

# Groton Daily Independent

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## Groton Community Calendar

**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.

**Sunday, Jan. 1**

Emmanuel Lutheran Worship with communion, 9 a.m.; No Sunday School or Choir.

United Methodist: Conde worship with communion, 8:30 a.m.; Coffee hour, 9:30 a.m.; Groton worship with communion, 10:30 a.m.

Groton CM&A: Sunday School at 9:15 a.m., Worship Service at 10:45 a.m.

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.

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

**OPEN: Recycling Trailer in Groton**  
The recycling trailer is located west of the city shop. It takes cardboard, papers and aluminum cans.

"Keep on knocking 'til the joy inside opens a window look to see who's there."

Rumi

Chicken Soup for the Soul



**Monday, Jan. 2**

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

**Tuesday, Jan. 3**

Senior Menu: Meatballs, mashed potatoes and gravy, carrots and peas, mixed fruit, whole wheat bread.

Basketball doubleheader in Groton with Warner: Girls JV at 4 p.m. followed by Boys JV, Girls Varsity and Boys Varsity.

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

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

Emmanuel: Executive Committee Meeting, 7 p.m.  
City Council Meeting, 7 p.m.

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## Spray Foam.

The resolution that keeps  
on giving and  
saving you money!

# 2023



## Bahr Spray Foam

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[www.bahrsprayfoam.net](http://www.bahrsprayfoam.net)



Bahr Spray Foam

**Now offering blown  
cellulose and fiberglass**

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concrete with foam.  
100% warranty**

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**Groton Police Officer Tom Strickland and city employee Paul Kosel distributed the Christmas food bags to residents in the community prior to Christmas. The Pantry and the Common Cents Thrift Shop helped with the purchase of the food.**





## SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

# Rosebud officials say at least six dead as tribe digs out from storms

**Tribal president hopes to pay for residents' propane and electricity before next blizzard**

**BY: JOHN HULT AND JOSHUA HAIAR - DECEMBER 28, 2022 6:20 PM**

ROSEBUD RESERVATION — Rosebud tribal officials say at least six people have died as a result of two winter storms that partially buried homes across the reservation, and some people remain trapped at home more than two weeks after the first snow fell.

The fatalities included a 12-year-old boy with health problems who couldn't be reached in time, an elderly man found bundled up in his home who'd frozen to death, and a man who froze to death in a ditch.

The deaths occurred both before and after a National Guard deployment ordered by Gov. Kristi Noem, which came six days after Rosebud Sioux Tribe President Scott Herman declared a state of emergency on the reservation in south-central South Dakota.

The tribe uses disaster declarations sparingly, and only after exhausting its own disaster management resources, said Herman, who called upon state officials to be more responsive to the tribe's needs. The president said the tribe began to call for help through the state's secretary of tribal relations, Dave Flute, before the official disaster declaration on Dec. 16.

"We're serious when we ask for (help)," said Herman. "It took us two weeks to actually be able to get the assistance we needed."

The South Dakota Office of Emergency Management sent two more highway-grade snowblowers on Wednesday morning, as the department and the National Guard additionally work to help residents of the Oglala Sioux Tribe in Pine Ridge, which was also hit hard by the storm.

Part of the work for those blowers involves widening the pathways cleared earlier, to make space for propane deliveries. Over half of Rosebud's households rely on the fuel for heat. Herman said he plans to



**Wayne Boyd, chief of staff to the president of the Rosebud Sioux Tribe, reflects on recent winter storms while helping with the storm response from his office on Dec. 27, 2022.** (Joshua Haiar/SD Searchlight)

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ask his tribal council to pay for a three months' supply of propane and pay residents' electricity bills for the same amount of time as a way to relieve pressure on residents.

Some residents of Todd County, home of the tribe and one of the poorest counties in the nation, "are lucky if they can put \$100 in the tank at a time," said Wayne Boyd, a former tribal treasurer who now serves as Herman's chief of staff.

The tribe is far from a place of planning for the next storm in earnest, though. The path-widening for propane deliveries will take place alongside continued road clearing. About 55% of the reservation's roadways were clear as of Tuesday.

That figure frustrates Herman, who knows that residents are frustrated with him and growing more impatient by the day.

"Everyone should be out by now," Herman said. "We can't tell them to wait any longer."

## Early stumbles with contractors

The storm's sheer breadth of coverage across the U.S. impeded the tribe's ability to secure assistance from the nearby neighbors it typically relies upon when disasters strike.

The tribe reached out to contractors from nearby Valentine, Nebraska, but they were booked. They then reached as far out as Minneapolis, St. Louis and Kansas City to seek backup for the three loaders, two plows, six small front-end loaders and seven Bobcat snow-pushers its highway department has to clear 170 miles of paved tribal roadways.

"This thing that happened didn't just happen here," Boyd said.

The first loader the tribe was able to hire came by way of a contractor that arrived during the first storm, which began on Dec. 13.

"It was gone to another area within a day and a half," Boyd said.

The next set of contractors broke a blade pushing through the 3 feet of heavy snow that first fell, which blew into drifts 10 feet tall or higher.

The tribe said it contracted for helicopters to air-drop supplies and rescue stranded residents, particularly those with medical needs.

That was important, tribal officials said, because so many people were stranded across the reservation under those enormous drifts and unable to access food, propane or wood for heat, or medicine.

The same poverty that keeps Rosebud residents from putting more than \$100 in the tank is the reason some tribal members don't keep more than three or four days' worth of food on hand, Boyd said.

The helicopters were able to help many of those families, he said, including one woman and her six children in the tiny community of Corn Creek. They were without food or heat for three days, huddled together in one bedroom for warmth.

"We had to send two helicopters because they wouldn't all fit in one," Boyd said.

## Fatalities mount

Others did not make it. Boyd explained the circumstances behind six fatalities known to the tribe as of Tuesday:

- An older man, stuck in a rural home with his daughter and granddaughter, had a heart attack during the first week of the storm. It took two and a half days to plow through to the home, Boyd said. His family was there with the body when crews arrived.
- The 12-year-old boy was running low on medicine and couldn't get out of his house. He lived 3-4 miles from the city of Rosebud, Boyd said, and it took hours to get to him. He died in the hospital.
- A man in Antelope also died at a hospital from blood loss after a long wait for an ambulance ride.
- The family of an older man in White River called to report that he'd been passing out and had pneumonia symptoms. He refused to ride in the helicopter and waited for an ambulance. He died at the hospital, Boyd said.
- A homeless man's body was found in a ditch, Boyd said.
- An older man who lived near Spring Creek froze to death with his coveralls on, Boyd said. The man's family had been checking on him early on in the storm but lost contact for a day and a half.

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## Response continues, future storms considered

The command center for the tribal Emergency Preparedness Program (EPP) in Rosebud had propane, small heaters, food and water, diapers and other supplies to distribute to tribal members in need on Tuesday afternoon. The tribe bought all the supplies to respond to community needs, Herman said, with requests for assistance written on paper forms and placed under sheets of paper with labels like "food," "furnace repairs," "rescue" and "water breaks."

The forms help guide the response to a storm whose effects continue to be felt across the reservation, said EPP Director Robert Oliver.

Much of the tribe's communication moves through social media. The tribe began warning residents of a pending winter storm on its Facebook page on Dec. 9, and later began posting the phone numbers of emergency responders.

Oliver and the rest of the EPP crew, which pulls in help from multiple tribal agencies, have been busy ever since.

Oliver hopes to see a digital aid in place by next winter. The plan is to gather information about each tribal household in the coming months – information on potentially vulnerable residents, the kind of heating fuel used and any other potential needs – and input the information into geographic information system software that would help guide emergency response.

The tribe began work on such a mapping system earlier this year, but a software crash rendered it unavailable long before the storm hit, Oliver said.

"If we have it back up, now we can start building those maps and everybody would have it on their phone," Oliver said. "Then it wouldn't be that tough getting to places. We will know where people live."

The three-month propane tank refills Herman is proposing will be helpful this winter, the president said, but forward-looking steps like a GIS app are important in the face of more frequent weather extremes. The tribal council has heard multiple presentations on the impact of climate change, Herman said "and they're telling us we need to worry."

"We've noticed the change," he said. "And we recognize that we need to prepare for these changes."

If that means filling tanks in advance of the next major storm, Herman said, he expects the tribe will work to find a way to pay for that.

## Funding questions loom

The tribe plans to seek reimbursement from the Federal Emergency Management Agency for the costs incurred during the storm, but Chief of Staff Boyd said the tribe will not be able to recoup all its costs.

It's taken emergency funds from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act to keep the tribe afloat during the storm. The money could also help fund the purchase of new snow removal equipment.

That's important, Boyd said, because the tribe gets \$2.8 million in road funding from the federal government. Another \$900,000 in fuel taxes from the state helps cover road work. The tribe's total annual budget is around \$9 million.

"That's why we have a hard time with emergency management," Boyd said. "We don't have the resources."

That's why the tribe kept asking for help, Boyd said. Herman said he placed multiple calls with Tribal Relations Secretary Flute, as well as calls with Secretary Craig Price of the state Department of Public Safety and representatives with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in the days leading up to Gov. Noem's disaster declaration. Neither the governor's spokesman, Ian Fury, nor Flute immediately responded to messages from South Dakota Searchlight.

The response following the governor's declaration was welcome and appreciated, Herman said, but it came too late.

Initially, he said, "they paid us lip service."

Herman said he plans to turn to the federal government first the next time help is needed.

## Pine Ridge also waited for help

Troubles from the winter storms continue for the Oglala Sioux Tribe, whose reservation sits just across the Rosebud Reservation's western border.

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Officials in Pine Ridge reached out to several offices in the federal government for emergency assistance, including the Federal Emergency Management Agency. That request was made Dec. 18. Aid from FEMA did not arrive until Dec. 27, according to Donna Salomon with the tribal president's office.

Snow removal, medical transport, and delivering medication, propane and food were top priorities for the tribal government, according to a Dec. 23 announcement.

President Frank Star Comes Out has since issued a water restriction order that will remain in place until Friday for some parts of the reservation, saying the tribe's utility crews have been unable to get to get to all its stations and that certain areas have "low or no pressure."

On Wednesday, the tribe issued a release on food box distributions at multiple locations that will continue for the next few days.

Salomon said the tribe had recorded no storm-related deaths as of Wednesday.

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

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

## President signs Rounds bill repealing discriminatory Native American laws

**BY: SEARCHLIGHT STAFF - DECEMBER 28, 2022 12:50 PM**

U.S. Sen. Mike Rounds' bipartisan legislation to repeal discriminatory federal laws targeting Native Americans was signed into law by the president on Tuesday, Rounds' office announced in a news release.

The RESPECT Act (Repealing Existing Substandard Provisions Encouraging Conciliation with Tribes) repeals 11 outdated federal laws, including laws that stripped Native American children from their families for the purpose of placing them in "Indian reform schools," such as the now-infamous Carlisle Indian Industrial School, Rounds' office said.

Other laws repealed by the RESPECT Act include several that authorized the elimination of treaties and funding obligations to tribes engaged in hostilities against the government, and a law that said "No annuities, or moneys, or goods, shall be paid or distributed to Indians while they are under the influence of any description of intoxicating liquor." (See below for a full list of the repealed laws.)

Rounds, a Republican from South Dakota, introduced the RESPECT Act in 2016 and every session of Congress since then.

"It's long overdue to remove these immoral, discriminatory federal laws from our books," Rounds said in the news release.

The RESPECT Act is supported by the Great Plains Tribal Chairmen's Association and the National Congress of American Indians.

J. Garret Renville, chairman-elect of the Sisseton Wahpeton Oyate, said in the news release, "The RESPECT Act is a first step in an attempt to better consult and coordinate with Tribal nations. Historically and symbolically, it is my hope that it represents a path to improving the longstanding inequities in the relationship and dealings between sovereign people, their nations and the United States government."

Companion legislation was introduced in the House last year and cosponsored by Dusty Johnson, R-South Dakota.

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## The RESPECT Act would repeal the following laws:

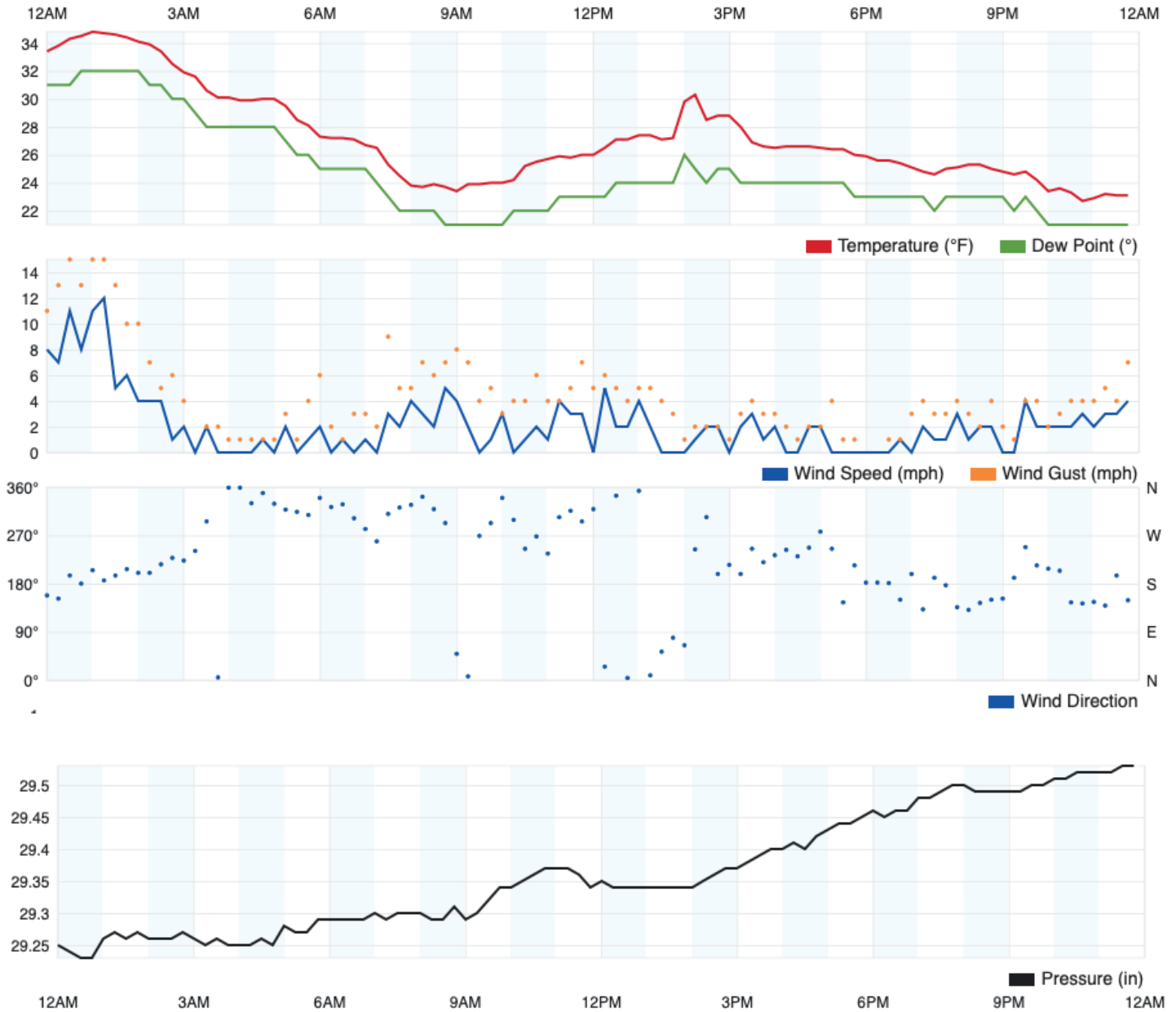
- 25 U.S.C. 302 Indian Reform School; rules and regulations; consent of parents to placing youth in reform school The Commissioner of Indian Affairs, under the direction of the Secretary of the Interior, is authorized and directed to select and designate some of the schools or other institution herein specifically provided for as an "Indian Reform School," and to make all needful rules and regulations for its conduct, and the placing of Indian youth therein.
- 25 U.S.C. 72 Abrogation of treaties; Whenever the tribal organization of any Indian tribe is in actual hostility to the United States, the President is authorized, by proclamation, to declare all treaties with such tribe abrogated by such tribe if in his opinion the same can be done consistently with good faith and legal and national obligations.
- 25 U.S.C. 127 Moneys of annuities of hostile Indians; No moneys or annuities stipulated by any treaty with an Indian tribe for which appropriations are made shall be expended for, or paid, or delivered to any tribe which, since the next preceding payment under such treaty, has engaged in hostilities against the United States, or against its citizens peacefully or lawfully sojourning or traveling within its jurisdiction at the time of such hostilities; nor in such case shall such stipulated payments or deliveries be resumed until new appropriations shall have been made therefor by Congress.
- 25 U.S.C. 128 Appropriations not paid to Indians at war with United States; None of the appropriations made for the Indian Service shall be paid to any band of Indians or any portion of any band while at war with the United States or with the white citizens of any of the States or Territories.
- 25 U.S.C. 129 Moneys due Indians holding captives other than Indians withheld; The Secretary of the Interior is authorized to withhold, from any tribe of Indians who may hold any captives other than Indians, any moneys due them from the United States until said captives shall be surrendered to the lawful authorities of the United States.
- 25 U.S.C. 130 Withholding of moneys of goods on account of intoxicating liquors; No annuities, or moneys, or goods, shall be paid or distributed to Indians while they are under the influence of any description of intoxicating liquor, nor while there are good and sufficient reasons leading the officers or agents, whose duty it may be to make such payments or distribution, to believe that there is any species of intoxicating liquor within convenient reach.
- 25 U.S.C. 137 Supplies distributed to able-bodied males on condition; For the purpose of inducing Indians to labor and become self-supporting, it is provided that, in distributing the supplies and annuities to the Indians for whom the same are appropriated, the agent distributing the same shall require all able-bodied male Indians between the ages of eighteen and forty-five to perform service upon the reservation, for the benefit of themselves or of the tribe..
- 25 U.S.C. 138 Goods withheld from chiefs violating treaty stipulations; No delivery of goods or merchandise shall be made to the chiefs of any tribe, by authority of any



