

# Groton Daily Independent

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## Groton Community Calendar

### Sunday, Dec. 25 - CHRISTMAS DAY

Groton CM&A: Worship Service at 10:45 a.m.  
Zion worship, 9 a.m.  
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.

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

### 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.

### Thursday, Dec. 29

Senior Menu: New England ham dinner, fruit cocktail, ice cream, dinner roll.

### Friday, Dec. 30

Senior Menu: Goulash, green beans, baked apples, whole wheat bread.  
Girls Basketball hosts Waverley-South Shore (JV at 5 p.m. followed by varsity)

### Saturday, Dec. 31

Wrestling Invitational at Webster, 9:30 a.m.  
Common Cents Community Thrift Store, 10 a.m. to 1 p.m.  
Catholic: SEAS Confession, 3:45-4:15 p.m.; SEAS Mass, 4:30 p.m.

## **OPEN:** Recycling Trailer in Groton

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

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# Groton Daily Independent

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## Weekly Vikings Recap - Week 16

By Jack & Duane Kolsrud

In yet another stressful game, the Minnesota Vikings pulled out another exciting victory over the New York Giants thanks to a franchise-record 61-yard field goal by Greg Joseph. The Vikings move to 12-3 and continue to keep the 2nd seed in the NFC playoff race.

The Vikings jumped out to a 10-0 lead to start the game, leaving Vikings' fans to think that Santa was going to perhaps gift the Vikings an easy victory for once. However, the Vikings decided yet again to play a stressful game as the Vikings' offense stalled for half the game and allowed the Giants to claw back into the game.

As the Vikings headed into the 4th quarter, they found themselves down 13-0. For some reason, the Vikings have decided to play their best football in the 4th quarter this year as they hold the best point differential in the NFL in the 4th quarter. Today was no different as the Vikings came to life in the 4th quarter thanks to a TJ Hockenson touchdown and a blocked punt by Josh Metellus. And, even after the Giants tied the game with 2:01 in the game, the Vikings drove down the field to let Greg Joseph kick the longest field goal in Vikings' history for the win.

Today was a history-making day for the Vikings. First, Justin Jefferson broke the franchise record for receiving yards in a season, passing Randy Moss who held the record for two decades. Jefferson now sits at 1756 receiving yards on the season and needs only 122 yards in each of the next two games to eclipse 2000 receiving yards in a season, a feat that has never been accomplished in NFL history. It will be interesting to see if the Vikings decide to go for that record or decide to let Jefferson get some rest before heading into the playoffs.

The other history that was made today came from tight end TJ Hockenson, who broke the franchise record for receptions by a tight end in a game with his 13 receptions today. Hockenson was the star of the game as he came up with two clutch touchdowns in the game, one of which was an impressive catch over two Giants defenders on a clutch third down play. For a Vikings franchise that has had solid tight ends over the years, Hockenson provides an extra receiving wrinkle that this team has not had since the Steve Jordan days.

Even though the Vikings won today, I would not say it was a great game for Kirk Cousins. There were multiple third downs where he missed an open Jefferson, and also multiple sacks he took where the offensive line blocked fairly well. Cousins even got lucky late in the game as he threw an awful interception to a covered Adam Thielen that got overturned because Thielen made a great play dislodging the ball as the Giants' defender fell to the ground. However, for all of Cousins' moments of poor play this season, he has still managed to come up clutch when it matters. Today, he tied the NFL record for most 4th quarter comebacks in a season with his eighth comeback of the season.

Looking forward, the Vikings will head to Green Bay next week. Technically, the game only affects whether the Vikings will have the 2nd or the 3rd seed in the NFC playoffs. However, if the Vikings win, they will officially knock the Packers out of the playoffs. I think that alone is enough for Vikings fans to look forward to next week's New Year's Day game at Lambeau Field.

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## White Christmas History for Aberdeen, SD



  
No snow on ground and no new snow (26/70).

  
No snow on ground but new snowfall (4/70).

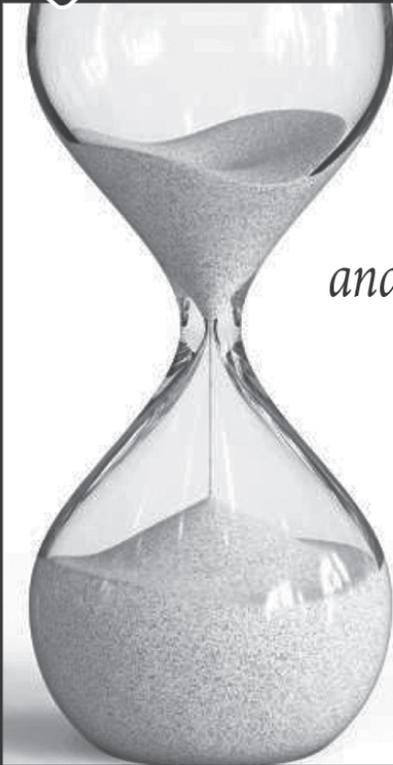
  
1 in to 3 in. snow depth (16/70).

  
Over 3 in. snow depth (24/70).





## THE ILLUSTRATED BIBLE

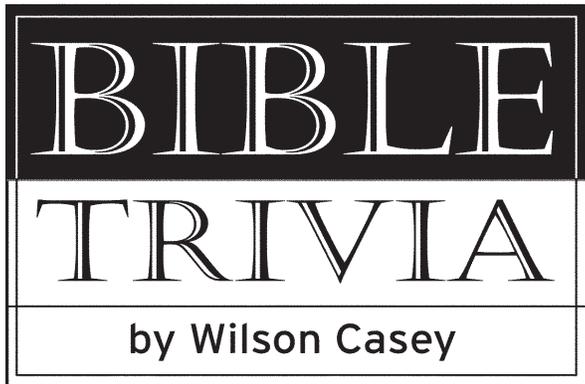


*✿* ECCLESIASTES 3:1-4 *✿*

*There is a time for everything,  
and a season for every activity under the heavens:  
a time to be born and a time to die,  
a time to plant and a time to uproot,  
a time to kill and a time to heal,  
a time to tear down and a time to build,  
a time to weep and a time to laugh...*

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1. Is the book of Yeshua in the Old or New Testament or neither?

2. What prophetess of about 84 years of age approached Mary and Joseph and thanked God for the infant Jesus?  
*Anna, Baara, Junia, Phoebe*

3. What phenomenon had led the wise men to the young Jesus and Savior?  
*Whirlwind, Star, Rainbow, Rain-fall of sparkling gold*

4. From Matthew 2, to what country did Mary, Joseph and the Baby Jesus flee?  
*Jordan, Syria, Oman, Egypt*

5. An angel appearing in a dream told whom about the death of Herod?  
*Mary, Joseph, Matthias, Rachel*

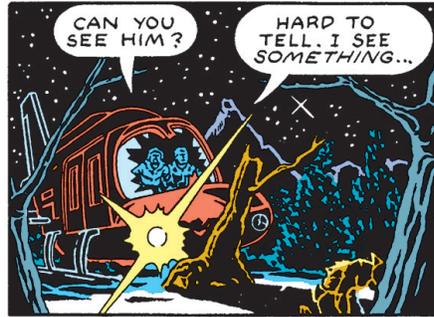
6. Where did Jesus live as a boy?  
*Jerusalem, Nazareth, Bethlehem, Bethany*

ANSWERS: 1) Neither, 2) Anna, 3) Star, 4) Egypt, 5) Joseph, 6) Nazareth

*Hardcore trivia fan? Visit Wilson Casey's subscriber site at [www.patreon.com/triviaguy](http://www.patreon.com/triviaguy).*

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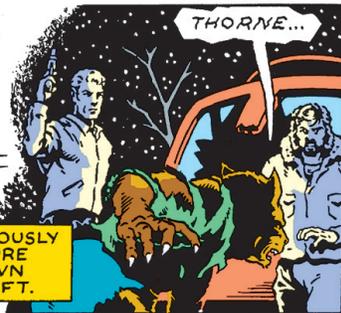
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## FLASH GORDON

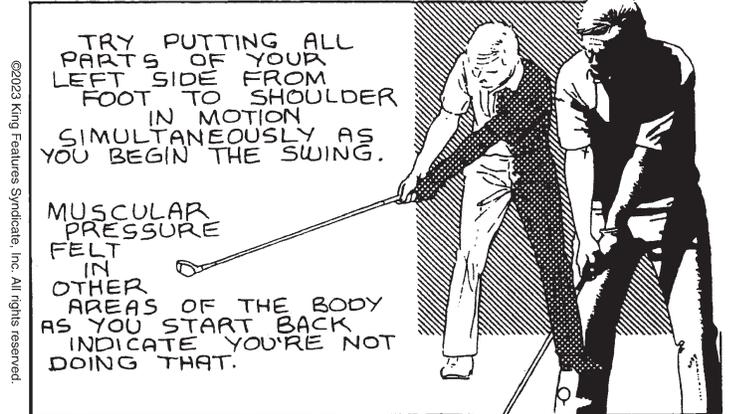
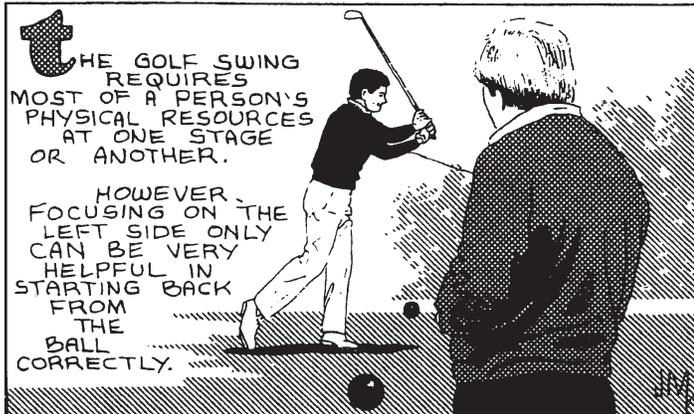
By JIM KEEFE 12-25

FLASH AND THORNE CAUTIOUSLY APPROACH THE CREATURE THAT HAS BEEN THROWN FROM THEIR DOWNED CRAFT.



NEXT: COUNTDOWN TO DISASTER!

## Play Better Golf with JACK NICKLAUS



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## Radiofrequency Ablation Considerably Lessens Back Pain

**DEAR DR. ROACH:** I suffered a lower back injury in 2001, with crushed and bulging discs in the L2, L3, L4 and L5 vertebrae. After over a year of physical therapy and drugs, my pain doctor tried an epidural injection, which did not work, and then suggested I try something new at that time called a radiofrequency ablation (also called a lumbar facet rhizotomy). It's done as an outpatient surgery and may have to be repeated.

I've done so many that I opt for no anesthesia. It works great; I even get up and drive myself home! I've learned to limit my activities, so as to not cause more damage due to my disabled pain receptors.

I have been pain- and drug-free for almost 20 years. The treatment usually lasts nine to 14 months, and when I feel the nerves starting to fire again and cause me pain, I just schedule the procedure and have them ablated again.

Whenever I see somebody walking funny due to back pain, I mention this procedure to them. Several of them have come back and thanked me for saying something.

Doctors don't seem to promote this procedure, and I don't understand why. It's clearly another option besides surgery and addictive medi-

opposed to surgery.

Please help promote this wonderful yet "unknown" procedure. I'm still living an active normal life at 64, 20 years after I was told I may end up in a wheelchair. — M.T.

**ANSWER:** Radiofrequency ablation of the nerves in the back has been used since the 1970s in people with intractable back pain. The procedure uses an electrode that heats the nerves in the facet joints of the back, stopping pain conduction. This is done when the treating physician is sure that the pain is coming from these particular nerves, called the lumbar medial branch nerves. This procedure is not appropriate for all types of back pain. Typically, the physician will perform a block using an injection, and if this is successful, but short-lived (as is often the case), a radiofrequency ablation is considered.

When it works, a year of relief is typical (sometimes shorter or, for a few, up to three years) before the nerve fibers regenerate, at which point the procedure can be repeated. Burning or numbness around the injection site is the most common adverse effect.

Effectiveness rates in the published literature range from 50% to nearly 100% in small trials of carefully chosen subjects. However, a large randomized trial of this procedure in subjects who were being treated with an exercise program and psychological support did not show a significant improvement in pain or function.

I agree with you that this procedure is safer than surgery, and while I'm glad it's worked for you, the evidence of benefit from the highest-quality trials is lacking.

*Dr. Roach regrets that he is unable to answer individual questions, but will incorporate them in the column whenever possible. Readers may email questions to [ToYourGoodHealth@med.cornell.edu](mailto:ToYourGoodHealth@med.cornell.edu).*

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**Emma Corrin and Jack O'Connell star in "Lady Chatterley's Lover."** Courtesy of Netflix

"Lady Chatterley's Lover" (R) -- Emma Corrin ("The Crown") and Jack O'Connell ("Skins") star in this steamy romantic drama, which recently premiered on Netflix. Based on the novel by D.H. Lawrence, Corrin plays Constance Reid, who marries Baronet Clifford Chatterley and becomes Lady Chatterley. Clifford gets injured fighting in World War I and returns paralyzed from the waist down, which causes a big rift in their marriage. Left feeling unwanted by her husband, Constance tries her best to hide her unhappiness, until she

meets gamekeeper Oliver Mellors. An attraction builds between Constance and Oliver and blossoms into a love affair that ultimately can't thrive in secrecy. (Netflix)

"Tom Clancy's Jack Ryan Season 3" (TV-MA) -- John Krasinski reprises the role of CIA agent Jack Ryan for the third season of this action series, out now! The first season followed Jack as he ventured out from his CIA analyst job to become a field agent. In the second season, he was stationed in Venezuela in the middle of intense political warfare. Now, Jack is called to Rome by a mysterious source, who gives him information about a secret Russian plot in Eastern Europe that could lead to a third World War. Facing his most challenging time ahead, Jack must go within and learn to become his own authority. Amazon confirmed that this would be the second-to-last season of the series, with talks of an eventual spin-off starring Michael Pena. (Prime Video)

"Bros" (R) -- Bobby Lieber (Billy Eichner) is a podcast host and museum curator who greatly enjoys the single life. But when he's out with a friend at a nightclub, Bobby meets Aaron Shepard (Luke Macfarlane), who Bobby's friend deems hot but boring. Amid their stark differences, the two begin to date and get to know each other. Their connection begins to get stronger, but Aaron still finds Bobby too intense, while Bobby doesn't appreciate having to minimize his behavior for others. The odd couple must learn to accept each other's differences in order to make their relationship prosper. Out now on streaming, "Bros" is one of the first gay rom-coms produced by a major studio. (Peacock)

"Into the Deep" (R) -- In this thriller, a young woman named Jess living on an island meets a young man named Ben and invites him to a party. The two hit it off and return to Ben's docked boat, but when Jess awakens, she realizes Ben set sail while she was asleep. And now, she is stuck on a boat with him in the middle of the ocean. Jess accepts it as yet another adventure, but things begin to escalate when Lexie, an unconscious woman on a jet ski, crashes into the boat. The two rescue Lexie, but Lexie begins to put doubts about Ben into Jess' head. Jess is at a loss of who to trust, as time ticks by for her to find a way off the boat. Premieres Dec. 30. (Hulu)

Write in to Couch Theater by emailing [TheCouchTheater@gmail.com](mailto:TheCouchTheater@gmail.com) or writing to KFWS, 628 Virginia Drive, Orlando, FL 32803.

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1. Which artist wrote and released "Abracadabra"?
2. What was Phil Vassar's "Just Another Day in Paradise" about?
3. Name the singer who wrote and released "All Around the World" on her debut album.
4. Which group released "Careless Whisper"?
5. Name the song that contains these lyrics: "In a cafe or sometimes on a crowded street, I've been near you, but you never noticed me."

