With President Joe Biden in the White House, the Democrats who controlled Washington found new partners in a wing of the Republican Party eager to push past the Trump years and the former president's repeated lies about a stolen election that led to the Capitol siege.

Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., compared this session to the Lyndon Johnson and Franklin Roosevelt administrations that produced some of the nation's most lasting laws.

"These two years in the Senate and House — in the Congress — were either the most productive in 50 years Great Society, or most productive in 100 years since the New Deal," he said.

And yet the legislative session that kicked off with the historic second impeachment of Trump for inciting the insurrection ended its final days with deeply felt partisanship.

Republican leader Kevin McCarthy unleashed a dark and vitriolic attack on colleagues Friday ahead of voting on the \$1.7 trillion spending bill to keep government running another year.

"One of the most shameful acts I've ever seen," McCarthy said, as many members voted by proxy.

McCarthy, who is struggling to take over as House speaker in the new year when Republicans have



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control, lashed out at the two retiring senators, a Democrat and a Republican, who partnered with House Democrats to craft the bill. He named names.

"I feel sad for you," McCarthy said, "but more importantly, the damage you've done to America."

Speaker Nancy Pelosi, in what was likely her last speech as Democratic leader, delivered bright holiday wishes and a cutting response.

"It was sad to hear the minority leader earlier say that this legislation is 'the most shameful' thing to be seen on the House floor in this Congress. I can't help but wonder had he forgotten January 6?"

Congress and the country have confronted one of the more divisive eras in American politics, partisan chasms scholars say unlike any seen since the middle of the 19th century, around the time of the Civil War.

Democrats had control these past two years, but just barely. The Senate was evenly split this session, 50-50, for the longest period in modern memory. The House's slim margin will be similar in the next session, but in Republican rather than Democratic control after the midterm elections.

Yet, as the branch of the federal government closest to the people, the Congress found its way to carry on, despite COVID-19 pandemic restrictions that kept the Capitol partly closed and menacing security threats to lawmakers. Pelosi's husband was brutally attacked in their home by an assailant who said he was intent on breaking the speaker's kneecaps.

Together, lawmakers sent Biden the \$1 trillion bipartisan infrastructure bill that invested in the nation's roads, bridges and public works, and another big package to invest in semi-conductor industry and scientific research in the U.S.

Democrats alone approved a massive coronavirus aid package that put money in Americans' pockets, supported business and funded free vaccines, a \$1.9 trillion deal Republicans rejected as wasteful spending and blamed for fueling soaring inflation.

While Biden's promised "Build Back Better" fell apart, his party regrouped to pass the Inflation Reduction Act, which that may not have curbed rising prices but delivered the nation's biggest investment yet in efforts to curb climate change and capped monthly insulin prices for seniors at \$35 starting in January.

The first bill to curb gun violence, though modest compared to advocates' demands, became law after the tragic school shooting in Uvalde, Texas — nearly a full decade after the Sandy Hook school shooting that killed 20 children failed at the time to move lawmakers to act.

As the worst war in Europe since World War II broke out, Congress embraced a little-known leader, welcoming Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy twice — first to address lawmakers remotely at the start of Russia's invasion and with a daring in-person speech this past week that echoed Winston Churchill's 1941 visit to Congress.

The latest \$45 billion tranche of Ukrainian aid could very well be the last for now, once Republicans who oppose the overseas spending take control in the new year as the focus puts a priority on America's needs at home.

And after an 18-month investigation into attack on the Capitol, the panel formed by Pelosi after Congress failed to stand up an independent commission released its 814-page report finding "one man" was responsible for the mob siege. Trump summoned the crowd to Washington and urged supporters to "fight like hell" for his presidency as Congress was meeting to certify Biden's election.

Jan. 6 committee Chairman Bennie Thompson, D-Miss., said the report provides a "roadmap to justice" and the panel took the unprecedented step of referring the former president for prosecution.

Among the committee's 11 recommendations to shore up democracy, Congress took a first step by passing the Electoral Count Act to bolster the way Congress tallies the presidential vote.

Past sessions of Congress have produced big bills: Republicans approved the \$2 trillion tax cuts package with Trump's signature in 2017; Democrats ushered the Affordable Care Act to law with Barack Obama in 2010.

While Schumer said he wants to work again with Republican leader Mitch McConnell for more bipartisan bills in the new year, the House GOP leader has other plans.

"In 11 days this all changes," McCarthy said Friday. "The new direction is coming."

## Cubans search for holiday food amid deepening crisis

By MEGAN JANETSKY Associated Press

HAVANA (AP) — As Belkis Fajardo, 69, walks through the dense streets of downtown Havana with a small bag of lettuce and onions in hand, she wonders how she'll feed her family over the holidays.

Scarcity and economic turmoil are nothing new to Cuba, but Fajardo is among many Cubans to note that this year is different thanks to soaring inflation and deepening shortages.

"We'll see what we can scrap together to cook for the end of the year," Fajardo said. "Everything is really expensive ... so you buy things little-by-little as you can. And if you can't, you don't eat."

Basic goods such as chicken, beef, eggs, milk, flour and toilet paper are difficult and often impossible to find in state stores.

When they do appear, they often come at hefty prices, either from informal shops, resellers or in expensive stores only accessible to those with foreign currency.

It's far out of the range of the average Cuban state salary, approximately 5,000 pesos a month, or \$29 USD on the island's more widely used informal exchange rate. Nearby, a pound of pork leg was selling for 450 pesos (around \$2.60.)

"Not everyone can buy things, not everyone has a family who sends remittances (money from abroad)," Fajardo said. "With the money my daughter earns and my pension, we're trying to buy what we can, but it's extremely hard."

In October, the Cuban government reported that inflation had risen 40% over the past year and had a significant impact on the purchasing power for many on the island.

While Fajardo managed to buy vegetables, rice and beans, she still has no meat for Christmas or New Years.

The shortages are among a number of factors stoking a broader discontent on the island, which has given rise to protests in recent years as well as an emerging migratory flight from Cuba. On Friday, U.S. authorities reported stopping Cubans 34,675 times along the Mexico border in November, up 21% from 28,848 times in October.

The dissatisfaction was made even more evident during Cuba's local elections last month, when 31.5% of eligible voters didn't cast a ballot — a far cry from the nearly 100% turnout during Fidel Castro's lifetime.

Despite being the highest voting abstention rate the country had seen since the Cuban revolution, the government still hailed it as "a victory." However in an address to Cuban lawmakers last week, President Miguel Díaz-Canel acknowledged the government's shortcomings in handling the country's complex mix of crises, particularly food shortages.

"I feel an enormous dissatisfaction that I haven't been able to accomplish, through leadership of the country, the results that the Cuban people need to attain longed-desired and expected prosperity," he said.

The admission provoked a standing ovation in the congressional assembly, made up solely of politicians from Díaz-Canel's communist party.

But Ricardo Torres, a Cuban and economics fellow at American University in Washington, said he saw the words as "meaningless" without a real plan to address discontent.

"People want answers from their government," he said. "Not words — answers."

For years, the Caribbean nation has pushed much of the blame for its economic turmoil on the United States' six-decade trade embargo on Cuba, which has strangled much of the island's economy. However, many observers, including Torres, stress that the government's mismanagement of the economy and reluctance to embrace the private sector are also to blame.

On Friday, a long line of Cubans waited outside an empty state-run butchery, waiting for a coveted item: a leg of pork to feed their families on New Year's Eve.

About a dozen people The Associated Press asked for an interview said they were scared to speak, including one who said "it could have consequences for us."

Estrella, 67, has shown up to the state butcher every morning for more than two weeks, waiting her turn to buy pork to share with her children, grandchildren and siblings. So far, she's come up dry.

Although pork is available to buy from private butchers, it's often far more expensive than at state-run

facilities, which subsidize prices.

So she waits, hopeful that she'll be able to cook Cuba's traditional holiday dish.

"If we're lucky, we'll be able to buy it today," she said. "If we're not, we'll come back tomorrow."

## Congress approves new election rules in Jan. 6 response

By NICHOLAS RICCARDI Associated Press

Congress on Friday gave final passage to legislation changing the arcane law that governs the certification of a presidential contest, the strongest effort yet to avoid a repeat of Donald Trump's violence-inflaming push to reverse his loss in the 2020 election.

The House passed an overhaul of the Electoral Count Act as part of its massive, end-of-the-year spending bill, after the Senate approved identical wording Thursday. The legislation now goes to President Joe Biden for his signature.

Biden hailed the provisions' inclusion in the spending bill in a statement Friday, calling it "critical bipartisan action that will help ensure that the will of the people is preserved."

It's the most significant legislative response Congress has made yet to Trump's aggressive efforts to upend the 2020 election results, and a step that been urged by the House select committee that conducted the most thorough investigation into the violent siege of the Capitol.

The provisions amending the 1887 law — which has long been criticized as poorly and confusingly written — won bipartisan support and would make it harder for future presidential losers to prevent the ascension of their foes, as Trump tried to do on Jan. 6, 2021.

"It's a monumental accomplishment, particularly in this partisan atmosphere, for such a major rewrite of a law that's so crucial to our democracy," said Rick Hasen, a law professor at the University of California Los Angeles. "This law goes a long way toward shutting down the avenues Trump and his allies tried to use in 2020, and could have been exploited in future elections."

On Jan. 6, Trump targeted Congress' ratification of the Electoral College's vote. He tried to exploit the vice president's role in reading out the states' electors to get Mike Pence to block Biden from becoming the next president by omitting some states Biden won from the roll. The new provisions make clear that the vice president's responsibilities in the process are merely ceremonial and that the vice president has no say in determining who actually won the election.

The new legislation also raises the threshold required for members of Congress to object to certifying the electors. Before, only one member of the House and Senate respectively had to object to force a roll call vote on a state's electors. That helped make objections to new presidents something of a routine partisan tactic — Democrats objected to certifying both of George W. Bush's elections and Trump's in 2016.

Those objections, however, were mainly symbolic and came after Democrats had conceded that the Republican candidates won the presidency. On Jan. 6, 2021, Republicans forced a vote on certifying Biden's wins in Arizona and Pennsylvania even after the violent attack on the Capitol, as Trump continued to insist falsely that he won the election. That led some members of Congress to worry the process could be too easily manipulated.

Under the new rules, one-fifth of each chamber would be required to force a vote on states' slates of electors.

The new provisions also ensure only one slate of electors makes it to Congress after Trump and his allies unsuccessfully tried to create alternative slates of electors in states Biden won. Each governor would now be required to sign off on electors, and Congress cannot consider slates submitted by different officials. The bill creates a legal process if any of those electors are challenged by a presidential candidate.

The legislation would also close a loophole that wasn't used in 2020 but election experts feared could be, a provision that state legislatures can name electors in defiance of their state's popular vote in the event of a "failed" election. That term has been understood to mean a contest that was disrupted or so in doubt that there's no way to determine the actual winner, but it is not well-defined in the prior law.

Now a state could move the date of its presidential election — but only in the event of "extraordinary



and catastrophic events," like a natural disaster.

Hasen said that while the changes are significant, dangers still remain to democracy, noting that in Arizona, the Republican nominee for governor, Kari Lake, was waiting on a ruling Friday in a lawsuit she filed to overturn the victory of her Democratic opponent, Katie Hobbs.