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## Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



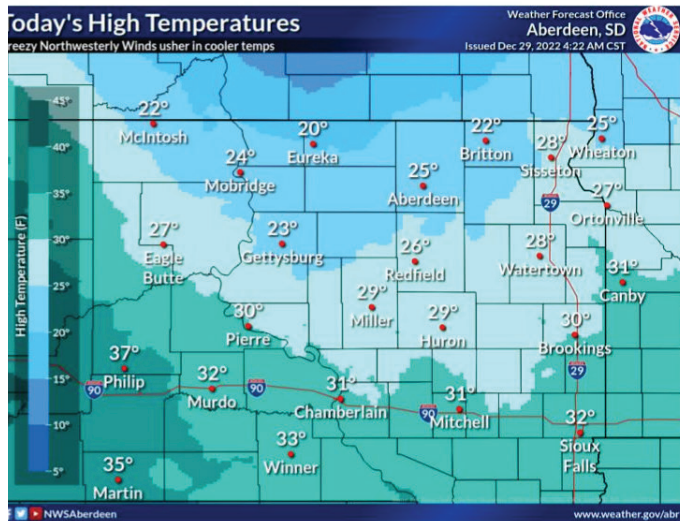
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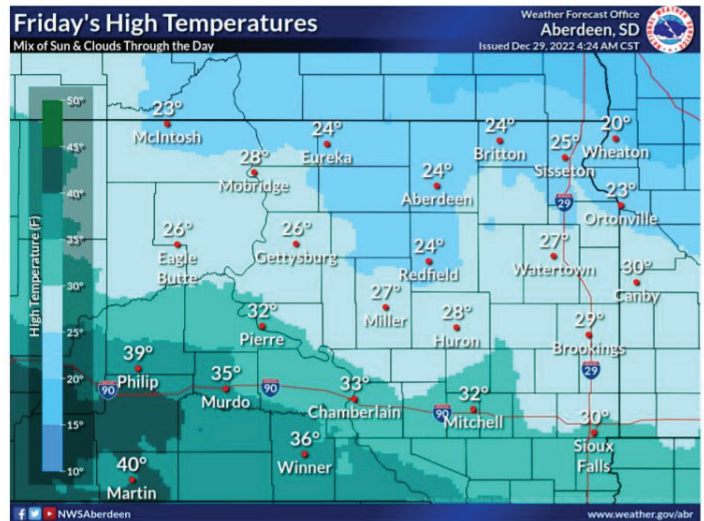
| Today         | Tonight       | Friday       | Friday Night  | Saturday     | Saturday Night | New Year's Day |
|---------------|---------------|--------------|---------------|--------------|----------------|----------------|
|               |               |              |               |              |                |                |
| Mostly Cloudy | Mostly Cloudy | Partly Sunny | Mostly Cloudy | Partly Sunny | Partly Cloudy  | Partly Sunny   |
| High: 23 °F ↓ | Low: 4 °F     | High: 23 °F  | Low: 11 °F    | High: 23 °F  | Low: 8 °F      | High: 23 °F    |

## Breezy & Cooler Today and Friday

High temperatures Today and Friday will be a good 7 to 10 degrees cooler than Wednesday's highs. There will be a slight chance for a few light snow showers skirting far south-central South Dakota, around Chamberlain, northeastward toward Hayti and Clear Lake up to around the Ortonville area. Accumulations will be very minimal at best.



National Weather Service Aberdeen, SD




Updated: December 29, 2022 4:57 AM

A cold front will pass through the area this morning. Breezing northwest winds will allow some cooler air to filter into the area. High temperatures both today and Friday will be cooler and closer to late December averages. A slight chance for light snow will be possible across south-central South Dakota northeastward into portions of east-central South Dakota and west-central Minnesota.

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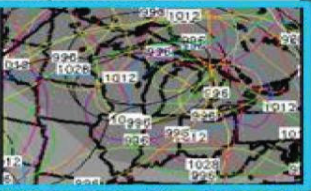
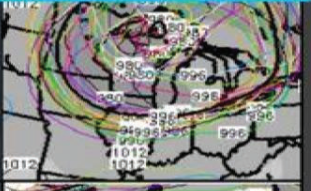
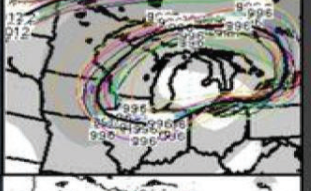
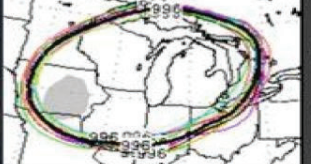


**A winter storm is possible next week...**

**Too much variability in model guidance to provide detail.**

**Stay tuned over the next couple days!**



| WINTER WEATHER FORECASTS  |   |
|---|---|
| What you should know, when  |   |
| <b>5 to 7 Days Out: General Patterns Only</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• A potential storm in a general area, may or may not happen at all</li><li>• LOCATION: Could vary by 2-3 states</li><li>• TIMING: Could vary by 1-2 days</li><li>• SNOW AMOUNTS: Not possible to guess</li></ul>               | <b>Example of model spread:</b>  |
| <b>3 to 4 Days Out: "Heads Up"</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Able to determine <i>if</i> storm will develop, but exactly where and what still unknown</li><li>• LOCATION: Could vary by 1-2 states</li><li>• TIMING: Could vary by 12-24 hours</li><li>• SNOW AMOUNTS: Vague estimates only</li></ul> |                                  |
| <b>1 to 2 Days Out: Forecast gets clearer</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Storm expected, but details could change</li><li>• LOCATION: Could vary 50-150 miles</li><li>• TIMING: Could vary by 6-12 hours</li><li>• SNOW AMOUNTS: Can be forecast in inches, <i>but may still change</i></li></ul>      |                                  |
| <b>12-24 Hours: Detailed Forecast</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Tracking storm as it approaches</li><li>• LOCATION: Within a county</li><li>• TIMING: Within a few hours</li><li>• SNOW AMOUNTS: Can often be forecast within an inch or two</li></ul>  |                                 |

National Weather Service - Aberdeen, SD

A weather system is possible next week but right now we don't have much for detail. As we weather models begin to align better in the next few days we will be able to address some of the details such as precipitation types, amounts and winds.

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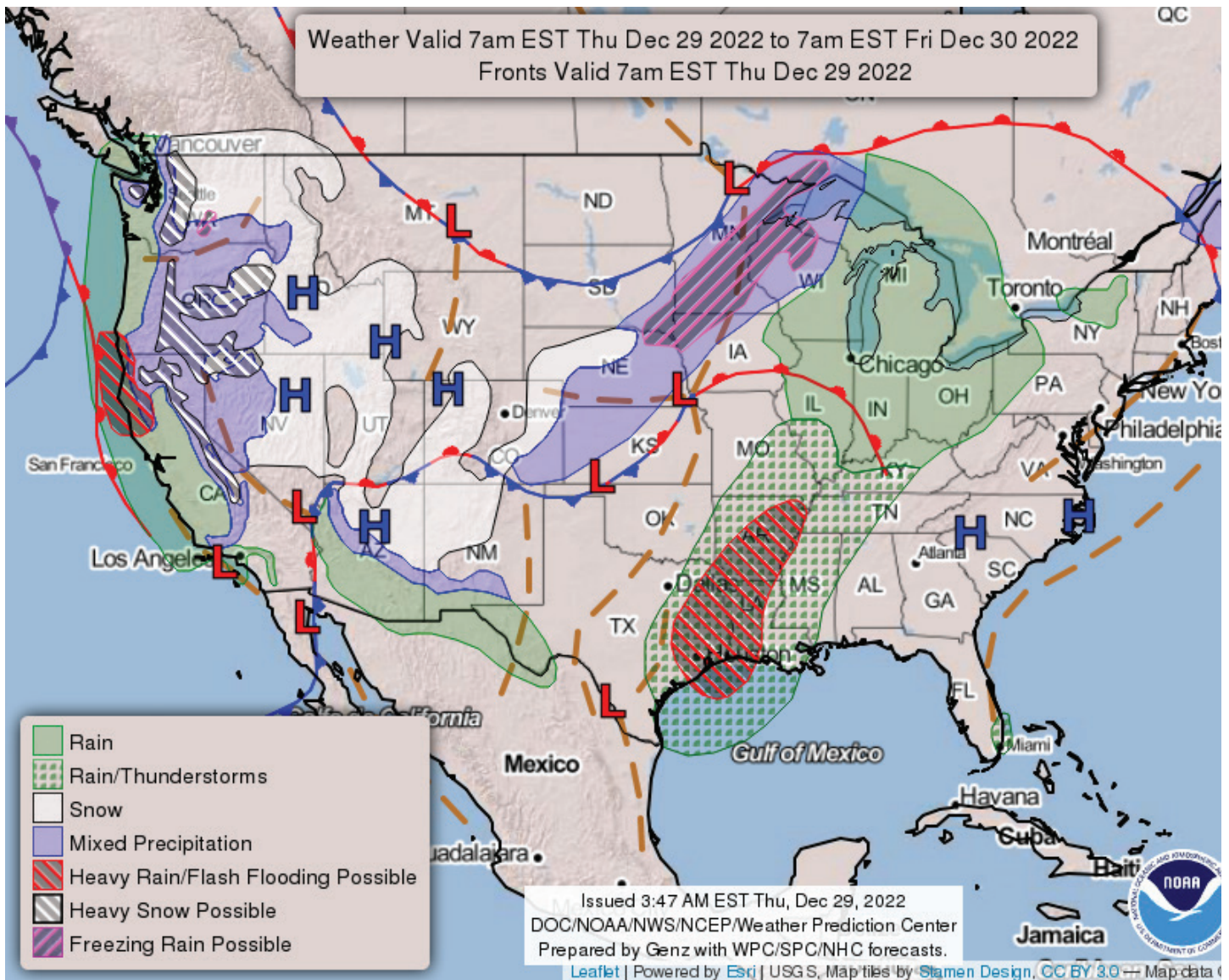
## Yesterday's Groton Weather

**High Temp: 34.8 °F at 1:00 AM**  
**Low Temp: 22.7 °F at 10:45 PM**  
**Wind: 15 mph at 1:00 AM**  
**Precip: : 0.00**

Day length: 8 hours, 48 minutes

## Today's Info

Record High: 59 in 1999  
Record Low: -35 in 1917  
Average High: 25°F  
Average Low: 4°F  
Average Precip in Dec.: 0.57  
Precip to date in Dec.: 2.82  
Average Precip to date: 21.78  
Precip Year to Date: 20.32  
Sunset Tonight: 4:58:53 PM  
Sunrise Tomorrow: 8:10:19 AM



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## Today in Weather History

December 29, 2005: Heavy snow of 6 to 14 inches fell across parts of north-central and most of north-east South Dakota from the morning of the 29th through the early afternoon of the 30th. Big Stone and Traverse counties in west-central Minnesota had 7 to 8 inches of snow the evening of the 29th through the early afternoon of the 30th. Light rain and freezing rain fell before the snow, creating some slick roads which resulted in some accidents. Some snowfall amounts included 7 inches at Watertown, Big Stone City, and Artichoke Lake; 8 inches at Waubay, Browns Valley, and Wheaton; 9 inches northeast of Isabel and Hecla; 10 inches at Wilmot and Clear Lake; 12 inches at Milbank; and 14 inches at Summit.

December 29, 1876: The Pacific Express train was crossing the Ashtabula River in Ohio when the bridge collapsed. The bridge collapsed at 7:28 PM, during a snowstorm that left two feet of snow and produced 40 mph winds. The only railcar not to fall into the icy river below was the first locomotive.

December 29, 1894: Express A severe freeze hit Florida destroying fruit and causing considerable damage to trees.

1830 - A very heavy snowstorm ushered in the "winter of the deep snow." The storm produced 30 inches of snow at Peoria IL and 36 inches at Kansas City MO. Cold and snow continued until the middle of February causing great suffering among pioneers. (David Ludlum)

1894 - A severe freeze hit Florida destroying fruit and causing considerable damage to trees. (David Ludlum)

1954 - Fort Scott, KS, was buried under 26 inches of snow in 24 hours to establish a state record. (28th-29th) (The Weather Channel)

1984 - One hundred cities in the central and eastern U.S. reported record high temperatures. Kansas City, MO, experienced its warmest December day of record with a morning low of 60 degrees and an afternoon high of 71 degrees. (The National Weather Summary) (Sandra and TI Richard Sanders - 1987)

1987 - A storm off the Middle Atlantic Coast produced heavy snow in the Appalachians and the north-eastern U.S. Snow and high winds created blizzard conditions in southeastern Massachusetts. Cape Cod received thirteen inches of snow, and snow drifts three feet deep were reported around Chatham MA. Strong winds produced wind chill readings as cold as 60 degrees below zero in southwestern New England. In the western U.S., a Pacific coast storm produced heavy snow in the Sierra Nevada Range of California, with 24 inches reported at Mammoth Mountain. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - A cold front brought rain and snow to the northwestern U.S. The rainfall total of 2.70 inches at Astoria OR was a record for the date. High winds along the eastern slopes of the Northern Rockies gusted to 81 mph at Livingston MT. (Storm Data) (The National Weather Summary)

1989 - Snow and ice prevailed from the southwestern U.S. to the Great Lakes Region. Flagstaff, AZ, received nine inches of snow in just six hours. Bitter cold weather continued over Maine. Portland ME reported a record twenty-two straight days with highs 32 degrees or colder. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

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Daily Devotionals

## Seeds of Hope

### WHAT TO EXPECT IN 2023

As we come to the close of this year and face the uncertainties that are before us in the year to come, it is important to pause, listen to, and accept a promise from our God:

"For I know the plans I have for you, says the LORD. They are plans for good and not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope.