### Answers

1. The Steve Miller Band, in 1982. The song was ignored by U.S. record companies ... until it became a chart topper in Europe. The song was then released in the U.S., and it shot to No. 1.
  2. The 2000 country/pop crossover single (from his debut album) was about homelessness.
  3. Lisa Stansfield, on her "Affection" album in 1989. The song received a nomination for a Grammy for Best Female Pop Vocal Performance. Stansfield had won the "Search for a Star" competition at the age of 14 in the U.K. in 1980.
  4. Wham!, in 1984.
  5. "My Cherie Amour," by Stevie Wonder, in 1969. The song was originally titled "Oh, My Marsha." Legend says that once record producers got involved, they wanted to add a French flavor to it similar to the Beatles' "Michelle" and changed the name.
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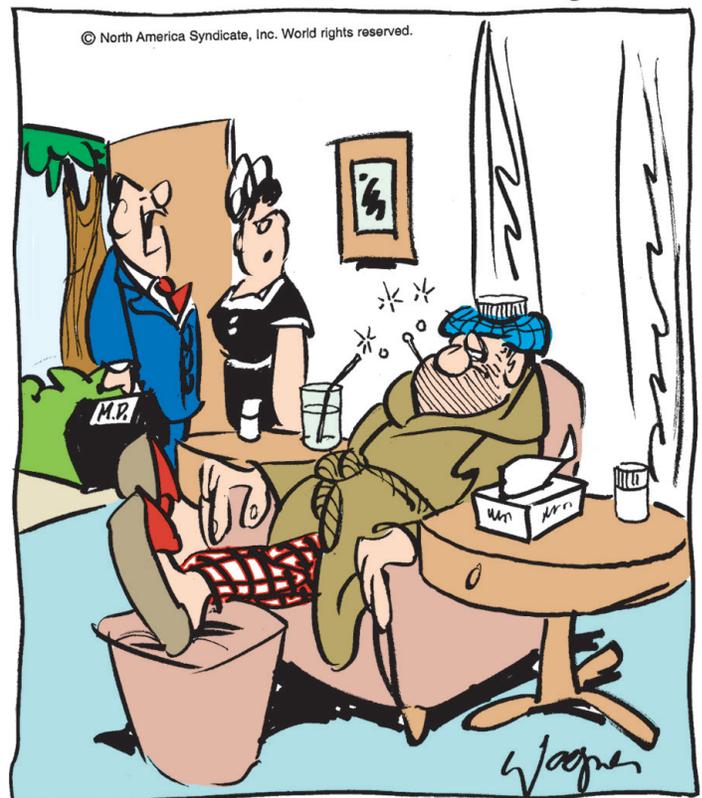
## Just Like Cats & Dogs

by Dave T. Phipps



## GRIN and BEAR IT

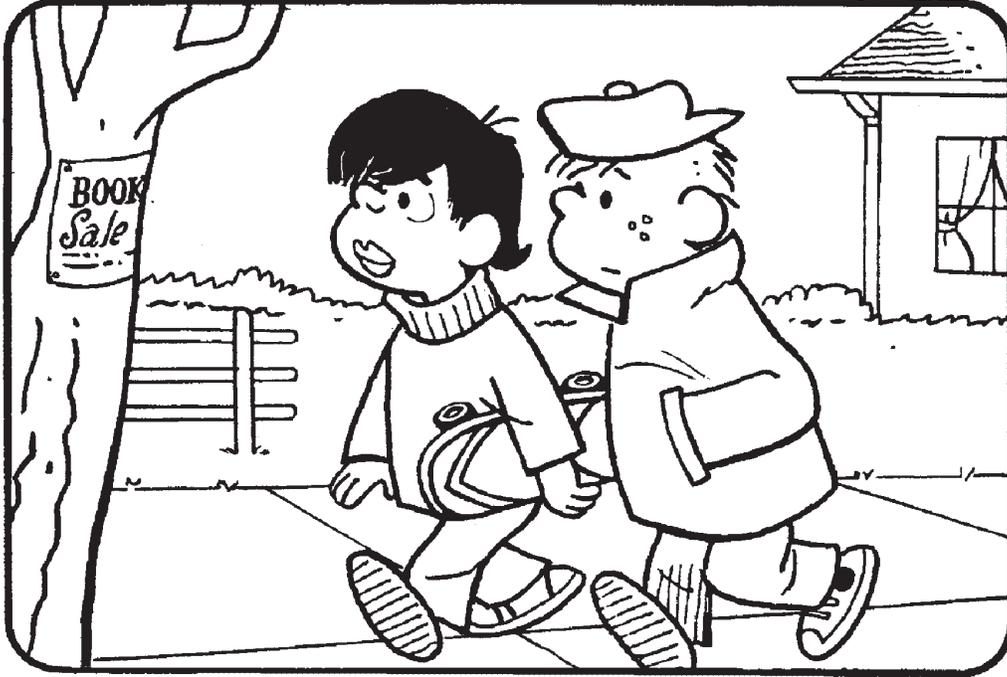
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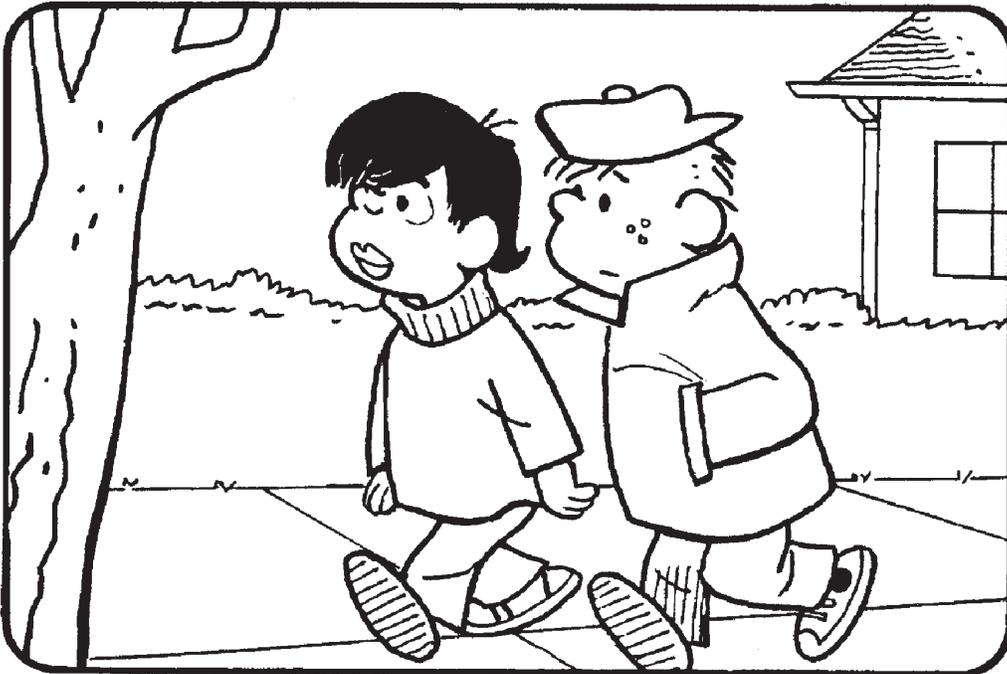
"It was touch and go there for a while, getting that lampshade off his head."

## HOCUS-FOCUS

BY  
HENRY BOLTINOFF



Find at least six differences in details between panels.



Differences: 1. Poster is missing. 2. Fence is missing. 3. Arm is missing. 4. Skateboard is missing. 5. Pocket is moved. 6. Curtains are missing.

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\* The end of the year is a great time to pick up next year's holiday decorations at a discount. Before you pack away your holiday lights, ornaments, cards, etc., do an inventory and see if you are able to find what you need to complete your look at a slashed price.

\* Computer grocery lists can make not only shopping easier, but organization as well. Keep a file listing all the items you usually purchase from week to week. You can even create sections based on where certain items are located throughout the store. This will ensure you don't miss something, necessitating a return trip to the store. Stay organized to save money.

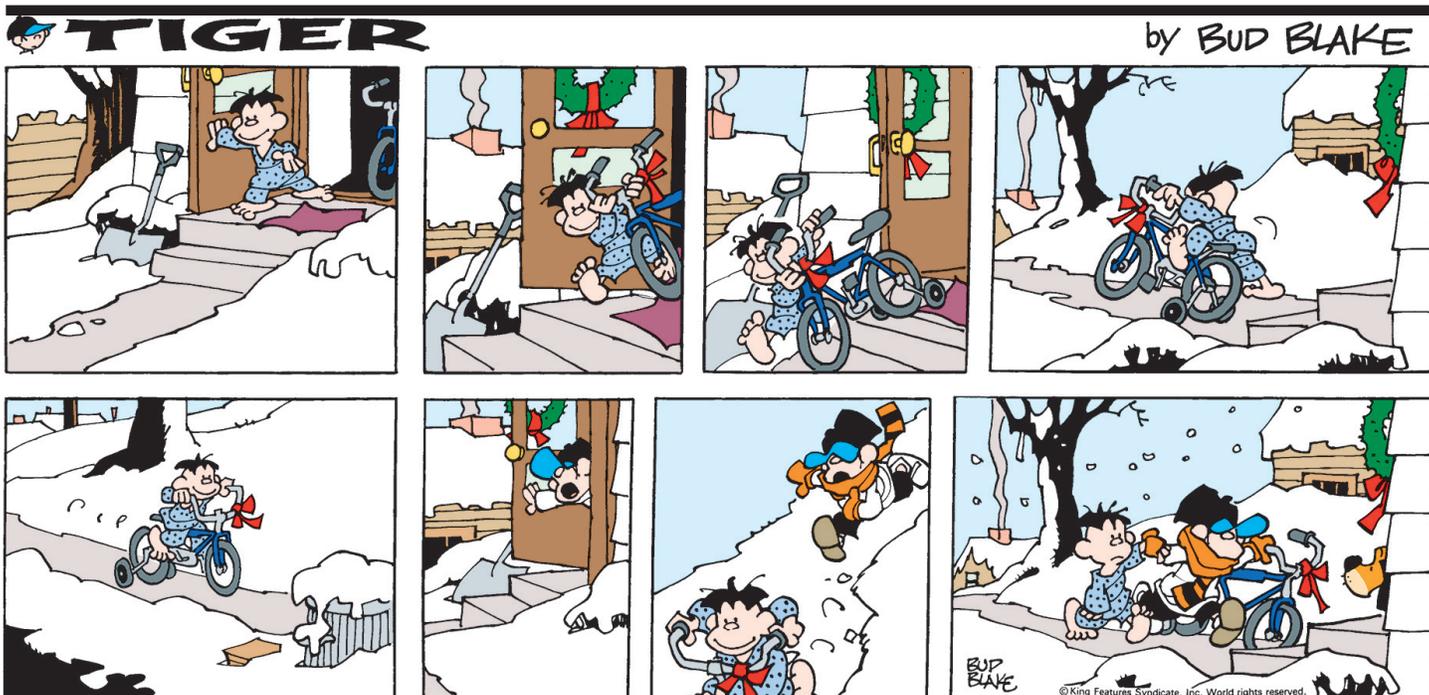
\* "Keep a small package of antibacterial wipes in your car to clean your hands after pumping gas. Not only is there any potential gas to get off your hands, but these handles don't get cleaned often, and are very dirty." -- R.D. in South Carolina

\* "If you have extra papers that are only printed on one side, save them. You can cut them in quarters and staple several sheets together to make scrap paper pads to keep near the telephone or on the fridge. They are handy, and you'll be reusing material, which is good for the environment." -- U.L. in Missouri

\* Putting up new calendars? Before you toss your old one, be sure to look through it for important anniversaries, and cut out and save any pictures or art that might be reusable for craft projects.

Send your tips to Now Here's a Tip, 628 Virginia Drive, Orlando, FL 32803.

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## King Crossword

### ACROSS

- 1 Dallas cager, for short
- 4 Reindeer herder
- 8 Persian leader
- 12 Hit CBS series
- 13 Vicinity
- 14 Roof overhang
- 15 Like some salad dressings
- 17 Frat letters
- 18 Duo
- 19 Sikhs' headwear
- 21 Enjoy, as fine food
- 24 Luau bowlful
- 25 Guitar's kin
- 26 Yule quaff
- 28 Desert flora
- 32 Simple
- 34 Drench
- 36 Lunch hour
- 37 Pesto herb
- 39 Super Bowl VIP
- 41 P followers
- 42 Joke
- 44 Learned one
- 46 Sans
- 50 Lucy of "Elementary"
- 51 Coup d' —
- 52 "Deathtrap" playwright
- 56 Impetuous
- 57 Toy block name

1	2	3		4	5	6	7		8	9	10	11
12				13					14			
15			16						17			
		18			19		20					
21	22				23		24					
25				26		27		28		29	30	31
32			33		34		35		36			
37				38		39		40		41		
			42		43		44		45			
46	47	48				49		50				
51					52		53				54	55
56					57					58		
59					60					61		

- 58 Here, to Henri
- 59 BPOE members
- 60 Beloved
- 61 Fanatic
- 9 "Funny!"
- 10 Bard's river
- 11 Big name in oil
- 16 Farm female
- 20 Sinbad's bird
- 21 — luck (accidental success)
- 22 Furniture brand
- 23 At once
- 27 Jewel
- 29 French chicken dish
- 30 Undecided
- 31 "Meet Me — Louis"
- 33 Pizza slices, often
- 35 Sports bar sets
- 38 Asian language
- 40 Wan quality
- 43 Screen Actors —
- 45 Compete
- 46 Existed
- 47 Slanted type (Abbr.)
- 48 Chore
- 49 Sloth's home
- 53 Khan title
- 54 Post-op area
- 55 Little louse

### DOWN

- 1 Roman 1105
- 2 " — was saying ..."
- 3 Wine producers
- 4 Snorkeling site
- 5 Altar constellation
- 6 Impudent
- 7 Settle a debt
- 8 Belgrade native

## — King Crossword —

Answers

Solution time: 25 mins.

M	A	V		L	A	P	P		S	H	A	H
C	S	I		A	R	E	A		E	A	V	E
V	I	N	E	G	A	R	Y		R	H	O	S
		T	W	O		T	U	R	B	A	N	S
D	I	N	E	O	N		P	O	I			
U	K	E		N	O	G		C	A	C	T	I
M	E	R	E		W	E	T		N	O	O	N
B	A	S	I	L		M	V	P		Q	R	S
			G	A	G		S	A	V	A	N	T
W	I	T	H	O	U	T		L	I	U		
E	T	A	T		I	R	A	L	E	V	I	N
R	A	S	H		L	E	G	O		I	C	I
E	L	K	S		D	E	A	R		N	U	T

### Out on a Limb

by Gary Kopervas



WITH PHONE BOOTHS NO LONGER AROUND, CLARK KENT NOW USES PHOTO BOOTHS TO CHANGE HIS IDENTITY

KOPERVAS

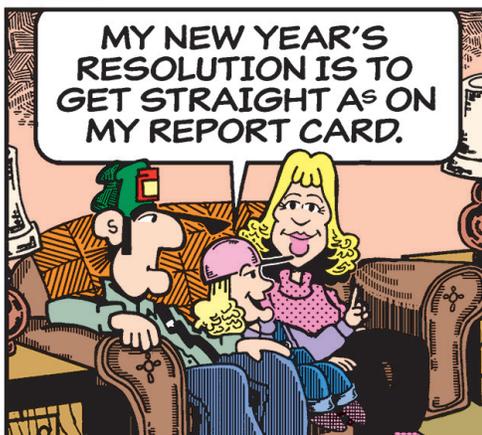
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## R.F.D.

by Mike Marland



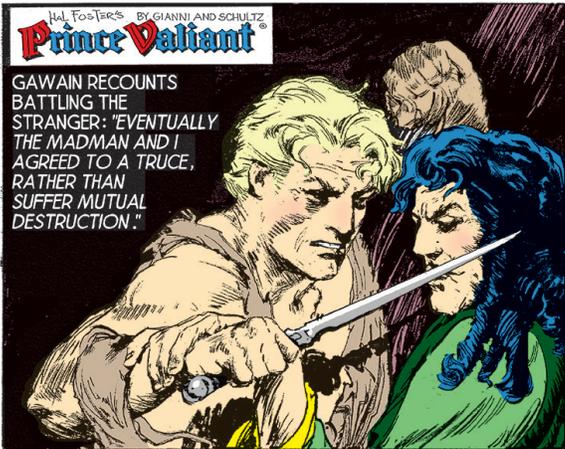
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MARLAND

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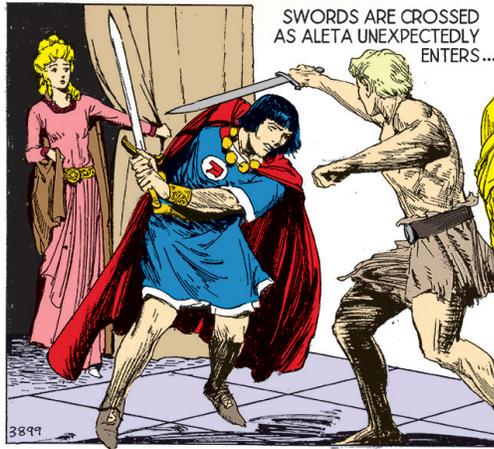
THE STRANGER SURPRISINGLY SPEAKS: "THE STORY IS ESSENTIALLY TRUE - BUT IF I WERE MAD, WHY WOULD I AGREE TO A TRUCE?"



VAL IS TAKEN ABACK - THE LANGUAGE IS FAMILIAR ENOUGH, ALTHOUGH SPOKEN WITH A BARBAROUS ACCENT, AND THE ARGUMENT IS REASONABLE. "ARN, I THINK THIS MAN SHOULD BE ALLOWED TO PROVE..."

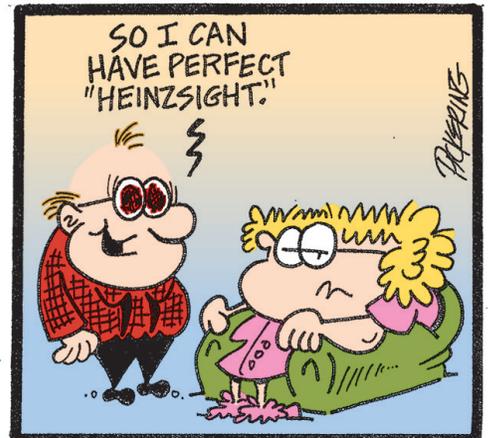
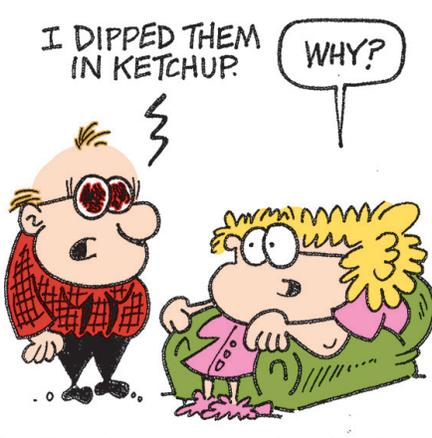
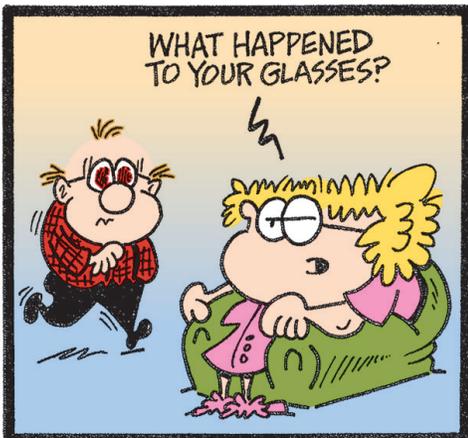


AT VAL'S WORDS, A GUARD RELAXES HIS GRIP ON THE STRANGER. INSTANTLY, A SWORD IS IN THE PRISONER'S HANDS!



## The Spats

by Jeff Pickering



## SENIOR NEWS LINE

by Matilda Charles

### One Billion Safety Recalls

It was recently disclosed that in the first half of 2022, there were over 1 billion recalls across the country of products that we buy.

That's billion, with a "b." Depending on the level of the recall, some of them can be extremely serious ... even deadly.

How do we know whether we missed an announcement about a product we own? We can go online to Recalls.gov and look. They cover everything from sports equipment to electronics, household items and more. You can search on that site by date, the type of hazard and the country where an item was manufactured. I searched for clothing. It was shocking to see a dozen children's items recalled for fire hazard. And the padded rolling desk chair with the legs that can break. And the smoke and carbon monoxide alarms that don't work. And laundry detergent with dangerous bacteria in it.

To be notified about recalls, go to [www.cpsc.gov/Newsroom/Subscribe](http://www.cpsc.gov/Newsroom/Subscribe) and sign up for the free email alerts.

If you need to keep up with recalls and alerts for a vehicle, go online to [www.nhtsa.gov/recalls](http://www.nhtsa.gov/recalls). You'll need the vehicle identification number (VIN), which can be found on the door jamb behind the driver door. Or you can search by year, make and model of your vehicle. For the very latest vehicle recalls, Kelley Blue Book also has them listed on the front page at [www.kbb.com/recall](http://www.kbb.com/recall).