"Nobody should think that passage of this legislation means we're out of the woods," Hasen said. "This is not one and done."

## US judge rejects Maduro ally's claim of diplomatic immunity

By JOSHUA GOODMAN Associated Press

MIAMI (AP) — A federal judge in Miami on Friday rejected attempts by a close ally of Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro to shield himself from criminal charges, ruling Alex Saab isn't entitled to diplomatic immunity in the U.S. and must stand trial on accusations of money laundering.

The legal fight over Saab's purported diplomatic status was being closely watched by Maduro's socialist government, which has demanded the release of the Colombian-born businessman as part of furtive negotiations with the Biden administration.

The U.S. in 2019 stopped recognizing Maduro as Venezuela's legitimate leader, and Judge Robert Scola cited that determination as a basis for rejecting Saab's motion to dismiss the criminal charges.

He also sided with prosecutors who raised doubts about the legitimacy of several official Venezuelan credentials that Saab relied on to bolster his claim to diplomatic status — and questioned why he never mentioned his purported diplomatic status in several secret meetings with U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration agents.

"The evidence suggests that the Maduro regime and its accomplices have fabricated documents to cloak Saab Moran in a diplomatic dress that does not benefit him, all in an effort to exploit the law of diplomatic immunities and prevent his extradition to the United States," the judge wrote.

Saab's attorney said they intend to appeal.

For more than two years, almost since the time of his arrest in Africa on a U.S. warrant, Saab has insisted he is a Venezuelan diplomat targeted for his work helping his adopted homeland circumvent American economic sanctions.

Saab, 51, was pulled from a private jet in the summer of 2020 during a stop in Cape Verde en route to Iran, where he was heading to negotiate oil deals on behalf of Maduro's government.

He is charged with conspiracy to commit money laundering tied to a bribery scheme that allegedly siphoned off \$350 million through state contracts to build affordable housing for Venezuela's government.

At a hearing Tuesday, Scola pressed Saab's legal team of seven attorneys to explain why he should depart from the position taken by the U.S. State Department, which said Saab isn't entitled to diplomatic immunity in the U.S.

The U.S. since 2019 has recognized opposition lawmaker Juan Guaido as Venezuela's legitimate leader — a position repeatedly affirmed by U.S. federal courts in numerous lawsuits brought by unpaid creditors seeking to seize the country's overseas oil assets.

Scola likened Saab's situation to a hypothetical situation in which former President Donald Trump — who hasn't recognized his loss in the 2020 election — were to issue passports with the supposed imprimatur of the U.S. government.

"It is clear that the United States does not recognize the Maduro regime to represent the official government of Venezuela," Scola wrote. "Accordingly, any claim to diplomatic immunity asserted by a representative of the Maduro regime must also be considered illegitimate."

Saab's attorney's presented as evidence what they claim are diplomatic notes exchanged between Iran and Venezuela discussing what was to be Saab's third trip to Iran. At the time of his arrest, Saab was also purportedly carrying a sealed letter from Maduro to Iran's supreme leader seeking his full support for a planned deal to import fuel at a time of long gas lines in Venezuela.

"It's like if you were to kidnap someone, bring them to your home and then charge them with trespass-

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ing," Lee Casey, one of Saab's attorney, said at this week's hearing.

But prosecutors presented evidence that some of the documents bolstering Saab's claim — among them a Venezuelan diplomatic passport and a presidential decree published in Venezuela's Official Gazette — were possibly falsified.

"At best he was a courier," Assistant U.S. Attorney Alex Kramer said during proceedings. "But being a courier of diplomatic letters does not make one a diplomat."

Scola seemed to agree. He also found that even if Saab was a properly appointed special envoy, he would not be entitled to in-transit immunity under international treaties and conventions that protect only members of permanent diplomatic missions. Doing so would make a defendant automatically "untouchable" in the U.S. so long as he had a free pass from another country making him the head of a temporary mission, he said.

"To immunize heads of temporary missions in the way Saab Moran suggests would open the door to the abuse of diplomatic immunities in a way that could seriously frustrate cross-border law enforcement activities," Scola wrote.

Saab's attorney said they intend to appeal to the 11th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals, which in April heard arguments on the issue of Saab's purported diplomatic status before deciding to send the case back to Scola to first evaluate the factual evidence.

"We have put forward compelling and un rebutted factual evidence that substantiates his status," attorney David Rivkin said. "We are confident that, as a result, Mr. Alex Saab Moran's diplomatic immunity will be recognized and vindicated."

Saab was initially held up as a trophy by the Trump administration, which made no secret of its efforts to oust Maduro, who himself is wanted on U.S. drug trafficking charges.

But the criminal case has become a major sticking point as the Biden administration seeks to improve relations with Venezuela and tap new oil supplies to make up for a loss of exports from Russia following sanctions over its invasion of Ukraine

The tug of war has been further complicated by the revelation that Saab, prior to his arrest, had been signed up as an informant by the DEA and had been providing it with information about corruption in Maduro's inner circle.

For months, speculation had been swirling that Saab could walk free as part of some sort of prisoner swap for several Americans detained in Caracas. A similar deal for two nephews of Maduro convicted in New York on drug charges secured the release in October of seven other Americans detained in Venezuela. The Biden administration has insisted that no such negotiations are taking place.

## Massive winter storm brings rolling blackouts, power outages

By HEATHER HOLLINGSWORTH and JILL BLEED Associated Press

MISSION, Kan. (AP) — Tens of millions of Americans endured bone-chilling temperatures, blizzard conditions, power outages and canceled holiday gatherings Friday from a winter storm that forecasters said was nearly unprecedented in its scope, exposing about 60% of the U.S. population to some sort of winter weather advisory or warning.

More than 200 million people were under an advisory or warning on Friday, the National Weather Service said. The weather service's map "depicts one of the greatest extents of winter weather warnings and advisories ever," forecasters said.

Power outages have left about 1.4 million homes and businesses in the dark, according to the website PowerOutage, which tracks utility reports. The Tennessee Valley Authority, the nation's largest public utility, ended its rolling blackouts Friday afternoon but continued to urge homes and businesses to conserve power. In Georgia, hundreds of people in Atlanta and northern parts of the state were without power and facing the possibility of sub-zero wind chills without heat.

And nearly 5,000 flights within, into or out of the U.S. were canceled Friday, according to the tracking site FlightAware, causing more mayhem as travelers try to make it home for the holidays.

"We've just got to stay positive," said Wendell Davis, who plays basketball with a team in France and

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was waiting at O'Hare in Chicago on Friday after a series of flight cancellations.

The huge storm stretched from border to border. In Canada, WestJet canceled all flights Friday at Toronto Pearson International Airport, beginning at 9 a.m. as meteorologists in the country warned of a potential once-in-a-decade weather event.

And in Mexico, migrants waited near the U.S. border in unusually cold temperatures as they awaited a U.S. Supreme Court decision on whether and when to lift pandemic-era restrictions that prevent many from seeking asylum.

Forecasters said a bomb cyclone — when atmospheric pressure drops very quickly in a strong storm — had developed near the Great Lakes, stirring up blizzard conditions, including heavy winds and snow.

Multiple highways were closed and crashes claimed at least six lives, officials said. At least two people died in a massive pileup involving some 50 vehicles on the Ohio Turnpike. A Kansas City, Missouri, driver was killed Thursday after skidding into a creek, and three others died Wednesday in separate crashes on icy northern Kansas roads.

Michigan also faced a deluge of crashes, including one involving nine semitrailers.

Brent Whitehead said it took him 7.5 hours — instead of the usual six — to drive from his home near Minneapolis to his parents' home outside Chicago on Thursday in sometimes icy conditions.

"Thank goodness I had my car equipped with snow tires," he said.

Activists also were rushing to get homeless people out of the cold. Nearly 170 adults and children were keeping warm early Friday in Detroit at a shelter and a warming center that are designed to hold 100 people.

"This is a lot of extra people" but it wasn't an option to turn anyone away, said Faith Fowler, the executive director of Cass Community Social Services, which runs both facilities.

In Chicago, Andy Robledo planned to spend the day organizing efforts to check on people without housing through his nonprofit, Feeding People Through Plants. Robledo and volunteers build tents modeled on ice-fishing tents, including a plywood subfloor.

"It's not a house, it's not an apartment, it's not a hotel room. But it's a huge step up from what they had before," Robledo said.

In Portland, Oregon, nearly 800 people slept at five emergency shelters on Thursday night, as homeless outreach teams fanned out to distributed cold-weather survival gear. Shelters called for volunteers amid high demand and staffing issues. Employees were laid low by flu or respiratory symptoms or kept from work by icy roads, officials said.

DoorDash and Uber Eats suspended delivery service in some states, and bus service was disrupted in places like Seattle.

The power ceased at Jaime Sheehan's Maryland bakery for about 90 minutes Friday, shutting off the convection oven and stalling the mixer she needed to make butter cream.

"Thankfully, all of the orders that were going out today already finished yesterday," she said a few moments before the power returned.

At about the same time, Corey Newcomb and his family were entering their sixth hour without power at their home in the small town of Phenix, Virginia.

"We are coping and that's about it," Newcomb said in a Facebook message.

South Dakota Gov. Kristi Noem said she was deploying the National Guard to haul timber to the Oglala Sioux and Rosebud Sioux tribes and help with snow removal.

"We have families that are way out there that we haven't heard from in two weeks," Wayne Boyd, chief of staff to the Rosebud Sioux president, said.

Fearing that some are running out of food, the tribe was hoping to get a helicopter on Saturday to check on the stranded.

The Oglala Sioux Tribe, meanwhile, was using snowmobiles to reach members who live at the end of miles-long dirt roads.

"It's been one heck of a fight so far," said tribal President Frank Star Comes Out.

On the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation, Harlie Young was huddled with five children and her 58-year-old father around a wood stove as 12-foot (3.6-meter) snow drifts blocked the house.



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"We're just trying to look on the bright side that they're still coming and they didn't forget us," she said Friday, as the temperature plunged to frigid lows.

The weather service is forecasting the coldest Christmas in more than two decades in Philadelphia, where school officials shifted classes online Friday.

Atop New Hampshire's Mount Washington, the tallest peak in the Northeast, the wind topped 150 mph (241 kph).

In Boston, rain combined with a high tide, sent waves over the seawall at Long Wharf and flooded some downtown streets. It was so bad in Vermont that Amtrak canceled service for the day, and nonessential state offices were closing early.

"I'm hearing from crews who are seeing grown trees ripped out by the roots," Mari McClure, president of Green Mountain Power, the state's largest utility, said at a news conference.

Calling it a "kitchen sink storm," New York Gov. Kathy Hochul declared a state of emergency. In parts of New York City, tidal flooding inundated roads, homes and businesses Friday morning, with police trudging through knee-deep water to pull stranded motorists to safety in Queens.

In Iowa, sports broadcaster Mark Woodley became a Twitter sensation after he was called on to do live broadcasts outdoors in the wind and snow because sporting events were called off. By midday Friday, a compilation of his broadcasts had been viewed nearly 5 million times on Twitter.

"I've got good news and I've got bad news," he told an anchor. "The good news is that I can still feel my face right now. The bad news is, I kind of wish I couldn't."