"In those days when you pray, I will listen. If you search for me with all your heart, you will find me, declares the Lord."

This is one of God's if – then's. There can be no misunderstanding of what He is talking about in this passage of Scripture. God knows our future. He very carefully designed it in our best interest to enable us to find and follow His will. Because He knows our future, He assures us that it can be one of goodness and hope – not one of disaster.

But if we want this future that contains goodness and hope, we must study His Word and go to Him in earnest prayer. He assures us that He will listen to us IF we search for Him with all of our hearts and THEN are obedient to and follow Him. IF we do this, THEN He will bless us.

Perhaps we have prayed and even searched for Him in years past, but did not do so with all our heart. With God, it is always IF you obey me, THEN you can count on Me.

Prayer: Lord, may we come to You this year with sincerity and singleness of heart to find Your plans. Give us Your courage to seek, find, and follow You in our lives. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scriptures For Today: Jeremiah 29:11 For I know the plans I have for you," says the Lord. "They are plans for good and not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope.



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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## WINNING NUMBERS

### MEGA MILLIONS

WINNING NUMBERS:  
12.27.22

9 13 36 59 61 11

MegaPlier: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:  
**\$640,000,000**

NEXT 1 Days 16 Hrs 9  
DRAW: Mins 23 Secs

[GAME DETAILS](#)

### LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS:  
12.28.22

2 10 21 44 45 7

All Star Bonus: 5x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:  
**\$32,440,000**

NEXT 2 Days 16 Hrs 9  
DRAW: Mins 23 Secs

[GAME DETAILS](#)

### LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS:  
12.28.22

7 10 14 15 41 8

TOP PRIZE:

**\$7,000/week**

NEXT 15 Hrs 39 Mins 23  
DRAW: Secs

[GAME DETAILS](#)

### DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS:  
12.28.22

2 7 9 15 22

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:  
**\$263,000**

NEXT 2 Days 16 Hrs 9  
DRAW: Mins 23 Secs

[GAME DETAILS](#)

### POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS:  
12.28.22

4 10 14 41 56 16

TOP PRIZE:

**\$10,000,000**

NEXT 2 Days 16 Hrs 8  
DRAW: Mins 24 Secs

[GAME DETAILS](#)

### POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS:  
12.28.22

26 32 38 45 56 1

Power Play: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:  
**\$246,000,000**

NEXT 2 Days 16 Hrs 8  
DRAW: Mins 24 Secs

[GAME DETAILS](#)

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## News from the Associated Press

### SD Lottery

By The Associated Press

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

Dakota Cash

02-07-09-15-22

(two, seven, nine, fifteen, twenty-two)

Estimated jackpot: \$263,000

Lotto America

02-10-21-44-45, Star Ball: 7, ASB: 5

(two, ten, twenty-one, forty-four, forty-five; Star Ball: seven; ASB: five)

Estimated jackpot: \$32,440,000

Mega Millions

Estimated jackpot: 640,000,000

Powerball

26-32-38-45-56, Powerball: 1, Power Play: 2

(twenty-six, thirty-two, thirty-eight, forty-five, fifty-six; Powerball: one; Power Play: two)

Estimated jackpot: \$246,000,000

### Editorial Roundup: South Dakota

By The Associated Press

Yankton Press & Dakotan. December 27, 2022.

Editorial: Winter Storms Bury South Dakota Reservations

Last week's winter storm was the second storm in as many weeks to blast the Upper Plains, and for some Native American reservations in western South Dakota, that one-two punch has been disastrous.

As has been reported by media from around the state and around the world, parts of the Pine Ridge reservation were buried by several feet of snow in mid-December, and last week's frigid, windy storm has suffocated the region with even more misery. It has left thousands of people without power, without open roads and, in some cases, practically no access to the rest of the world.

"We're fighting a losing battle," Oglala Sioux Tribe President Frank Star Comes Out told BBC News.

One reservation resident told the Rapid City Journal, "I've seen across the reservation some members were burning clothes in their wood stove because they couldn't get access to wood."

Last week, Gov. Kristi Noem mobilized the National Guard to bring in firewood from the Black Hills to the reservation, as well as to assist in opening roads. The Guard mission was subsequently expanded to help both the Oglala and Rosebud tribes in these endeavors.

The Journal said the governor's decision "underscored the desperate situation in western South Dakota. Tribal officials say snow drifts have formed as high as 10 feet, blocking roads and stranding families with dwindling supplies for heating and food."

The state response has arguably been slow. The storm that initially smothered the western part of South Dakota and buried the reservations hit two weeks ago, and a week passed before Pierre mobilized with National Guard units to cope with the disaster.

However, it could also be noted that the first storm was, if you recall, extremely slow moving, and the epic conditions developed over several days, which could have slowed any government response.

Either way, the two storms have left probably the most vulnerable people in South Dakota all but isolated as they try not only to dig out from the snow but also to just survive the cruel wrath of these recent weather events.

What is needed now is to get the word out, to seek out organizations that can lend a hand in this disaster.

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What's also needed is for people across the region to help if asked or when the opportunity presents itself. With this being a winter storm — and with plenty of winter left in front of us — the help is needed immediately. This is a pressing emergency, and it's time to mobilize.

## Wednesday's Scores

The Associated Press

GIRLS PREP BASKETBALL=

Aberdeen Roncalli 46, Herreid/Selby Area 38

Campbell County, Wyo. 59, Mitchell 39

Mandaree, N.D. 66, Pine Ridge 51

McLaughlin 59, Wakpala 12

Parshall, N.D. 54, St. Francis Indian 50

BOYS PREP BASKETBALL=

Aberdeen Christian 62, Lower Brule 48

Ethan 67, McCook Central/Montrose 64

Hamlin 55, Howard 49

Little Wound 54, White Shield, N.D. 35

McLaughlin 63, Mandaree, N.D. 43

Mitchell 83, Campbell County, Wyo. 61

Pine Ridge 79, Wakpala 53

St. Francis Indian 93, Solen, N.D. 11

Viborg-Hurley 58, Gregory 44

Waubay/Summit 64, Canistota 56

White River 62, Bridgewater-Emery 61

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

## Woman criticizes Noem for releasing her father's killer

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — A woman is criticizing Gov. Kristi Noem's decision to release her father's killer from prison.

Noem announced Monday that she had commuted seven prisoners' sentences to parole, saying they had earned a second chance and present a low risk of recidivism.

One of the prisoners is Connie Hirsch. KELO-TV reported Wednesday that Hirsch in 2012 was convicted of first-degree manslaughter in connection with the death of her husband, Jerold Hirsch, in 2010. She was sentenced to 35 years in prison.

Jarold Hirsch's daughter, Sandra Lopez, told KELO-TV that she learned of Noem's decision on Christmas Day through a victim advocate. No one consulted her, she said. If someone had, she would have asked why Connie Hirsch couldn't have sat in prison until her parole date in 2026.

"I feel like I'm victimized all over again by Noem doing this," Lopez said. "I don't got a dad. I don't get to see my dad. I got to go visit my dad at a grave. My kids got to go visit their grandpa at a grave. Her kids would've at least got to visit her behind bars. I mean, at least she was still alive."

Two of the other prisoners who saw their sentences commuted — Tammy Kvasnicka and Whitney Renae Turney — also were sentenced for first-degree manslaughter. The other four were doing time for drug offenses, KELO-TV reported.

Noem spokesperson Ian Fury didn't immediately return a message.

## Wisconsin radio magnate Duey 'Duke' Wright dies age 83

By TRISHA AHMED Associated Press/Report for America

Duey "Duke" Wright, a radio mogul who built Midwest Communications into a multistate operation, has died. He was 83.

Wright passed away on Dec. 21, according to an obituary from Lyndahl Funeral Home and Cremation Services posted on the Green Bay Press-Gazette's website.

As a child, Wright would take apart radios and put them back together, and later constructed a radio station that could be heard a few miles away, Midwest Communications' website says.

His parents owned a music store, and Wright played several instruments, including piano, bass, and accordion. At age 15, he hosted a weekly music show on WSAU-TV in Wausau, Wisconsin, according to the obituary.

His parents bought a local Wausau radio station in 1958 for \$54,000, renaming it WRIG. Wright worked as the station's general manager, after serving in the National Guard and earning a business degree from the University of Wisconsin.

In the decades that followed, Wright took over Midwest Communications and expanded its operations across nine states — from North Dakota to Tennessee — and more than 80 radio stations.

Wright met his wife Pegge at the Central Wisconsin State Fair in 1972, and they moved to Green Bay in 1976 to grow their family and business, the obituary said. Midwest Communications is still family-owned.

Before his death, Wright was inducted into the Wisconsin Broadcasters Hall of Fame for "running a sound business, serving the communities of his radio stations and having fun every step of the way," according to a video on the Wisconsin Broadcasting Museum's website.

Wright is survived by Pegge, their four children and 10 grandchildren, according to the obituary.

"What do I hope people say about me? That I was nice. That's it. Nothing else," Wright said in the Hall of Fame video.

## Winter storm leaves reservation facing water shortage

RAPID CITY, S.D. (AP) — Last week's fierce winter storms have left an American Indian reservation in South Dakota facing a water shortage.

The Oglala Sioux Tribe Department of Water Maintenance and Conservation issued water restrictions for most of the Pine Ridge Reservation on Monday, the Rapid City Tribune reported.

Agency officials wrote in a notice that heavy snowfall has prevented workers from reaching stations to keep water flowing as normal, resulting in little to no water for some areas of the reservation.

The agency said residents should limit the use of household water to avoid overburdening the system and check livestock tanks, homes and hydrants for leaks.

The restriction is expected to remain in effect until 4:30 p.m. Friday.

Officials with the Federal Emergency Management Agency are on the reservation this week to meet with tribal leaders.

## Lack of info on China's COVID-19 surge stirs global concerns

By KEN MORITSUGU and HUIZHONG WU Associated Press

BEIJING (AP) — Moves by several countries to mandate COVID-19 tests for passengers arriving from China reflect global concern that new variants could emerge in its ongoing explosive outbreak — and that the government may not inform the rest of the world quickly enough.

There have been no reports of new variants to date, but China has been accused of not being forthcoming about the virus since it first surfaced in the country in late 2019. The worry is that it may not be sharing data now on any signs of evolving strains that could spark fresh outbreaks elsewhere.

The U.S., Japan, India, South Korea, Taiwan and Italy have announced testing requirements for passengers from China. The U.S. cited both the surge in infections and what it said was a lack of information,

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including genomic sequencing of the virus strains in the country.

Authorities in Taiwan and Japan have expressed similar concern.

"Right now the pandemic situation in China is not transparent," Wang Pi-Sheng, the head of Taiwan's epidemic command center, told The Associated Press. "We have a very limited grasp on its information, and it's not very accurate."

The island will start testing everyone arriving from China on Jan. 1, ahead of the expected return of about 30,000 Taiwanese for the Lunar New Year holiday later in the month. The new Japanese rules, which restrict flights from mainland China, Hong Kong and Macao to designated airports beginning Friday, are already disrupting holiday travel plans.

Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Wang Wenbin noted Thursday that many countries have not changed their policies for travelers from China and said that any measures should treat people from all countries equally.

Every new infection offers a chance for the coronavirus to mutate, and it is spreading rapidly in China. Scientists can't say whether that means the surge will unleash a new mutant on the world — but they worry that might happen.

Chinese health officials have said the current outbreak is being driven by versions of the omicron variant that have also been detected elsewhere, and a surveillance system has been set up to identify any potentially worrisome new versions of the virus. Wu Zunyou, the chief epidemiologist at China's Center for Disease Control, said Thursday that China has always reported the virus strains it has found in a timely way.

"We keep nothing secret," he said. "All work is shared with the world."

German Health Ministry spokesperson Sebastian Guelde said authorities there have "no indication that a more dangerous variant has developed in this outbreak in China," but they are monitoring the situation. The European Union is also assessing the situation, though its executive branch noted that a prevalent variant in China is already active in Europe.

More broadly, World Health Organization Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus has said the body needs more information on the severity of the outbreak in China, particularly on hospital and ICU admissions, "in order to make a comprehensive risk assessment of the situation on the ground."

China rolled back many of its tough pandemic restrictions earlier this month, allowing the virus to spread rapidly in a country that had seen relatively few infections since an initial devastating outbreak in the city of Wuhan. Spiraling infections have led to shortages of cold medicine, long lines at fever clinics, and at-capacity emergency rooms turning away patients. Cremations have risen several-fold, with a request from overburdened funeral homes in one city for families to postpone funeral services until next month.

Chinese state media has not reported the fallout from the surge widely and government officials have blamed Western media for hyping up the situation.

The global concerns, tinged with anger, are a direct result of the ruling Communist Party's sudden exit from some of the world's most stringent anti-virus policies, said Miles Yu, director of the China Center at the Hudson Institute, a conservative think tank in Washington.

"You can't conduct the lunacy of 'zero-COVID' lockdowns for such a long period of time ... and then suddenly unleash a multitude of the infected from a caged China to the world," risking major outbreaks elsewhere, Yu said in an email.

Dr. David Dowdy, an infectious disease expert at Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, said the move by the U.S. may be more about increasing pressure on China to share more information than stopping a new variant from entering the country.

China has been accused of masking the virus situation in the country before. An AP investigation found that the government sat on the release of genetic information about the virus for more than a week after decoding it, frustrating WHO officials.

The government also tightly controlled the dissemination of Chinese research on the virus, impeding cooperation with international scientists.

Research into the origins of the virus has also been stymied. A WHO expert group said in a report this

year that "key pieces of data" were missing on the how the pandemic began and called for a more in-depth investigation.

## Russia launches massive missile barrage across Ukraine

By RENATA BRITO and HANNA ARHIROVA Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Multiple regions of Ukraine, including its capital, faced a massive Russian missile attack Thursday, the biggest wave of strikes in weeks targeting power stations and other critical infrastructure during freezing weather.

Air raid sirens rang out across the country. Ukraine's military chief, Gen. Valerii Zaluzhnyi, said preliminary data showed Russia fired 69 missiles at energy facilities and Ukrainian forces shot down 54 of them. There were no immediate reports of any deaths.

Russia dispatched explosive drones to selected regions overnight before broadening the barrage with "air and sea-based cruise missiles launched from strategic aircraft and ships" in the morning, the Ukrainian air force reported.

The widespread attack was the latest in a series of Russian strikes on power and water supplies that have increased the Ukrainian population's suffering. Moscow has launched such attacks on a weekly basis since October, while its ground forces struggle to advance.

On Thursday, air defense systems were activated in the capital, Kyiv, to fend off strikes, according to the regional administration. Sounds of explosions were heard in the city.

At least three people were wounded and hospitalized, including a 14-year-old girl, Mayor Vitali Klitschko said. He warned of power outages in the capital, asking people to stockpile water and to charge their electronic devices.

Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba condemned Russia for launching the missiles amid the winter holidays, calling it an act of "senseless barbarism."

"There can be no 'neutrality' in the face of such mass war crimes. Pretending to be 'neutral' equals taking Russia's side," Kuleba tweeted.

After more than 10 months of fighting, Russia and Ukraine are locked in a grinding battle of attrition. The Ukrainian military has reclaimed swaths of Russian-occupied territory in the country's northeast and south, and continues to resist persistent Russian attempts to seize all of the industrial Donbas region.

At the same time, Moscow has methodically targeted Ukrainian power facilities and other key infrastructure in a bid to weaken the country's resolve and force it to negotiate on Russian terms.