Food is another area where we need to keep up with any recalls and warnings. Search for "FDA Recalls, Market Withdrawals, & Safety Alerts" for the latest information on cosmetics, veterinary items, medical devices and food. Right on the front page was a list of alerts for products with undeclared wheat, potential listeria, salmonella and more. In the medical devices it was disturbing to learn of rust on needles.

You'll see a link there to sign up for alert emails.

Let's make 2023 our year to be aware and safe.

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1. On Dec. 8, 1987, what member of the Philadelphia Flyers became the first goaltender in NHL history to score a goal by intentionally shooting the puck into the opponent's net?

2. What racehorse became the first (and only as of 2022) to win the prestigious Breeders' Cup Classic twice?

3. Soccer greats Clint Dempsey and Landon Donovan hold the U.S. men's career record for goals scored in international competition with how many?

4. Daniel Sunjata, John Turturro and Oliver Platt starred in what 2007 ESPN drama series about the New York Yankees set against the backdrop of New York City's turbulent summer of 1977?

5. Name the French racecar driver who won Formula One World Drivers' Championships in 1985-86, '89 and '93.

6. What soiled article of clothing from Game 2 of the 2004 World Series was sold at auction for \$75,330 in 2021?

7. How many overtimes did it take for the Illinois Fighting Illini to defeat the Penn State Nittany Lions 20-18 in their October 2021 college football game?



by Ryan A. Berenz

## Answers

1. Ron Hextall.
2. Tiznow.
3. 57.
4. "The Bronx Is Burning."
5. Alain Prost.
6. Curt Schilling's blood-stained sock.
7. Nine.

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## Amber Waves

by Dave T. Phipps



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## How to Give Your Pet a Healthy, Happy New Year

**DEAR PAW'S CORNER:** This week, many Americans are celebrating their newest gift to the family: a cute puppy or kitten, duck or chicken, or pocket pets like hamsters and Guinea pigs. It's also a time to form new resolutions in anticipation of the New Year.

I hope that new pet owners' first resolution will be to establish a relationship with a veterinarian with expertise in their specific pet. Some pets need to start or continue a vaccination schedule so that they grow up healthy. Puppies are at risk of contracting parvo virus, for example, so bolstering their immune

system is very important.

Your vet also can provide advice and tips for caring for pets. Guinea pigs, hamsters and rabbits communicate happiness or distress in unique ways that a new owner may not be familiar with. Puppies are wiggly and energetic. Kittens are curious and fearless. Vets can help new owners navigate these waters and provide regular checkups to help keep pets healthy. -- Dedicated Vet in Boston

**DEAR DEDICATED:** Thank you for sending this! Establishing a care routine with a veterinarian is so important. It should sit at the top of owners' to-do lists, along with providing comfortable, warm bedding, a clean and safe environment and, especially for puppies, a daily training routine. Mark your calendar with key dates, including checkups with the vet, appointments with a trainer and regular resupplies of food, litter, bedding, and everything else your new pet needs.

Here's to a happy, healthy and fun New Year with your pet!

Send your New Year pet pics to [ask@pawscorner.com](mailto:ask@pawscorner.com), and we may share them in a future column!

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## Strange BUT TRUE

By Lucie Winborne

\* Martial arts icon Bruce Lee could throw a single grain of rice into the air and catch it with chopsticks.

\* A 2009 study found that lost wallets were 88% more likely to be returned to their owners if they contained a photo of a baby. Barring that, you're also more likely to recover one if you typically carry pictures of a puppy, family members or an elderly couple.

\* The word "checkmate" comes from the Arabic "shat mat," or "The king is dead."

\* Want your candles to burn longer and drip less? Put them in the freezer for a few hours before light-

ing them.

\* In what must qualify as one of the oddest marketing campaigns ever created, Burger King launched one that entitled customers to a free Whopper if they unfriended 10 Facebook friends. Those folks would receive a message explaining that their digital relationship was less valuable than the sandwich. Hey, we like Whoppers too, but really!

\* Dolphins have been witnessed amusing themselves by creating underwater bubble rings.

\* There's a Google Map for Mercury, Venus, Earth's moon, Mars, Pluto, three out of four of Jupiter's moons, and all but one of the round Saturnian moons.

\* Leonardo da Vinci often bought caged animals just to set them free.

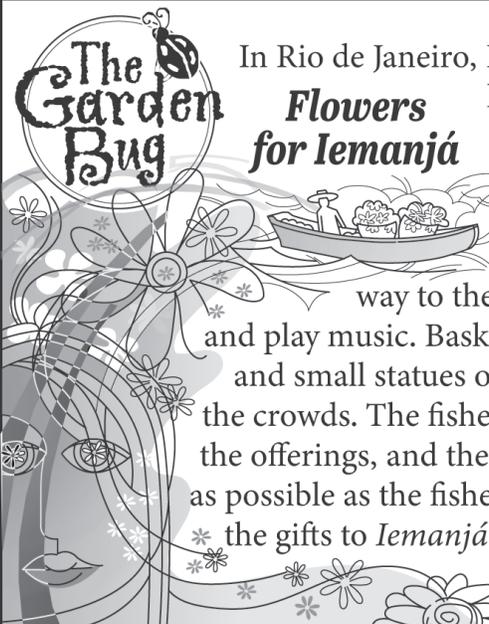
\* Early 19th-century composer Robert Schumann had an interesting, if grisly and ineffective, method of attempting to cure any disease he had or might have: plunging his hands into the guts of recently slaughtered animals.

\* Sid Nouar, owner of the 1000&1 Signes restaurant in Paris, was the first deaf person to open a restaurant in France. It is also staffed entirely by deaf employees.

\*\*\*

Thought for the Day: "Take action. An inch of movement will bring you closer to your goals than a mile of intention." -- Steve Maraboli

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**The Garden Bug**

**Flowers for Iemanjá**

In Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, the *Festa de Iemanjá* is held every January 1 to honor the sea goddess who protects sailors and provides fish for all fishermen. Dressed in white, the people make their way to the sea's edge as they dance, sing and play music. Baskets filled with colorful flowers and small statues of *Iemanjá* are carried through the crowds. The fishermen load their boats with all the offerings, and the people follow them out as far as possible as the fishermen set out to sea to present the gifts to *Iemanjá* to seek her favor. - Brenda Weaver

Source: [theculturetrip.com](http://theculturetrip.com)



by Freddy Groves

## Life Insurance From the VA

As of now, for the first time in 50 years, the Department of Veterans Affairs is opening up enrollment in Veterans Affairs Life Insurance, aka VALife. Veterans who are age 80 or under, with any level of service-connected disabilities, are guaranteed to be accepted to receive up to \$40,000 in whole life insurance.

A bonus is that there is no requirement for medical underwriting, meaning that no one is going to squint at the health details of your application and try to decide whether or not to offer you insurance.

The VALife changes are to the existing Service-Disabled Veterans Insurance (S-DVI):

- You'll be able to apply online and get a fast decision.
- There is no time limit to apply (the existing insurance requires you to sign up for life insurance within two years).
- There is no good-health requirement (the existing insurance requires you to be healthy, except for conditions that are service connected).
- You can now apply for \$40,000 in insurance (the existing insurance limits you to \$10,000).

Before you sign up, read about whole life insurance versus term insurance. Whole life can stay with you for your lifetime as long as you keep paying the premiums, and it accumulates a cash value that you can withdraw or borrow from. Term insurance is for a specific period of time and doesn't accrue cash value. BUT whole life costs more, sometimes a lot more. Do your homework and know what you're getting if you sign up for the VA's whole life.

A fact to notice: With the VALife policy, it will build cash value for two years and then convert to face value. If the veteran dies during the two years, beneficiaries will get back the premiums paid, plus interest.

If you currently have the old S-DVI, you'll be able to switch over to the VALife, should you choose to do so.

To see the fine print, go to [www.benefits.va.gov/insurance/valife.asp](http://www.benefits.va.gov/insurance/valife.asp). Click on the Cost link to see a chart showing the premiums.

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## Wishing Well®

3	8	3	6	5	8	6	3	4	7	2	5	7
L	B	O	L	Y	L	A	V	A	L	C	O	A
2	6	8	6	3	2	6	2	3	4	2	3	2
A	S	I	T	I	U	I	T	N	T	I	G	O
5	6	2	6	4	7	2	6	5	2	5	3	5
U	N	N	G	T	D	A	L	G	D	A	F	I
8	4	6	5	2	7	5	4	7	5	6	2	7
S	A	O	N	V	Y	R	I	L	E	V	I	U
2	7	2	7	6	7	5	3	2	3	7	3	8
S	C	E	K	E	S	S	R	D	I	M	E	S
3	7	4	7	5	4	3	4	8	7	4	5	8
N	I	N	L	P	H	D	U	F	E	M	E	U
5	7	5	3	4	8	4	8	4	8	4	8	4
C	S	T	S	I	L	L	D	I	A	T	Y	Y

HERE IS A PLEASANT LITTLE GAME that will give you a message every day. It's a numerical puzzle designed to spell out your fortune. Count the letters in your first name. If the number of letters is 6 or more, subtract 4. If the number is less than 6, add 3. The result is your key number. Start at the upper left-hand corner and check one of your key numbers, left to right. Then read the message the letters under the checked figures give you.

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1. TELEVISION: What is the name of the next-door neighbor on TV's sitcom "Home Improvement"?
2. LITERATURE: Which war was the setting for Anthony Doerr's novel "All the Light We Cannot See"?
3. MUSIC: Who wrote the song "All Along the Watchtower," performed by Jimi Hendrix?
4. GEOGRAPHY: When is Earth Day celebrated each year?
5. HISTORY: Which two city-states fought the Peloponnesian War?
6. MEDICAL TERMS: What is a common name for the disorder called sphenopalatine ganglioneuralgia?
7. ASTRONOMY: Where is the Oort Cloud in space?
8. GEOMETRY: How many sides does a nonagon have?
9. FOOD & DRINK: What's another name for egg white?
10. GENERAL KNOWLEDGE: How large is the Times Square ball that drops at midnight on New Year's Eve?

### Answers

1. Wilson.
2. WWII.
3. Bob Dylan.
4. April 22.
5. Athens and Sparta.
6. Brain freeze.
7. The most distant region in our solar system, beyond the Kuiper Belt.
8. Nine.
9. Albumen.
10. 12 feet in diameter.

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South Dakota Governor

**Kristi Noem**



**South Dakota:** *Under God, the People Rule*

## I Heard the Bells

One of my favorite parts of the holiday season are all the Christmas songs that we pass down from generation to generation. Some are silly and fun. Others reflect the more serious reason for the season.

This season is a time of celebration and reflection of many different faiths, with holidays like Hannukah and Kwanzaa. As a Christian, Christmas is a time for me and my family to reflect on our faith and the good news of Jesus' birth.

My favorite Christmas song is "I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day." The song itself might remind us of the Christmas season. "Their old familiar carols play," sounds an awful lot like those familiar Christmas songs playing on repeat (maybe even too many times).

But it's a later verse that might most reflect the way that we all too often perceive the world:

And in despair I bowed my head:  
"There is no peace on Earth," I said,  
"For hate is strong and mocks the song  
Of peace on Earth, good will to men."

When we look at the world around us, we may see a world full of anger and division. We may think that "hate is strong." We may despair and say, "there is no peace on Earth." But if we say that, then we are forgetting the miraculous reason for the season. We are forgetting that God came down to Earth to make peace with mankind – and to promise us eternal peace with him.

As the song says, "God is not dead, nor doth he sleep." He is here to bring us peace. And we can all emulate that by showing love and respect for our neighbors every single day.

Sometimes on Christmas, we get a brief glimpse of that heavenly peace. Remember the World War I soldiers who laid down their weapons and celebrated Christmas together in no man's land. That day, "peace on Earth" was real. I hope we all can remember that spirit on more days than just Christmas – that we can bring a desire for peace to our daily lives.

This Christmas, let's all remember to hear the bells. Peace on Earth – good will to men. Merry Christmas!

**John Thune**  
U.S. SENATOR - SOUTH DAKOTA



## A Joyful Season

Trimming the tree. Wrapping the gifts. Making Christmas cookies. We cherish these traditions with our loved ones. And then on Christmas Day, the flurry of preparation gives way to the warmth of the fire, the aroma of a delicious dinner, and the sounds of family and friends gathered together. All this and more make Christmas a special time to be thankful for the blessings of family and for God's love revealed through His son, Jesus.

Like many South Dakotans, my most treasured Christmas memories are tied to family traditions. I remember piling in the car for Christmas Eve at my grandmother's house for her Norwegian specialties, lutefisk and lefse. We would then continue on to Okaton for the annual Christmas Eve service. During Christmas, my siblings and I always looked forward to a break from school, ice skating with friends, and sledding down Jackson Avenue in Murdo, hopefully on a new, faster sled that had arrived under the tree.

As Kimberley and I raised our daughters, we kept many of our families' traditions alive – although we replaced lutefisk with clam chowder, a family favorite. I'll always cherish the memory of watching my daughters in their church and school Christmas programs and joining in their excitement on Christmas morning. Now that our daughters have grown up, our family has grown to include our two sons-in-law and five grandchildren. We've started new traditions, but we still share Christmas Eve together like we did with my grandmother all those years ago.

As I spend time with my family during the holidays, I'm also mindful that many of our servicemen and women stationed around the globe don't get to spend Christmas with their families. I'm grateful for the freedoms we enjoy as Americans, our South Dakota way of life, and that we are able to celebrate Christmas in peace and security. These things aren't free, and at Christmastime I'm especially thankful for our men and women in uniform and their families, whose sacrifices and bravery help secure these blessings.

The Christmas season also brings out some of the best in our communities. I am always impressed with the generosity of the many South Dakotans who give their time and resources to help the less fortunate during the Christmas season. Their giving spirit represents the best of South Dakota and the best of the holiday season.

Whether it's the bright decorations, the aroma of a tree and a delicious meal in your home, seasonal songs on the radio, or the good cheer emanating from family and friends, it's easy to get into the Christmas spirit in South Dakota. As you celebrate your families' traditions and make new memories this holiday season, Kimberley and I want to wish you a blessed Christmas and much happiness in the New Year. May the season be filled with joy for you and your family.

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CONGRESSMAN  
**DUSTY JOHNSON**  
Representing **SOUTH DAKOTA** at large



## Deadlines

From end-of-year deadlines, performance reviews, next-year planning, data analysis, end-of-year budgets, businesses do a lot to close out the calendar year. This year, it seems Congress has one thing in common—the budget.

Although the fiscal year ended on September 30, Congress didn't complete negotiations to pass a full spending package. Instead, Congress passed a continuing resolution to keep last year's funding levels until December 15. It didn't surprise many people when yet again, Congress couldn't negotiate by the deadline and extended it another week.

By now, most people have finalized their important end-of-year projects and are spending time with family, prepping for Christmas parties, baking cookies, and drinking hot chocolate. However, Congress is back in Washington, D.C. to vote on an omnibus spending package to keep the federal government open and funded through the rest of the fiscal year.

Don't get me wrong, I know passing a budget is necessary, which is why I introduced the GET IT DONE Act. This bill would motivate Members of Congress to work to pass a budget on time, and without repeated extensions, like how it has been done for years.

If a small business can pass a budget on time and before its deadline, Congress should too. Year after year, we watch the can get kicked down the road. And it's usually a pretty expensive can.

In the end, I'm confident Congress will keep the lights on, but it shouldn't have to be this way. I'm hopeful that in the new Congress, a Republican House Majority will pass a budget on time, just like South Dakota businesses do.

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As we celebrate the holidays with our loved ones, we remember the true reason for the season: the birth of our Lord, Jesus Christ. His teachings remind us to love one another, share our gratitude for all the good things in our lives and give back to those less fortunate. Through these acts, we can experience the real magic of Christmas.

My family has a tradition of attending the 4 PM Christmas Eve mass in Pierre. After the service, we gather together at my house and enjoy a homecooked meal of chicken noodle soup. In total, we will host about 100 people, including my four kids and ten grandkids that you see pictured above, as well as some of my siblings and their kids and grandkids. I'm looking forward to celebrating the holiday at my home again this year, and continuing to tell the story of Christmas. It is a chance for all of us to reflect upon what is truly important this holiday season: family, friends, and the birth of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

For some, the holidays can be a challenging time of year. You never know what someone is going through. Showing kindness costs nothing and can make a difference in someone's day, week or even year. During the Christmas season, we are reminded to spread the message of peace on earth and goodwill to all. This is a message that we should remember throughout the rest of the year as well.

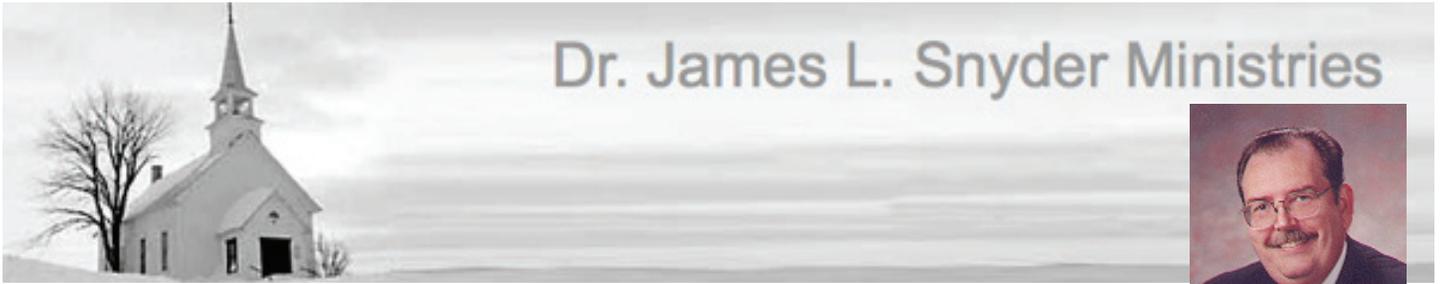
Of course, none of us would be able to celebrate the holidays freely if not for our men and women in uniform and their families. This time of year, we remember those who are spending the holidays away from home as they fight to protect our freedom. Our service members and their families deserve our eternal gratitude for the sacrifices they make on behalf of our country.

From my family to yours, I would like to wish you all a very blessed Christmas and peace in the new year. It is an honor to work for you in the United States Senate. Thank you for all you do to make South Dakota the best place in the world to call home.

Mike Rounds

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Dr. James L. Snyder Ministries



## The Liar in the Red Suit

Around this time of the year, The Gracious Mistress of the Parsonage and I revel in our family memories.