## **Trial in shooting of Megan Thee Stallion exposes misogynoir**

By NARDOS HAILE and KARENA PHAN Associated Press

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Megan Thee Stallion is a three-time Grammy winner and hip-hop superstar, but her success wasn't enough to shield the 27-year-old artist from the power of widespread misinformation and social media vitriol leveled against her after she was shot in 2020.

The Houston-born rapper, whose legal name is Megan Pete, was shot multiple times in both feet after leaving a Hollywood Hills party in 2020 with rapper Tory Lanez, whose legal name is Daystar Peterson, and former assistant Kelsey Harris. Megan needed surgery to remove the bullet fragments from her feet. On Friday, a jury found Lanez guilty of all three felonies with which he was charged, which could lead to up to 22 years in prison.

Three months after the shooting, Megan accused Lanez of wielding the gun. The ensuing onslaught of criticism reached a fever pitch this month during Lanez's assault trial. Experts say it stems from misogynoir, a specific type of misogyny experienced by Black women.

Tia Tyree, a professor at Howard University, described misogynoir as "contempt, dislike" or mistreatment of Black women.

Tyree, whose research focuses on representations of Black women in mass media, social media and hip-hop culture, emphasized that misogynoir has been part of the Black female experience in the U.S. for centuries, dating back to the beginnings of American slavery.

"Many people see the term, and they're intrigued by it. They think, 'Wow, what is this new thing happening to Black women?'" she said. "And that's the most disappointing part of the narrative about misogynoir. There's nothing new about the mistreatment and disrespect of Black women in the United States."

Megan said she did not tell Los Angeles police responding to the scene until three months after the shooting because she was afraid for her safety.

The shooting happened on July 12, 2020, less than two months after George Floyd died at the hands of Minneapolis police.

Fear of police violence could have played a role in her reluctance to share specifics with officers, Tyree said, adding that Black women are expected to protect Black men in society.

A cycle of silence prevents many Black women from sharing their experiences, explained Melvin L. Williams, a professor at Pace University who studies hip-hop feminism, Black male rappers and hip-hop culture.

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"They face industry blackballing and fewer professional opportunities when they speak out," Williams said. Megan alleged that Lanez and his team spread misinformation about the shooting. Social media users have claimed that Lanez never shot her and have posted about her sexual history to discredit her.

Lanez, who has now been convicted of all three felonies and awaits sentencing, has maintained his innocence. In closing arguments this week, his lawyers argued that Harris was the shooter and that Megan tried to create a more sympathetic narrative by blaming Lanez.

Harris' attorney has declined to comment on her involvement.

"Tory came out and told so many different lies — about me not being shot, about him not being the shooter and making this all about a sex scandal," Megan testified last week.

When jury deliberations began Thursday, misinformation claiming that Lanez had already been acquitted abounded. Social media platforms have also played host to intense scrutiny of Megan's story — specifically her credibility.

Rappers Drake and 21 Savage mentioned her in their joint album with specific lyrics that attempted to discredit her allegations. 50 Cent posted memes mocking her interview with Gayle King as well.

Megan is "infiltrating what is a very hypermasculine space," Tyree said, referring to hip-hop culture. "And just as any other hypermasculine space, there are bro codes that exist, and she is at the point bumping up against them, and you see the response for it."

She is a part of a chorus of Black women — including #MeToo founder Tarana Burke and U.S. Rep. Maxine Waters — who have spoken out about violence against women. Burke and Waters signed an open letter supporting Megan.

Social media attacks against Megan have drawn comparisons to television coverage in the 1990s of Anita Hill's congressional testimony and, more recently, to online racist hate targeting Meghan Markle. Another recent example was Johnny Depp's defamation lawsuit against Amber Heard, which drew many social media posts that spread misinformation and cast doubts on Heard's credibility.

Northwestern University law professor Deborah Tuerkheimer, the author of "Credible: Why We Doubt Accusers and Protect Abusers," noted that these trials came five years after the #MeToo movement sparked a global social reckoning, followed by a backlash.

"We can look at this outpouring of stories as being really significant and meaningful, and it is, but until we can have figured out how to fairly judge credibility, and how to hold perpetrators to account in a meaningful way, then I think there's just a lot of work left to be done," Tuerkheimer said.

Race is a key difference in the treatment of accusers, said Izzi Grasso, a doctoral candidate at the University of Washington who studied misinformation around the Depp-Heard trial.

Grasso's research concluded that people with marginalized identities are disproportionately targeted for harassment, online misinformation campaigns and discriminatory content moderation. The online world reflects the "systems of power and domination that we see in the real world," Grasso said.

Moya Bailey, a Northwestern University professor who coined the term misogynoir, found that social media platforms such as TikTok and Twitter perpetuate harmful stereotypes about Black women because it's profitable.

Algorithms normalize the dehumanization and objectification of Black women for other people's pleasure or ambivalence, Washington University in St. Louis professor Raven Maragh-Lloyd said.

Lanez has claimed that Harris and Megan were fighting over him. People are more likely to see content about Megan's sexual history as "some sort of justification" for not believing her — or for blaming her for getting shot, Maragh-Lloyd said.

She said it comes down to what sells — and misogynoir provides the fuel: "To perpetuate misinformation about Black women's bodies or Black women's desires, it's going to garner clicks and eyeballs."

## Bidens visit patients at Children's National Hospital

By DARLENE SUPERVILLE Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden and his wife, first lady Jill Biden, visited Children's National Hospital on the Friday before Christmas to visit with patients and read a story.

Sitting in front of a towering Christmas tree, the president helped hold the book while the first lady read "The Snowy Day," an award-winning story about a boy named Peter and his adventures in the snow. This year is the 60th anniversary of the book, written by Ezra Jack Keats.

Jill Biden noted that Washington "had a little, tiny bit of snow" Friday as temperatures plunged. "Did anybody see it?" she asked.

When the story mentioned Peter and snow angels, she asked how many of the patients had ever made them. "I loved to do that," she said.

When finished reading, the first lady said, "Merry Christmas and happy holidays everybody. Thanks for coming and listening to me read and have the president hold the book."

"That's my job," he added.

Biden and his wife also met in private with pediatric patients and their families. The White House said they also thanked doctors, nurses and staff, including at the hospital's cardiac intensive care unit.

Jill Biden's visit continued an 80-year annual tradition dating to Bess Truman of first ladies bringing holiday cheer to children who are too ill to be at home on Christmas. President Biden joined his wife last year, making the first visit by a sitting president.

Kurt Newman, the hospital's president and CEO, said he asked the president last year to return this year and exclaimed, "Look, he did!"

"It's so important to all of our families, our kids and our staff because there've been a lot of challenges," Newman said of the visit. "We look forward to seeing you next year."

Before leaving, the president told parents in the audience to "be strong." He said his family has spent a lot of time in children's hospitals, too. "It's gonna be OK," Biden said.

## Judge kept FTX execs' plea deals secret to get founder to US

By LARRY NEUMEISTER Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — A judge kept secret that two of Sam Bankman-Fried's closest associates had turned against him so the cryptocurrency entrepreneur wouldn't get spooked and fight extradition from the Bahamas, according to court transcripts made public Friday.

U.S. prosecutors in New York waited until Bankman-Fried, the founder of the collapsed crypto exchange FTX, was in FBI custody before revealing that his business partners, Carolyn Ellison and Gary Wang, had secretly pleaded guilty to fraud charges and were cooperating, which can earn them leniency at sentencing.

U.S. Attorney Damian Williams announced the guilty pleas when Bankman-Fried was in the air late Wednesday.

Prosecutors had been concerned that if Bankman-Fried found out his friends were cooperating, he might try to fight extradition from the Bahamas, where he had been arrested at the request of U.S. authorities.

Ellison, 28, and Wang, 29, entered their guilty pleas in Manhattan federal court Monday to charges that carry a potential penalty of decades in prison.

At that hearing, Assistant U.S. Attorney Danielle Sassoon told the judge prosecutors had expected Bankman-Fried to consent to extradition Monday before there were "some hiccups in the Bahamian courtroom."

"We're still expecting extradition soon, but given that he has not yet entered his consent, we think it could potentially thwart our law enforcement objectives to extradite him if Ms. Ellison's cooperation were disclosed at this time," Sassoon told U.S. District Judge Ronnie Abrams.

The judge got assurance from Ellison's lawyer that there was no objection to the request before granting it.

"Exposure of cooperation could hinder law enforcement officials' ability to continue the ongoing investigation and, in addition, may affect Mr. Bankman-Fried's decision to waive extradition in this case," Abrams said.

Bankman-Fried, 30, appeared in court in New York on Thursday. He was released on the condition that



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he live under house arrest with his parents in Palo Alto, California, while awaiting trial.

The home where he was staying was protected Friday by heightened security, including a Stanford University security guard posted about 50 yards (46 meters) from the home to keep passersby away. The school's president lives nearby.

Late Friday, Abrams recused herself from presiding over the case, saying she had learned that the law firm Davis Polk & Wardwell LLP, where her husband is a partner, had advised FTX in 2021 and had represented parties that may be adverse to FTX and Bankman-Fried in other proceedings.

She said her husband has had no involvement in any of the representations and she has no knowledge of the confidential matters, but decided to recuse herself "to avoid any possible conflict, or the appearance of one."

Ellison is the former chief executive of Bankman-Fried's cryptocurrency hedge fund trading firm, Alameda Research. Wang co-founded FTX, the crypto exchange. Both agreed to testify at Bankman-Fried's trial.

They and Bankman-Fried are accused of defrauding customers and investors by illegally diverting massive sums of customer money from FTX to make lavish real estate purchases, donate money to politicians and make risky trades at Alameda.

In court Monday, Ellison said since FTX and Alameda collapsed in November, she has "worked hard to assist with the recovery of assets for the benefit of customers and to cooperate with the government's investigation."

"I am truly sorry for what I did. I knew that it was wrong. And I want to apologize for my actions to the affected customers of FTX, lenders to Alameda and investors in FTX," she said, according to a transcript.

Ellison said she was aware from 2019 through 2022 that Alameda was given access to a borrowing facility at FTX.com that allowed Alameda to maintain negative balances in various currencies.

She said the practical effect of the arrangement was that Alameda had access to an unlimited line of credit without being required to post collateral and without owing interest on negative balances or being subject to margin calls or liquidation protocols.

Ellison said she knew that if Alameda's FTX accounts had significant negative balances in any currency, it meant that Alameda was borrowing funds that FTX's customers had deposited into the exchange.

"While I was co-CEO and then CEO, I understood that Alameda had made numerous large illiquid venture investments and had lent money to Mr. Bankman-Fried and other FTX executives," she said.

Ellison said she understood that Alameda had financed the investments with short-term and open-term loans worth several billion dollars from external lenders in the cryptocurrency industry.

When many of those loans were recalled by lenders in June, she agreed with others to borrow several billion dollars from FTX to repay them.

"I understood that FTX would need to use customer funds to finance its loans to Alameda," she said. "I also understood that many FTX customers invested in crypto derivatives and that most FTX customers did not expect that FTX would lend out their digital asset holdings and ... deposits to Alameda in this fashion."