While the Ukrainian military reported success in shooting down incoming Russian missiles and explosive drones after earlier attacks, some still reached their targets. Most cities have gone without heat, internet service and electricity for hours or days at a time.

Anastasia, a medic who took shelter Thursday at a central Kyiv subway station and gave only her first name, said she was tired of the war. "We don't know how long the war will last. It's hard to be afraid every day and put your life on hold," she said.

Numerous explosions also took place in Kharkiv, which is located in eastern Ukraine and the country's second-largest city, and in the city of Lviv near the border with Poland, according to their mayors.

About 90% of Lviv was without electricity, Mayor Andriy Sadovyi wrote on Telegram. Trams and trolley buses were not working, and residents might experience water interruptions, he said.

Ukrainian authorities in several regions said some incoming Russian missiles were intercepted.

The governor of southern Ukraine's Mykolaiv province, Vitaliy Kim, said five missiles were shot down over the Black Sea. The Ukrainian military's command North said two were downed over the Sumy region, located on the border with Russia in the country's northeast.

Fragments from downed Russian missiles damaged two private buildings in the Darnytskyi district of Kyiv, the city administration said. An industrial facility and a playground in neighborhoods located across the Dnieper River also were damaged, city officials said. No casualties were immediately reported.

As the latest wave of Russian strikes began Thursday, authorities in the Dnipro, Odesa and Kryvyi Rih

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regions said they switched off electricity to minimize the damage to critical infrastructure facilities if they were hit.

Earlier this month, the United States agreed to give a Patriot missile battery to Ukraine to boost the country's defense. The U.S. and other allies also pledged to provide energy-related equipment to help Ukraine withstand the attacks on its infrastructure.

Mykhailo Podolyak, an adviser to Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, said Russia was aiming to "destroy critical infrastructure and kill civilians en masse."

"We're waiting for further proposals from 'peacekeepers' about 'peaceful settlement,' 'security guarantees for RF' and undesirability of provocations," Podolyak wrote on Twitter, a sarcastic reference to statements from some in the West who urged Ukraine to seek a political settlement of the conflict.

Kuleba, the Ukrainian foreign minister, said Monday that his nation wants a "peace" summit within two months at the United Nations with Secretary-General António Guterres as mediator. He said Russia must face a war-crimes tribunal before his country directly talks with Moscow but that other nations should feel free to engage with the Russians.

Commenting on the summit proposal Thursday, Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova dismissed it as "delirious" and "hollow," describing the proposal as a "publicity stunt by Washington that tries to cast the Kyiv regime as a peacemaker."

"It's an attempt to give a semblance of legitimacy to a meaningless discussion that will not be followed by any concrete steps," Zakharova said during a briefing.

Russian officials have said that any peace plan can only proceed from Kyiv's recognition of Russia's sovereignty over the regions it illegally annexed from Ukraine in September.

## Massive fire at Cambodia hotel casino kills at least 16

By SOPHENG CHEANG Associated Press

PHNOM PENH, Cambodia (AP) — A massive fire that lasted more than 12 hours in a Cambodian hotel casino killed at least 16 people and injured about 50, while other victims were apparently not yet accounted for Thursday, as neighboring Thailand sent firetrucks to help fight the blaze in a bustling border town.

Videos posted on social media showed people falling from a roof after they were trapped by the fire at the Grand Diamond City casino and hotel in the border town of Poipet. Many of those inside, both customers and staff, were from neighboring Thailand.

In a video posted by Cambodia's firefighting agency, onlookers could be heard shouting pleas to rescue people trapped on the roof of the hotel complex, which is more than a dozen stories tall at its highest point. The video showed at least one man falling as the flames reached the roof.

"Oh, please help rescue them. Pump water... pump water," shouted the onlookers.

The Department of Fire Prevention, Extinguishing and Rescue posted that calls for help were heard from the 13th, 14th and 15th floors at 4 a.m. and hands were seen waving from windows as well as a mobile phone's flashlight signaling from inside the complex.

"The fire was massive, and was inside the casino, so it was difficult for our water cannons to reach it," observed a firefighter on the video posted online by the fire department. He said that was the reason the fire continued burning for such a long time.

The blaze, which started around midnight Wednesday, was finally put out at 2 p.m. Thursday, said Sek Sokhom, head of Banteay Meanchey's information department. He said a local Buddhist temple was being prepared to receive the dead.

The province's deputy governor, Ngor Meng Chroun, told Cambodia's Bayon Radio the death toll had reached 16, with about 50 other people injured. The number of deaths appeared likely to rise, as more bodies of those trapped inside were discovered and critically hurt people succumbed to their injuries.

Banteay Meanchey police chief Sithi Loh said 360 emergency personnel and 11 firetrucks had been sent to the scene of the fire, whose cause was not yet known. The casino employed about 400 workers.

"Right now, we are trying to bring the dead bodies from the building down. I don't think there will be any survivors because of very thick smoke. Even we all (the rescue staff) have to wear proper gear when

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we go inside the building, otherwise we cannot breathe at all," said Montri Khaosa-ard, a staff member of Thailand Ruamkatanyu Foundation, a social welfare organization that sends volunteers to the sites of emergencies.

Thai and Cambodia rescue teams worked side-by-side in Thursday's search of the badly burned premises.

Thailand's public television network, Thai PBS, reported that 50 Thais, both staff and customers, had been trapped inside the casino complex. It reported that Cambodian authorities requested help to deal with the fire from Thailand, which sent five firetrucks and 10 rescue vans.

Poipet in western Cambodia is opposite the city of Aranyaprathet in more affluent Thailand, and there is busy cross-border trade and tourism.

Thai PBS cited reports that Aranyaprathet Hospital's emergency ward was full and other victims had to be sent to other hospitals.

Casinos are illegal in Thailand, but neighboring countries such as Myanmar, Cambodia and Laos host the lucrative industry. Cambodia has an especially active casino industry because the Southeast Asian country is also a popular tourist destination with convenient international connections.

The Grand Diamond City casino is just a few meters (yards) from the border checkpoint with Thailand and popular with customers who make the four-hour drive from the Thai capital, Bangkok.

## Djokovic says no hard feelings over Australian deportation

ADELAIDE, Australia (AP) — Novak Djokovic has reiterated his earlier comments that he bears no hard feelings on his return to Australia after his visa cancellation and subsequent deportation in January ahead of the Australian Open tennis tournament.

Djokovic was deported almost 12 months ago after arriving unvaccinated against COVID-19 at a time when the country was still subject to strict quarantine regulations and proof of vaccination.

Those regulations have since been lifted and in November, the Australian government overturned the three-year ban that came with Djokovic's deportation and granted him a visa to return for the Australian Open beginning Jan. 16.

Djokovic arrived back in Australia on Tuesday ahead of the Adelaide International, where he is scheduled to play next week.

"It's great to be back in Australia," he said Thursday. "It's a country where I've had tremendous success in my career, particularly in Melbourne. It's by far my most successful Grand Slam. I'm hoping that everything is going to be positive. Obviously (fan reaction) is not something that I can predict.

"I'll do my best to play good tennis and bring good emotions and good feelings to the crowd."

Djokovic said he still has difficulty forgetting his deportation.

"Obviously what happened 12 months ago was not easy for me, for my family, team, anybody who is close to me. It's obviously disappointing to leave the country like that," he said.

"You can't forget those events. It's one of these things that stays with you for I guess the rest of your life. It's something that I've never experienced before and hopefully never again. But it is a valuable life experience for me and something that as I said will stay there, but I have to move on."

Djokovic has won the Australian Open a record nine times, including the last three times he played. Rafael Nadal won the 2022 title in Djokovic's absence.

## New year expected to bring more changes to state voting laws

By NICHOLAS RICCARDI and ACACIA CORONADO Associated Press

State lawmakers around the country introduced thousands of bills to change the way elections are run after former President Donald Trump falsely blamed his 2020 loss on voter fraud. Hundreds became law.

Even with proponents of Trump's election lies roundly defeated during this year's midterms, advocates on both sides of the voting debate are bracing for another round of election-related legislation. Republicans are eager to tighten election rules further while Democrats, who took control of two additional statehouses, will seek to make it easier to cast a ballot.



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Minnesota's newly reelected Democratic secretary of state, Steve Simon, said he had spoken to several secretaries of state who are eager to push for changes in voting. Losses by election-denier candidates in top races have emboldened some Democrats to champion expansions of voting rights.

"Voters spoke loudly and clearly about what they wanted and didn't want, both in regards to this office and all these other issues," said Simon, who defeated a Republican challenger who parroted some of Trump's lies about the 2020 election.

Democrats won majorities in both houses of the Minnesota Legislature in November, giving Simon a good shot at enacting changes. He expects to urge lawmakers to adopt automatic voter registration and allow high school students to pre-register.

States routinely make adjustments in their voting laws — some subtle, some dramatic. But experts have never seen an explosion of legislation like that which followed the 2020 presidential election, when more than 3,600 election bills were introduced, according to the Voting Rights Lab, which tracks the legislation.

Liz Avore, senior adviser to the group, said 22 states in the last couple of years expanded access to the ballot, 10 created new restrictions and five expanded access in some ways while creating new barriers in others. This, she said, has created a divide in the U.S. in which "your ZIP code determines your access to our democracy."

That divide seems likely to grow next year. Legislatures won't convene until January at the earliest, so it's unclear how many bills are being drafted and on which subjects. But Texas, where the Legislature meets only once every two years and lawmakers can "pre-file" drafts of legislation for the upcoming session, offers a preview.

The Associated Press has identified nearly 100 election-related legislative proposals already filed in the state, both to increase access to the ballot box and to further restrict it. This includes one that would allow the state's top lawyer to assign a prosecutor focused on election crimes, testing the boundaries of a court ruling earlier this year that said the attorney general did not have the authority to prosecute election crimes.

Another would assign a group of peace officers to serve as election marshals who investigate claims of election-related missteps. That would follow the lead of Florida, where officers in a special unit assigned to elections have already made a handful of arrests — including of people who mistakenly thought they were eligible to vote under a 2018 constitutional amendment restoring voting rights to some felons. Critics have labeled the unit a political tool of the governor.

Matt Simpson, a senior attorney at the American Civil Liberties Union of Texas, said current election legislation proposed in the state, such as increasing criminal penalties for election crimes and creating election marshals, is "extreme" and "very intimidating" for voters. He said these approaches are primarily political and don't solve actual voting-related issues, such as high rejection rates of mail ballots and ballot applications due to widespread confusion on the identification numbers necessary.

"It is certainly the case that Texas elections do not have widespread fraud," Simpson said. "These bills, these concerns that are raised, are solutions in search of a problem."

The reliability of Texas' elections was underscored by the release earlier this month of an audit by the secretary of state's office. The 359-page audit of the 2020 election in the state's two largest Democratic counties and two largest Republican ones found some "irregularities," but they were largely related to holding an election during a pandemic.

"In most cases, the audit found that the counties followed their procedures and clearly documented their activities," the audit says.

Ohio is another Republican-controlled state where lawmakers continue to push for restrictions.

The state is likely to draw national attention next year after Republicans indicated they might try again to place on the May ballot a measure requiring a 60% majority for any future constitutional amendments to pass. That provision could limit the ability of Ohio voters to rein in GOP gerrymandering or otherwise counter the majority-Republican Legislature, such as by codifying the right to an abortion.

Republicans failed to muster enough votes during December's lame-duck session to place the higher threshold for passing amendments on the ballot, but they did pass a sweeping election law overhaul. The bill adds a photo ID requirement for voters and provides them for free, codifies a directive requiring

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one ballot drop box per county and eliminates early voting on the Monday before Election Day — county officials had said it interfered with their final preparations. The legislation also shrinks the window for receiving mail-in ballots after the election from 10 days to four.

Republican state Sen. Theresa Gavarone said taking steps to tighten access to the voting booth and speed vote counting are aimed at improving the “perception, confidence and integrity” in elections.

“Folks, perception matters,” Gavarone said. “Whether you want to believe it or not, the goal should not just be to secure our elections, but it’s imperative that we give people doubting the results of our elections reason to participate in them.”

Voting rights advocates were outraged.

“This legislation will make voting unnecessarily harder for seniors, students, rural Ohioans, active-duty military and other eligible Ohioans,” said Jen Miller, executive director of the League of Women Voters Ohio.

The office of Republican Gov. Mike DeWine said he was reviewing the legislation.

Democrats are readying their own pushes, especially in two states where they won control of the legislatures and retained the governorship — Michigan and Minnesota.

Michigan voters not only gave Democrats control of the state Legislature, they also passed Proposal 2, a sweeping ballot initiative that expanded early and mail voting. Democrats already are preparing to strengthen the measure in the legislative session.

“There will need to be quite a bit of implementation legislation next term, and I look forward to working with the Legislature and the governor’s office to enact this,” Ingham County Clerk Barb Byrum, a Democrat, said in an interview.

Jake Rollow, a spokesman for the Michigan Department of State, said Secretary of State Jocelyn Benson will likely ask lawmakers to allocate \$100 million annually for local election offices and propose new measures against circulating election misinformation. A Democratic state lawmaker also proposed imposing penalties for people who pressure election workers, a key cause of Democrats in state legislatures after conspiracy theorists targeted voting officials after the 2020 presidential election.

In Minnesota, Simon said he also wants to increase penalties against threatening or interfering with election workers. He said he’ll push a range of other reforms, including pre-registering high schoolers so they can quickly join the voting rolls upon turning 18. Younger voters lean Democratic, but Simon said he’s not trying to promote his party.

He said he merely wants to make the electorate more reflective of the population, a goal he also pushed when the statehouse was split between Republicans and Democrats.

“These are reforms that will benefit everyone,” he said.

## Thriving network of fixers preys on migrants crossing Mexico

By EDGAR H. CLEMENTE and MARÍA VERZA Associated Press

TAPACHULA, Mexico (AP) — When migrants arrive to the main crossing point into southern Mexico -- a steamy city with no job opportunities, a place packed with foreigners eager to keep moving north -- they soon learn the only way to cut through the red tape and expedite what can be a monthslong process is to pay someone.

With soaring numbers of people entering Mexico, a sprawling network of lawyers, fixers and middlemen has exploded in the country. At every step in a complicated process, opportunists are ready to provide documents or counsel to migrants who can afford to speed up the system — and who don’t want to risk their lives packed in a truck for a dangerous border crossing.

In nearly two dozen interviews with The Associated Press, migrants, officials and those in the business described a network operating at the limit of legality, cooperating with — and sometimes bribing — bureaucrats in Mexico’s immigration sector, where corruption is deeply ingrained, and at times working directly with smugglers.

Fixers have always found business with those passing through the country. But the increasing numbers

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over the last year and Mexico's renewed efforts to control migration by accelerating document processing without clear criteria have made the work more prominent and profitable. The result is a booming business that often preys on a population of migrants who are largely poor, desperate and unable to turn elsewhere.

Legal papers, freedom from detention, transit permits, temporary visas: All are available for a price via the network. But even though the documents are legal and the cost can be several hundred dollars or more, migrants are at risk of arrest or return to their entry point as they make their way through the country, thanks to inconsistent policy enforcement and corrupt officials at checkpoints.

This story is part of the ongoing Associated Press series "Migration Inc.," which investigates individuals and companies that profit from the movement of people who flee violence and civil strife in their homelands.

Crossing through Mexico — a country plagued by drug cartels that also make millions from migrant smuggling — has long been a risk. Legal, free channels that can mitigate danger have always been available through the government. That formal process usually involved requesting asylum, even when people simply wanted documents to move legally to the U.S. border.

But the record number of migrant arrivals has wreaked havoc on the system, particularly at offices in the south.