Unlike me, she has some wonderful memories because of her large family. I came from a very small family and therefore don't have that many memories let alone wonderful memories.

This reminded me of my first encounter with what my parents called Santa Claus.

Growing up, we didn't have television, and the teachers at the school I attended were mostly Mennonites. They didn't celebrate Santa Claus, and there was no mention of him in our classes. Christmas was focused on the birth of Christ.

In a small town like ours, there weren't any shopping malls, so there was no place for Santa Claus to set up his little booth and greet all the little children during the Christmas season.

Then one Christmas, Santa Claus and his entourage set up in our downtown square. Everybody was invited to come and see Santa Claus.

I mentioned this to my father and asked him about Santa Claus.

"Well," my father said, "you go see Santa Claus, sit on his lap and tell him what you want for Christmas."

When I heard that my eyes just lit up in great delight. "You mean I can tell Santa Claus what I want for Christmas?"

With a smile on his face, my father shook his head most energetically. I believed him; after all, fathers don't lie.

All I ever wanted for Christmas when I was young was a pony. Now, with Santa Claus in town, I had the opportunity to request a pony for this Christmas. I can't tell you how excited I was.

My parents took me and my siblings downtown at the square to meet Santa Claus. I was excited, and so were my siblings. We chattered and chattered all the way the Santa's place. We told each other what we wanted Santa to bring us for Christmas..

I remember that first experience with Santa Claus. As I walked up and sat in his lap, I was a wee bit nervous. Then the thoughts dancing in my head was that this was my opportunity to get my long-awaited pony for Christmas

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"Ho, ho, ho, and what would you like for Christmas this year, little fella?"

I wanted to hear that all my life. I then explained to him that all I wanted for Christmas was a pony. Any color pony would do as long as it was a pony. So I explained to him what I would do with a pony and how it would change my life and everything.

As he listened to me, he was chuckling, "Ho, ho, ho."

When I finished my request, he said, "Young man is that really what you want for Christmas? If so, you'll have to be nice and not naughty because if you're naughty, I can't do it."

With a hearty nod and a smile on my face, I promised I would never be naughty.

As I left dear old Santa's lap, all I could think of was how this little pony he would bring me on Christmas day would change my life. That's all I could talk about on the way home that day..

I did notice that my father and mother were looking at each other but not smiling and I did not catch what was happening.

On Christmas Eve, as we got the Christmas tree all ready, I was excited, and I made a little space under the tree for the pony Santa would bring me that night.

It was hard to sleep because I was listening for the reindeer to land on the roof with my pony for Christmas. Eventually, I fell asleep and dreamed of that wonderful little pony all night.

I couldn't wait to get up that morning, and I ran into the living room where the Christmas tree was. I shouted excitedly, "Where's my pony?"

My father tried to explain that perhaps I had been on Santa's "naughty list," and he couldn't bring me that pony for Christmas this year.

I shed tears all day, and the following days were terrible.

For the next three Christmases, I did the same thing. Every Christmas, Santa promised to bring me a pony for Christmas as long as I was not naughty.

Christmas after Christmas and no pony. I tried to have my father explain to me what Santa's definition of naughty was. He tried to explain, but I couldn't understand what he was talking about at the time.

I could not believe that that wonderful person called Santa Claus could ever lie to someone like me. So what did I ever do to get on his naughty list?

I never went back to sit on Santa's lap ever again. But, later in life, I realized that the guy in the red suit was lying to me, and he wasn't really Santa Claus.

Thinking about this I remembered what the Angels told the shepherds on that glorious day. "For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger." (Luke 2:11-12).

The real purpose of Christmas is celebrating the birth of the Lord Jesus Christ. My life changed when I received him as my Lord and Savior. Yours can too.

## EARTHTALK ™

Dear EarthTalk: I hear that world population just topped eight billion. Is this growth wreaking havoc on the environment/climate and what is the prognosis for population growth globally over next few decades?

-- Peter. W., Albuquerque, NM

Global population has indeed reached eight billion, but it won't remain there for long. Lower mortality rates and longer life expectancies have contributed to elevated population numbers. Although richer countries have lowered their birth rates in recent decades, poorer countries—specifically those in sub-Saharan Africa—continue to have high birth rates. Whether or not we will be able to support a continually growing population is still a hotly debated topic.

Many analysts still subscribe to philosopher Thomas Malthus' hypothesis, first postulated in a 1798 essay, that humans' ability to provide more and more resources will always be overwhelmed by ever-increasing population growth numbers. But others believe that growing population numbers can be supported with proper and effective resource allocation. Regardless, a growing population coupled with climate change will have an impact on resource availability and distribution.

Population projections are inherently tricky. It's impossible to account for every scenario that could be a determinant over the course of a century. The Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat (UNPD) projects that human population will pass 10 billion by 2100. However, a convergence of population forecasts created by the Wittgenstein Centre projected a global population of 8.79 billion by 2100 after an initial peak of 9.73 billion in 2064. This projection is vastly lower than UNPD's projections due to their different modeling approaches.

The Wittgenstein Centre's models arrived at different population totals based on variables such as fertility, mortality and migration pattern changes. The models predicted a lower total fertility rate (TFR) as access to education and contraception for childbearing people increased. A low TFR will have long term impacts on the overall global population. A reduced global population would reduce carbon dioxide output and lower resource needs and stresses, but climate change will continue to have consequences that will affect resource availability for decades to come even if we are successful at reining in emissions.

Social programs and systems will need to adapt as populations age and access to contraception and education increases. Age gaps will expand in countries with low TFRs. Labor forces will decrease, social security and universal healthcare systems will become strained and economic growth will be lowered as a result. These factors create a daunting task to support a growing global population, but it is possible.

Global population numbers do put a large strain on the environment, so it is important to elect policymakers who support a sustainable future with commitments to reduce fossil fuel emissions and who uphold and encourage reproductive education and healthcare for everyone, especially childbearing people. Whether our future will be some sort of Malthusian hell or a global garden where most of us receive the nourishment and resources needed to survive is still anybody's guess.



**The environmental consequences of global human population numbers cresting four decades from now are anybody's guess.** Credit: James Cridland, FlickrCC.

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## South Dakota COVID-19 Report

<b>New Cases*</b> 624 <b>-299</b>	<b>Total Cases*</b> 271,433	<b>Currently Hospitalized</b> 83 <b>+19</b>
<b>New Hospitalizations</b> 28	<b>Total Hospitalized</b> 12,189	<a href="#">Click to Visit</a> SD COVID-19 Vaccination Coverage
<b>New Deaths</b> 1	<b>Total Deaths</b> 3,116	<a href="#">Click to Visit</a> COVID-19 Community Levels

## SD 2022/2023 Influenza Weekly Summary Week Ending December 17, 2022 (Week 50)

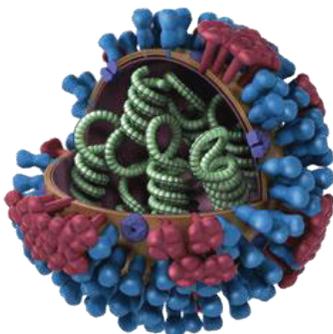
Provisional numbers, \* Lab confirmed: PCR, Culture or DFA. The number of laboratories using rapid confirmatory tests has increased, which may account for some of the increase in confirmed cases observed this influenza season



Lab Confirmed Cases	Dec 11-17	Season to Date
Type A, H1	1,052	2,309
Type A, H3	22	165
Type A, Unspecified	1,735	7,059
Type B Unspecified	8	38
B Yamagata	0	0
B Victoria	0	0
Total*	2,817	9,571

Rapid Antigen Tests (41) sites reporting	Dec 11-17	Season to Date
Total Tested	902	11,505
Total Positive	325 (307A/18B)	2,267 (1,915A/352B)
% Rapid Antigen Tests Positive	36.03%	19.70%

	Dec 11-17	Season to Date
Hospitalizations	74	350
Deaths	0	8



3D Influenza Virus

SD Influenza Geographic: **WIDESPREAD**  
 SD Influenza Activity: **HIGH**  
 US Influenza Activity: <http://www.cdc.gov/flu/weekly/fluactivitysurv.htm>

International Flu Activity: <http://www.cdc.gov/flu/international/index.htm>

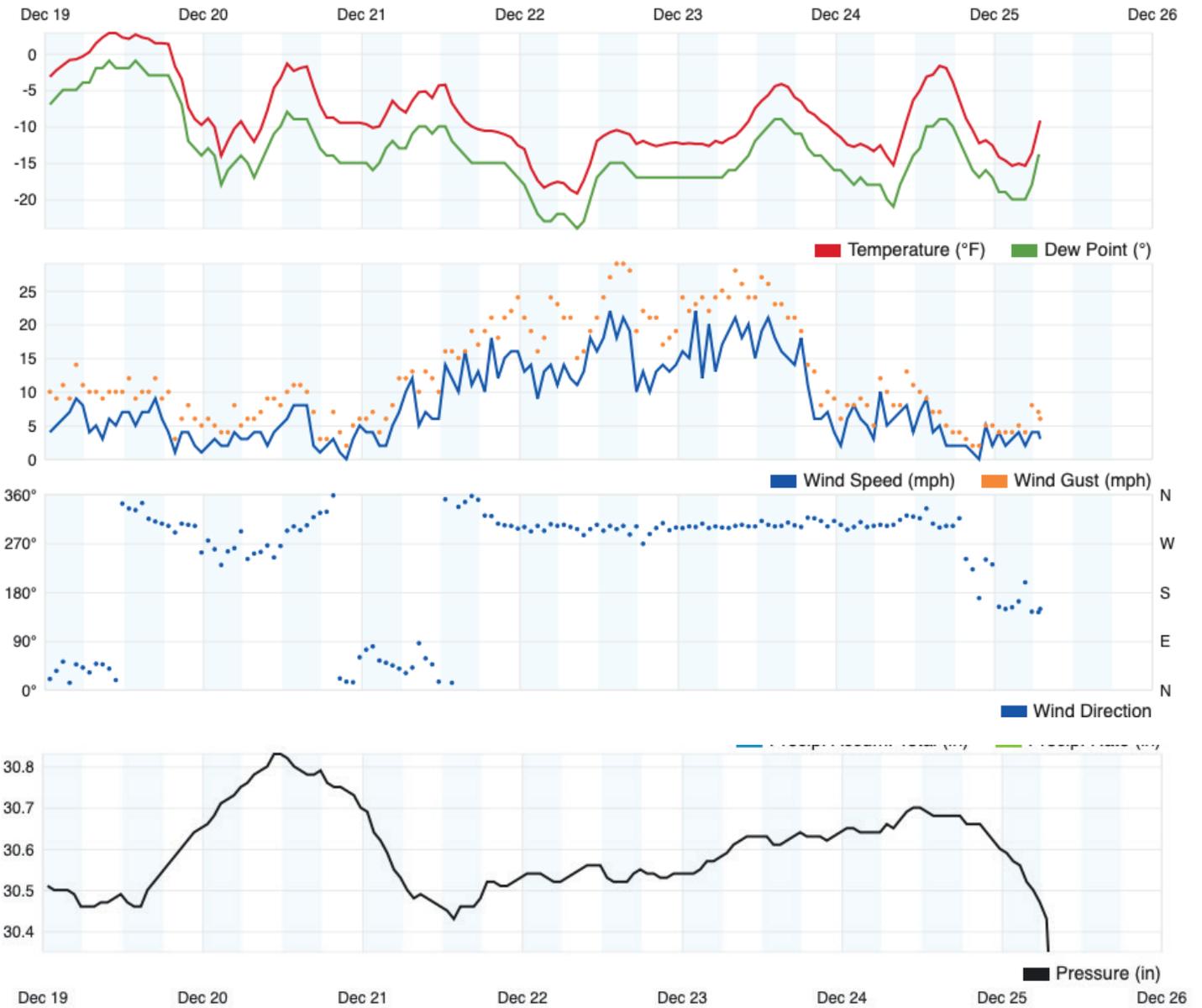
South Dakota Influenza information:  
<http://doh.sd.gov/diseases/infectious/flu/>

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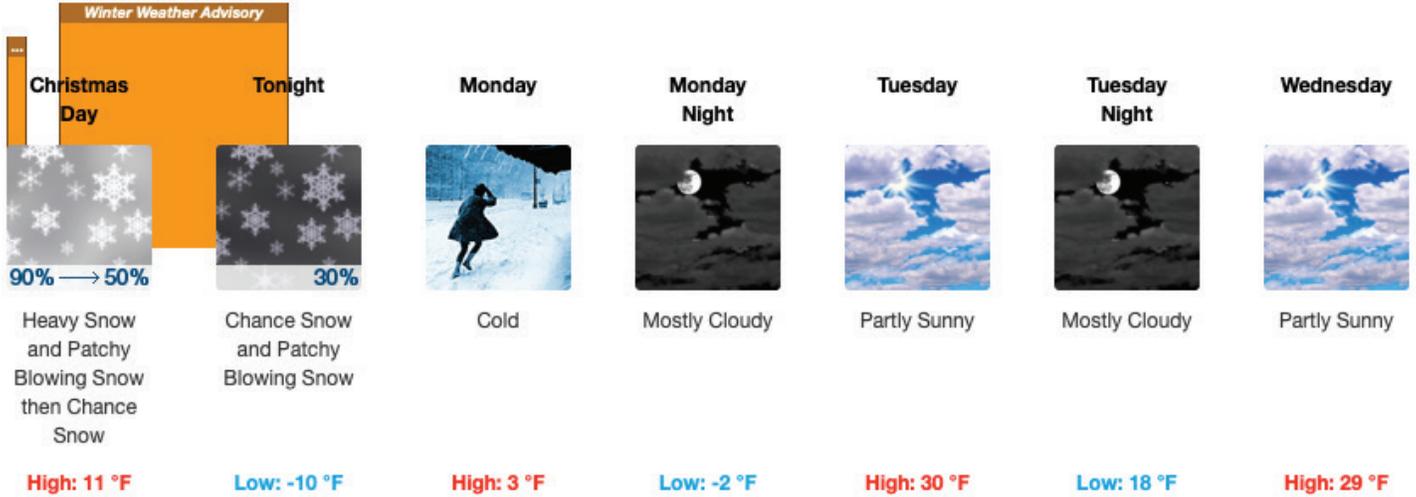
## Past Week's Groton Weather Graphs

December 19, 2022 - December 25, 2022



# Broton Daily Independent

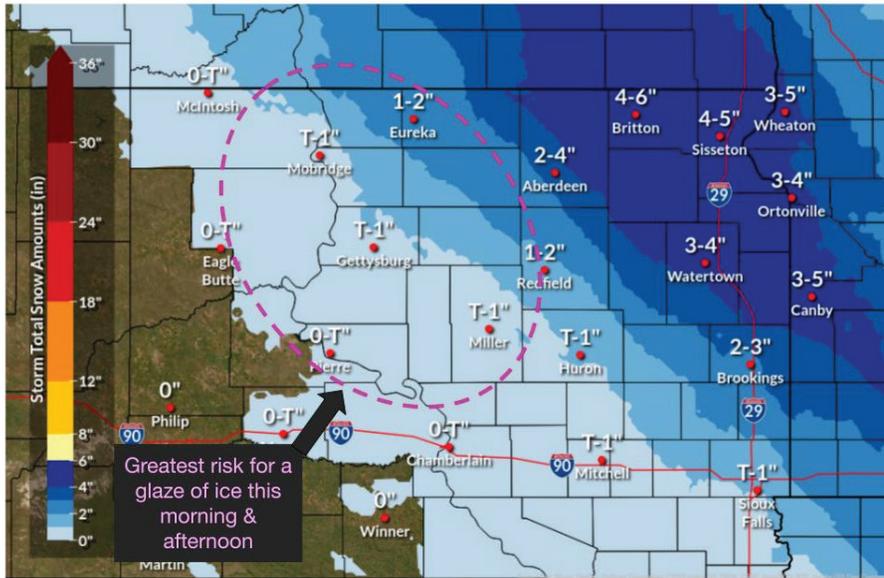
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## Expected Snowfall and Timing

December 25, 2022  
5:17 AM

Moderate confidence on amounts. Travel impacts possible from slippery roadways possible.



Expected Snowfall 6am Sunday - 6am Monday (CST)

	Sun 6AM	Sun 12PM	Sun 6PM	Mon 12AM	Mon 6AM
Aberdeen	2-3"	1-2"	<1"		
Watertown	1-2"	2-3"	<1"		
Britton	2-3"	2-3"	<1"		
Milbank	<1"	2-3"	<1"	<1"	
Redfield	1-2"	<1"	<1"		
Pierre	<1"				
Eagle Butte	<1"		<1"		
Kennebec			<1"		
Gettysburg	<1"		<1"		
Sisseton	1-2"	2-3"	<1"		
Mobridge	<1"	<1"	<1"		
Wheaton	<1"	2-3"	1-2"		



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

National Weather Service  
Aberdeen, SD

Accumulating snowfall is expected today, with highest amounts east of the James River Valley. A light glazing of ice is also possible across portions of central SD.

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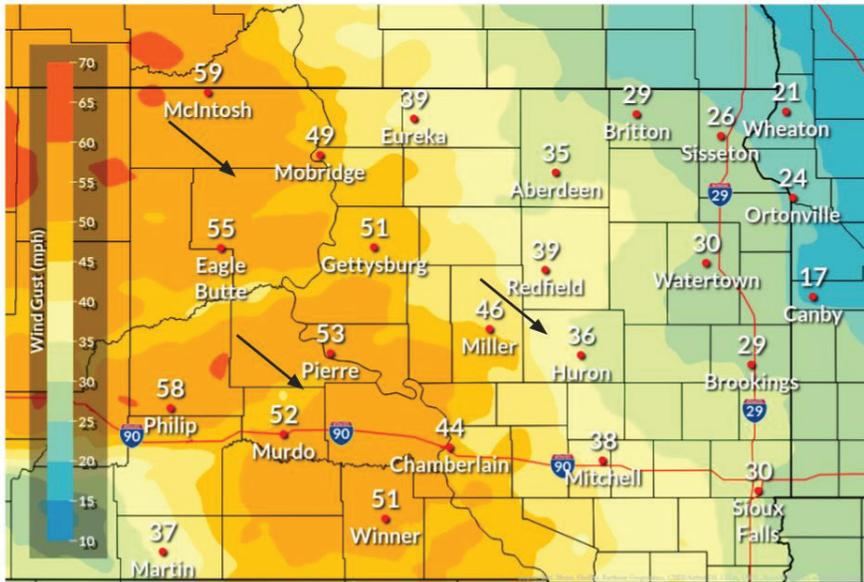
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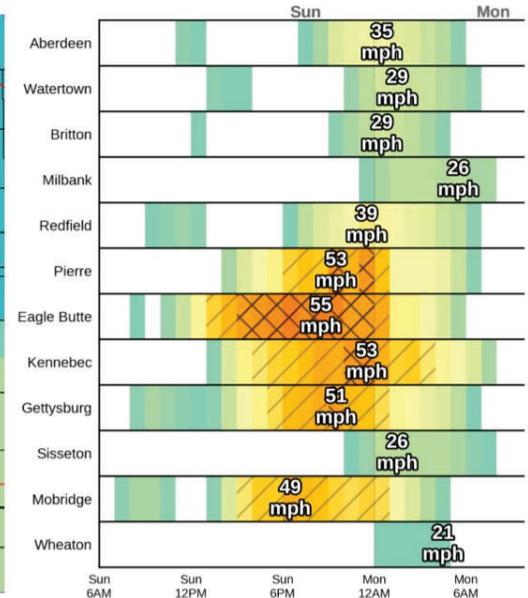
## Peak Wind Gusts and Timing

December 25, 2022  
5:19 AM

Moderate to high confidence on wind gusts. Strongest across central SD this evening.