From July to October, Ellison said, she agreed with Bankman-Fried and others to provide misleading financial statements to Alameda's lenders, including quarterly balance sheets that concealed the extent of the company's borrowing and the billions of dollars in loans it had made to FTX executives and others.

"I agreed with Mr. Bankman-Fried and others not to publicly disclose the true nature of the relationship between Alameda and FTX, including Alameda's credit arrangement," Ellison said.

During his plea earlier Monday, Wang said that he made changes to computer code to enable the transactions with Alameda.

"I knew what I was doing was wrong," he said.

## Jan. 6 report blames Trump, aims to prevent return to power

By MARY CLARE JALONICK Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — A massive final report released by the House Jan. 6 committee late Thursday places the blame for the 2021 Capitol insurrection on one person: former President Donald Trump.

The dense, 814-page document details the findings of the panel's 18-month investigation, drawing on more than 1,000 witness interviews and more than a million pages of source material. The committee found a "multi-part conspiracy" orchestrated by Trump and his closest allies, all with the aim of overturning his 2020 election defeat.

By laying out the extraordinary details — his pressure on states, federal officials and Vice President Mike Pence — the committee of seven Democrats and two Republicans says it is trying to prevent anything similar from ever happening again.

The panel is also aiming to prevent Trump, who is running again for the presidency, from ever returning to power. Among other recommendations, the panel suggests that Congress consider barring him and others who helped him from federal office for his role in the insurrection, in which a violent mob of his supporters stormed the Capitol and interrupted the certification of President Joe Biden's victory.

"Our country has come too far to allow a defeated President to turn himself into a successful tyrant by upending our democratic institutions, fomenting violence, and, as I saw it, opening the door to those in our country whose hatred and bigotry threaten equality and justice for all Americans," wrote the committee's chairman, Democratic Rep. Bennie Thompson of Mississippi, in a foreword to the report.

A look at the findings and what's next:

### 'ONE MAN' TO BLAME

The report traces Trump's lies about widespread election fraud to conversations with some of his allies ahead of Election Day, evidence that his plan was "premeditated," the committee says. After he carried out that plan by questioning the legitimate results on election night — "Frankly, we did win this election," he told the TV cameras — he purposely disseminated false allegations of fraud.

Many of Trump's White House advisers told him the lies were not true, according to multiple committee interviews, and his campaign lost a series of lawsuits challenging the results. But the former president did not waver.

"Donald Trump was no passive consumer of these lies," the committee wrote. "He actively propagated them."

The false claims "provoked his supporters to violence on January 6th," the committee wrote. Trump summoned them to Washington and instructed them in a fiery speech to march to the Capitol even though some "were angry and some were armed."

And after the violence started, Trump waited hours to tell them to stop. That was a "dereliction of duty," the committee said.

### PRESSURE ON THE STATES

As he lost in the courts, Trump "zeroed in" on key battleground states Biden had won and leaned on GOP state officials to overrule the will of their voters. The plan was wide-ranging, the committee shows, from pressuring state legislatures and election officials to creating false slates of electors. The panel obtained emails and documents showing talks within the White House and with outside advisers about how such a scheme could work.

Perhaps the most stunning attempt to pressure a state official was Trumps' remarkable Jan. 2, 2021, phone call with Georgia's secretary of state, Brad Raffensperger, in which he asked him to "find" votes. Raffensperger did not comply.

After speaking with election officials from several states, the committee said that Georgia call was "one element of a larger and more comprehensive effort — much of it unseen by and unknown to the general public — to overturn the votes cast by millions of American citizens across several states."

The panel assessed that Trump and his inner circle engaged in "in at least 200 apparent acts of public or private outreach" to state officials between the election and the insurrection. At the same time, the

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president was trying to get Justice Department officials to go along with his plan.

"Had enough state officials gone along with President Trump's plot, his attempt to stay in power might have worked," the committee wrote. "It is fortunate that a critical mass of honorable officials withstood President Trump's pressure to participate in this scheme."

## PENCE'S LIFE AT RISK

As Trump aggressively pushed Mike Pence to illegally object to the congressional certification of Biden's victory as he presided over the joint session of Congress, the vice president's life was increasingly in danger, the committee found.

At 8:17 a.m. on Jan. 6, Trump tweeted, "Do it Mike, this is a time for extreme courage!"

By the start of the joint session at 1 p.m., Pence had announced that he would not. By then, there were hundreds of Trump's supporters outside the Capitol, some chanting, "Hang Mike Pence!" Pence eventually fled the Senate chamber and narrowly escaped the rioters.

According to Secret Service documents provided to the panel, agents were aware of growing threats against Pence. In one instance, an agent in the intelligence division "was alerted to online chatter 'regarding the VP being a dead man walking if he doesn't do the right thing,'" the report says.

"It was an unprecedented scene in American history," the committee wrote. "The President of the United States had riled up a mob that hunted his own Vice President."

## A THWARTED TRIP TO THE CAPITOL

Trump was determined to go to the Capitol with his supporters, the investigation found, but nearly everyone thought that was a bad idea — most of all his security detail.

Cassidy Hutchinson, a former White House aide, testified over the summer about a conversation she had with former Trump security official Tony Ornato, where he recalled Trump lashing out at his security after his speech and even grabbing the wheel of the presidential SUV.

In the report, the committee writes that Ornato denied Hutchinson's story in a deposition last month, saying he was not aware of a genuine push by Trump to join his supporters at the Capitol. The committee said it continues to have "significant concerns about the credibility" of his testimony.

The driver of the presidential SUV testified that he didn't see Trump and could not recall if Trump had lunged toward him. The driver, who is not named in the report, did recall Trump asking within 30 seconds of getting inside the vehicle whether he could go to the Capitol. One Secret Service employee testified to the committee that Trump's determination to go to the Capitol put agents on high alert.

"(We) all knew ... that this was going to move to something else if he physically walked to the Capitol," a unidentified employee said. "I don't know if you want to use the word 'insurrection,' 'coup,' whatever."

Trump stayed at the White House, watching the violence on television for hours while refusing to ask his supporters to leave.

## FOREIGN INTERFERENCE

The report includes an appendix on the role of foreign influence in the 2020 presidential campaign, saying that while adversaries including Russia, Iran and China sought to sway American voter opinion, there was no evidence to support Trump's repeated claims that foreign actors had interfered in the voting process or did anything to manipulate the outcome.

"President Trump's relentless propagation of the Big Lie damaged American democracy from within and made it more vulnerable to attack from abroad. His actions did not go unnoticed by America's adversaries, who seized on the opportunity to damage the United States," the report states.

The report suggests that even Trump himself did not believe some of his allies' claims about foreign actors.

According to testimony from longtime Trump aide Hope Hicks, Trump appeared somewhat incredulous when he was talking on the phone to lawyer Sidney Powell, who had pushed theories of hacked voting machines and thermostats.

The report says that while Powell was speaking, Trump muted his speakerphone and laughed, "telling the others in the room, 'This does sound crazy, doesn't it?'"

## WHAT'S NEXT



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The committee is dissolving over the next week as the new Republican-led House will be sworn in on Jan. 3.

But the panel ensured that its work will live on, officially recommending that the Justice Department investigate and prosecute Trump on four crimes.

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

The panel recommended the department investigate charges of aiding an insurrection, obstructing an official proceeding, conspiracy to defraud the United States and conspiracy to make a false statement, all for various parts of his scheme.

The committee is also making its work, including transcripts, public for the Justice Department and the public to see.

"We have every confidence that the work of this committee will help provide a roadmap to justice," Thompson said.

## Wall Street ends higher, still winds up with 3rd weekly loss

By DAMIAN J. TROISE and ALEX VEIGA AP Business Writers

A choppy day on Wall Street ended with broad gains for stocks Friday, though most of the major indexes wound up with their third weekly loss in a row.

Mixed economic news weighed on stocks early on, but the indexes rebounded by late afternoon amid relatively light trading ahead of a long holiday weekend.

The S&P 500 reversed a 0.7% loss to close 0.6% higher. With one week left of trading in 2022, the benchmark index is down 19.3% for the year.

The Dow Jones Industrial Average rose 0.5% and the Nasdaq composite eked out a 0.2% gain. The S&P 500 and Nasdaq posted their third straight weekly loss.

Markets are in a tricky situation where relatively solid consumer spending and a strong employment market reduce the risk of a recession but also raise the threat of higher interest rates from the Federal Reserve as it presses its campaign to crush inflation.

The government reported Friday that a key measure of inflation is continuing to slow, though it's still far higher than anyone wants to see. The Federal Reserve monitors the inflation gauge in the consumer spending report, called the personal consumption expenditures price index, even more closely than it does the government's better-known consumer price index.

Also, growth in consumer spending weakened last month by more than expected, but incomes were a bit stronger than expected.

Helping to support the market was a separate report from the University of Michigan indicating U.S. households are lowering their forecasts for upcoming inflation. That could help avoid a scenario the Federal Reserve has said often it's desperate to prevent: a vicious cycle where shoppers rush to make purchases in advance of expected price rises, which would only worsen inflation.

"Investors are really looking to hang their hat on anything that would show a little bit more confidence in the direction of where things are going to go," said Greg Bassuk, CEO at AXS Investments.

Treasury yields rose following the reports. The yield on the 10-year Treasury, which influences mortgage rates, rose to 3.75% from 3.69 late Thursday. The yield on the two-year Treasury, which tends to track actions by the Fed, rose to 4.31% from 4.28%.

The latest round of reports are the last big economic updates of the year and investors will soon turn their focus to the next round corporate earnings. Most investors are hoping to get a better sense of how consumers are doing through those reports and forecasts, along with the picture for corporate profits, said Chris Zaccarelli, chief investment officer at Independent Advisor Alliance.

"The stock market is in a tough spot," he said "If the consumer starts slowing down, earnings are likely to decrease, but if the consumer remains strong, the Fed has to remain strong and interest rates keep rising."

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The Fed has been upfront about its plan to remain aggressive in raising interest rates in order to tame inflation, even though the pace of price increases continue to ease. The Fed has already hiked its key overnight rate to its highest level in 15 years, after it began the year at a record low of roughly zero. The key lending rate, the federal funds rate, stands at a range of 4.25% to 4.5%, and Fed policymakers forecast that the rate will reach a range of 5% to 5.25% by the end of 2023.

Their forecast doesn't call for a rate cut before 2024. The high rates have raised concerns that the economy could slow too much and slip into a recession in 2023. High rates have also been weighing heavily on prices for stocks and other investments.

Inflation remains a global problem. Japan reported its core inflation rate, excluding volatile fresh foods, rose to 3.7% in November, the highest level since 1981, as surging costs for oil and other commodities added to upward price pressures in the world's third-largest economy.

Roughly 80% of the stocks in the S&P 500 notched gains Friday. The index rose 22.43 points to 3,844.82. The Dow gained 176.44 points to 33,203.93. The Nasdaq rose 21.74 points to 10,497.86.

Oil and gas industry stocks were big gainers as energy futures prices closed broadly higher. Hess climbed 4.7%.

Communications services and financial stocks also posted solid gains. Disney rose 1.5% and American Express added 1.2%.

Small company stocks also rose. The Russell 2000 index picked up 6.85 points, or 0.4%, to 1,760.93.

Markets in Asia fell and markets in Europe closed mixed.