In the fiscal year that ended Sept. 30, U.S. authorities apprehended people crossing the southwest border 2.38 million times. That's up 37 percent from the year prior. The annual total surpassed 2 million for the first time in August and is more than twice the highest level during Donald Trump's presidency, in 2019.

With more people has come more waiting, desperation and protests. In response, more than a year ago, the Mexican government loosened criteria for some temporary and transit permits, especially for migrants from countries where it would be difficult for Mexico to return them.

But with the influx of migrant arrivals, it takes months just to get an appointment to begin the process. Amid the waits and tension, it's tempting to pay fixers and lawyers.

And with the U.S. Supreme Court's decision Tuesday allowing pandemic-era asylum restrictions to remain in place until it hears arguments in February, it was unclear what kind of effects might be felt by the thousands of migrants already making their way through Mexico to the U.S. border.

In the south, migrants going to fixers can generally choose from different packages — transit permits, temporary visas — promoted on social media and adapted to various scenarios and budgets. Farther north, options are scarce, and paying specific operators may be the only way to get out of a detention center.

Migrants rarely report questionable practices. Most assume their payments and time are part of the price of getting to the U.S. Even when corruption is reported, authorities seldom take action, citing lack of evidence.

In December 2018, when President Andrés Manuel López Obrador took office, he said fighting corruption was a top priority. He declared the National Immigration Institute one of Mexico's most corrupt institutions. Yet in the past four years, only about one in every 1,000 internal investigations opened by the agency made it to the prosecutor's office, according to data obtained through freedom of information requests.

The National Immigration Institute did not reply to multiple requests for comment about its efforts to combat corruption, and officials there refused to be interviewed. This month, the agency said it had followed up on every recommendation issued by the internal control office as part of its commitment in the fight against corruption.

The lack of accountability has made it easy for fixers to operate and exchange payments and information with officials.

The Federal Institute of Public Defenders has denounced arrangements between immigration agents and private lawyers. In response, some of its officials have been harassed and intimidated, according to the agency.

"This is never going to end because there are many high-ranking officials involved who are receiving a lot of money," said Mónica Vázquez, a public defender from Puebla, in central Mexico. She and her colleagues believe the situation is only getting worse.

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On a fall day in Tapachula, at the border with Guatemala, 100 migrants lined up outside immigration offices, hoping for documents to cross Mexico. They soon learn the free, government-sanctioned process can take months.

Just a few blocks away, the same papers can arrive quickly — for a price.

For one Dominican man, it took three days and \$1,700 to get a permit to travel through Mexico, he told AP. He said a lawyer brought the government-issued transit document to a house where a smuggler took him after he crossed into Mexico.

While waiting for the lawyer, he said he suddenly feared he'd been kidnapped — nobody told him how long it would take to get the documents and he was too afraid to ask. But once payment was transferred by a friend in the U.S., papers arrived and he took a bus to Mexico City, he said.

The man spoke with AP several times before leaving Tapachula, on condition of anonymity to remain safe as he traveled north. He refused to give other details for fear of retaliation. One of his relatives confirmed to AP that he has since managed to cross into the United States and lives there now.

He and others who travel through the country use "safe-passage" permits — the common term for some temporary documents issued by the Mexican government. Most allow the holder to leave the country through any border, including the one with the U.S.

Lawyers and brokers advertise prices for various safe-passage papers largely via WhatsApp messages. In one such message seen by AP, options ranged from \$250 paid in Mexican currency for a simple document allowing transit to \$1,100 in U.S. money for more sophisticated humanitarian visas, printed with a photo and fingerprint, for temporary legal stays in Mexico.

The broker who sent the message guarantees the papers are real government-issued documents, not forgeries. He showed AP the message on condition of anonymity because of the illegal nature of some of the work and fears for his safety and livelihood.

Much of the money goes toward paying officials at the National Immigration Institute, according to the broker. A lawyer who independently spoke with AP confirmed details about bribes. He also spoke on condition of anonymity to protect his business and avoid legal issues.

The lawyer said additional costs are added for middlemen — those who set up the accounts where migrants' family or friends send payments for documents, for example.

The immigration agency did not answer AP's requests for comment. In previous statements, it has said officials try to avoid bribery and corruption by installing surveillance cameras in offices and encouraging people to report problems.

The broker who spoke with AP said his contact at the National Immigration Institute is a senior official who always comes through with documents, except when transactions freeze temporarily — often when the agency is in the spotlight or in the middle of political tensions. The broker did not identify his contact to AP.

He told AP he deals mainly with Cubans who spread the word of his services to friends and family. With his growth in earnings, he said, he decided to set up an apartment to accommodate some migrants while they wait, charging \$50 a week.

The lawyer described to AP another way to get migrants legal status in Mexico: buying a crime report from a prosecutor's office, which can open the door to the humanitarian visa.

Any foreigner who has been the victim of a crime is eligible to seek such a visa under Mexican law. Over the years, thousands of migrants have been kidnapped, extorted or raped while crossing Mexico. Formal complaints, however, were rare, due to fear and distrust of authorities.

But now, reports of crime are up, along with hopes of visas.

In all of 2021, fewer than 3,000 migrants -- mostly Central Americans -- reported crimes and successfully obtained humanitarian visas in Mexico. In the first 11 months of 2022, there were more than 20,000, with Cubans constituting 82%.

Some public defenders and others in Mexico find the increase suspicious and fear some crime reports

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are being purchased to obtain visas. By paying someone for a report, migrants bypass the formal process of authorities requesting details and evidence.

Juan Carlos Custodio, a public defender in Tapachula, found more than 200 Cubans processing visas as crime victims in immigration offices in nearby Huixtla one September day he dropped by for paperwork.

He said he was surprised, so he asked some for details of the crimes and their situations. "They didn't want to tell me," he said. He and some colleagues fear a rise in false complaints will hamper the process for true victims.

Asked by AP, the Chiapas state prosecutor's office said one official was dismissed in July and an investigation was recently opened into the sale of crime reports. The office wouldn't comment further.

Mexico's administration says the fight against corruption is at the top of its agenda, but few changes have come at the National Immigration Institute, especially as the flow of migrants grows.

Generally, when there's an allegation of corruption, immigration officials demand that employee's resignation or simply do not renew the contract, since most are temporary workers, according to a federal official who insisted upon anonymity because the official was not authorized to speak to AP.

Tonatiuh Guillen, who led the immigration agency at the beginning of President Andrés Manuel López Obrador's term, said in an interview with AP that he asked for the resignation of some 400 officials suspected of wrongdoing. He said he found it the fastest way to tackle the problem given that a single investigation could take years. After he left in June 2019, some of those he asked to resign were rehired, he said.

Of more than 5,000 internal investigations opened since 2019, five made it to prosecutors by mid-2022, data obtained through AP's records requests show.

There is conflicting information on how many officials have been sanctioned in that period. In December, the federal government in its freedom of information portal listed 16 officials, with no other details. But according to the agency's internal audit office, 308 officials were suspended through August. When the immigration agency was asked directly, via freedom of information requests, it said it was just one.

Guillén said that by the time he left, he'd already detected "widespread and worrying" practices of many middlemen and lawyers, but he said the problem could be addressed only by changing the law to eliminate its gray areas.

After Guillén's departure, the agency began putting retired military officers in charge of many of its state delegations — a move human rights groups criticized.

Andrés Ramírez, chief of the Mexican Commission for Refugee Aid, the government's agency responsible for asylum seekers and refugees, said corrupt practices such as selling documents have been on the rise since last year. At that time, he said, his office was "on the verge of collapse" after receiving 130,000 asylum applications in 2021, four times that of 2018.

Last April, the sale of documents inside the COMAR office in Tapachula became the subject of an investigation when two complaints were filed with the Chiapas state prosecutor's office. Four officials left the agency; the investigation is ongoing.

Ramírez said anyone else implicated will be fired.

"Zero tolerance," he said in an interview with AP. "It is awful. How is it possible that people under international protection can suffer those criminal abuses from officials charged with protecting them?"

Even when migrants buy travel documents or visas, they aren't guaranteed safe transit. The papers may be disregarded or destroyed by the very agency that issued them.

A 37-year-old Cuban man who spoke on condition of anonymity to protect himself and others who may be traveling through Mexico described buying his documents last year in Tapachula for \$1,800, including transportation to the U.S. border.

A few days later, he was arrested, he said, as immigration agents boarded the bus he and other migrants were traveling on when it stopped at a gas station in Puebla. He described the agents tearing up safe-passage documents.

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When he reached the immigration detention center, he said, an official told him the way things worked there: He could pay the man \$1,500 to get out and be put on a bus to the border.

The man said he refused and went on hunger strike with others. Through the intervention of United Nations officials who visited, he contacted public defender Vázquez, who helped get him released.

The Federal Institute of Public Defenders has long complained about the way immigration agents in Puebla work. They have alleged in complaints to the National Human Rights Commission that immigration officials are working in collusion with a private law firm at the expense of migrants' rights.

Vázquez says the firm is run by Claudia Ibeth Espinoza, whose services are advertised on large signs in front of the Puebla center. According to Vázquez and others, firm lawyers have privileged access not only to the detention center, but also to the lists of recently detained migrants before they arrive, so they can offer their services as the only alternative to languishing for months inside.

Espinoza denied the allegations and any wrongdoing in an interview with AP. She said she hadn't received privileges or special treatment from immigration authorities. She confirmed that she charged migrants \$500 to \$1,000 for her services, though sometimes more.

Asked if she'd ever paid an official in her job, Espinoza said: "It's not necessary to pay an immigration official."

"We're not benefiting, nor robbing, nor doing anything outside the law," she said. "I charge because the law allows me to."

But a former immigration agent with knowledge of the situation in Puebla told AP about the existence of an arrangement between immigration agents and Espinoza's firm at least in 2019 and 2020. That former agent, who spoke on condition of anonymity because of fears over safety and retribution, said legal procedures were violated and requirements skipped to quickly release some migrants who paid.

Another former agent who spoke independently to AP and worked in Puebla also described a deal between local immigration officials and Espinoza. That former agent also insisted on anonymity because of fears over safety and retribution.

Espinoza filed complaints against Vázquez for defamation and extortion; both are under investigation. Espinoza reiterated to AP that the allegations of Vázquez, her colleagues and others are false: "If the Institute of Public Defenders doesn't know how to do its job on immigration issues, it's not the fault of private lawyers," she said.

The federal immigration institution also denounced Vázquez and said she damaged the agency by filing an injunction for 300 migrants. But she said someone else did so in her name and has countersued.

Vázquez said she's rejected proposals to make deals with officials because she suspects they want bribes. She said the public defenders' office has become a target because it's seen as taking business from others — she cites restricted access to the detention center as retaliation, as well as anonymous threatening phone calls and intimidating messages.

She said that when detainees opt for free representation from public defenders, they're sometimes punished by immigration authorities — forced to go without food or showers.

"It seems like every office has its discretionary powers," she said, and that leaves migrants more vulnerable.

Immigration officials have refused to answer questions about allegations of corruption in Puebla.

From 2020 to 2021, when the public defender's office began denouncing irregularities and privileges linked to Espinoza's firm, retired Gen. José Luis Chávez Aldana was in charge of the Puebla immigration office. According to online public records, he was transferred in September 2021 to a similar role in another state.

The agency did not answer questions about whether he is still employed or under investigation. Chávez Aldana did not reply to AP requests for comment.

David Méndez, who was appointed head of the immigration office in Puebla at the beginning of 2022, acknowledged irregularities when he started his role but said he did not file complaints because he didn't have proof.

He said he tried to "close the information leaks" with new rules and made agreements to promote public

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defenders. But after six months, Méndez was transferred, then left the federal government. He wouldn't discuss why.

Vázquez said she has filed three complaints with the National Human Rights Commission denouncing the practices in Puebla, the last one in August 2022. The commission told AP that two complaints have been closed and one remains open, but it would not explain its findings. Vázquez said she has not been informed, either.

Puebla's office is now run by the man who was second in command during Chávez Aldana's period.

Back at Mexico's border with Guatemala, more migrants arrive daily. Most pass unseen, crossing the country crammed into semitrailers. Others take selfies with the "Welcome to Mexico" sign visible just after stepping onto Mexican territory. Then, they turn themselves over to authorities, with hopes of obtaining safe-passage documents.

One October day south of Tapachula, on the bank of the Suchiate River separating Mexico from Guatemala, immigration agents registered some 200 migrants, mostly Venezuelans, at one entry point. They were all given expulsion orders, but also told they could exchange those documents for transit permits if they made it to a small town about 185 miles (300 kilometers) north, San Pedro Tapanatepec.

It's not clear why authorities chose an out-of-the-way place for what became a massive migrant camp. The immigration agency did not answer AP's request for comment about the decision.

Thousands of migrants waited there, in a constant churn of arrivals and departures. More than 190,000 people passed through from the end of July through November, federal data show. By mid-December, the immigration agency suddenly announced the closing of the camp with no explanation. Migrants vanished from the town in a matter of days.

While the camp was open, some people said they spent days in detention in Tapachula before getting there; others said they were released immediately. Some were released for free, others after paying up to \$500 to a lawyer.

For Lully Ismael Batista, it was the latter. The Dominican man said a friend recommended the lawyer who got him freed after nine days.

"A friend went out with my credential; the lawyer called me on the loudspeaker," he said. The agents "let me go, but I had to give my passport and credentials to the lawyer as a guarantee to pay him when I was free."

Later, he paid \$300 for transportation and a guide to bypass about 10 immigration checkpoints on the way from Tapachula to San Pedro Tapanatepec. "They moved us in all kinds of vehicles, vans, cabs, motorcycles," Batista said.

He said he got on a bus heading north with his transit permit and no money left. He didn't know how he would reach the U.S. border.

"I will sell my phone, I will sell my watch, I will sell whatever," he told AP. "God will help us, he will bless us, and we will continue to move forward."

It ended up being his last message to AP. His cellphone number no longer works.

## National Guard checks homes in Buffalo for blizzard victims

By CAROLYN THOMPSON and JENNIFER PELTZ Associated Press

BUFFALO, N.Y. (AP) — The National Guard went door to door in parts of Buffalo on Wednesday to check on people who lost power during the area's deadliest winter storm in decades, and authorities faced the tragic possibility of finding more victims amid melting snow.

Already, more than three dozen deaths have been reported in western New York from the blizzard that raged Friday and Saturday across much of the country, with Buffalo in its crosshairs.

Carolyn Eubanks, who relied on an oxygen machine, collapsed after losing electricity at her Buffalo home during a time when emergency workers were unable to respond to calls, son Antwaine Parker told The Buffalo News.

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"She's like, 'I can't go no further.' I'm begging her, 'Mom, just stand up.' She fell in my arms and never spoke another word," Parker told the newspaper.

Parker and his stepbrother knocked on nearby doors, seeking help. They found it when a stranger, David Purdy, answered and helped them carry the 63-year-old Eubanks inside and try in vain to revive her. Purdy and his fiancée sheltered her body until first responders arrived the next day.

"I done it as respectful as I could," Purdy told The Buffalo News.

Timothy Murphy, 27, died after snow covered a furnace and sent carbon monoxide into his Lockport home, the Niagara County sheriff's office said. Monique Alexander, 52, was found buried in snow after going out in the storm for unclear reasons, her daughter told The Buffalo News.

Anndel Taylor, 22, died in her car after it got stuck on her way home from work, her family told WSOC-TV.

The driving ban in New York's second-most-populous city was set to lift early Thursday, just after midnight, Buffalo Mayor Byron Brown said at a press conference Wednesday evening.

As the deep freeze eased into milder weather Wednesday and the number of lingering power outages dwindled, more than 600 National Guard members were sent to western New York, officials said.

"We are fearful that there are individuals who may have perished, living alone, or people who are not doing well," said Erie County Executive Mark Poloncarz. The county encompasses Buffalo.

One pair of National Guard troops, clipboard in hand, knocked on the door of a home as people nearby tried to dig their way to businesses on a major avenue in Buffalo.