Peak Wind Gusts 9am Sunday - 6am Monday (CST)



National Weather Service  
Aberdeen, SD

## Winter Weather Advisory URGENT - WINTER WEATHER MESSAGE National Weather Service Aberdeen SD 601 AM CST Sun Dec 25 2022

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

...WIND CHILL ADVISORY REMAINS IN EFFECT UNTIL 9 AM CST THIS MORNING...

...WINTER WEATHER ADVISORY REMAINS IN EFFECT FROM 9 AM THIS MORNING TO MIDNIGHT CST TONIGHT...

\* WHAT...For the Wind Chill Advisory, very cold wind chills. Wind chills as low as 25 below zero. For the Winter Weather Advisory, mixed precipitation expected. Total snow accumulations of 2 to 5 inches and ice accumulations of a light glaze. Winds gusting as high as 40 mph.

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

\* WHEN...For the Wind Chill Advisory, until 9 AM CST this morning. For the Winter Weather Advisory, from 9 AM this morning to midnight CST tonight.

\* IMPACTS...Plan on slippery road conditions. The dangerously cold wind chills could cause frostbite on exposed skin in as little as 10 minutes.

PRECAUTIONARY/PREPAREDNESS ACTIONS...

Use caution while traveling outside. Wear appropriate clothing, a hat, and gloves. Slow down and use caution while traveling.

In South Dakota, the latest road conditions can be obtained by calling 5 1 1.

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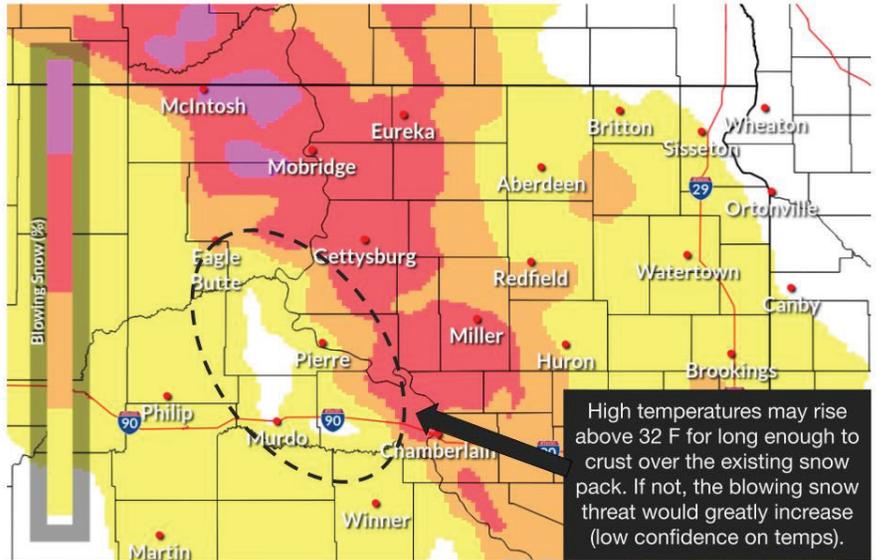
## Blowing Snow Potential

December 25, 2022  
5:23 AM

Moderate confidence on blowing snow. Travel impacts from reduced visibilities possible.

### Key Messages

- Uncertainty remains on how much blowing snow and how low visibilities will be reduced!
- Temperatures may rise into the mid-30s across portions of central South Dakota, which could limit some of the potential of drifting of current snowpack
- However, 50+ mph wind gusts are expected across central South Dakota.
- Areas highlighted in red and pink in the images to the right have the greatest potential for visibilities down to 1/4 mile at times.
- This area will be monitored closely! If you have travel plans Sunday evening, be aware that conditions may change rapidly!



Blowing Snow Potential Noon Sunday - 6am Monday (CST)



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

**Minor** ☁️  
Patches of Blowing Snow with reduced visibilities expected

**Moderate** ☁️☁️  
Areas of Blowing Snow with reduced visibilities expected

**Significant** ☁️☁️☁️  
Widespread Blowing Snow and greatly reduced visibilities expected

**Blizzard** ☁️☁️☁️☁️  
Significant Blowing Snow possible, travel may be impossible

National Weather Service  
Aberdeen, SD



## Safety Information

December 25, 2022  
5:28 AM

**Know Before You Go!**  
Check the forecast & road conditions before you leave!

www.511mn.org  
www.sd511.org  
weather.gov

Local TV & Radio

511 Mobile.weather.gov  
Cell phone apps



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

National Weather Service  
Aberdeen, SD

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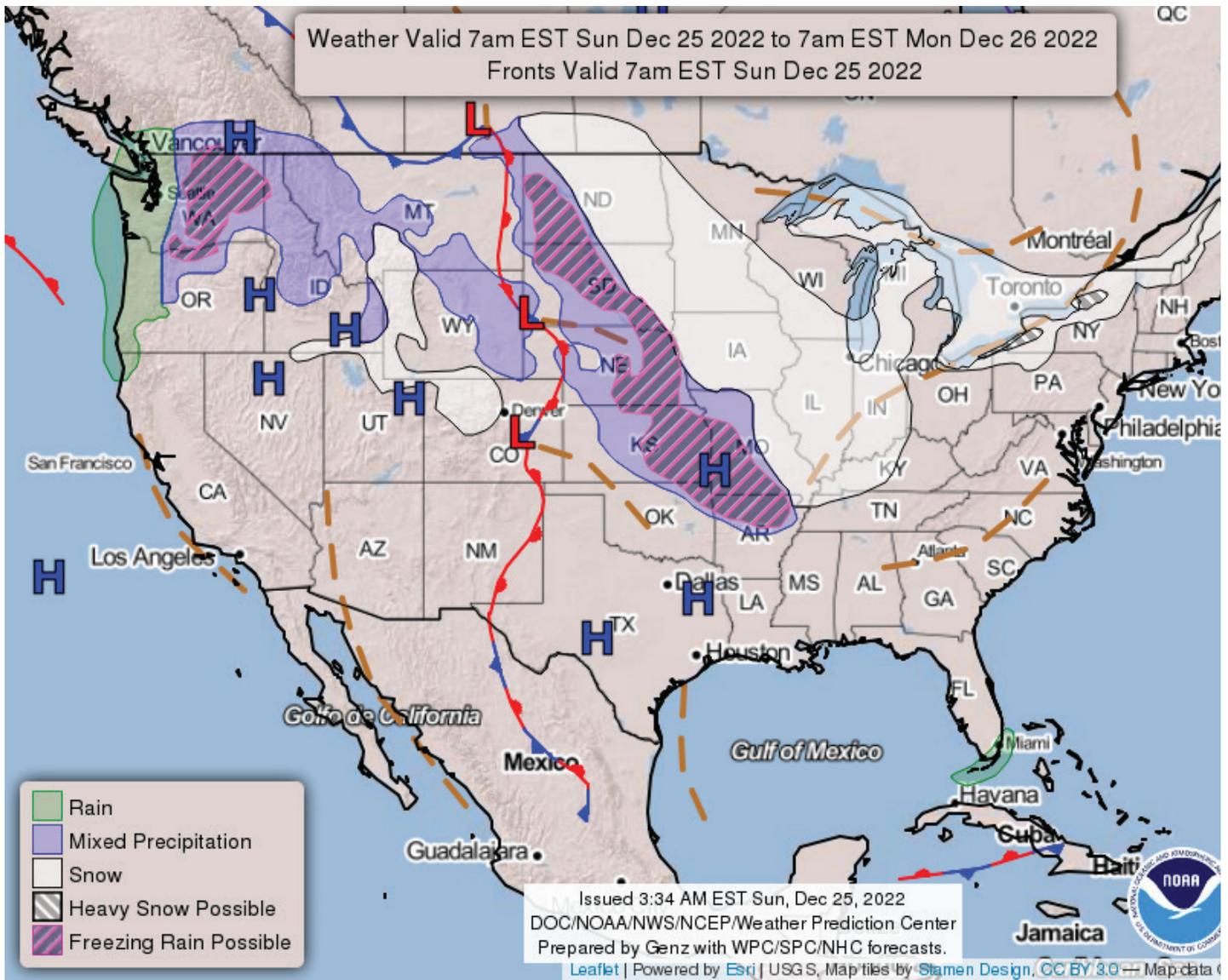
## Yesterday's Groton Weather

**High Temp: -2 °F at 3:45 PM**  
**Low Temp: -16 °F at 7:55 AM**  
**Wind: 13 mph at 10:09 AM**  
**Precip: : 0.00**

Day length: 8 hours, 46 minutes

## Today's Info

Record High: 56 in 1907  
Record Low: --25 in 1996  
Average High: 26°F  
Average Low: 5°F  
Average Precip in Dec.: 0.48  
Precip to date in Dec.: 1.85  
Average Precip to date: 21.69  
Precip Year to Date: 19.35  
Sunset Tonight: 4:55:58 PM  
Sunrise Tomorrow: 8:09:29 AM



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## Today in Weather History

December 25, 1983: Winds of 20 to 30 mph, with occasional higher gusts, combined with very light falling snow and loose surface snow to cause near-blizzard conditions and dangerously low wind chills in most of South Dakota, as well as in southwest and west-central Minnesota, from the early evening of the 23rd into Christmas morning. Visibilities were frequently near zero, and four- to five-foot drifts closed the vast majority of roads, making travel impossible. Hundreds of motorists became stranded during the evenings of December 23rd and 24th. In Minnesota, many holiday travelers heading west from Minneapolis and St. Paul drove to central Minnesota before conditions became too severe to continue. Winds and severe cold in the western part of Minnesota caused several power outages as well as the loss of livestock.

In South Dakota, at least 70 vehicles were stalled at one point over a 14-mile stretch of Interstate 90 between Kennebec and Reliance in Lyman County. The Pierre Airport in Hughes County was closed twice on the 23rd as visibility was reduced to zero. Most flights were canceled at Sioux Falls Airport in Minnehaha County, stranding numerous holiday travelers. Sub-zero temperatures, combined with gusts of over 60 mph, produced wind chill indices in the 60 to 100 below zero range. Several cases of frostbite were reported, propane gas solidified, fuel jelled, and water pipes and tanks froze as a result of the extreme cold. In Minnehaha County at Wall Lake, electrical outages of 12 hours were experienced from power lines snapping as a result of the cold and winds.

1776: Thomas Jefferson noted that the first winter snow fell on December 20th, but did not last on the ground one day. Temperatures dropped to 30 degrees or colder on Christmas Day. That night, 22 inches of snow fell. From the 25th of December until March 6, 10 snow covered the ground, and some of them were deep. The first rain came on the 9th of March. In Frederick County, two feet of snow was recorded.

1872: Since records began back in 1887, Columbia, South Carolina, only a trace of snow has been reported on Christmas Day. Before records, 13-hour sleet, and snowstorm occurred in Columbia and surrounding areas. Credit goes to Cary Mock, a USC geography professor who specializes in historical weather research. Here is a link to the newspaper article.

1966 - A white Christmas was enjoyed by residents from North Carolina to New England in the wake of a major snowstorm. Even coastal Virginia was white. (David Ludlum)

1974: Cyclone Tracy was a small but powerful tropical storm that devastated the city of Darwin, Northern Territory, Australia, from December 24-26th, 1974. The storm was the second smallest tropical cyclone on record, in terms of gale-force wind diameter, behind Tropical Storm Marco in 2008.

1980 - It was the coldest Christmas Day of modern record in the northeastern U.S. Temperatures as cold as 36 degrees below zero were reported in New York State, and as the sharp cold front swept south-eastward the temperature at Boston MA plunged from 34 degrees to seven degrees below zero during the day. (David Ludlum)

1983 - It was the coldest Christmas Day of modern record for the central and eastern U.S. More than 125 cities reported record low temperatures for the date, and thirty-four of those cities reported all-time records for the month of December. The temperature plunged to one degree below zero at Huntsville AL, and dipped to 14 degrees at Galveston TX. Snow covered the ground from the Pacific Northwest through much of the Great Plains Region to the Northern Appalachians. (The National Weather Summary)

1987: Since 1894, Tucson, Arizona, has seen snow on Christmas Day four times. The most recent event occurred in 1987 when Tucson saw 2.6 inches.

2002: A major snowstorm moved up the east coast on Christmas Day, 2002. Widespread snowfalls of a foot or more occurred across much of central New York and northeast Pennsylvania, with amounts as high as 30 inches reported over the northwest slopes of the Catskills.

2010 - Up to 32 inches of snow and blizzard conditions affected parts of the eastern U.S. on December 25th-27th. A state of emergency was declared in North Carolina, Virginia, Maryland, New Jersey, Massachusetts, and Maine. In New York City, up to 24.5 inches of snow fell, effectively shutting down rail lines, major airports, and bus services. Thousands of flights were cancelled and stranded subway riders were forced to spend a night in unheated train cars. One person was reported killed in Maine due to the weather conditions. (NCDC)

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Daily Devotionals

## Seeds of Hope

### THE BIRTH OF JESUS

"And while they were there, the time came for her baby to be born. She gave birth to her first child, a son. She wrapped him snugly in strips of cloth and laid him in a manger because there was no lodging available for them.

"That night there were shepherds staying in the fields nearby, guarding their flocks of sheep. Suddenly, an angel of the Lord appeared among them, and the radiance of the Lord's glory surrounded them. They were terrified, but the angel reassured them. "Don't be afraid!" he said. "I bring you good news that will bring great joy to all people. The Savior—yes, the Messiah, the Lord—has been born today in Bethlehem, the city of David! And you will recognize him by this sign: You will find a baby wrapped snugly in strips of cloth, lying in a manger."

Suddenly, the angel was joined by a vast host of others - the armies of heaven - praising God and saying, 'Glory to God in highest heaven, and peace on earth to those with whom God is pleased.'

'When the angels had returned to heaven, the shepherds said to each other, "Let's go to Bethlehem! Let's see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about.

'They hurried to the village and found Mary and Joseph. And there was the baby, lying in the manger."

Prayer: We lift our hearts in praise this day, Lord of Life, for the birth of Your Son, our Savior. Our minds cannot comprehend, nor our hearts contain, the generosity of Your love, mercy, grace, love, and hope that we have because of the gift of Your one and only Son. Fill our hearts with unending gratitude for Your salvation. In Jesus Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: Luke 2:6-16 I bring you good news that will bring great joy to all people. The Savior—yes, the Messiah, the Lord—has been born today in Bethlehem, the city of David! And you will recognize him by this sign: You will find a baby wrapped snugly in strips of cloth, lying in a manger."



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

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News from the **AP** Associated Press

## SD Lottery

By The Associated Press undefined

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

Dakota Cash

02-10-19-31-33

(two, ten, nineteen, thirty-one, thirty-three)

Estimated jackpot: \$263,000

Lotto America

07-12-40-44-48, Star Ball: 1, ASB: 3

(seven, twelve, forty, forty-four, forty-eight; Star Ball: one; ASB: three)

Estimated jackpot: \$32,000,000

Mega Millions

Estimated jackpot: 565,000,000

Powerball

17-37-46-54-67, Powerball: 8, Power Play: 3

(seventeen, thirty-seven, forty-six, fifty-four, sixty-seven; Powerball: eight; Power Play: three)

Estimated jackpot: \$201,000,000

## Millions in US hunker down from frigid, deadly monster storm

By CAROLYN THOMPSON and JAKE BLEIBERG Associated Press

BUFFALO, N.Y. (AP) — Millions of people hunkered down in a deep freeze overnight and early morning to ride out the frigid storm that has killed at least 18 people across the United States, trapping some residents inside homes with heaping snow drifts and knocking out power to hundreds of thousands of homes and businesses.

The scope of the storm has been nearly unprecedented, 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.

More than 2,360 domestic and international flights were canceled Saturday, according to the tracking site FlightAware.

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.

The storm unleashed its full fury on Buffalo, with hurricane-force winds and snow causing whiteout conditions, paralyzing emergency response efforts — New York Gov. Kathy Hochul said almost every fire truck in the city was stranded — and shutting down the airport through Monday, according to officials.

Freezing conditions and day-old power outages had Buffalonians scrambling Saturday to get out of their homes to anywhere that had heat. But with city streets under a thick blanket of white, that wasn't an option for people like Jeremy Manahan, who charged his phone in his parked car after almost 29 hours without electricity.

"There's one warming shelter, but that would be too far for me to get to. I can't drive, obviously, because I'm stuck," Manahan said. "And you can't be outside for more than 10 minutes without getting frostbit."

Mark Poloncarz, executive of Erie County, home to Buffalo, said ambulances were taking more than three hours to make a single hospital trip and the blizzard may be "the worst storm in our community's history."

Two people died in their suburban Cheektowaga, New York, homes Friday when emergency crews could not reach them in time to treat their medical conditions, he said, and another died in Buffalo.

"We can't just pick up everybody and take you to a warming center. We don't have the capability of doing

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that," Poloncarz said. "Many, many neighborhoods, especially in the city of Buffalo, are still impassable."

Ditjak Ilunga of Gaithersburg, Maryland, was on his way to visit relatives in Hamilton, Ontario, for Christmas with his daughters Friday when their SUV was trapped in Buffalo. Unable to get help, they spent hours with the engine running in the vehicle buffeted by wind and nearly buried in snow.