U.S. markets will be closed on Monday for the Christmas holiday.

## 3 dead in Kurdish center shooting in Paris; suspect arrested

By ANGELA CHARLTON and JADE LE DELEY Associated Press

PARIS (AP) — A man who was charged last year with attacking migrants shot and killed three people at a Kurdish cultural center Friday in Paris in an assault that appeared to be specifically aimed at foreigners, authorities said.

The shooting, which also wounded three people, shook the Kurdish community in the French capital and sparked skirmishes between angry Kurds and police. It also rattled merchants in the bustling neighborhood in central Paris on the eve of Christmas weekend and put officers on alert for more violence.

Authorities identified the suspect as a 69-year-old Paris man who had been jailed for attacking migrants living in tents and released earlier this month. Investigators were considering a possible racist motive for the shooting.

The attack occurred at midday at the cultural center and a nearby restaurant and hair salon, according to the mayor of that part of the city, Alexandra Cordebar.

Skirmishes erupted in the neighborhood a few hours later as members of the Kurdish community shouted slogans against the Turkish government, and police fired tear gas to disperse the increasingly agitated crowd. Some garbage bins were set on fire.

Interior Minister Gerald Darmanin said the suspect was clearly targeting foreigners and had acted alone and was not affiliated with any extreme-right or other radical movements.

French President Emmanuel Macron tweeted: "The Kurds of France were the target of an odious attack in the heart of Paris. Thoughts for the victims, those who are fighting to survive, to their families and loved ones."

Shocked members of the city's Kurdish community called it a terrorist act. They said they had recently been warned by police of threats to Kurdish targets, and they demanded justice.

Paris Prosecutor Laure Beccuau said terrorism prosecutors were in contact with investigators but had not given any indication of a terrorist motive. Darmanin was holding a special meeting Friday night to assess threats to the Kurdish community in France.

A construction worker who was on a job nearby described seeing the assailant go first to the cultural center, then to the restaurant and the hair salon. The worker told The Associated Press that he saw the

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assailant wound three people before two passersby in the salon intervened and stopped him.

The worker, who spoke on the condition that his name not be published because he was concerned for his security, described the attacker as silent and calm as he wielded a small-caliber pistol.

The suspect was wounded in the face during his arrest, Beccau said.

Police cordoned off the area in the 10th arrondissement of the French capital, on a busy street with shops and restaurants near the Gare de l'Est train station.

One of the wounded was in critical condition, and two others were hospitalized with less serious injuries, the prosecutor said.

The suspect, who is French, attended a shooting range in a sports club and had several registered weapons, Darmanin said. The man was not on any radicalism watch lists.

The suspect had past convictions for illegal arms possession and armed violence, and was handed preliminary charges of "premeditated, armed violence of a racist nature" for the attack last year on a migrant camp in Paris, the prosecutor said.

He had been held in provisional detention in that case until Dec. 12, when he was released under judicial supervision, ordered to get psychiatric care and banned from carrying weapons.

In the attack on migrants, the suspect wielded a saber and wounded some people in a makeshift camp, said Yann Manzi of aid group Utopia 54.

He lamented the suspect's recent release, as did Kurds who gathered at the scene of Friday's shooting.

"We do not at all feel protected in Paris," activist Murat Roni told The Associated Press. "We don't feel defended by the French justice system. It's clearly the Kurds who were targeted."

He described the cultural center as being "like the embassy for Kurds in Paris," a gathering place for events, political discussion and assistance with immigration procedures — "a house where all Kurds get together."

In 2013, three women Kurdish activists, including Sakine Cansiz, a founder of the Kurdistan Workers' Party, or PKK, were found shot dead at a Kurdish center in Paris. A Turkish citizen was charged with their killing, although suspicion also fell on the Turkish intelligence service.

Turkey's army has been battling against Kurdish militants affiliated with the banned PKK in southeast Turkey as well as in northern Iraq. Turkey's military also recently launched a series of air and artillery strikes against Syrian Kurdish militant targets in northern Syria.

The PKK is considered a terrorist organization in Turkey, Europe and the United States, and has led an armed insurgency against the Turkish state since 1984.

France was hit with a string of deadly attacks by Islamic extremists in 2015 and 2016 and remains on alert for terrorism-related violence.

## House passes \$1.7 trillion spending bill with Ukraine aid

By KEVIN FREKING Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — A \$1.7 trillion spending bill financing federal agencies through September and providing more aid to a devastated Ukraine cleared the House on Friday as lawmakers raced to finish their work for the year and avoid a partial government shutdown.

The bill passed mostly along party lines, 225-201. It now goes to President Joe Biden to be signed into law.

Passage of the bill represented a closing act for Rep. Nancy Pelosi's second stint as House speaker, and for the Democratic majority she led back to power in the 2018 election. Republicans will take control of the House next year and Rep. Kevin McCarthy is campaigning to replace her.

He is appealing for support from staunch conservatives in his caucus who have largely trashed the size of the bill and many of the priorities it contains. He spoke with a raised voice for about 25 minutes, assailing the bill for spending too much and doing too little to curb illegal immigration and the flow of fentanyl across the U.S.-Mexico border.

"This is a monstrosity that is one of the most shameful acts I've ever seen in this body," McCarthy said of the legislation.

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The speech prompted a quick quip from Rep. Jim McGovern, D-Mass., who said "after listening to that, it's clear he doesn't have the votes yet," a reference to McCarthy's campaign to become speaker.

Pelosi said "we have a big bill here because we had big needs for the country," then turned her focus to McCarthy:

"It was sad to hear the minority leader say that this legislation is the most shameful thing to be seen on the House floor in this Congress," Pelosi said. "I can't help but wonder, had he forgotten January 6th?"

Biden applauded the bill's approval, saying it was proof that Republicans and Democrats can work together, and "I'm looking forward to continued bipartisan progress in the year ahead."

"This bill is good for our economy, our competitiveness and our communities — and I will sign it into law as soon as it reaches my desk," Biden said.

The Senate passed the defense-heavy measure with significant bipartisan support Thursday, but the vote was much more split in the House. Some 30 GOP lawmakers promised to block any legislative priority that comes from those Republican senators who voted for the bill and leadership urged a no vote.

In the end, nine House Republicans voted for the bill. Seven of them are leaving Congress. Only Reps. Brian Fitzpatrick of Pennsylvania and Steve Womack of Arkansas are returning. The lone Democrat to vote against the measure was Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez of New York.

The bill runs for 4,155 pages, not including amendments the Senate added. It contains about a 6% percent increase in spending for domestic initiatives, to \$772.5 billion. Spending on defense programs will increase by about 10% to \$858 billion.

The bill's passage came only hours before financing for federal agencies was set to expire. Lawmakers had passed two stopgap spending measures to keep the government operating, and a third, funding the government through Dec. 30, passed Friday and was signed by Biden. That ensured services continue until Biden could sign the full-year measure, called an omnibus, into law.

The massive bill wraps together 12 appropriations bills, aid to Ukraine and disaster relief for communities recovering from hurricanes, flooding and wildfires. It also contains scores of policy changes that lawmakers worked to include in the final major bill considered by the current Congress.

Lawmakers provided roughly \$45 billion for Ukraine and NATO allies, more than even Biden requested, an acknowledgment that future rounds of funding are not guaranteed with a new GOP-led House.

In a dramatic address to a joint meeting of Congress on Wednesday night, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy told lawmakers that the aid was not charity, but an investment in global security and democracy.

Though Ukraine aid has largely had bipartisan support, some House Republicans have been critical of the effort, arguing the money is better spent on priorities in the U.S.

"How can we send an additional \$47 BILLION to Ukraine for security while terrorists, drugs, and criminals flood our southern border?" tweeted Rep. Matt Rosendale, R-Mont.

"\$100 billion to Ukraine. Let's put that in perspective," tweeted Rep. Thomas Massie, R-Ky., who included past rounds of aid in his count. "That's more than \$200 million this year from each Congressional district. What could your congressman have done for your district with \$200 million?"

McCarthy has warned that Republicans would not write a "blank check" for Ukraine in the next Congress. Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer said after Thursday's vote he's having trouble understanding the concerns.

"I'm just befuddled by some of these right-wing Republicans who don't want to help Ukraine," Schumer said. "It's always been, the more hard right you were, the more anti-Soviet you were, but all of a sudden, they're pro. I hope it's not a residue of Trump."

The Senate passed the funding package Thursday by a vote of 68-29 but it takes time for the Senate clerk's office to review the bill and include amendments that were added that day. As a result, the bill ended up passing with a half-empty House chamber. More than 220 lawmakers sought the option to vote by proxy, and many raced to get out of town before risking canceled flights and spending Christmas in Washington.

Republicans have vowed that abolishing the practice of remote voting will be among their first acts in



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the majority next year.

The funding bill also contains roughly \$40 billion in emergency spending in the U.S., mostly to assist communities across the country recovering from drought, hurricanes and other natural disasters.

And it has scores of policy changes largely unrelated to spending that lawmakers worked furiously behind the scenes to include, else they start from scratch next year in a divided Congress where Republicans will be returning to the majority in the House.

One of the most notable examples was a historic revision to federal election law that aims to prevent any future presidents or presidential candidates from trying to overturn an election.

The bipartisan overhaul of the Electoral Count Act is in direct response to former President Donald Trump's efforts to persuade Republican lawmakers and then-Vice President Mike Pence to object to the certification of Biden's victory on Jan. 6, 2021.

Among the spending increases Democrats emphasized: a \$500 increase in the maximum size of Pell grants for low-income college students, a \$100 million increase in block grants to states for substance abuse prevention and treatment programs, a 22% increase in spending on VA medical care and \$3.7 billion to provide emergency relief to farmers and ranchers hit by natural disasters, just to name a few.

The bill also provides roughly \$15.3 billion for more than 7,200 projects that lawmakers sought for their home states and districts. Under revamped rules for community project funding, also referred to as earmarks, lawmakers must post their requests online and attest they have no financial interest in the projects. Still, many fiscal conservatives criticize the earmarking as leading to unnecessary spending.

## Title 42 border rules confound Washington, migrants alike

By COLLEEN LONG Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The drawn-out saga of Title 42, the set of emergency powers that allows border officials to quickly turn away migrants, has been chaotic at the U.S.-Mexico border. In Washington, it hasn't unfolded much better.

The Supreme Court is weighing whether to keep the powers in place following months of legal battles brought on by Republican-led states after President Joe Biden's administration moved to end the Trump-era policy, which was set to lapse this week until the court agreed to take it up.

The administration has yet to lay out any systemic changes to manage an expected surge of migrants if the restrictions end. And a bipartisan immigration bill in Congress has been buried just as Republicans are set to take control of the House.

In short, America is right back where it has been. A divided nation is unable to agree on what a longer-term fix to the immigration system should look like. Basic questions — for example, should more immigrants be allowed in, or fewer? — are unanswered. Meantime the asylum system continues to strain under increasing numbers of migrants.

The Biden administration has been reluctant to take hardline measures that would resemble those of his predecessor. That's resulted in a barrage of criticism from Republicans who are using Title 42 to hammer the president as ineffective on border security. The rules were introduced as an emergency health measure to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

"The Democrats have lost the messaging war on this," said Charles Foster, a longtime immigration attorney in Texas who served as an immigration policy adviser to Republican George W. Bush but now considers himself independent. "The tragedy is, Democrats more than anyone should focus on this issue, because unless and until it can be fixed, and the perception changes, we'll get nothing ever through Congress."