Twenty-five Guard teams were making such rounds Wednesday, spokesperson Eric Durr said by phone. He said troops had made some wellness checks previously but went out with a specific list of questions, including whether residents had food, water, electricity or any special health or medication concerns.

"The idea is to get a sense of: What are the needs out there?" said Durr, who noted that troops were offering food and water.

Buffalo Police Commissioner Joseph Gramaglia said officers from his and other agencies were searching for victims, sometimes using officers' personal snowmobiles, trucks and other equipment.

With the death toll already surpassing that of the area's notorious Blizzard of 1977, local officials faced questions about the response to last week's storm. They insisted they prepared, but that the weather was extraordinary even for a region prone to powerful winter storms.

"The city did everything that it could under historic blizzard conditions," the mayor, a Democrat, said at a news conference.

Enough snow remained that driving was still banned for most of Wednesday, and officials worked to clear storm drains and watched a forecast which calls for some rain later in the week. Erie County officials said they were preparing for the possibility of flooding and ice jams in local creeks.

The National Weather Service said any flooding was expected to be minor.

Gov. Kathy Hochul said Wednesday that the state is ready to deploy nearly 800,000 sandbags and more than 300 pumps and generators for flooding response efforts if needed.

Buffalo Niagara International Airport reopened after a five-day closure, although many flights were canceled.

Temperatures rose above 40 degrees (about 4 degrees Celsius) in Buffalo on Wednesday and are expected to top 50 degrees (10 degrees Celsius) on Friday with a chance for showers, according to the National Weather Service.

While suburban roads and most major highways in the area reopened Tuesday, state and military police were assigned to enforce Buffalo's driving ban. Poloncarz said the goal was to have at least one lane on every street open by Wednesday evening.

It was tough going. Even on some of the city's main streets, there were still cars buried in snow being towed to make way for snowplows.

Erie County Undersheriff William Cooley said deputies helped people get to crucial medical appointments, such as dialysis.

Police also reported looting at some stores during the storm. Several people were arrested.



## NY Rep.-elect Santos investigated for lying about his past

By BOBBY CAINA CALVAN Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — U.S. Rep.-elect George Santos of New York was under investigation by Long Island prosecutors on Wednesday, after revelations surfaced that the now-embattled Republican lied about his heritage, education and professional pedigree as he campaigned for office.

Despite intensifying doubt about his fitness to hold federal office, Santos has shown no signs of stepping aside — even as he publicly admitted to a long list of lies.

Nassau County District Attorney Anne T. Donnelly, a Republican, said the fabrications and inconsistencies were “nothing short of stunning.”

“The residents of Nassau County and other parts of the third district must have an honest and accountable representative in Congress,” she said. “If a crime was committed in this county, we will prosecute it.”

Santos’ campaign did not immediately respond to a request for comment Wednesday.

He is scheduled to be sworn in next Tuesday, when the U.S. House reconvenes. If he assumes office, he could face investigations by the House Committee on Ethics and the Justice Department.

Santos suggested he does not plan to step aside in a Twitter post Wednesday about a visit to the U.S. Merchant Marine Academy earlier in the day.

“In Congress, I look forward to working alongside them to fully utilize this amazing resource we have in our own backyard in #NY03,” the tweet said.

The Republican has admitted to lying about having Jewish ancestry, a Wall Street pedigree and a college degree, but he has yet to address other lingering questions — including the source of what appears to be a quickly amassed fortune despite recent financial problems, including evictions and owing thousands in back rent.

Fellow Long Island Republican, Rep.-elect Nick Lalota, said he was troubled by the revelations.

“I believe a full investigation by the House Ethics Committee and, if necessary, law enforcement, is required,” Lalota said Tuesday.

The New York attorney general’s office has already said it’s looking into issues that have come to light.

A spokesperson for the Nassau County DA’s office, Brendan Brosh, said Wednesday: “We are looking into the matter.” The scope of the investigation was not immediately clear.

Other Republicans castigated Santos but stopped short of asking him to step aside.

“Congressman-Elect George Santos has broken the public trust by making serious misstatements regarding his background, experience and education, among other issues,” said Joseph G. Cairo, chair of the Nassau County Republican Committee, which is within the 3rd Congressional District.

Questions intensified after The New York Times examined the narrative Santos, 34, presented to voters during his successful campaign for a congressional district that straddles the north shore suburbs of Long Island and a sliver of Queens.

The Times uncovered records in Brazil that show Santos was the subject of a criminal investigation there in 2008 over allegations that he used stolen checks to buy items at a clothing shop in the city of Niteroi. At the time, Santos would have been 19. The Times quoted local prosecutors as saying the case was dormant because Santos had never appeared in court.

Santos continued to deny that he was being sought by authorities in South America.

Democrats pounced, calling Santos a serial fabulist and demanded he voluntarily not take office.

In an interview with the New York Post earlier this week, Santos apologized for his fabrications but downplayed them as “sins” over embellishing his resume, adding that “we do stupid things in life.”

He admitted to lying about working for Citigroup and Goldman Sachs, as well as having earned a degree in finance and economics from Baruch College in New York.

Beyond his resume, Santos invented a life story that has also come under question, including claims that his grandparents “fled Jewish persecution in Ukraine, settled in Belgium, and again fled persecution during WWII.”

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During his campaign, he referred to himself as "a proud American Jew."

He backtracked on that claim, saying he never intended to claim Jewish heritage, which would have likely raised his appeal among his district's significant ranks of Jewish voters.

"I am Catholic," he told the Post. "Because I learned my maternal family had a Jewish background I said I was 'Jew-ish.'"

In a statement Tuesday, the Republican Jewish Coalition repudiated Santos.

"He deceived us and misrepresented his heritage. In public comments and to us personally he previously claimed to be Jewish," the coalition said. "He will not be welcome at any future RJC event."

On Fox News Tuesday night, Santos came under withering questioning by former Hawaii Rep. Tulsi Gabbard, who was sitting in for Tucker Carlson.

"You don't really seem to be taking this seriously," she told him.

"You've apologized, you've said you've made mistakes, but you've outright lied. A lie is not an embellishment on a resume," she said.

"Look, I agree with what you're saying," Santos replied. "We can debate my resume and how I worked with firms such as -"

"Is it debatable?" Gabbard interjected. "Or is it just false?"

"No, it's not false at all," he said. "It's debatable."

Santos lost his first race for Congress in 2020 but successfully ran again this year.

In its opposition research on Santos, the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee raised several red flags about the Republican's record — but also accepted some of his assertions, including his educational record, as fact. The 87-page dossier sought to tie him to the Jan. 6 insurrection at the U.S. Capitol and his support for baseless claims of widespread fraud in the 2020 presidential election. The report also sought to depict him as a far-right candidate. But buried within its report, the DCCC had raised issues about his shaky financial standing and multiple evictions that left him thousands of dollars in debt.

Federal campaign records show that he loaned his campaign more than \$700,000, but the source of that money has yet to be explained.

His Democratic opponent, Robert Zimmerman, also tried to raise Santos' misrepresentations during his losing campaign, but it didn't gain much traction.

Zimmerman has said Santos is unfit for office and has called for him to step aside so a special election can be held.

## US will require COVID-19 testing for travelers from China

By CARLA K. JOHNSON AP Medical Writer

The U.S. announced new COVID-19 testing requirements Wednesday for all travelers from China, joining other nations imposing restrictions because of a surge of infections.

The increase in cases across China follows the rollback of the nation's strict anti-virus controls. China's "zero COVID" policies had kept the country's infection rate low but fueled public frustration and crushed economic growth.

The new U.S. requirements, which start Jan. 5, apply to travelers regardless of their nationality and vaccination status.

In a statement explaining the testing, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention cited the surge in infections and what it said was a lack of adequate and transparent information from China, including genomic sequencing on the viral strains circulating in the country.

"These data are critical to monitor the case surge effectively and decrease the chance for entry of a novel variant of concern," the CDC said.

Some scientists are worried the COVID-19 surge in China could unleash a new coronavirus variant on the world that may or may not be similar to the ones circulating now. That's because every infection is another chance for the virus to mutate.

"What we want to avoid is having a variant enter into the U.S. and spread like we saw with delta or

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omicron," said Matthew Binnicker, director of clinical virology at Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minnesota.

But the CDC's action may be less about stopping a new variant from crossing U.S. borders and more about increasing pressure on China to share more information, said Dr. David Dowdy, an infectious disease epidemiologist at Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, adding he hopes the restrictions "aren't kept in place longer than they need to be."

"I don't think it's going to have a major impact in slowing the spread of COVID-19," Dowdy said. "We have a whole lot of transmission of COVID-19 here within our borders already."

Dr. Stuart Campbell Ray, an infectious disease expert at Johns Hopkins University, agreed China isn't sharing enough genomic sequencing information. But he also said the U.S. has become a little complacent about sequencing and needs to redouble its own efforts. The CDC also announced the expansion of an early warning program that tests volunteers at select airports for new and rare variants of the coronavirus. That program will expand to airports in Seattle and Los Angeles.

Under the new U.S. rules, travelers to the U.S. from China, Hong Kong and Macau, will be required to take a COVID-19 test no more than two days before travel and provide a negative test before boarding their flight. The testing applies to anyone 2 years and older, including U.S. citizens.

It will apply to people traveling from China via a third country and to people connecting through the U.S. as they go on to other destinations. Anyone testing positive more than 10 days before the flight can provide documentation showing they've recovered from COVID-19 instead of a negative test result.

It will be up to the airlines to confirm negative tests and documentation of recovery before passengers board.

Other countries have taken similar steps in an effort to keep infections from spreading beyond China's borders. Japan will require a negative COVID-19 test upon arrival for travelers from China, and Malaysia announced new tracking and surveillance measures. India, Italy, South Korea and Taiwan are requiring virus tests for visitors from China.

Lunar New Year, which begins Jan. 22, is usually China's busiest travel season, and China announced Tuesday it will resume issuing passports for tourism for the first time since the start of the pandemic in 2020.

"We look forward to welcoming Chinese travelers back to the United States," U.S. Travel Association President and CEO Geoff Freeman said in a statement. He called the U.S. approach to testing inbound travelers "reasonable and appreciated."

The U.S. action is a return to testing requirements for some international travelers. The Biden administration lifted the last of such mandates in June. At that time, the CDC continued to recommend that people boarding flights to the U.S. get tested close to departure time and not travel if they are sick.

"We've done this before. We can do it again," Dowdy said.

Early in the pandemic, the U.S. barred entry to foreigners traveling from China, weeks after the virus first emerged there three years ago, and dozens of other countries were added to the list. The country started lifting travel bans late last year, but required travelers to the U.S. to be vaccinated and tested. \_\_\_\_\_

AP Science Writer Laura Ungar contributed.

## Southwest Airlines flight cancellations continue to snowball

By DAVID KOENIG and HEATHER HOLLINGSWORTH Associated Press

DALLAS (AP) — Travelers who counted on Southwest Airlines to get them home suffered another wave of canceled flights Wednesday, and pressure grew on the federal government to help customers get reimbursed for unexpected expenses they incurred because of the airline's meltdown.

Exhausted Southwest travelers tried finding seats on other airlines or renting cars to get to their destination, but many remained stranded. The airline's CEO said it could be next week before the flight schedule returns to normal.

Adontis Barber, a 34-year-old jazz pianist from Kansas City, Missouri, had camped out in the city's airport since his Southwest flight was canceled Saturday, hoping to reach a New Year's gig in Washington, D.C.

He left his airport vigil Wednesday. "I give up," he said. "I'm starting to feel homeless."

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By early afternoon on the East Coast, about 90% of all canceled flights Wednesday in the U.S. were on Southwest, according to the FlightAware tracking service.

Other airlines recovered from ferocious winter storms that hit large swaths of the country over the weekend, but not Southwest, which scrubbed 2,500 flights Wednesday and 2,300 more on Thursday.

The Dallas airline was undone by a combination of factors including an antiquated crew-scheduling system and a network design that allows cancellations in one region to cascade throughout the country rapidly. Those weaknesses are not new — they helped cause a similar failure by Southwest in October 2021.

The U.S. Transportation Department is now investigating what happened at Southwest, which carries more passengers within the United States than any other airline. A Senate committee promises to investigate too.

In a video that Southwest posted late Tuesday, CEO Robert Jordan said Southwest would operate a reduced schedule for several days but hoped to be “back on track before next week.”

“We have some real work to do in making this right,” said Jordan, a 34-year Southwest veteran who became CEO in February. “For now, I want you to know that we are committed to that.”

Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg, who has criticized airlines for previous disruptions, said that “meltdown” was the only word he could think of to describe this week’s events at Southwest. He noted that while cancellations across the rest of the industry declined to about 4% of scheduled flights, they remained above 60% at Southwest.

From the high rate of cancellations to customers’ inability to reach Southwest on the phone, the airline’s performance has been unacceptable, Buttigieg said. He vowed to hold the airline accountable and push it to reimburse travelers.

“They need to make sure that those stranded passengers get to where they need to go and that they are provided adequate compensation,” including for missed flights, hotels and meals, he said Wednesday on ABC’s “Good Morning America.”

Robert Mann, an aviation consultant and former airline executive, said the Transportation Department could force Southwest to pay refunds for all flights that were canceled for reasons within the airline’s control, such as lack of crews. He estimated that could total 6,000 cancellations affecting 1 million customers and adding up to \$300 million.

Since Southwest plans to pay \$428 million in shareholder dividends next month, “the numbers are not life-threatening, although brand damage has been done,” Mann said.

Some consumer advocates are skeptical the government will punish Southwest.

William McGee, a travel expert at the American Economic Liberties Project, noted that the Transportation Department fined Frontier Airlines and several foreign carriers for slow refunds early in the pandemic but didn’t touch the four biggest U.S. airlines.

“What Pete Buttigieg should do and what he will do are probably two different things,” McGee said. His group wants a change in federal law that would make it easier for states and private parties to sue airlines for harming consumers.

On its website, Southwest told customers affected by canceled or delayed flights between Dec. 24 and Jan. 2 to submit receipts. The airline said, “We will honor reasonable requests for reimbursement for meals, hotel, and alternate transportation.”

Navy physician Lt. Cmdr. Manoj Mathew said after spending hours on hold over two days Southwest reimbursed him for the first leg of his family’s trip from Washington to Houston — they drove through terrible weather after the Dec. 23 flight was canceled. Now he is worried whether Southwest will operate the return flight Sunday.

“I’m trying to reach other airlines,” he said. “There are no flights, plus it’s very expensive for us.”

Delta Air Lines said it was capping last-minute fares in Southwest markets through the weekend, and American Airlines said it too was limiting fares in “select” cities. Neither provided figures.

Leaders of Southwest labor unions have warned for years that the airline’s crew-scheduling system, which dates to the 1990s, was not keeping up as the route map grew more complicated.

“The fact is this is not the same airline that (Southwest co-founder) Herb Kelleher built where planes

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went point-to-point," Randy Barnes, president of the union that represents Southwest ground workers, said Wednesday. "If airline managers had planned better, the meltdown we've witnessed in recent days could have been lessened or averted."

The other large U.S. airlines use "hub and spoke" networks in which flights radiate out from a few major or hub airports. That helps limit the reach of disruptions caused by bad weather in part of the country.

Southwest, however, has a "point-to-point" network in which planes crisscross the country during the day. This can increase the utilization and efficiency of each plane, but problems in one place can ripple across the country and leave crews trapped out of position. (Crews can be stranded at hub-and-spoke airlines too.)

Those issues don't explain all the complaints that stranded travelers made about Southwest, including no ability to reach the airline on the phone and a lack of help with hotels and meals.