By 4 a.m. Saturday, with their fuel nearly gone, Ilunga made a desperate choice to risk the howling storm to reach a nearby shelter. He carried 6-year-old Destiny on his back while 16-year-old Cindy clutched their Pomeranian puppy, stepping into his footprints as they trudged through drifts.

"If I stay in this car I'm going to die here with my kids," he recalled thinking, but believing they had to try. He cried when the family walked through the shelter doors. "It's something I will never forget in my life."

The storm knocked out power in communities from Maine to Seattle, and a major electricity grid operator warned 65 million people across the eastern U.S. of possible rolling blackouts.

Across the six New England states, more than 273,000 customers remained without power on Saturday, with Maine the hardest hit. Some utilities said electricity may not be restored for days.

In North Carolina, 169,000 customers were without power Saturday afternoon, down from more than 485,000. Utility officials said rolling blackouts would continue for the next few days.

Storm-related deaths were reported in recent days all over the country: Four dead in an Ohio Turnpike pileup involving some 50 vehicles; four motorists killed in separate crashes in Missouri and Kansas; an Ohio utility worker electrocuted; a Vermont woman struck by a falling branch; an apparently homeless man found amid Colorado's subzero temperatures; a woman who fell through Wisconsin river ice.

In Mexico, migrants camped near the U.S. border were facing unusually cold temperatures as they awaited a U.S. Supreme Court decision on pandemic-era restrictions preventing many from seeking asylum.

Along Interstate 71 in Kentucky, Terry Henderson and her husband, Rick, weathered a 34-hour traffic jam in a rig outfitted with a diesel heater, a toilet and a refrigerator after getting stuck trying to drive from Alabama to their Ohio home for Christmas.

"We should have stayed," Terry Henderson said after they got moving again Saturday.

Poloncarz of Erie County tweeted late Saturday that 34.6 inches (about 88 centimeters) of snow had accumulated at the Buffalo Airport and drifts were well over 6 feet (1.8 meters) in some areas. Blizzard conditions were expected to ease early Sunday, he continued, but continuing lake effect snow was forecast.

Vivian Robinson of Spirit of Truth Urban Ministry in Buffalo said she and her husband have been sheltering and cooking for 60 to 70 people, including stranded travelers and locals without power or heat, who were spending Saturday night at the church.

Many arrived with ice and snow plastered to their clothes, crying, their skin reddened by the single-digit temperatures. On Saturday night, they prepared to spend Christmas together.

"It's emotional just to see the hurt that they thought they were not going to make it, and to see that we had opened up the church, and it gave them a sense of relief," Robinson said. "Those who are here are really enjoying themselves. It's going to be a different Christmas for everyone."

## Some Ukrainians move up Christmas to part ways with Russia

By RENATA BRITO and HANNA ARHIROVA Associated Press

BOBRYTSIA, Ukraine (AP) — Ukirainians usually celebrate Christmas on Jan. 7, as do the Russians. But not this year, or at least not all of them.

Some Orthodox Ukrainians have decided to observe Christmas on Dec. 25, like many Christians around the world. Yes, this has to do with the war, and yes, they have the blessing of their local church.

The idea of commemorating the birth of Jesus in December was considered radical in Ukraine until recently, but Russia's invasion changed many hearts and minds.

In October, the leadership of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine, which is not aligned with the Russian church and one of two branches of Orthodox Christianity in the country, agreed to allow faithful to celebrate on Dec. 25.

The choice of dates has clear political and religious overtones in a nation with rival Orthodox churches

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and where slight revisions to rituals can carry potent meaning in a culture war that runs parallel to the shooting war.

For some people, changing dates represents a separation from Russia, its culture, and religion. People in a village on the outskirts of Kyiv voted recently to move up their Christmas observance.

"What began on Feb. 24, the full-scale invasion, is an awakening and an understanding that we can no longer be part of the Russian world," Olena Paliy, a 33-year-old Bobrytsia resident, said.

The Russian Orthodox Church, which claims sovereignty over Orthodoxy in Ukraine, and some other Eastern Orthodox churches continue to use the ancient Julian calendar. Christmas falls 13 days later on that calendar, or Jan. 7, than it does on the Gregorian calendar used by most church and secular groups.

The Catholic Church first adopted the modern, more astronomically precise Gregorian calendar in the 16th century, and Protestants and some Orthodox churches have since aligned their own calendars for purposes of calculating Christmas.

The Synod of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine decreed in October that local church rectors could choose the date along with their communities, saying the decision followed years of discussion but also resulted from the circumstances of the war.

In Bobrytsia, some members of the faith promoted the change within the local church, which recently transitioned to being part of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine, with no ties to Russia. When a vote was taken last week, 200 out of 204 people said yes to adopting Dec. 25 as the new day to celebrate Christmas.

"This is a big step because never in our history have we had the same dates of celebration of Christmas in Ukraine with the whole Christian world. All the time we were separated," said Roman Ivanenko, a local official in Bobrytsia, and one of the promoters of the change. With the switch, he said, they are "breaking this connection" with the Russians.

As in all the Kyiv region, Sunday morning in Bobrytsia began with the sound of sirens, but that didn't prevent people from gathering in the church to attend a Christmas Mass on Dec. 25 for the first time. In the end, there were no attacks reported in the capital.

"No enemy can take away the holiday because the holiday is born in the soul," the Rev. Rostyslav Korchak said in his homily, during which he used the words "war," "soldiers," and "evil" more than "Jesus Christ."

Anna Nezenko, 65, attended the church in Bobrytsia on every Christmas since the building was inaugurated in 2000, although always on Jan. 7th. She said she did not feel strange doing so Sunday.

"The most important is the God to be born in the heart," she said.

In 2019, Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, the spiritual leader of the Eastern Orthodox Church, granted complete independence, or autocephaly, to the Orthodox Church of Ukraine. Ukrainians who favored recognition for a national church in tandem with Ukraine's political independence from the former Soviet Union had long sought such approval.

The Russian Orthodox Church and its leader, Patriarch Kirill, fiercely protested the move, saying Ukraine was not under the jurisdiction of Bartholomew.

The other major branch of Orthodoxy in the country, the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, remained loyal to Moscow until the outbreak of war. It declared independence in May, though it remains under government scrutiny. That church has traditionally celebrated Christmas on Jan. 7.

## China's foreign minister signals deeper ties with Russia

BEIJING (AP) — Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi defended what he said was his country's position of impartiality on the war in Ukraine on Sunday and signaled that China would deepen ties with Russia in the coming year.

Wang, speaking by video to a conference in the Chinese capital, also blamed America for the deterioration in relations between the world's two largest economies, saying that China has "firmly rejected the United States' erroneous China policy."

China has pushed back against Western pressure on trade, technology, human rights and its claims to a broad swath of the western Pacific, accusing the U.S. of bullying. Its refusal to condemn the invasion of

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Ukraine and join others in imposing sanctions on Russia has further frayed ties and fueled an emerging divide with much of Europe.

Wang said that China would "deepen strategic mutual trust and mutually beneficial cooperation" with Russia. Warships from the two countries held joint naval drills in the East China Sea last week.

"With regard to the Ukraine crisis, we have consistently upheld the fundamental principles of objectivity and impartiality, without favoring one side or the other, or adding fuel to the fire, still less seeking selfish gains from the situation," Wang said, according to an official text of his remarks.

Even as China has found common ground with Russia as both come under Western pressure, its economic future remains tied to American and European markets and technology. Leader Xi Jinping is pushing Chinese industry to become more self-sufficient, but Wang acknowledged that experience has shown "that China and the United States cannot decouple or sever supply chains."

He said that China would strive to bring relations with the U.S. back on course, saying they had plunged because "the United States has stubbornly continued to see China as its primary competitor and engage in blatant blockade, suppression and provocation against China."

Wang and U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken talked by phone late last week. The State Department said that Blinken discussed the need to manage the U.S.-China relationship responsibly and raised concerns about Russia's war against Ukraine and the threats it poses to global security and economic stability.

Wang accused the U.S. of "unilateral bullying" and said that China would continue to play a constructive role in resolving the Ukraine crisis in its own way, a Chinese Foreign Ministry statement said.

## **Pope's lament: Icy winds of war buffet humanity at Christmas**

By FRANCES D'EMILIO Associated Press

VATICAN CITY (AP) — Pope Francis used his Christmas message Sunday to lament the "icy winds of war" buffeting humanity and to make an impassioned plea for an immediate end to the fighting in Ukraine, a 10-month-old conflict he decried as "senseless."

At noon in Rome, Francis delivered the traditional "Urbi et Orbi" (Latin for "to the city and to the world") speech from the central balcony of St. Peter's Basilica.

On a sunny day, with the midday temperature reaching about 15 degrees Celsius (nearly 60 F), warm for a Roman winter, some 70,000 tourists, pilgrims and residents of the city packed St. Peter's Square to listen to the pontiff and to receive his blessing.

Francis also cited long-running conflicts in the Middle East, including in the Holy Land, "where in recent months violence and confrontations have increased, bringing death and injury in their wake." In addition, he prayed for a lasting truce in Yemen and for reconciliation in Iran and Myanmar, and cited violence and conflicts in Africa's Sahel region.

He lamented that on Christmas, the "path of peace" is blocked by social forces that include "attachment to power and money, pride, hypocrisy, falsehood."

"Indeed, we must acknowledge with sorrow that, even as the Prince of Peace is given to us, the icy winds of war continue to buffet humanity," Francis said.

"If we want it to be Christmas, the birth of Jesus and of peace, let us look to Bethlehem and contemplate the face of the child who is born for us," he said. "And in that small and innocent face, let us see the faces of all those children who, everywhere in the world, long for peace."

Francis urged the faithful to remember the millions of Ukrainians who were without electricity or heating Sunday because of Russian attacks on energy infrastructure, as well as the millions more living as refugees abroad or displaced within their country since the Feb. 24 invasion ordered by Russian President Vladimir Putin.

"Let us also see the faces of our Ukrainian brothers and sisters, who are experiencing this Christmas in the dark and cold, far from their homes due to the devastation caused by 10 months of war," the pontiff said as he gestured toward those in the crowd waving small Ukrainian flags.

The pope prayed that the Lord will "enlighten the minds of those who have the power to silence the

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thunder of weapons and put an immediate end to this senseless war!"

Hobbled by a knee problem, Francis leaned on a walking stick with a pronged support base to inch forward for a better view of the crowd below.

The first pontiff from Latin America, he prayed that Christmas would "inspire the political authorities and all people of good will in the Americas to attempt to calm the political and social tensions experienced by various countries."

Francis said he was particularly thinking of Haiti, the impoverished Caribbean nation where nearly 100,000 people in the capital have fled gang-related violence, according to a recent United Nations migration agency report.

"On this day, as we sit around a well-spread table, may we not avert our gaze from Bethlehem, a town whose name means 'house of bread,' but think of all those, especially the children, who go hungry while huge amounts of food daily go to waste and resources are being spent on weapons."

"The war in Ukraine has further aggravated this situation, putting entire peoples at risk of famine, especially in Afghanistan and in the countries of the Horn of Africa," Francis said.

Early in the war, sea mines and a Russian naval blockade of Ukraine's ports choked off shipments from the Black Sea ports of Ukraine, one of the world's largest producers of grain and corn. An agreement brokered by Turkey and the U.N. has sought to address the problem.

## China's COVID-19 surge raises odds of new coronavirus mutant

By LAURA UNGAR and ANIRUDDHA GHOSAL Associated Press

Could the COVID-19 surge in China unleash a new coronavirus mutant on the world?

Scientists don't know but worry that might happen. It could be similar to omicron variants circulating there now. It could be a combination of strains. Or something entirely different, they say.

"China has a population that is very large and there's limited immunity. And that seems to be the setting in which we may see an explosion of a new variant," said Dr. Stuart Campbell Ray, an infectious disease expert at Johns Hopkins University.

Every new infection offers a chance for the coronavirus to mutate, and the virus is spreading rapidly in China. The country of 1.4 billion has largely abandoned its "zero COVID" policy. Though overall reported vaccination rates are high, booster levels are lower, especially among older people. Domestic vaccines have proven less effective against serious infection than Western-made messenger RNA versions. Many were given more than a year ago, meaning immunity has waned.

The result? Fertile ground for the virus to change.

"When we've seen big waves of infection, it's often followed by new variants being generated," Ray said.

About three years ago, the original version of the coronavirus spread from China to the rest of the world and was eventually replaced by the delta variant, then omicron and its descendants, which continue plaguing the world today.

Dr. Shan-Lu Liu, who studies viruses at Ohio State University, said many existing omicron variants have been detected in China, including BF.7, which is extremely adept at evading immunity and is believed to be driving the current surge.

Experts said a partially immune population like China's puts particular pressure on the virus to change. Ray compared the virus to a boxer that "learns to evade the skills that you have and adapt to get around those."

One big unknown is whether a new variant will cause more severe disease. Experts say there's no inherent biological reason the virus has to become milder over time.

"Much of the mildness we've experienced over the past six to 12 months in many parts of the world has been due to accumulated immunity either through vaccination or infection, not because the virus has changed" in severity, Ray said.

In China, most people have never been exposed to the coronavirus. China's vaccines rely on an older technology producing fewer antibodies than messenger RNA vaccines.

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Given those realities, Dr. Gagandeep Kang, who studies viruses at the Christian Medical College in Vellore, India, said it remains to be seen if the virus will follow the same pattern of evolution in China as it has in the rest of the world after vaccines came out. "Or," she asked, "will the pattern of evolution be completely different?"

Recently, the World Health Organization expressed concern about reports of severe disease in China. Around the cities of Baoding and Langfang outside Beijing, hospitals have run out of intensive care beds and staff as severe cases surge.

China's plan to track the virus centers around three city hospitals in each province, where samples will be collected from walk-in patients who are very sick and all those who die every week, Xu Wenbo of the Chinese Center for Disease Control and Prevention said at a briefing Tuesday.

He said 50 of the 130 omicron versions detected in China had resulted in outbreaks. The country is creating a national genetic database "to monitor in real time" how different strains were evolving and the potential implications for public health, he said.

At this point, however, there's limited information about genetic viral sequencing coming out of China, said Jeremy Luban, a virologist at the University of Massachusetts Medical School.

"We don't know all of what's going on," Luban said. But clearly, "the pandemic is not over."

## Millions in US hunker down from frigid, deadly monster storm

By CAROLYN THOMPSON and JAKE BLEIBERG Associated Press

BUFFALO, N.Y. (AP) — Millions of people hunkered down in a deep freeze overnight and early morning to ride out the frigid storm that has killed at least 18 people across the United States, trapping some residents inside homes with heaping snow drifts and knocking out power to hundreds of thousands of homes and businesses.

The scope of the storm has been nearly unprecedented, 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.

More than 2,360 domestic and international flights were canceled Saturday, according to the tracking site FlightAware.

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.

The storm unleashed its full fury on Buffalo, with hurricane-force winds and snow causing whiteout conditions, paralyzing emergency response efforts — New York Gov. Kathy Hochul said almost every fire truck in the city was stranded — and shutting down the airport through Monday, according to officials.

Freezing conditions and day-old power outages had Buffalonians scrambling Saturday to get out of their homes to anywhere that had heat. But with city streets under a thick blanket of white, that wasn't an option for people like Jeremy Manahan, who charged his phone in his parked car after almost 29 hours without electricity.

"There's one warming shelter, but that would be too far for me to get to. I can't drive, obviously, because I'm stuck," Manahan said. "And you can't be outside for more than 10 minutes without getting frostbit."

Mark Poloncarz, executive of Erie County, home to Buffalo, said ambulances were taking more than three hours to make a single hospital trip and the blizzard may be "the worst storm in our community's history."

Two people died in their suburban Cheektowaga, New York, homes Friday when emergency crews could not reach them in time to treat their medical conditions, he said, and another died in Buffalo.

"We can't just pick up everybody and take you to a warming center. We don't have the capability of doing that," Poloncarz said. "Many, many neighborhoods, especially in the city of Buffalo, are still impassable."

Ditjak Ilunga of Gaithersburg, Maryland, was on his way to visit relatives in Hamilton, Ontario, for Christmas with his daughters Friday when their SUV was trapped in Buffalo. Unable to get help, they spent hours with the engine running in the vehicle buffeted by wind and nearly buried in snow.

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By 4 a.m. Saturday, with their fuel nearly gone, Ilunga made a desperate choice to risk the howling storm to reach a nearby shelter. He carried 6-year-old Destiny on his back while 16-year-old Cindy clutched their Pomeranian puppy, stepping into his footprints as they trudged through drifts.

"If I stay in this car I'm going to die here with my kids," he recalled thinking, but believing they had to try. He cried when the family walked through the shelter doors. "It's something I will never forget in my life."

The storm knocked out power in communities from Maine to Seattle, and a major electricity grid operator warned 65 million people across the eastern U.S. of possible rolling blackouts.

Across the six New England states, more than 273,000 customers remained without power on Saturday, with Maine the hardest hit. Some utilities said electricity may not be restored for days.

In North Carolina, 169,000 customers were without power Saturday afternoon, down from more than 485,000. Utility officials said rolling blackouts would continue for the next few days.

Storm-related deaths were reported in recent days all over the country: Four dead in an Ohio Turnpike pileup involving some 50 vehicles; four motorists killed in separate crashes in Missouri and Kansas; an Ohio utility worker electrocuted; a Vermont woman struck by a falling branch; an apparently homeless man found amid Colorado's subzero temperatures; a woman who fell through Wisconsin river ice.

In Mexico, migrants camped near the U.S. border were facing unusually cold temperatures as they awaited a U.S. Supreme Court decision on pandemic-era restrictions preventing many from seeking asylum.

Along Interstate 71 in Kentucky, Terry Henderson and her husband, Rick, weathered a 34-hour traffic jam in a rig outfitted with a diesel heater, a toilet and a refrigerator after getting stuck trying to drive from Alabama to their Ohio home for Christmas.

"We should have stayed," Terry Henderson said after they got moving again Saturday.

Poloncarz of Erie County tweeted late Saturday that 34.6 inches (about 88 centimeters) of snow had accumulated at the Buffalo Airport and drifts were well over 6 feet (1.8 meters) in some areas. Blizzard conditions were expected to ease early Sunday, he continued, but continuing lake effect snow was forecast.

Vivian Robinson of Spirit of Truth Urban Ministry in Buffalo said she and her husband have been sheltering and cooking for 60 to 70 people, including stranded travelers and locals without power or heat, who were spending Saturday night at the church.