Anyone who comes to the U.S. has the right to ask for asylum, but laws are narrow on who actually gets it. Under Biden, migrants arriving at the border are often let into the country and allowed to work while their cases progress. That process takes years because of a 2-million-case backlog in the immigration court system that was exacerbated by Trump-era rules.

Title 42 allows border officials to deny people the right to seek asylum, and they have done so 2.5 million times since March 2020. The emergency health authority has been applied disproportionately to those

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from countries that Mexico agreed to take back: Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador and more recently Venezuela, in addition to Mexico.

"There is not going to be a good moment, politically speaking," to end the restrictions, said Jorge Loweree of the American Immigration Council. The administration should have been preparing all along to create a better system for asylum seekers," Loweree said.

"It has allowed the other side to weaponize this issue. And the longer it remains in place, the longer the weapon will remain effective."

The authority was first invoked at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic by President Donald Trump, whose immigration policies were aimed at keeping out as many migrants as possible. He also drastically reduced the number of refugees allowed into the country, added restrictions to the asylum process that clogged the system and kept migrants in detention, and reduced legal immigration pathways.

Biden has been working to expand legal immigration and has undone some of the most restrictive Trump policies. But the administration kept the policy in place until this spring, and even expanded its use after announcing it would end.

Republicans say there will be even more chaos if it's lifted. But even with Title 42 in place, border officials have been encountering more migrants than ever before. In the budget year that ended Sept. 30, migrants were stopped 2.38 million times, up 37% from 1.73 million times the year before.

"I don't know why it's taking them so long to get serious about deterrence," Republican Sen. Shelley Moore Capito of West Virginia said of the Biden administration. Capito is an incoming member of the Senate Republican leadership and the top GOP senator on the committee that oversees money for Homeland Security, the federal agency that manages border security.

Border officials have braced for an expected increase, and migrants who have arrived are unsure of how asylum processes will work when the policy ends. Homeland Security officials have reported faster processing for migrants in custody on the border, more temporary detention tents, staffing increases and more criminal prosecutions of smugglers.

They say progress has been made on a plan announced in April but large-scale changes are needed. Meanwhile, the Senate's Republican leadership killed a bipartisan immigration bill that would have addressed some of these issues.

The split isn't just inside Congress. One in 3 U.S. adults believes an effort is underway to replace native-born Americans with immigrants for electoral gains, according to an AP-NORC survey.

Biden and his aides have said they are working to divert migrants coming out of Central America and helping provide aid to poorer nations that are bleeding people headed for the U.S. But the president is limited without action from Congress.

White House press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre said the administration is surging assistance to the border and will continue to do so. But "the removal of Title 42 does not mean the border is open," she said. "Anyone who suggests otherwise is simply doing the work of these smugglers who again are spreading misinformation, which is very dangerous."

A year-long appropriations bill passed the Senate on Thursday that would give the Border Patrol 17% more money, as well as 13% more for the Justice Department to develop an electronic case management system for immigration courts.

But Citizenship and Immigration Services, central in the asylum process, only got one third of what Biden had proposed to speed up the system.

Democrats, for their part, say they want policies that reflect America's reputation as a haven for those fleeing persecution. But they can't agree on what that looks like.

Sen. Dick Durbin, D-Ill., has been working on the issue for 20 years. This week, he stood on the Senate floor, sounding dejected as he talked about how Congress couldn't push through reform.

"It is a humanitarian and security nightmare that is only getting worse," he said. "We're being flooded at the border by people who want to be in the United States, safely in the United States."

Why, he asked, can't Washington figure out a better way?

## Thom Bell, an architect of 1970s Philadelphia soul, dies

By HILLEL ITALIE AP National Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Thom Bell, the Grammy-winning producer, writer and arranger who helped perfect the “Sound of Philadelphia” of the 1970s with the inventive, orchestral settings of such hits as the Spinners’ “I’ll Be Around” and the Stylistics’ “Betcha by Golly, Wow,” has died at age 79.

Bell’s wife, Vanessa Bell, said that he died Thursday at his home in Bellingham, Washington, after a lengthy illness. She declined to give additional details.

A native of Jamaica who moved to Philadelphia as a child, Thom Bell drew upon the classical influences of his youth and such favorite composers as Oscar-winner Ennio Morricone in adding a kind of cinematic scale and grandeur to the gospel-styled harmonies of the Spinners, Stylistics, Delfonics and other groups.

Few producer-arrangers compared to Bell in setting a mood — whether the celebratory strings and horns kicking off the Spinners’ “Mighty Love,” the deadly piano roll at the start of the O’Jays’ “Back Stabbers” or the blissful oboe of “Betcha by Golly, Wow,” a soulful dreamland suggesting a Walt Disney film scored by Smokey Robinson.

“Nobody else is in my brain but me, which is why some of the things I think about are crazy — I hear oboes and bassoons and English horns,” he told recordcollectormag.com in 2020.

“An arranger told me ‘Thom Bell, Black people don’t listen to that.’ I said, ‘Why limit yourself to Black people?’ I make music for people.”

Bell, often collaborating with lyricist Linda Creed, worked on more than 30 gold records from 1968-78 as Philadelphia became as much a center of soul music as Detroit and Motown Records were in the 1960s. He was an independent producer but so vital to the Philadelphia International Records empire built by Kenny Gamble and Leon Huff that the publishing company they formed together was called Mighty Three Music.

Bell’s other hits included the Delfonics’ “La-La (Means I Love You),” the Stylistics’ “You Make Me Feel Brand New,” Joe Simon’s “Drowning in the Sea of Love” and Elton John’s “Mama Can’t Buy You Love.”

He is widely credited with reviving the Spinners, a former Motown act that hadn’t had a hit in years. Bell took them on in the early 1970s and helped create such hits as “I’ll Be Around,” “Ghetto Child” and “The Rubberband Man.”

The Spinners’ chart-topping “Then Came You” featured Dionne Warwick, who had been skeptical that the up-tempo ballad would catch on. Bell tore a dollar bill in half and got Warwick to agree that whoever guessed wrong about the song would have to inscribe an apology on their half of the money and send it to the other. Bell would long hold on to the signed note he received from Warwick.

He also worked with some personal favorites, such as an album with Anthony Gourdine of Little Anthony of the Imperials, one of his early influences, and “I’m Coming Home” and “Mathis Is ...” for Johnny Mathis, whom Bell would call the most talented singer he ever worked with, “sterling of sterling.”

Bell won a Grammy in 1975 for best producer, but within a few years, the Philadelphia sound had been overtaken by other trends. He had just a handful of hits in the 1980s and after, including Deniece Williams’ “Gonna Take a Miracle” and James Ingram’s “I Don’t Have the Heart.” He was inducted into the Songwriters Hall of Fame in 2006, and received an honorary Grammy in 2017. Three years later, his work was highlighted in the anthology “Ready or Not: Philly Soul Arrangements & Productions, 1965-1978.”

“To put it in a nutshell, he’s responsible for everything that’s happened to me in my career,” Stylistics lead singer Russell Thompkins Jr. told the Seattle Times in 2018. “He helped me in knowing my vocal range, finding the best way to sing a song. Everyone was his instrument. It didn’t matter if you were a singer, a trombonist or a studio engineer. You were part of his construction.”

One of 10 siblings, Thomas Randolph Bell grew up in a household where both parents were accomplished musicians and only classical works were heard. He was taking piano lessons by age 5 and thought of becoming a conductor, but he could not ignore the sounds he was imagining in his head — high notes keyed to his own tenor — or discovering on the radio, notably Little Anthony and the Imperials’ mournful “Tears On My Pillow.”

“I fell in love with the whole production,” he told the Seattle Times. “I listened to the background, the

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bass, a lot more than just the lyrics.”

Thanks to such longtime friends as Gamble and Huff, he became well connected in the local music scene. He and Gamble were together briefly in Kenny Gamble & the Romeos, and he also worked as an arranger and session player for the Cameo and Parkway labels, where artists included the Delfonics and Chubby Checker of “The Twist” fame. Gamble and Huff began producing together in 1967, and Bell was soon working with them on songs by Jerry Butler and Dusty Springfield among others.

In the early 1970s, he met Creed, a Philadelphia-born Jew who as a teen fell in love with soul music and with Bell formed a rare interracial musical partnership. Their songs often began with Bell creating a melody and arrangement and Creed providing the words.

For “You Are Everything,” a Stylistics hit which opens with “Today I saw somebody/Who looked just like you/She walked like you do,” inspiration was found during a break from recording.

“We’re walking down the street. We’re looking around, because there’s always something in the street to write about,” Bell told NPR in 2006. “I saw this guy crossing, we were all crossing, and this guy stopped in the middle of the street and he looked back. Then he looked back again. He’s looking at this woman. And he calls out this girl’s name. And he was chasing her, and the girl looked at him like he was crazy. I was watching this, and I said, ‘Creed, I’ve got an idea.’”

## Jan. 6 report: Trump ‘lit that fire’ of Capitol insurrection

By MARY CLARE JALONICK, ERIC TUCKER, FARNOUSH AMIRI, JILL COLVIN, MICHAEL BALSAMO and NOMAAN MERCHANT Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The House Jan. 6 committee’s final report asserts that Donald Trump criminally engaged in a “multi-part conspiracy” to overturn the lawful results of the 2020 presidential election and failed to act to stop his supporters from attacking the Capitol, concluding an extraordinary 18-month investigation into the former president and the violent insurrection two years ago.

Trump “lit that fire,” the committee’s chairman, Mississippi Rep. Bennie Thompson, writes.

The 814-page report released late Thursday comes after the panel interviewed more than 1,000 witnesses, held 10 hearings and obtained more than a million pages of documents. The witnesses — ranging from many of Trump’s closest aides to law enforcement to some of the rioters themselves — detailed Trump’s “premeditated” actions in the weeks ahead of the attack and how his wide-ranging efforts to overturn his defeat directly influenced those who brutally pushed past the police and smashed through the windows and doors of the Capitol on Jan. 6, 2021.

The central cause was “one man,” the report says: Trump.

The insurrection gravely threatened democracy and “put the lives of American lawmakers at risk,” the bipartisan nine-member panel concluded, offering a definitive account of a dark chapter in modern American history. It functions not only as a compendium of the most dramatic moments of testimony from months of hearings, but also as a document that is to be preserved as a warning for future generations.

In a series of recommendations, the seven Democrats and two Republicans on the committee suggest that Congress consider barring Trump from holding future office. The findings should be a “clarion call to all Americans: to vigilantly guard our Democracy and to give our vote only to those dutiful in their defense of our Constitution,” says House Speaker Nancy Pelosi in a foreword to the report.

The report’s eight chapters tell the story largely as the panel’s hearings did this summer — describing the many facets of the remarkable plan that Trump and his advisers devised to try and void President Joe Biden’s victory. The lawmakers detail the former president’s pressure on states, federal officials, lawmakers and Vice President Mike Pence to game the system or break the law.