Teal Williams, a 48-year-old active-duty Army reservist from Utah, was stuck at the Denver airport with her husband and two teenage kids on Christmas Day after their flight to Des Moines, Iowa, was canceled. She said Southwest employees had no information about flights and didn't offer food vouchers while elderly passengers sat in wheelchairs for hours and mothers ran out of formula for their infants.

"It was just imploding, and no one could tell you anything," Williams said. The airline employees "were desperately trying to help, but you could tell they were just as clueless as everybody else... it was scary."

Unable to find plane, train or bus seats, Williams and her family felt lucky to score a rental car. They drove 12 hours to Iowa.

## Paul Pelosi attack: Suspect enters not-guilty plea

SAN FRANCISCO (AP) — The man who allegedly broke into U.S. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi's home and beat her 82-year-old husband in October pleaded not guilty Wednesday to six charges, including attempted murder, prosecutors said.

The suspect, David DePape, had planned to kidnap the speaker — who was in Washington at the time of the attack — when he broke into the couple's San Francisco home on Oct. 28, authorities said. Instead, the 42-year-old defendant severely beat her husband Paul Pelosi with a hammer in an attack that was witnessed by two police officers and shocked the political world.

Paul Pelosi was knocked unconscious and woke up in a pool of his own blood. He later underwent surgery to repair a skull fracture and serious injuries to his right arm and hands. He has since appeared in public wearing a hat and a glove that covered his wounds.

Earlier this month, a judge ruled that prosecutors had presented enough evidence during a preliminary hearing to move forward. Wednesday's appearance was another arraignment, a procedural move where the defendant enters a plea on the charges that will be brought to trial.

DePape is still being held without bail; his state case returns to court Feb. 23. The public defender's office declined to comment. A federal case in which DePape has also pleaded not guilty is also ongoing.

He is charged in state court with attempted murder, first-degree residential burglary, elder abuse, assault with a deadly weapon, false imprisonment and threatening a family member of a public official.

During the preliminary hearing earlier this month, a San Francisco police investigator testified that DePape said there was "evil in Washington," and he was looking to harm Nancy Pelosi because she is second in line for the presidency. Authorities have said DePape was drawn to conspiracy theories.

DePape told police he wanted to hold the Democratic leader hostage and "break her kneecaps" to show other members of Congress there were "consequences to actions," the criminal complaint alleges.

In November, Nancy Pelosi said she would step down as Democrats' leader in the House after two decades but remain in office. She and Paul have been married for nearly 60 years.

## **EXPLAINER: Kansas' Democratic governor imposes TikTok ban**

By JOHN HANNA AP Political Writer

TOPEKA, Kan. (AP) — Kansas Gov. Laura Kelly banned the use of TikTok on the state-issued devices of government workers under her control on Wednesday, becoming one of the first Democratic governors to restrict the popular social media app.

Kelly's action came five days after Congress approved the \$1.7 trillion omnibus spending bill that banned TikTok from most U.S. government-issued devices for employees. Republican governors in at least 15 states have already imposed such restrictions.

In Louisiana on Monday, the state's commissioner of administration — a Republican appointed by Democratic Gov. John Bel Edwards — banned the use of TikTok on state networks under Edwards' control, with his approval. Also, Indiana's GOP attorney general has sued TikTok's owner. U.S. armed forces have already prohibited the app on military devices.

TikTok has become the world's second most-popular domain and is consumed by two-thirds of American teenagers, some of whom use it to fill gaps in their school lessons. The provision in the congressional spending bill reflected bipartisan concerns about security and the spread of misinformation because of the app's Chinese ownership.

Here's a look at Kelly's action and the broader debate over TikTok:

### **WHAT ARE THE CONCERNS ABOUT TIKTOK?**

Like Republican governors who imposed similar bans, Kelly cited concerns about security and the privacy of users' data.

Both the FBI and the Federal Communications Commission have warned that TikTok user data could be shared by owner ByteDance Ltd. with China's authoritarian government. U.S. officials also worry that the Chinese government might use TikTok to push pro-China narratives or misinformation.

There's also been concern about TikTok's content and whether it harms teenagers' mental health.

Kelly said in a statement: "TikTok mines users' data and potentially makes it available to the Chinese Communist Party." Lawmakers have said this includes browsing history and location.

TikTok spokesperson Jamal Brown said the company is working with the U.S. government to address the concerns that have been raised.

"We're disappointed that so many states are jumping on the political bandwagon to enact policies that will do nothing to advance cybersecurity in their states and are based on unfounded falsehoods about TikTok," he said in an emailed statement.

### **WHO HAS PUSHED FOR RESTRICTIONS?**

In 2020, then-President Donald Trump and his administration sought to ban dealings with TikTok's owner, force it to sell off its U.S. assets and remove it from app stores. Courts blocked Trump's efforts to ban TikTok, and President Joe Biden rescinded Trump's orders after taking office but ordered an in-depth study of the issue. A planned sale of TikTok's U.S. assets was shelved.

Earlier this month in Louisiana, the Republican secretary of state imposed a TikTok ban for his department — before the commissioner of administration acted this week.

"The governor didn't say, 'I direct you to do this.' But when we brought it to him, he gave his input and then his approval," Jacques Berry, the commissioner's spokesperson, said Wednesday.

In Congress, concern about the app has been bipartisan.

The Senate earlier this month approved a version of the TikTok ban authored by conservative Republican Sen. Josh Hawley of Missouri, a vocal critic of big tech companies.

But Democratic U.S. Rep. Raja Krishnamoorthi, of Illinois has co-sponsored legislation to prohibit TikTok from operating in the U.S. altogether, and the measure approved by Congress had the support of Democratic U.S. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi.

### **WHAT ABOUT KELLY'S MOVE?**

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Both Kelly and Edwards operate in a different political context than many other Democratic governors. Both are in Republican-leaning states that have conservative, GOP-led Legislatures. Trump also carried each state handily twice. Kelly narrowly won reelection in November by pitching herself to moderate GOP and independent voters as a middle-of-the-road problem solver.

Kelly's order applies to state executive branch agencies, boards and commissions, but not to state universities, which are overseen by the Kansas Board of Regents. It also doesn't apply to the Legislature or employees of other statewide elected official, such as the attorney general or secretary of state. Kelly urged all of them to impose restrictions.

Kelly is directing state employees to remove the TikTok app from their government-issued devices. She has directed the state's information technology office to limit employees' ability to access TikTok's website on state devices.

## French defense chief visits Ukraine, pledges more support

By FELIPE DANA, RENATA BRITO and ANGELA CHARLTON Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — France's defense minister on Wednesday pledged further military support for Ukraine, insisting his government's backing is unflagging while efforts are also being made with Moscow to reach an eventual negotiated end to Russia's invasion.

Minister for the Armed Forces Sebastien Lecornu said support will include French army equipment and a 200 million euro (US\$212 million) fund that would allow Ukraine to purchase weapons.

While France has been less vocal about its military backing for Ukraine than the United States and Britain, the country has sent a steady supply of weapons to Ukraine since Russia invaded on Feb. 24.

France hosted two aid conferences for Ukraine this month. But many in Ukraine remain critical of Paris' response to the war because of President Emmanuel Macron's efforts to maintain contact with Russian President Vladimir Putin and seek a negotiated solution.

Lecornu said France was giving military equipment from the French army to the Ukrainian army, but highlighted that this would not weaken France's defense. France could deliver a new air-defense system in the future, officials said, without revealing details, though Ukrainian Defense Minister Oleksii Reznikov added that France would immediately begin training Ukrainian air officers on how to use it.

Lecornu and Reznikov did not specify which new air defense system France could give Ukraine in the near future. But Lecornu later mentioned the MAMBA anti-missile system developed together with Italy, describing it as the European equivalent of the Patriot air defense system that the U.S. has given Ukraine.

Unlike the U.S. government, which announced it was giving the Patriots before teaching Ukrainians how to use them, France will train Ukrainians first so that it could potentially deliver a new system, such as the Mamba SAMP/T together with Italy, once they are ready to use it, Lecornu's office explained to the AP.

Reznikov said Ukraine's top priority remains "air defense, anti-missile defense, anti-drone defense, that is, the task of protecting (the) Ukrainian sky." French Crotale air-defense systems already are "on combat duty," said Reznikov.

"And accordingly, we agreed that we will increase (the) capabilities of our air force," he said.

Lecornu arrived a week after Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy visited the U.S., Ukraine's chief ally, and amid fighting focused mostly in the country's east but with neither Moscow nor Kyiv reporting major gains in recent weeks.

After a meeting with Lecornu, Zelenskyy expressed gratitude to France on social media "for the already provided military assistance aimed at protecting the Ukrainian sky and strengthening the capabilities of the defense forces."

Earlier on Wednesday, in his annual speech to Ukraine's parliament, Zelenskyy urged the European Union to open membership talks with his country after granting it candidate status in June. He also praised relations with the U.S., saying its decision to send Patriot missiles is "a special sign of trust in Ukraine."

While both Russia and Ukraine have said they were willing to participate in peace talks, their stated conditions remain far apart. Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov reiterated Wednesday that any peace plan

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must acknowledge four regions of Ukraine that Russia illegally annexed as Russian territory, a demand that Kyiv flatly rejects.

Russian forces have pressed their offensive to capture all of eastern Ukraine by concentrating in recent weeks on Bakhmut, a city in Donetsk province. Ukrainian forces were pushing a counteroffensive toward Kreminna, a city in neighboring Luhansk province, in hopes of potentially dividing Russia's troops in the east.

France has supplied Ukraine with a substantial chunk of its arsenal of Caesar cannons, as well as anti-tank missiles, Crotale air defense missile batteries and rocket launchers. It is also training some 2,000 Ukrainian troops on French soil. Macron pledged last week to provide a new injection of weapons in early 2023.

Western military aid to Ukraine has angered Moscow. On Tuesday, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov accused Washington and NATO of fueling the war with the aim of weakening Russia and warned the conflict could spin out of control.

Russia invaded Ukraine 10 months ago, alleging a threat to its security orchestrated by NATO. The war has killed tens of thousands of people and displaced millions so far, with an end nowhere in sight.

Russian attacks on power stations and other infrastructure have left millions of Ukrainians without heating and electricity for hours or days at a time.

The latest Russian shelling wounded at least eight civilians, including three in Bakhmut, Donetsk regional governor Pavlo Kyrylenko said.

In the southern region of Kherson, Russian shelling hit a maternity hospital soon after two women gave birth there, although Ukrainian officials said no one was wounded.

Ukraine's foreign minister told The Associated Press this week that his government would like to see a peace conference by the end of February. Ukraine has said in the past that it wouldn't negotiate with Russia before the full withdrawal of its troops, while Moscow insists its military gains and the 2014 annexation of the Crimean Peninsula cannot be ignored.

Asked about Ukraine's intention to hold a February summit under the U.N.'s aegis, Kremlin spokesman Peskov said any peace plan could only proceed from the assumption of Russia's sovereignty over the illegally annexed areas of Ukraine.

"There isn't any peace plan by Ukraine yet," Peskov said during a conference call with reporters. "And there can't be any Ukrainian peace plan that fails to take into account today's realities regarding the Russian territory, the incorporation of the new four regions into Russia. Any plan that fails to acknowledge these realities can't be considered a peace plan."

## **New Orleans guitarist Walter 'Wolfman' Washington dead at 79**

NEW ORLEANS (AP) — New Orleans music legend Walter "Wolfman" Washington, a cornerstone of the city's musical nightlife for decades, has died of cancer, just days after turning 79.

Washington died Dec. 22 at Passages Hospice, The Times-Picayune/The New Orleans Advocate reported.

Funeral services are scheduled for Jan. 4. at 2 p.m. at Jacob Schoen & Son Funeral Home. A benefit concert to help with medical and funeral expenses is planned for Jan. 8 at the Tipitina's music venue.

Washington and his band, the Roadmasters, mixed blues, R&B, funk and soul, punctuating songs with his trademark howl, the newspaper reported. In director Michael Murphy's 2005 New Orleans music documentary "Make It Funky!," Rolling Stones guitarist Keith Richards bows down to Washington in tribute to his guitar style and tone, the newspaper reported.

Washington started his career backing New Orleans musical legends Irma Thomas, Lee Dorsey and Johnny Adams, who ultimately became a mentor and close friend.

"Johnny taught me a whole lot," Washington recalled in 1999. "He'd say, 'If you want to sing high notes, you've got to pay attention to how you go up there. Take your time. Don't rush yourself. Once you get used to going up there, it will come easy.' He played guitar, too. He'd show me how to hit notes and how to run from one note to another and pay attention to why that note fits there. He was like a dad. I could talk to him about anything."

Washington backed Adams on several Rounder Records albums before releasing his first album with the



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Roadmasters, "Leader of the Pack," for the Hep'Me label in 1981. He moved to Rounder for 1986's "Wolf Tracks" and the subsequent "Out of the Dark" and "Wolf at the Door." The 1991 album "Sada" was named for his first daughter.

He traveled abroad and occasionally toured domestically, but New Orleans' nightclubs were his heart and soul. He was one of the first musicians to play in New Orleans following Hurricane Katrina via generator-powered shows at the Maple Leaf.

After more than 10 years without a new album, Washington made a comeback with 2018's "My Future Is My Past." The album reunited him with Thomas for a duet on the old Adams song "Even Now" and earned Washington some of the best reviews of his career.

More recently, he finished another batch of eight blues-tinged songs, produced by Galactic saxophonist Ben Ellman. Washington's manager, Adam Shipley, is currently shopping the finished album to record labels, the newspaper reported.

"For the last six or seven years, Walter got the recognition he deserved," Shipley said. "He put out some great music, and had a great life."

A dedicated smoker and drinker with a colorful personal life, Washington battled back from numerous health challenges over the years. Still, his March diagnosis of tonsil cancer was surprising.

Even as he underwent chemotherapy and radiation, he continued to perform, including at this year's French Quarter Festival and New Orleans Jazz & Heritage Festival.

"Nobody could tell what he was going through," his wife, Michelle Washington said. "He was a trooper to the end. He didn't want people feeling sorry for him. He led an amazing life. He touched a lot of people and brought them a lot of joy."

In addition to his wife, survivors include two daughters, Sada and Mamadou Washington, and a son, Brian Anderson.

## Netanyahu government: West Bank settlements top priority

By ILAN BEN ZION Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — Benjamin Netanyahu's incoming hard-line Israeli government put West Bank settlement expansion at the top of its priority list on Wednesday, vowing to legalize dozens of illegally built outposts and annex the occupied territory as part of its coalition deal with ultranationalist allies.

The coalition agreements, released a day before the government is to be sworn into office, also included language endorsing discrimination against LGBTQ people on religious grounds, contentious judicial reforms, as well as generous stipends for ultra-Orthodox men who prefer to study instead of work.

The package laid the groundwork for what is expected to be a stormy beginning for the country's most religious and right-wing government in history, potentially putting it at odds with large parts of the Israeli public, rankling Israel's closest allies and escalating tensions with the Palestinians.

"What worries me the most is that these agreements change the democratic structure of what we know of as the state of Israel," said Tomer Naor, chief legal officer of the Movement for Quality Government in Israel, a watchdog group. "One day we'll all wake up and Netanyahu is not going to be prime minister, but some of these changes will be irreversible."

The guidelines were led by a commitment to "advance and develop settlement in all parts of the land of Israel," including "Judea and Samaria," the biblical names for the West Bank.

Israel captured the West Bank in 1967 along with the Gaza Strip and east Jerusalem — territory the Palestinians seek for a future state. Israel has constructed dozens of Jewish settlements home to around 500,000 Israelis who live alongside around 2.5 million Palestinians.

Most of the international community considers Israel's West Bank settlements illegal and an obstacle to peace with the Palestinians. The United States already has warned the incoming government against taking steps that could further undermine hopes for an independent Palestinian state.

In response to a request for comment, the Palestinian leadership emphasized that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict can be resolved only through the establishment of a Palestinian state with east Jerusalem as its capital.