Many arrived with ice and snow plastered to their clothes, crying, their skin reddened by the single-digit temperatures. On Saturday night, they prepared to spend Christmas together.

"It's emotional just to see the hurt that they thought they were not going to make it, and to see that we had opened up the church, and it gave them a sense of relief," Robinson said. "Those who are here are really enjoying themselves. It's going to be a different Christmas for everyone."

## 18 die as monster storm brings rain, snow, cold across US

By CAROLYN THOMPSON and JAKE BLEIBERG Associated Press

BUFFALO, N.Y. (AP) — A frigid winter storm killed at least 18 people as it swept across the country, knocking out power to hundreds of thousands of homes and businesses and leaving millions of people on edge about the possibility of Christmas Eve blackouts.

The storm unleashed its full fury on Buffalo, New York, with hurricane-force winds causing whiteout conditions. Emergency response efforts were paralyzed, and the city's international airport was shut down.

Across the U.S., officials have attributed deaths to exposure, car crashes, a falling tree limb and other effects of the storm. At least three people died in the Buffalo area, including two who suffered medical emergencies in their homes and couldn't be saved because emergency crews were unable to reach them amid historic blizzard conditions.

Deep snow, single-digit temperatures and day-old power outages sent Buffalo residents scrambling Saturday to get out of their houses to anywhere that had heat. New York Gov. Kathy Hochul said the Buffalo Niagara International Airport would be closed through Monday morning and almost every fire truck in the city was stranded in the snow.

"No matter how many emergency vehicles we have, they cannot get through the conditions as we

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“speak,” Hochul said.

Blinding blizzards, freezing rain and frigid cold also knocked out power in places from Maine to Seattle, while a major electricity grid operator warned the 65 million people it serves across the eastern U.S. that rolling blackouts might be required.

Pennsylvania-based PJM Interconnection said power plants are having difficulty operating in the frigid weather and has asked residents in 13 states to conserve electricity through at least Christmas morning. The Tennessee Valley Authority, which provides electricity to 10 million people in the state and parts of six surrounding ones, directed local power companies to implement planned interruptions but ended the measure by Saturday afternoon. The start of the NFL's Tennessee Titans' game in Nashville was delayed an hour by a planned power outage.

Across the six New England states, more than 273,000 customers remained without power on Saturday, with Maine the hardest hit and some utilities saying it could be days before electricity is restored.

In North Carolina, 169,000 customers were without power as of the afternoon, down from a peak of more than 485,000, but utility officials said rolling blackouts would continue for “the next few days.”

Those without power included James Reynolds of Greensboro, who said his housemate, a 70-year-old with diabetes and severe arthritis, spent the morning bundled beside a kerosene heater with indoor temperatures “hovering in the 50s.”

In the Buffalo suburb of Cheektowaga, two people died in their homes Friday when emergency crews could not reach them in time to treat their medical conditions, according to Erie County Executive Mark Poloncarz. He said another person died in Buffalo and said the blizzard may be “the worst storm in our community's history.”

It was taking ambulances over three hours to do one trip to a hospital, Poloncarz said.

Forecasters said 28 inches (71 centimeters) of snow accumulated as of Saturday in Buffalo. Last month, areas just south of the city saw a record 6 feet of snow (about 1.8 meters) from a single storm.

The latest storm knocked out the furnace in the Buffalo home of Brian LaPrade, who woke up Saturday morning to indoor temperatures dipping below 50 degrees Fahrenheit (10 degrees Celsius).

“I had to go out and dig out the vents,” LaPrade said. “As it was, the snow was taller than my snow blower.”

Plows were on the roads, but large snow drifts, abandoned cars and downed power lines were slowing progress.

On the Ohio Turnpike, four died in a pileup involving some 50 vehicles. 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.

A utility worker in Ohio was also killed Friday while trying to restore power, according to the Buckeye Rural Electric Cooperative. It said the 22-year-old died in “an electrical contact incident” near Pedro in Lawrence County.

A woman in Vermont died in a hospital Friday after a tree broke in the high winds and fell on her. Police in Colorado Springs said they found the body of a person who appeared to be homeless as subzero temperatures and snow descended on the region. Near Janesville, Wisconsin, a 57-year-old woman died Friday after falling through the ice on a river, the Rock County Sheriff's Office announced.

Along Interstate 71 in Kentucky, Terry Henderson and her husband, Rick, were stuck for 34 hours in a massive traffic jam caused by several accidents. The truck drivers weathered the wait in a rig outfitted with a diesel heater, a toilet and a refrigerator but nonetheless regretted trying to drive from Alabama to their home near Akron, Ohio, for Christmas.

“We should have stayed,” Terry Henderson said after they got moving again Saturday.

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.

As millions of Americans were traveling ahead of Christmas, more than 2,360 flights within, into or out

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of the U.S. were canceled Saturday, according to the tracking site FlightAware.

In Mexico, migrants camped near the U.S. border were facing 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.

Western New York often sees dramatic lake-effect snow, which is caused by cool air picking up moisture from the warm water, then dumping it on the land. But even area residents found conditions Christmas Eve to be dire.

Latricia Stroud and her two daughters, 1 and 12, were stranded without heat or power in their Buffalo house since Friday afternoon, with the snow too deep to leave.

"I have to go over a snowbank to get out," Stroud told the AP. "There's a warming center, I just need a ride to get there."

## 5 arrested in deadly shooting at Minnesota's Mall of America

BLOOMINGTON, Minn. (AP) — Five people were arrested in the fatal shooting of a 19-year-old man at the Mall of America that sent the sprawling commercial center into lockdown on one of the final days of the holiday shopping season, police said Saturday.

At an evening news conference, Bloomington Police Chief Booker Hodges announced the arrests in connection with the Friday night shooting in the Minneapolis suburb of Bloomington and said all would face murder charges, the Minneapolis Star Tribune reported.

Hodges said the arrested suspects were two men, 18, and three 17-year-old male juveniles, according to the Star Tribune, and they were taken into custody in the morning at a home in nearby St. Louis Park by SWAT team officers from three jurisdictions.

The chief added that one of the 18-year-olds is believed to be the shooter, though another suspect may also have fired a weapon. A sixth suspect was still being sought.

"In Bloomington, if you come here and murder people at our mall, you get one of these at Christmas," the newspaper quoted Hodges as saying while holding up an orange prison suit.

Minnesota Gov. Tim Walz tweeted Saturday that the mall shooting was "absolutely unacceptable. We are in touch with local officials to provide the support and resources they need."

Police have not yet identified the slain 19-year-old, but the police chief and Bloomington Mayor Tim Busse have spoken with the man's relatives.

The gunfire Friday at the Nordstrom store in the nation's largest shopping center sent frightened customers scurrying for safety. A bystander was said to have had their jacket grazed by a bullet.

There appeared to be some type of altercation between two groups that escalated into a fistfight, and someone pulled out a gun and shot the victim multiple times, according to police. The entire incident lasted about 30 seconds.

A nearby Bloomington police officer — one of 16 stationed at the mall that day — heard the gunshots around 7:50 p.m. The officer tried life-saving measures but was unable to save the victim.

The lockdown lasted for about an hour before the mall tweeted that shoppers were being sent outside. Videos posted on social media showed people hiding in stores, and an announcement in the mall warned people to seek shelter.

Since it opened in 1992, the Mall of America 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.

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

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

By JEFFREY SCHAEFFER and ANGELA CHARLTON Associated Press

PARIS (AP) — Members of France's Kurdish community and anti-racism activists joined together in mourning and anger on 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 detained, and transferred Saturday to psychiatric care, the Paris prosecutor's office said. The 69-year-old Parisian had been charged with attacking a migrant camp last year and released from jail earlier this month. For Friday's shooting, he is facing potential charges of murder and attempted murder with a racist motive, the prosecutor's office said.

Thousands gathered Saturday at the Place de la Republique in eastern Paris, waving a colorful spectrum of flags representing Kurdish rights groups, left-wing political movements and other causes.

The gathering was largely peaceful, though some youths threw projectiles and set a few cars and garbage bins on fire, and police fired tear gas to disperse the crowd. Some protesters shouted slogans against the Turkish government. Berivan Firat of the Kurdish Democratic Council in France told BFM TV that the violence began after some people drove by waving a Turkish flag.

Most demonstrators were ethnic Kurds of varying generations who came together to mourn the three fellow Kurds who were killed, who included a prominent feminist activist and a Kurdish singer who came to France as a refugee.

"We are devastated, really. We are destroyed because we lost a very important member of our community and we are angry. How is this possible?" said demonstrator Yekbun Ogur, a middle school biology teacher in Paris. "Is it normal for a man with a gun to sneak into a cultural place to come and murder people?"

Demonstrator Yunus Cicek wiped his tears away as spoke of the victims, and his fears. "We are not protected here. Even though I have political refugee status, I don't feel safe. ... Maybe next time it will be me."

The shooting shook the Kurdish community and put French 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.

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. Surveillance video from the hair salon shared online suggests people in the salon subdued the attacker before police reached the scene. The prosecutor's office would not elaborate on the circumstances of his arrest.

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 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 long been battling against Kurdish militants affiliated with the banned PKK in south-east 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, JALAL BWAITEL and HANNAH SCHOENBAUM Associated Press

BETHLEHEM, West Bank (AP) — The biblical town of Bethlehem marked a merry Christmas on Saturday, with thousands of visitors descending 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. Although the numbers have not reached pre-pandemic levels, the return of tourists has palpably raised spirits in Bethlehem.

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

Throughout the day, hundreds of people strolled through Manger Square for Christmas Eve celebrations. 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, though many people headed indoors to shops and restaurants to warm up. By nightfall, the crowds had thinned.

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 before heading to the Church of the Nativity, built on the spot where Christians believe Jesus was born. Later, he was to celebrate Midnight Mass.

Hundreds of millions 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 were missing due to restrictions and power cuts. Instead, a modest tree decorated with blue and yellow lights barely broke the gloom of the square. Mayor Vitali Klitschko has called it the "Tree of Invincibility."

In the United States, a winter storm battered much of the country, bringing blinding blizzards, freezing rain and bone-chilling temperatures that caused many holiday events to be canceled and created mayhem for travelers.

But off the central coast of Florida, where temperatures dropped as low as 27 degrees Fahrenheit (minus 2.7 Celsius), more than a hundred surfers dressed in Santa costumes braved the frigid waters of the Atlantic Ocean in the morning for an annual Christmas Eve Surfing Santas festival.

NORAD, the U.S. military agency known for its playful tradition of tracking Santa Claus as he delivers presents on Christmas Eve, said it didn't expect COVID-19 or the storms hitting North America to affect Saint Nick's global travels.

"I think Santa will be right at home with the Arctic weather that's hitting into the lower 48," said Lt. Gen. David Nahom, a NORAD official based in Anchorage, Alaska.

In Mexico, tens of thousands of migrants who fled violence and poverty in their home countries are almost certain to spend Christmas in crowded shelters or on the streets of towns along the U.S. border, where organized crime routinely targets them.

Present-day reality was visible at Manger Square as banners showing photos of Palestinian prisoner

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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.

## **Pope on Christmas: Jesus was poor, so don't be power-hungry**

By FRANCES D'EMILIO Associated Press

VATICAN CITY (AP) — Recalling Jesus' birth in a stable, Pope Francis rebuked those "ravenous" for wealth and power at the expense of the vulnerable, including children, in a Christmas Eve homily decrying war, poverty and greedy consumerism.

In the splendor of St. Peter's Basilica, Francis presided over the evening Mass attended by about 7,000 faithful, including tourists and pilgrims, who flocked to the church on a warm evening and took their place behind rows of white-robed pontiffs.

Francis drew lessons from the humility of Jesus' first hours of life in a manger.

"While animals feed in their stalls, men and women in our world, in their hunger for wealth and power, consume even their neighbors, their brothers and sisters," the pontiff lamented. "How many wars have we seen! And in how many places, even today, are human dignity and freedom treated with contempt!"

"As always, the principal victims of this human greed are the weak and the vulnerable," said Francis, who didn't cite any specific conflict or situation.

"This Christmas, too, as in the case of Jesus, a world ravenous for money, power and pleasure does not make room for the little ones, for the so many unborn, poor and forgotten children," the pope said, reading his homily with a voice that sounded tired and almost hoarse. "I think above all of the children devoured by war, poverty and injustice."

Still, the pontiff exhorted people to take heart.

"Do not allow yourself to be overcome by fear, resignation or discouragement." Jesus' lying in a manger shows where "the true riches in life are to be found: not in money and power, but in relationships and persons."

Remarking on the "so much consumerism that has packaged the mystery" of Christmas, Francis said there was a danger the day's meaning could be forgotten.

But, he said, Christmas focuses attention on "the problem of our humanity — the indifference produced by the greedy rush to possess and consume."

"Jesus was born poor, lived poor and died poor," Francis said. "He did not so much talk about poverty as live it, to the very end, for our sake."

Francis urged people to "not let this Christmas pass without doing something good."

When the Mass ended, the pope, pushed in a wheelchair by an aide, moved down the basilica with a life-sized statue of Baby Jesus on his lap and flanked by several children carrying bouquets. The statue then was placed in a manger in a creche scene in the basilica.

Francis, 86, has been using a wheelchair to navigate long distances due to a painful knee ligament and a cane for shorter distances.

Traditionally, Catholics mark Christmas Eve by attending Mass at midnight. But over the years, the starting time at the Vatican has crept earlier, reflecting the health or stamina of popes and then the pandemic.

Two years ago, the start of Christmas Eve Mass in St. Peter's Basilica was moved up to 7:30 p.m. to allow faithful to get home before for a nighttime curfew imposed by the Italian government as a measure to combat the COVID-19 pandemic. Although virtually all pandemic-triggered restrictions have long been lifted in Italy, the Vatican kept to the early start time.

During Saturday evening's service, a choir sang hymns. Clusters of potted red poinsettia plants near the altar contrasted with the cream-colored vestments of the pontiff.

On Sunday, tens of thousands of Romans, tourists and pilgrims were expected to crowd into St. Peter's Square to hear Pope Francis deliver an address on world issues and give his blessing. The speech, known in Latin as "Urbi et Orbi" (to the city and to the world), generally is an occasion to review crises including war, persecution and hunger, in many parts of the globe.

## Pelé's family gathers at hospital in Sao Paulo

By MAURICIO SAVARESE AP Sports Writer

SAO PAULO (AP) — Family members of Brazilian soccer great Pelé are gathering at the Albert Einstein hospital in Sao Paulo where the 82-year-old global icon has been since the end of November.

Doctors said earlier this week that Pelé's cancer had advanced, adding the three-time World Cup winner is under "elevated care" related to "kidney and cardiac dysfunctions." No other hospital statements have been published since.

Edson Cholbi Nascimento, one of Pelé's sons and known as Edinho, arrived Saturday, one day after he gave a news conference to deny he would visit his father in hospital. Edinho, who works for a soccer club in southern Brazil, had said then that only doctors could help his father.

"He (Edson) is here," Kely Nascimento, one of Pelé's daughters, said in a posting on Instagram with a picture showing her sitting next to Edinho and two of his children at the hospital. "I am not leaving, no one will take me out of here."

Hours later, Edinho, a former Santos goalkeeper, posted a picture showing his hand holding his father's. "Dad... my strength is yours," Pelé's son said.

Edson Arantes do Nascimento, who is globally known as Pelé, had a colon tumor removed in September 2021. Neither his family nor the hospital have said whether it had spread to other organs.

Kely Nascimento and her sister Flavia Arantes do Nascimento used their social media channels Friday night to post an undated picture of Pelé apparently holding Kely with one hand as he lay on his hospital bed and Flavia slept on a couch.

"We continue to be here, in this fight and with faith. Another night together," Kely Nascimento wrote.

The hospital has not mentioned any signs of Pelé's recent respiratory infection, which was aggravated by COVID-19.

Newspaper Folha de S.Paulo reported last weekend that Pelé's chemotherapy was not working and that doctors had decided to put him on palliative care. Pelé's family denied that report.

Pelé led Brazil to victory in the 1958, 1962 and 1970 World Cups and remains one of the team's all-time leading scorers with 77 goals. Neymar tied Pelé's record during the latest World Cup.

## 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.

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 serious 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."

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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 through the end of next year, and a top World Health Organization official 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 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.

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"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.

## Shells pummel Ukraine's Kherson; 10 dead, 55 wounded

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Russian shells pummeled the southern Ukrainian city of Kherson on Saturday, killing at least 10 people and injuring 55 in the city that Moscow's troops 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.

Yaroslav Yanushevych, the governor of the Kherson region, said in televised remarks that the number of people killed in the latest shelling of the city has risen from seven to 10.

He added that 55 people were wounded, 18 of them in grave condition. Yanushevych said scores of others, including a 6-year-old girl, were wounded by Russian shelling a day earlier.

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 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 30 kilometers (18 miles) west of Russian-controlled Donetsk city.

About 60 shells 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 another \$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 it annexed in 2014, as well as other territorial gains.

## Taliban ban women from working for domestic, foreign NGOs

By RIAZAT BUTT Associated Press

KABUL, Afghanistan (AP) — The Taliban government on Saturday ordered all foreign and domestic non-governmental groups in Afghanistan to suspend employing women, allegedly because some female employees didn't wear the Islamic headscarf correctly. They also separately banned women from attending religious classes at the mosques in the capital of Kabul.

The bans are the latest restrictive moves by Afghanistan's new rulers against women's rights and freedoms, coming just days after the Taliban banned female students from attending universities across the country.

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Afghan women have since demonstrated in major cities against the ban — a rare sign of domestic protest since the Taliban seized power last year. The decision has also caused international outrage.

The NGO order came in a letter from Economy Minister Qari Din Mohammed Hanif, which said that any organization found not complying with the order will have their operating license revoked in Afghanistan. The ministry's spokesman, Abdul Rahman Habib, confirmed the letter's content to The Associated Press.

The ministry said it had received "serious complaints" about female staff working for NGOs not wearing the "correct" headscarf, or hijab. It was not immediately clear if the order applies to all women or only Afghan women working at the NGOs.

More details were not immediately available amid concerns the latest Taliban move could be a stepping-stone to a blanket ban on Afghan women leaving the home.

"It's a heartbreaking announcement," said Maliha Niazi, a master trainer at an NGO teaching young people about issues such as gender-based violence. "Are we not human beings? Why are they treating us with this cruelty?"

The 25-year-old, who works at Y-Peer Afghanistan and lives in Kabul, said her job was important because she was serving her country and is the only person supporting her family. "Will the officials support us after this announcement? If not, then why are they snatching meals from our mouths?" she asked.