In the two months between the election and the insurrection, the report says, “President Trump or his inner circle engaged in at least 200 apparent acts of public or private outreach, pressure, or condemnation, targeting either State legislators or State or local election administrators, to overturn State election results.”

Trump’s repeated, false claims of widespread voter fraud resonated with his supporters, the committee said, and were amplified on social media, building on the distrust of government he had fostered for his



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four years in office. And he did little to stop them when they resorted to violence and stormed the Capitol, interrupting the certification of Biden's victory.

The massive, damning report comes as Trump is running again for the presidency and also facing multiple federal investigations, including probes of his role in the insurrection and the presence of classified documents at his Florida estate. This week is particularly fraught for him, as a House committee voted to release his tax returns after he has fought for years to keep them private. At the same time, Trump has been blamed by Republicans for a worse-than-expected showing in the midterm elections, leaving him in his most politically vulnerable state since he was elected in 2016.

Looking forward, the committee makes several suggestions for action, including an overhaul of the Electoral Count Act, the election law that Trump tried to circumvent. Bipartisan legislation to make it harder for lawmakers to object to presidential results, and for the vice president to intervene, is set to be passed as part of year-end spending legislation on Friday and sent to Biden for his signature.

The panel also notes in that section that the 14th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution holds that anyone who has taken an oath to uphold the Constitution can be prevented from holding office for engaging in insurrection or rebellion.

Trump "is unfit for any office," writes the committee's vice chairwoman, Republican Rep. Liz Cheney of Wyoming.

Posting on his social media site, Trump called the report "highly partisan" and falsely claimed it didn't include his statement on Jan. 6 that his supporters should protest "peacefully and patriotically." The committee did include that statement, noting that he followed it with election falsehoods and charged language exhorting the crowd to "fight like hell."

The report details a multitude of failings by law enforcement and intelligence agencies, noting that many of the rioters came with weapons and had openly planned for violence online before they overwhelmed underprepared law enforcement. "The failure to sufficiently share and act upon that intelligence jeopardized the lives of the police officers defending the Capitol and everyone in it," the report says.

At the same time, the committee makes an emphatic point that security failures are not the primary cause for the insurrection.

"The President of the United States inciting a mob to march on the Capitol and impede the work of Congress is not a scenario our intelligence and law enforcement communities envisioned for this country," Thompson wrote.

"Donald Trump lit that fire," Thompson writes. "But in the weeks beforehand, the kindling he ultimately ignited was amassed in plain sight."

The report details Trump's inaction as his loyalists were storming the building, detailing the hours when he watched the violence on television but did nothing to stop it.

A White House photographer snapped a picture of Trump at 1:21 p.m., learning of the early violence from an employee upon returning to the White House after his speech — after his own security officials had rebuffed his efforts to go to the Capitol himself. "By that time, if not sooner, he had been made aware of the violent riot," the report states.

In total, 187 minutes elapsed between the time Trump finished his speech at the Ellipse and his first effort to get the rioters to disperse, through an eventual video message hours later in which he asked his supporters to go home even as he reassured them, "We love you, you're very special."

That inaction was a "dereliction of duty," the report says, noting that Trump had more power than any other person as the nation's commander-in-chief. "He willfully remained idle even as others, including his own Vice President, acted."

During those hours, Pence huddled and hid in the Capitol, begging security officials for a quicker National Guard response as rioters outside called for his hanging because he would not illegally try to thwart Biden's win as Congress was counting the votes. Inside the White House, dozens of staffers and associates pleaded with Trump to make a forceful statement.

But he did not.

"We all look like domestic terrorists now," longtime aide Hope Hicks texted Julie Radford, who served

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as Ivanka Trump's chief of staff, in the aftermath.

The report says "virtually everyone on the White House staff" interviewed by the committee condemned Trump's 2:24 p.m. tweet — just as the rioters were first breaking into the Capitol — that Vice President Mike Pence "didn't have the courage to do what should have been done to protect our Country and our Constitution."

"Attacking the VP? Wtf is wrong with him," Hicks texted another colleague that evening.

The investigation's release is a final act for House Democrats who are ceding power to Republicans in less than two weeks, and have spent much of their four years in power investigating Trump. Democrats impeached Trump twice, the second time a week after the insurrection. He was acquitted by the Senate both times. Other Democratic-led probes investigated his finances, his businesses, his foreign ties and his family.

On Monday, the panel officially passed their investigation to the Justice Department, recommending the department investigate the former president on four crimes, including aiding an insurrection. While the criminal referrals have no legal standing, they are a final statement from the committee after its extensive, year-and-a-half-long probe.

The committee has also begun to release hundreds of transcripts of its interviews. On Thursday, the panel released transcripts of two closed-door interviews with former White House aide Cassidy Hutchinson, who testified in person at one of the televised hearings over the summer and described in vivid detail Trump's actions and inaction inside the White House.

In the two interviews, both conducted after her June appearance at the hearing, Hutchinson described how many of Trump's allies, including her lawyer, pressured her not to say too much in her committee interviews.

## **An inflation measure watched by the Fed eases to 5.5%**

By PAUL WISEMAN AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — A measure of inflation closely watched by the Federal Reserve slowed last month, another sign that a long surge in consumer prices seems to be easing.

Friday's report from the Commerce Department showed that prices rose 5.5% in November from a year earlier, down from a revised 6.1% increase in October and the smallest gain since October 2021. Excluding volatile food and energy prices, so-called core inflation was up 4.7% over the previous year. That was also the smallest increase since October 2021.

On a month-to-month basis, prices rose 0.1% from October to November after rising 0.4% the previous month. Core prices rose 0.2%.

Inflation, which began surging a year and a half ago as the economy bounced back from 2020's coronavirus recession, still remains well above the 2% year-over-year growth the Fed wants to see.

The central bank has raised its benchmark interest rate seven times since March in an attempt to bring consumer prices under control.

Higher prices and borrowing costs may be taking a toll on American consumers. Their spending rose just 0.1% from October to November and didn't rise at all after adjusting for higher prices.

"We expect a deceleration in household spending as the Fed hikes rates further in 2023," Rubeela Farooqi, chief U.S. economist at High Frequency Economics, wrote in a research note.

Americans' after-tax income, however, rose 0.3% in November even after accounting for inflation.

The Fed is believed to monitor the Commerce Department's inflation gauge that was issued Friday, called the personal consumption expenditures price index, even more closely than it does the Labor Department's better-known consumer price index. CPI rose 7.1% in November from 12 months earlier, down from June's 9.1% year-over-year increase, which had been the biggest such jump in four decades.

The PCE index tends to show a lower inflation rate than CPI. In part, that is because rents, which have soared, carry double the weight in the CPI that they do in the PCE.

The PCE price index also seeks to account for changes in how people shop when inflation jumps. As a

result, it can capture, for example, when consumers switch from pricey national brands to cheaper store brands.

## **Brazil's Lula promises no deforestation but challenges loom**

By FABIANO MAISONNAVE, TATIANA POLLASTRI AND ERALDO PERES undefined

XAPURI, Brazil (AP) — When Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva is sworn in as president of the second most populous country in the western hemisphere Jan. 1, few challenges will be greater than fulfilling his promise to end all deforestation in the Brazilian Amazon by 2030.

To understand why, consider the vastly different visions of three daughters from one family of rubber tappers who live on a large reserve in the western state of Acre. The reserve is forest protected in the name of the legendary rubber tapper leader and environmentalist Chico Mendes.

Luzineide da Silva is a third-generation rubber tapper. One of her daughters wants to follow in her footsteps and make a living from the family fields, rubber trees and Brazil nuts, the other two want to cut down the forest, plant grass and run cattle.

"My eldest daughter was dazzled when she took part in a livestock training course. She learned how to produce beef and cheese and even drive a tractor. That changed her worldview," said da Silva at the end of a day tending her corn, pumpkin, watermelon, banana and gherkin crops under a scorching sun. "She said: 'Mom, everyone who raises cattle has a car, a good life and attends private colleges, whereas I can't afford veterinary school.'"

It's the same with other families. In the past two decades, many rubber tappers have gradually abandoned the vision of Mendes, who fiercely opposed deforestation by big cattle ranchers.

The forest defender was shot dead in his tiny home in Xapuri city here in Acre in December 1998. A local farmer had ordered the killing. The international outcry that followed led to the creation of "extractive reserves" across the Amazon, a type of federal conservation unit where forest communities could live their traditional lives protected from land-robbing.

Classic rubber tapping is done by slicing grooves into the bark of rubber trees and collecting the latex that oozes out. But that artisanal rubber has fallen into decline over decades, a casualty of synthetic rubber made in chemical factories or rubber grown on plantations.

Finding few opportunities elsewhere, many locals cut down trees and turned to cattle as a more reliable income than seasonal forest products, such as Brazil nuts. Cattle became Acre's most important economic activity.

In the last four years, this trend of converting forest into pasture reached unprecedented levels under far-right President Jair Bolsonaro.

His government tried to shrink protected areas and legalize large-scale cattle herds inside extractive reserves. Land-robbers from the neighboring state of Rondonia illegally bought land parcels, even on public land. One of them deforested 104 hectares (257 acres), the largest swath of destruction this year, according to environmental law enforcement officials who spoke anonymously as they are not authorized to speak with the press.

Residents also cleared trees to lease the land to nearby cattle ranchers, who finance the destruction. There are even cases where traditional rubber tappers have used money earned from selling rubber to extend their grazing land. Others post ads on Facebook selling their traditional rubber groves.

"What strikes me is that when we had nothing, we were able to bring people together and fight the way we did," Raimundo Mendes de Barros said while sitting on the porch of his wooden house, whose walls bear pictures of him beside Chico Mendes, who was his cousin, and Lula. All belong to the same party, the Workers' Party. Thanks to the rubber tappers movement, he said, people now have roads and electricity, and walk around on an equal footing with city residents.

But "these improvements ended up benefitting evildoers," Raimundo Mendes said. Many think that forest products and family farming are worth nothing and they need money to buy a motorcycle and a cellphone. They'll sell a piece of their own rubber grove and deforest in order to raise cattle.

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"We fought so hard and built so many good things, but people don't care about it," the 77-year-old rubber leader said.

The result is that an area roughly the size of Manhattan was destroyed during Bolsonaro's presidency between 2019 and 2022. That's triple the previous four years, according to an analysis by Socio-Environmental Institute, a Brazilian non-profit, based on official figures.

"In the past, the Chico Mendes reserve's residents used profits from rubber and Brazil nuts to buy cattle as a sort of savings account," Institute researcher Antonio Oviedo told The Associated Press in a phone interview. He said now it's all on a much larger scale.

Most locals, however, don't seem to view this forest loss as a problem — quite the opposite. In the recent election Bolsonaro beat Lula by a wide margin here in Xapuri and throughout the six municipalities of the Chico Mendes reserve.

The broader state of Acre also hit an all-time high for deforestation in the past four years, according to official monitoring. Yet Bolsonaro beat Lula 70% to 30%. His ally, pro-agribusiness Gov. Gladson Cameli, also was reelected in a landslide. It showed the long fade of the Workers' Party's years-long effort to implement a sustainable economy in Acre. It was also an indicator of the strength of agribusiness and the cultural changes in recent years across rural Brazil.