Another NGO worker, a 24-year-old from Jalalabad working the Norwegian Refugee Council, said it was "the worst moment of my life."

"The job gives me more than a ... living, it is a representation of all the efforts I've made," she said, declining to give her name fearing for her own safety.

The United Nations condemned the NGO order, and said it will seek to meet with the Taliban leadership to get some clarity.

"Taking away the free will of women to choose their own fate, disempowering and excluding them systematically from all aspects of public and political life takes the country backward, jeopardizing efforts for any meaningful peace or stability in the country," a U.N. statement said.

In another edict, a spokesman for the Ministry of Hajj and Religious Affairs, Fazil Mohammad Hussaini, said late Saturday that "adult girls" are barred from attending Islamic classes in mosques in Kabul, although they could still go to standalone madrassas, or religious schools.

He gave no further details, and did not elaborate on the ages affected with the ban or how it would be enforced. It was also not explained why the measure only applies to Kabul mosques.

Earlier on Saturday, Taliban security forces used a water cannon to disperse women protesting the ban on university education for women in the western city of Herat, eyewitnesses said.

According to the witnesses, about two dozen women were heading to the Herat provincial governor's house on Saturday to protest the ban — many chanting: "Education is our right" — when they were pushed back by security forces firing the water cannon.

Video shared with the AP shows the women screaming and hiding in a side street to escape the water cannon. They then resume their protest, with chants of "Disgraceful!"

One of the protest organizers, Maryam, said between 100 and 150 women took part in the protest, moving in small groups from different parts of the city toward a central meeting point. She did not give her last name for fear of reprisals.

"There was security on every street, every square, armored vehicles and armed men," she said. "When we started our protest, in Tariqi Park, the Taliban took branches from the trees and beat us. But we continued our protest. They increased their security presence. Around 11 a.m. they brought out the water cannon."

A spokesman for the provincial governor, Hamidullah Mutawakil, claimed there were only four-five protesters.

"They had no agenda, they just came here to make a film," he said, without mentioning the violence against the women or the use of the water cannon.

There has been widespread international condemnation of the university ban, including from Muslim-majority countries such as Saudi Arabia, Turkey, the United Arab Emirates and Qatar, as well as warnings from the United States and the G-7 group of major industrial nations that the policy will have consequences

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for the Taliban.

An official in the Taliban government, Minister of Higher Education Nida Mohammad Nadim, spoke about the ban for the first time on Thursday in an interview with the Afghan state television.

He said the ban was necessary to prevent the mixing of genders in universities and because he believes some subjects being taught violated the principles of Islam. He also added the ban would be in place until further notice.

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

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

Afghan society, while largely traditional, had increasingly embraced the education of girls and women over the past two decades of a U.S.-backed government.

In the southwestern Pakistani city of Quetta, dozens of Afghan refugee students protested on Saturday against the ban on female higher education in their homeland and demanded the immediate reopening of campuses for women.

One of them, Bibi Haseena, read a poem depicting the grim situation for Afghan girls seeking an education. She said she was unhappy about graduating outside her country when hundreds of thousands of her Afghan sisters were being deprived of an education.

## **EXPLAINER: Arctic blast sweeps US, causes bomb cyclone**

By MADDIE BURAKOFF AP Science Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — An arctic blast has brought extreme cold, heavy snow and intense wind across much of the U.S. — just in time for the holidays.

The weather system, dubbed a “bomb cyclone,” is disrupting travel and causing hazardous winter conditions. Where is this winter weather coming from, and what’s in store for the coming days?

**WHAT’S HAPPENING?**

A front of cold air is moving down from the Arctic, sending temperatures plunging.

Much of the U.S. will see below-average temperatures, said Bob Oravec, lead forecaster for the National Weather Service in College Park, Maryland.

Temperatures may drop by more than 20 degrees Fahrenheit (11 degrees Celsius) in just a few hours, the National Weather Service predicts.

Wind chill temperatures could drop to dangerous lows far below zero — enough to cause frostbite within minutes. In parts of the Plains, the wind chill could dip as low as minus 70 degrees Fahrenheit (minus 57 Celsius).

Those in the Plains, the Upper Midwest and the Great Lakes were cautioned to expect blizzard conditions as heavy winds whip up the snow, according to the National Weather Service.

**WHO WILL BE AFFECTED?**

Pretty much everyone east of the Rockies — around two-thirds of the country — will see extreme weather, said Ryan Maue, a private meteorologist in the Atlanta area.

Though much of the West Coast will be shielded from the cold, the Arctic front is expected to pass east and south all the way through Florida.

Heavy snowfall and intense winds could be bad news for air travel, Oravec said.

And for those planning to hit the road for the holidays, “you’re going to have pretty serious whiteout conditions,” Maue cautioned.

**HOW LONG WILL IT LAST?**

This weather system is expected to bring some major “weather whiplash,” said Judah Cohen, a winter storm expert for Atmospheric Environmental Research.

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The cold isn't going to stick around for long. After the dramatic plunge that will keep temperatures low for about a week, "everything will snap back to normal," Cohen said.

Shortly after Christmas, temperatures are expected to start to warm up again, moving from west to east. They are likely to remain near normal through the end of the year in most of the U.S.

## WHY IS THIS HAPPENING?

It all started farther north, as frigid air collected over the snow-covered ground in the Arctic, Maue said.

Then the jet stream — wobbling air currents in the middle and upper parts of the atmosphere — began pushing this cold pool down into the U.S.

As this arctic air is pushed into the warmer, moister air ahead of it, the system can quickly develop into serious weather — including what's known as a "bomb cyclone," a fast-developing storm in which atmospheric pressure falls very quickly over 24 hours.

These severe weather events usually form over bodies of water, which have lots of warmth and moisture to feed the storm, Maue said. But with the huge amount of cold air coming through, we could see a rare bomb cyclone forming over land.

## IS THIS NORMAL?

The storm is definitely a strong one, but "not unheard of for the winter seasons," Oravec said.

It's pretty normal to have cold air build up in the winter. This week, though, shifts in the jet stream have pushed the air more to the southeast than usual, Oravec said — sweeping the freeze across the country and making storm conditions more intense.

The U.S. probably won't reach record-breaking lows, like those seen in the cold snap of 1983 or the polar vortex of 2014, Maue said.

Still, "for most people alive, this will be a memorable, top-10 extreme cold event," Maue said.

## Days before new president, old divisions tearing at Brazil

By MAURICIO SAVARESE Associated Press

SAO PAULO (AP) — Trumpets and snares will play Brazil's national anthem at Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva's swearing-in on Jan. 1. Then, one will hear a different song on the streets, its lyrics taking a shot at outgoing President Jair Bolsonaro.

"It is time for Jair, it is time for Jair ... to go away!" the lyrics say. "Pack your bags, hit the road and go away!"

When Lula clinched his election win over Bolsonaro on Oct. 30, tens of thousands of people sang the familiar tune throughout the night, pushing the song to the top of Spotify's list in Brazil and showing one way that many Brazilians aren't ready to extend olive branches.

Healing Brazil's divided society will be easier said than done. Lula's Cabinet appointments thus far favoring leftists and stalwarts of his Workers' Party are turning off those who trusted the divisive 77-year-old to govern alongside moderates, and who joined forces after Bolsonaro repeatedly tested the guardrails of the world's fourth-biggest democracy.

"Governing Brazil means deals with agribusiness, evangelicals, former Bolsonaro allies. It can be frustrating for half-hearted Lula voters, but that's what they have before them," said Carlos Melo, a political science professor at Insper University in Sao Paulo.

Of course, Bolsonaro's far-right backers are hardly the picture of post-election bonhomie. Many reject results of the vote and remain camped outside military buildings nationwide, demanding that Lula's inauguration be impeded.

Brazil's October election was its closest in more than three decades, pitting two arch-rivals against one another. In Lula's victory speech on Oct. 30, he declared that "there are not two Brazils," as tens of thousands gathered outside his hotel in Sao Paulo to celebrate his victory and Bolsonaro's defeat.

A hopeful sign for Lula's bridge-building ambitions came days later, with leftists and moderates once again donning the nation's yellow soccer jersey to cheer on their team at the World Cup. The shirt for almost a decade has been an anti-left symbol and often featured in protests against Lula and in favor of Bolsonaro.

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Lula and his allies wore the yellow shirt, too, in an effort to reclaim it; he posted photos of himself to social media, and said green and yellow "are the colors of 213 million people who love this country." Salesman Elias Gaspar said yellow jerseys started flying off his rack as the team's flamboyant performances trickled in.

"Before the World Cup I would sell on average six blue shirts and four yellow out of every ten," Gaspar, 43, said on Dec. 4. "Now it is almost all yellow."

Soccer was a short-lived unifying force. Brazil exited the tournament earlier than expected after a surprise penalty shootout loss to Croatia in the quarterfinals, and most Brazilians stuffed their jerseys back in their drawers. Bolsonaro's backers are the only ones still sporting the national colors.

Lula has avoided inflaming tensions, mostly refraining from public attacks against Bolsonaro or his supporters, and instead focusing speeches on helping the most disadvantaged Brazilians once he returns to the office he held from 2003 to 2010. At times, though, us-versus-them comments have slipped past his lips. On Dec. 22, while announcing new ministers, he said Bolsonarismo remains alive and angry among those who refuse to recognize the electoral loss, so it must be defeated on Brazil's streets.

For defense minister, Lula picked conservative José Múcio Monteiro after four years of Bolsonaro striving to secure the armed forces' allegiance.

Other Lula appointments seem crafted to please his base and party, such as Anielle Franco, sister of slain Rio de Janeiro city councilwoman Marielle Franco, for minister of racial equality. He also tapped long-time ally Aloizio Mercadante to head the country's development bank -- precisely the sort of position business leaders expected to remain clear of Workers' Party hands.

Gleisi Hoffmann, the chairwoman of Lula's Workers' Party, said building a Cabinet would be a challenge even if Lula were only selecting progressives. Complicating decisions further is the fact that some would-be ministers are likely 2026 presidential candidates, as Lula has indicated he won't run for reelection.

"We have our differences within the Workers' Party, now go figure what happens when we bring a dozen other parties," Hoffmann said on her social media channels Dec. 16. "It is a puzzle, it takes time."

That may help explain why the number of ministries will nearly double, to 37.

Centrist endorsements from former environment minister Marina Silva and Simone Tebet, who finished third in the presidential race's first round, brought in votes from Brazil's moderates -- a demographic that grew leery of Lula since the sprawling Car Wash corruption probe landed him in jail in 2018. With their support, he beat Bolsonaro by less than two percentage points. Many expected them to be quickly announced as ministers, but negotiations have dragged on.

Thomas Traumann, a political consultant, said delays reflect the fact the president-elect has had a central role in negotiations for positions.

"People who helped him like Marina and Simone will have less stature than they would have had they been appointed shortly after he won," Traumann said. "Lula's luck is that moderates will view his administration like many leftist Democrats see (U.S. President Joe) Biden: they might not like what they see, but it is better than the alternative."

Biden's attempt to bridge the political chasm could offer an instructional, albeit dispiriting, model, said Brian Ott, a professor of communication at Missouri State University who has researched the stratifying impact of social media on American political discourse.

Early in his presidency, Biden did not shy away from the fact that he was governing in a polarized country and played up his bonafides as a throwback to a different era when Democrats and Republicans could battle on the Senate floor before repairing to the dining room to hammer out compromises.

"The problem that Biden faces and the problem that politicians face in 51% countries like Brazil is there may no longer be smart strategies to deliver big tent messages without alienating your base," said Ott. "We are now in a period where politics is so intensely, deeply divided culturally, where people don't have to be exposed to different points."

On Dec. 22, Lula named 16 ministers, bringing his total thus far to 21. Neither Tebet nor Silva are among them.

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"It is harder to assemble a government than to win elections," he said while counseling his appointees to hire staffers from diverse backgrounds. "We're trying to make a government that, as much as we can, represents the political forces that participated in our campaign."

He added that people who helped and haven't yet been named will be taken into account, and are owed a debt for "daring to stick their necks out to confront fascism."

Still, many new Lula voters already feel inclined to jump ship. One is Thereza Bittencourt, 65, who spoke at a military club in Rio and said initial signs worry her.

"I took a lot of criticism from my friends at the club because I voted for Lula. All of them chose Bolsonaro. I told them the management of the economy would be better," Bittencourt said as she sipped her caipirinha. "If I only see members of the Workers' Party in the government, goodbye." \_\_\_\_

Associated Press writer Amer Madhani in Washington contributed to this report.

## US officials: COVID, bomb cyclone won't slow Santa's travels

By TERRY CHEA Associated Press

The U.S. military agency known for tracking Santa Claus as he delivers presents on Christmas Eve doesn't expect COVID-19 or the "bomb cyclone" hitting North America to affect Saint Nick's global travels.

NORAD, the North American Aerospace Defense Command, is responsible for monitoring and defending the skies above North America.

But the Colorado Springs, Colorado-based agency also runs the NORAD Tracks Santa service, which allows people to follow his Christmas journey through its noradsanta.org website, social media channels and mobile app.

The agency this year plans to have about 1,500 volunteers working on Christmas Eve to field phone calls from children who want to know Santa's location and delivery schedule.

Lt. General David Nahom, a NORAD official based in Anchorage, Alaska, said the pandemic has not affected Santa's busy delivery schedule and he doesn't expect any impact this weekend.

The freezing temperatures and heavy snowfall that's disrupting holiday travel in the U.S. shouldn't be a problem for a man who lives at the North Pole, Nahom said.

"I think Santa will be right at home with the Arctic weather that's hitting into the lower 48," Nahom said.

NORAD's holiday tradition began in 1955 after a kid mistakenly called a Colorado military command asking to speak to Santa. More calls came in so the commander on duty assigned an officer to answer the Santa calls, and the tradition took hold.

## Today in History: December 25, Washington crosses Delaware

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Sunday, Dec. 25, the 359th day of 2022. There are six days left in the year. This is Christmas Day.

Today's Highlight in History:

On Dec. 25, 1776, Gen. George Washington and his troops crossed the Delaware River for a surprise attack against Hessian forces at Trenton, New Jersey, during the American Revolutionary War.

On this date:

In A.D. 336, the first known commemoration of Christmas on Dec. 25 took place in Rome.

In 1066, William the Conqueror was crowned King of England.

In 1818, "Silent Night (Stille Nacht)" was publicly performed for the first time during the Christmas Mid-night Mass at the Church of St. Nikolaus in Oberndorf, Austria.

In 1926, Hirohito became emperor of Japan, succeeding his father, Emperor Yoshihito.

In 1946, comedian W.C. Fields died in Pasadena, California, at age 66.

In 1977, comedian Sir Charles Chaplin died in Switzerland at age 88.

In 1989, ousted Romanian President Nicolae Ceausescu (chow-SHES'-koo) and his wife, Elena, were executed following a popular uprising. Former baseball manager Billy Martin, 61, died in a traffic accident

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near Binghamton, New York.

In 1991, Soviet President Mikhail S. Gorbachev went on television to announce his resignation as the eighth and final leader of a communist superpower that had already gone out of existence.

In 1999, space shuttle Discovery's astronauts finished their repair job on the Hubble Space Telescope and released it back into orbit.

In 2003, 16 people were killed by mudslides that swept over campgrounds in California's San Bernardino Valley. Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf (pur-VEHZ' moo-SHAH'-ruhv) survived a second assassination bid in 11 days, but 17 other people were killed.

In 2009, passengers aboard Northwest Airlines Flight 253 foiled an attempt to blow up the plane as it was landing in Detroit by seizing Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab (OO'-mahr fah-ROOK' ahb-DOOL'-moo-TAH'-lahb), who tried to set off explosives in his underwear. (Abdulmutallab later pleaded guilty and was sentenced to life in prison.)

In 2020, a recreational vehicle parked in the deserted streets of downtown Nashville exploded early Christmas morning, damaging dozens of buildings, causing widespread communications outages and grounding holiday travel at the city's airport; investigators later determined that the bomber, a 63-year-old Nashville-area man, was killed in the explosion.

Ten years ago: In his Christmas message to the world, Pope Benedict XVI called for an end to the slaughter in Syria and for more meaningful negotiations between Israelis and Palestinians, while encouraging more religious freedom under China's new leaders. Chicago mobster Frank Calabrese Sr., 75, died at a federal prison in North Carolina.

Five years ago: In his traditional Christmas message, Pope Francis called for a two-state solution in the Middle East, and prayed that confrontation could be overcome on the Korean Peninsula. Harsh winter weather gripped much of the country on Christmas, with bitter cold in the Midwest and a blizzard moving into New England. Russian election officials formally barred opposition leader Alexei Navalny from running for president, prompting him to call for a boycott of the March, 2018 vote.

One year ago: NASA's James Webb Space Telescope, the world's largest and most powerful space telescope, rocketed away from French Guiana in South America on a quest to behold light from the first stars and galaxies and scour the universe for hints of life. Airlines canceled hundreds of flights as staffing issues tied to COVID-19 disrupted holiday celebrations during one of the busiest travel times of the year. Pope Francis used his Christmas Day address to pray for an end to the coronavirus pandemic.

Today's Birthdays: Author Anne Roiphe is 87. Actor Hanna Schygulla (SHEE'-goo-lah) is 79. R&B singer John Edwards (The Spinners) is 78. Actor Gary Sandy is 77. Singer Jimmy Buffett is 76. Pro and College Football Hall-of-Famer Larry Csonka is 76. Country singer Barbara Mandrell is 74. Actor Sissy Spacek is 73. Blues singer/guitarist Joe Louis Walker is 73. Former White House adviser Karl Rove is 72. Actor CCH Pounder is 70. Singer Annie Lennox is 68. Reggae singer-musician Robin Campbell (UB40) is 68. Country singer Steve Wariner is 68. Singer Shane MacGowan (The Pogues, The Popes) is 65. Baseball Hall of Famer Rickey Henderson is 64. The former chair of the Council of Economic Advisers, Christina Romer, is 64. Actor Klea Scott is 54. Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau is 51. Rock musician Noel Hogan (The Cranberries) is 51. Singer Dido is 51. Rock singer Mac Powell (Third Day) is 50. R&B singer Ryan Shaw is 42. Country singer Alecia Elliott is 40. Pop singers Jess and Lisa Origliasso (The Veronicas) are 38. Actor Perdita Weeks is 37. Rock singer-musician Lukas Nelson (Lukas Nelson & Promise of the Real) is 34.