Acre is also the home of Marina Silva, a former environment minister being considered for the same job again in the new administration. Silva, too, is a former rubber tapper who fought deforestation alongside Mendes. A renowned forest defender worldwide, she has become very unpopular in her home state. Her political party, the environmentalist Sustainability Network, is almost nonexistent here — it doesn't even have an elected councilmember.

Angela Mendes, daughter of Chico Mendes, says that to really halt deforestation, the incoming Lula administration will have to listen to the needs of smallholders who live from forest products like rubber, Brazil nuts, and açaí, and overhaul the federal agency in charge of running protected areas, the Chico Mendes Institute for Biodiversity Conservation.

"We still have a lot of forest standing," she said during an interview in Xapuri. To ensure it stays like that, she said, it's essential to find a pathway for people who live from the land. "That is the only way to move forward."

## **Greece: EU's external border is hardening, attitudes are too**

By DEREK GATOPOULOS Associated Press

LYKOFI, Greece (AP) — Accompanied by a cloud of mosquitos, Police Capt. Konstantinos Tsolakidis and three other border guards set out on a boat patrol along the Evros River that forms a natural frontier between Greece and Turkey.

The route takes them through a maze formed by tall reeds, past clusters of flamingos and boat trippers visiting a nature reserve where the river fans out to meet the Mediterranean.

The Evros — called the Meric River in Turkey — runs through one of the remotest parts of Europe. It's also becoming one of its most militarized as Greece and the wider European Union work on ways to prevent migrants from entering the country from Turkey.

In 2023, Greece plans to triple the length of a steel border wall. The five-meter (16-foot) high structure, made with sturdy steel columns, has foundation supports up to 10 meters deep and is topped with razor wire and an anti-grip metal scaling barrier.

In army-controlled areas on the Greek side of the border, the EU is funding and testing an advanced surveillance network that uses machine-learning software and an array of fixed and mobile cameras and sensors to detect migrants trying to cross the border.

Critics of the measures argue that Greece is toughening authoritarian policies against migrants and asylum-seekers, operating in the shadows in border areas that are under military control and where outside civilian monitors are denied access. A visit by Associated Press journalists to the Greek-Turkish border area took place under military and police supervision.



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Police and border residents say they are just happy that the wall is working.

"It's impossible to penetrate," says Tsolakidis, who supervises patrols along a southern section of the border. "It's been built in areas along the Evros where crossings were most frequent. And the deterrence capacity is 100%."

In a post-pandemic surge of activity, more than 250,000 migrant crossings have been prevented this year at the land border between Greece and Turkey through late November, according to Greek authorities. During the same period, more than 5,000 people were detained after making it across the river.

Border guards, who use sniffer dogs, loudspeakers and powerful spotlights on patrols, say multiple incidents involving up to 1,000 migrants aren't uncommon in a single day during the summer and early fall when water levels along the Evros hit an annual low.

Small islets, some straddling the midpoint of the river where the border technically lies, seasonally reappear, making crossings easier.

Completed in 2021, the wall currently spans 27 kilometers (17 miles) in three separate sections but is considered to be effective over an additional 10 kilometers (six miles) because of ground conditions. Authorities plan to add up to another 100 kilometers (60 miles) of the steel barrier to cover most of the 192-kilometer (120-mile) land border.

When wall building started at the border a decade ago, it was met with heated political debate and public demonstrations backed by left-wing parties and Greek human rights groups.

Reaction this time around has been muted.

With little discussion, parliament recently passed an emergency amendment sanctioning the extension, with rules for commercial tenders and cost control safeguards both waived through June 30, 2023.

A poll published by private Antenna television found that nearly two thirds of Greek voters support tougher measures to control migration, with just 8.1% arguing that policing needs to be relaxed. Backing for the tougher measures was reported across party lines, and includes more than 60% of voters from the left-wing main opposition party — which officially opposes the wall extension.

The October survey was conducted by the Marc polling company for the private Greek channel.

At one newly built section of the wall, buds of cotton from nearby farms are caught in the razor wire, while wild goats, cut off from their usual grazing grounds, scour the riverbank for something to eat.

A few hundred meters westward, 41-year-old farm worker Stavros Lazaridis tosses bales of hay onto a truck. He says the extension can't come fast enough.

"Before the wall went up, we had a lot of trouble. More than 200 or 300 (migrants) could cross through the village in a single day. It was out of control," he said.

The local police station has retrieved pickup trucks stolen by smugglers in border villages and abandoned near a bus station in the northern Greek port city of Thessaloniki. Piles of clothes, dumped by migrants traveling with just a small backpack, are often found near highways in the area.

Border village residents, Lazaridis says, used to be sympathetic to migrants, many of whom are fleeing wars in the Middle East to seek asylum in Europe, but they have grown tired of the nightly disruptions.

"There are old people who live in these villages, many living by themselves, and they are scared to leave their homes," he said. "It's quiet here now, but further north where there's no (wall). things are still crazy."

Polling data suggests residents of other EU frontier states, including Poland and the Baltic nations, have also become more security conscious as threats like Russia's war in Ukraine draw closer to the bloc's external borders.

And a flareup in a spat between Greece and Turkey over maritime boundaries and drilling rights has darkened disputes over migration.

Greece has made a series of international complaints after border police in October found 92 male migrants, stripped of their clothing, and accused Turkish authorities of deliberately pushing them over the border.

Turkey has repeatedly accused Greece of carrying out clandestine deportations, known as pushbacks, of potential asylum-seekers, and putting their lives at risk.

Athens is also under fire from major human rights groups, United Nations and EU refugee agencies,

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and even a government advisory panel that says hundreds of credible accounts have been gathered suggesting that often-violent pushbacks have been occurring at the Greek-Turkish border for up to 20 years.

The U.N. and EU agencies are demanding the creation of an independent border monitoring body, a request that Athens has so far failed to act upon.

Disputes with countries bordering the EU, and the often legitimate security concerns they generate, have reduced attention on migrants in need of international protection and are tempting European governments to adopt hard-line policies, argues Begum Basdas at the Center for Fundamental Rights at the Hertie School in Berlin.

"The militarization of migration is disabling us from seeing the issue as a human rights concern ... and what is really worrying me is the creeping in of authoritarianism through migration management in the European Union," Basdas said.

"People are not really critical of the securitization or wall building at the borders because they don't really see the connection between migration and the decay of democratic values in their own environment, in their own rights," she said.

"But, you know, those walls are literally being built around us."

## Today in History: December 24, astronauts read from Genesis

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Saturday, Dec. 24, the 358th day of 2022. There are seven days left in the year. This is Christmas Eve.

Today's Highlight in History:

On Dec. 24, 1968, the Apollo 8 astronauts, orbiting the moon, read passages from the Old Testament Book of Genesis during a Christmas Eve telecast.

On this date:

In 1814, the United States and Britain signed the Treaty of Ghent, which ended the War of 1812 following ratification by both the British Parliament and the U.S. Senate.

In 1851, fire devastated the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C., destroying about 35,000 volumes.

In 1865, several veterans of the Confederate Army formed a private social club in Pulaski, Tennessee, that was the original version of the Ku Klux Klan.

In 1906, Canadian physicist Reginald A. Fessenden became the first person to transmit the human voice (his own) as well as music over radio, from Brant Rock, Massachusetts.

In 1913, 73 people, most of them children, died in a crush of panic after a false cry of "Fire!" during a Christmas party for striking miners and their families at the Italian Hall in Calumet, Michigan.

In 1914, during World War I, impromptu Christmas truces began to take hold along parts of the Western Front between British and German soldiers.

In 1943, President Franklin D. Roosevelt appointed Gen. Dwight D. Eisenhower supreme commander of Allied forces in Europe as part of Operation Overlord.

In 1951, Gian Carlo Menotti's "Amahl and the Night Visitors," the first opera written specifically for television, was broadcast by NBC-TV.

In 1990, actor Tom Cruise married his "Days of Thunder" co-star, Nicole Kidman, during a private ceremony at a Colorado ski resort (the marriage ended in 2001).

In 1992, President Bush pardoned former Defense Secretary Caspar Weinberger and five others in the Iran-Contra scandal.

In 2013, Britain's Queen Elizabeth II granted a posthumous pardon to code-breaker Alan Turing, who was convicted of homosexual behavior in the 1950s.

In 2020, Bethlehem ushered in Christmas Eve with a stream of joyous marching bands and the triumphant arrival of the top Catholic clergyman in the Holy Land, but few people were there to greet them as the pandemic and a strict lockdown dampened celebrations. Just a week before the deadline, Britain and the European Union struck a free-trade deal that would avert economic chaos on New Year's and bring a

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measure of certainty for businesses after years of Brexit turmoil.

Ten years ago: An Afghan policewoman walked into a high-security compound in Kabul and killed an American contractor, the first such shooting by a woman in a spate of insider attacks by Afghans against their foreign allies. An ex-con gunned down two firefighters in Webster, New York, after luring them to his suburban Rochester neighborhood by setting a car and a house ablaze, then took shots at police and committed suicide as seven homes burned down. Death claimed actors Charles Durning, 89, and Jack Klugman, 90.

Five years ago: Peru's president announced that he had granted a medical pardon to jailed former strongman Alberto Fujimori, 79, who had been serving a 25-year sentence for human rights abuses, corruption and the sanctioning of death squads. In Christmas eve remarks, Pope Francis likened the journey to Bethlehem by Mary and Joseph to the migrations of millions of people today who are forced to leave homelands for a better life, or just to survive.

One year ago: Around the world, the surging coronavirus dampened Christmas Eve festivities for a second year, with travel plans disrupted and churches canceling or scaling back services. Airlines canceled hundreds of flights as the omicron variant jumbled schedules and drew down staffing levels at some carriers during the busy holiday travel season. Drummers and bagpipers marched through Bethlehem to smaller than usual crowds after new Israeli travel restrictions aimed at slowing the highly contagious omicron variant kept international tourists away. Pope Francis celebrated Christmas Eve Mass before an estimated 2,000 people in St. Peter's Basilica, going ahead with the service despite the resurgence in COVID-19 cases that had prompted a new vaccine mandate for Vatican employees.

Today's Birthdays: Dr. Anthony Fauci is 82. Recording company executive Mike Curb is 78. Actor Sharon Farrell is 76. Former U.S. Attorney General Jeff Sessions is 76. Actor Grand L. Bush is 67. Actor Stephanie Hodge is 66. The former president of Afghanistan, Hamid Karzai (HAH'-mihd KAHR'-zeye), is 65. Rock musician Ian Burden (The Human League) is 65. Actor Anil Kapoor (ah-NEEL' kuh-POOR') is 63. Actor Eva Tamargo is 62. Actor Wade Williams is 61. Rock singer Mary Ramsey (10,000 Maniacs) is 59. Actor Mark Valley is 58. Actor Diedrich Bader is 56. Actor Amaury Nolasco is 52. Singer Ricky Martin is 51. Author Stephenie Meyer is 49. TV personality Ryan Seacrest (TV: "Live With Kelly & Ryan") is 48. Actor Michael Raymond-James is 45. Actor Austin Stowell is 38. Actor Sofia Black-D'Elia is 31. Rock singer Louis Tomlinson (One Direction) is 31. NFL wide receiver Davante Adams is 30. Estonian tennis player Anett Kontaveit is 27.