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Without a negotiated two-state solution, "there will be no peace, security or stability in the region," said Nabil Abu Rdeneh, a spokesman for Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas.

There was no immediate U.S. comment.

Netanyahu, who served 12 years as prime minister, is returning to power after he was ousted from office last year. His new government is made up of ultra-Orthodox parties, a far-right ultranationalist religious faction affiliated with the West Bank settler movement and his Likud party.

In the coalition agreement between Likud and its ally, the Religious Zionism party, Netanyahu pledged to legalize wildcat settlement outposts considered illegal even by the Israeli government. He also promises to annex the West Bank "while choosing the timing and considering the national and international interests of the state of Israel."

Such a move would alienate much of the world, and give new fuel to critics who compare Israeli policies in the West Bank to apartheid South Africa.

The deal also grants favors to Itamar Ben-Gvir, a far-right politician who will be in charge of the national police force as the newly created national security minister.

It includes a commitment to expand and vastly increase government funding for the Israeli settlements in the divided West Bank city of Hebron, where a tiny ultranationalist Jewish community lives in heavily fortified neighborhoods amid tens of thousands of Palestinians. Ben-Gvir lives in a nearby settlement.

The agreement also includes a clause pledging to change the country's anti-discrimination laws to allow businesses to refuse service to people "because of a religious belief."

The legislation drew outrage earlier this week when members of Ben-Gvir's party said the law could be used to deny services to LGBTQ people. Netanyahu has said he will not let the law pass, but nonetheless left the clause in the coalition agreement.

Among its other changes is placing Bezalel Smotrich, a settler leader who heads Religious Zionism party, in a newly created ministerial post overseeing West Bank settlement policy.

In an op-ed published in the Wall Street Journal, Smotrich said there would be no "changing the political or legal status" of the West Bank, indicating that annexation would not immediately take place.

But he leveled criticism at the "feckless military government" that controls key aspects of life for Israeli settlements — such as construction, expansion and infrastructure projects. Smotrich, who will also be finance minister, is expected to push to expand construction and funding for settlements while stifling Palestinian development in the territory.

Netanyahu and his allies also agreed to push through changes meant to overhaul the country's legal system — specifically, a bill that would allow parliament to overturn Supreme Court decisions with a simple majority of 61 lawmakers.

Critics say the law will undermine government checks and balances and erode a critical democratic institution. They also say Netanyahu has a conflict of interest in pushing for the legal overhaul because he is currently on trial for corruption charges.

"Since (the new government's) intention is to weaken the Supreme Court, we're not going to have the court as an institution that would help guard the principles of freedom and equality," Yohanan Plesner, president of the Israel Democracy Institute, a Jerusalem think tank, told reporters.

Two of Netanyahu's key ministers — incoming interior minister Aryeh Deri and Ben-Gvir — have criminal records. Deri, who served time in prison in 2002 for bribery, pleaded guilty to tax fraud earlier this year, and Netanyahu and his coalition passed a law this week to allow him to serve as a minister despite his conviction. Ben-Gvir was convicted in 2009 of inciting racism and supporting a terrorist organization.

Israel's figurehead president, Isaac Herzog, on Wednesday expressed "deep concern" about the incoming government and its positions on LGBTQ rights, racism and the country's Arab minority in a rare meeting with Ben-Gvir, one of the coalition's most radical members. Herzog urged Ben-Gvir to "calm the stormy winds."

The government platform also mentioned that the loosely defined rules governing holy sites, including Jerusalem's flashpoint shrine known to Jews as the Temple Mount and to Muslims as the Al-Aqsa Mosque compound, would remain the same.

Ben-Gvir and other Religious Zionism politicians had called for the "status quo" to be changed to allow Jewish prayer at the site, a move that risked inflaming tensions with the Palestinians. The status of the site is the emotional epicenter of the decades-long Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

In an interview with CNN published Wednesday, King Abdullah II of Jordan warned that his country would respond if Israel crossed red lines and tried to change the status of the sacred Jerusalem site, over which Jordan has custodianship.

"If people want to get into a conflict with us, we're quite prepared," he said.

## Vatican says health of retired pope Benedict XVI 'worsening'

By FRANCES D'EMILIO Associated Press

VATICAN CITY (AP) — Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI's health has worsened over the past hours due to advanced age and doctors are constantly monitoring his condition, the Vatican said Wednesday, as Pope Francis appealed to the faithful to pray for his "very ill" predecessor "until the end."

Vatican spokesperson Matteo Bruni said Francis went to visit the frail, 95-year-old Benedict in the monastery on Vatican grounds where he has lived since retiring in February 2013.

"Regarding the health condition of the emeritus pope, for whom Pope Francis asked for prayers at the end of his general audience this morning, I can confirm that in the last hours, a worsening due to advanced age has happened," Bruni said in a written statement.

"The situation at the moment remains under control, constantly monitored by doctors," the statement said.

At the end of his customary Wednesday audience with the public in a Vatican auditorium, Francis departed from his prepared remarks to say that Benedict is "very ill" and asked the faithful to pray for the retired pontiff.

Francis didn't elaborate on Benedict's condition.

"I would like to ask you all for a special prayer for Pope Emeritus Benedict, who is sustaining the church in silence," Francis said. "Remember him — he is very ill — asking the Lord to console him and to sustain him in this testimony to love for the church, until the end."

After the hour-long audience, "Pope Francis went to the Mater Ecclesiae monastery to visit Benedict XVI. Let us all unite with him in prayer for the emeritus pope," Bruni said.

Benedict, who was the first pontiff to resign in 600 years, has become increasingly frail in recent years as he dedicated his post-papacy life to prayer and meditation.

When Benedict turned 95 in April, his longtime secretary, Archbishop Georg Gaenswein, said the retired pontiff was in good spirits, adding that "naturally he is physically relatively weak and fragile, but rather lucid."

Francis also paid a visit to Benedict at the monastery four months ago. The occasion was Francis' latest ceremony elevating churchmen to cardinal rank, and the new "princes of the church" accompanied him to the monastery for the brief greeting.

The Vatican released a photo at the time that showed a very thin-looking Benedict clasping Francis' hand as the current and past pontiff smiled at each other.

In his first years of retirement, Benedict attended a couple of cardinal-elevating ceremonies in St. Peter's Basilica. But in recent years, he wasn't strong enough to attend the long service.

He was elevated to cardinal's rank in 1977 by the then-pontiff, Paul VI. As Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, the German prelate and theologian long served as the Vatican's doctrinal orthodox watchdog. He was elected pontiff in 2005.

Benedict startled a room full of Vatican prelates by announcing, in Latin, in February 2013 that he would step down as pope in two weeks. Some church traditionalists were dismayed by his decision.

Francis has praised Benedict's decision as a courageous acknowledgement that physical frailty no longer left him able to fully serve the world's 1.3 billion Catholics.

Given his own health history, including a knee ligament problem that has forced him to use a wheelchair or a cane, Francis has said that retirement is something he'd consider, if the situation warranted it.

In an interview earlier this month with Spanish newspaper ABC, Francis revealed that shortly after fellow

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cardinals elected him to succeed Benedict in the papacy, he wrote a resignation letter to have on hand in case medical problems impeded him from carrying out his duties.

But in the same interview, Francis played down his mobility challenge, saying one governs with the head, not the knee.

In Benedict's native Germany, the head of that nation's bishops' conference, Limburg Bishop Georg Baetzing, joined in Francis' call for prayers.

"My thoughts are with the emeritus pope," Baetzing told German news agency dpa. "I call on the faithful in Germany to pray for Benedict XVI."

In Berlin, Chancellor Olaf Scholz "wishes the German pope, as we say, a good recovery and his thoughts are with him," government spokesperson Christiane Hoffmann said during a regular government news conference.

## **Pelé nears 1 month in hospital with no sign of improvement**

By MAURICIO SAVARESE AP Sports Writer

SAO PAULO (AP) — One of Pelé's daughters said Wednesday she and her family are enduring moments of sadness and despair as the 82-year-old Brazilian soccer great's hospitalization nears one month.

The three-time World Cup winner's cancer has advanced and doctors at Albert Einstein hospital recently said he's under "elevated care" related to "kidney and cardiac dysfunctions."

Pelé was admitted to the Sao Paulo facility on Nov. 29. The hospital hasn't published any updates in the past week.

"These moments are hard to explain. Sometimes it is a lot of sadness and despair, in other moments we laugh and speak about fun memories," Kely Nascimento said on Instagram.

Other family members are also at the hospital.

"And what we learn the most from all of this is that we have to seek one another, hold each other tight. That's the only way this is worth it. Everyone together," she wrote.

One of Pelé's sons, Edson Cholbi Nascimento, who is known as Edinho, visited on Saturday but returned on Tuesday to a southern Brazil city where he works as a soccer coach. He has not spoken to journalists since he left Sao Paulo.

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 specified whether it had spread to other organs.

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 has 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.

Several tributes and get-well soon wishes were made for the former footballer during the Qatar tournament, which was won by Argentina.

## **Review: A baby for sale in Korean drama 'Broker'**

By LINDSEY BAHR AP Film Writer

The Korean drama "Broker" begins like a noir. A young woman walks slowly in the pouring rain in the middle of the night in Busan, her flimsy hood doing little to keep her dry. She looks haunted but determined and soon we see her destination: A church with a collection receptacle labeled "Baby Box." It's then, from behind, that we see something squirming under her large, hooded jacket. She doesn't open it, though. She sets the infant boy gingerly on the ground, wrapping him in his blanket, and walks away.

Thankfully for the kid, two detectives are staking out this particular baby box. One, Soo-jin (Bae Doo-na), gets out to put the baby in the box. The other, Detective Lee (Lee Joo-young), trails the mysterious woman. They suspect an illegal child trafficking ring is operating out of the church and need to catch the perpetrators in the middle of a sale.

Yet "Broker" is not an edge-of-your-seat crime thriller or maudlin drama. Yes, there are two cops on the

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tail of several men who have a shadowy business selling orphaned and deserted kids to wealthy owners. Yes, there are shades of a large, powerful crime syndicate looming. And yes, there are abandonment issues aplenty.

But despite all the ingredients for a certain kind of film, writer-director Hirokazu Kore-eda had something different in mind. In "Broker," he's made a quiet road trip film about some gentle souls in difficult situations and the makeshift family they become.

Anyone who has seen the Japanese filmmaker's "Shoplifters" will recognize some similar throughlines, from the family aspect to its gentle approach towards people on the fringes of society — but "Broker" takes things a step further by playing around with gender roles and expectations in unexpected and enlightening ways, making the detectives women and men the ones wearing the baby carriers.

The baby box is not something out of a dystopian future, but a real thing in Japan and Korea that was meant for good but also extremely controversial. Was it enabling parents to "throw away" children too easily, some wondered. Or was it a public service for the most desperate in societies where single mothers are shamed?

These questions are asked in the film, and gently debated, but "Broker" isn't interested in definitive answers or moralizing, but instead empathy for both the mothers in impossible situations and the children haunted by their abandonment.

Ha Sang-hyeon (played by Song Kang-ho of "Parasite") is the lead broker of the operation, but he is not a slimy, soulless criminal mastermind using the babies and kids as a mere means to a profitable end. In fact, his de facto daycare looks like a pleasant place of love and attention for the littlest and most helpless infants on up.

He and his right-hand man, Dong-soo (Gang Dong-won) discover a note with this newest arrival: His name is Woo-sung and his mother says she'll be back for him. From experience, they know that this is rarely ever true, especially when there is no parental name or number left. But the early twist is that the mother, Moon So-young (Lee Ji-eun), does come back and soon the three are on a journey to sell Woo-sung to the right kind of parents (a kind of Goldilocks scenario). There is a light and almost comic touch to some of these interactions that also doesn't trivialize things.

"Broker" is definitely a slow burn that can feel a bit repetitive at times, though the introduction of Hae-jin (Im Seung-soo) as an 8-year-old orphan with Premier League dreams helps get the film over a meandering hump.

It also packs an emotional punch and has some surprises yet, but most importantly it's a reminder that filmmakers looking to explore society's ills don't need to make something a misery fest to do so effectively and powerfully.

"Broker," a NEON release now playing in theaters, is rated R by the Motion Picture Association for "some language." Running time: 129 minutes. Three stars out of four.

## Judge orders longest prison term so far in Gov. Whitmer plot

By JOEY CAPPELLETTI and COREY WILLIAMS Associated Press/Report for America

GRAND RAPIDS, Mich. (AP) — A Delaware trucker described as an architect of the conspiracy to kidnap Michigan's governor was sentenced Wednesday to more than 19 years in prison — the longest term yet given to anyone convicted in the plot.

Prosecutors had sought a life sentence for Barry Croft Jr., 47, who was the fourth and final federal defendant to learn his fate. Judge Robert J. Jonker described him as "the idea guy" behind the plot and called him "a very convincing communicator" for people who were open to his views.

"However twisted or irrational it may seem to many of us, it did resonate to the targeted audience," the judge said. "That is as important a method of leadership as being out in the field telling people where to go."

Defense attorney Joshua Blanchard said he would appeal the sentence.

Croft and Adam Fox were convicted in August of conspiracy charges in Grand Rapids. Croft also was found guilty of possessing an unregistered explosive.

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Fox, 39, was sentenced Tuesday to 16 years behind bars. The government also sought a life sentence for him.

Both men were accused of hatching a stunning plot to abduct Gov. Gretchen Whitmer from her vacation home just before the 2020 presidential election. The conspirators were furious over tough COVID-19 restrictions that Whitmer and officials in other states had put in place during the early months of the pandemic, as well as perceived threats to gun ownership.

Whitmer was not physically harmed. The FBI was secretly embedded in the group and made 14 arrests. "We're talking about a conspiracy to physically kidnap the governor, potentially assassinate her as well. It doesn't get much more serious than that," Jonker said before announcing Croft's sentence. "The group had a lot of guns. This group had all kinds of material ready to go to achieve their end."

Assistant U.S. Attorney Nils Kessler called Croft the "spiritual leader" of the group of conspirators, comparing his role to that of "some sheikh in ISIS."

"He essentially was putting himself as a role of a prophet ... there are people who believe this sort of rhetoric, and he used it," Kessler told the judge.

"This man is fully radicalized. He hasn't changed his viewpoint," Kessler added. "He's not admitting the ideas are wrong because he still holds them. This whole thing was Mr. Croft's idea."

Whitmer's office declined to comment Wednesday. She said in August that the guilty verdicts proved that "those who seek to divide us will be held accountable." She also said such plots are "a disturbing extension of radicalized domestic terrorism" that threaten "the very foundation of our republic."

Croft regularly wore the type of tricorne hat common during the American Revolution and had tattoos on his arms symbolizing resistance — "Expect Us" — as he traveled to Ohio, Wisconsin and Michigan to meet with like-minded extremists.

A different jury in Grand Rapids couldn't reach a verdict on the pair at the first trial last spring but acquitted two other men.

The abduction was meant to be the beginning of a "reign of terror," Kessler said in court documents. Croft's plan called for riots, "torching" government officials in their sleep and setting off violence across the country.

In one key piece of evidence, Croft, Fox and others traveled to see Whitmer's vacation home in northern Michigan, with undercover agents and informants inside the cabal.

At one point, Croft told allies: "I don't like seeing anybody get killed either. But you don't make an omelet without breaking a few eggs, you know what I mean?"

Croft's attorney tried to soften his client's role. In a court filing, Blanchard said Croft did not actually have authority over others and often frustrated them because he "just kept talking."

Croft "went way down a conspiracy rabbit hole," Blanchard said Wednesday in seeking a sentence less than life.

"When the pandemic touched off, a lot of people went down a similar rabbit hole and suddenly Mr. Croft was connected with a lot of people who felt the same way he did," Blanchard told the judge.

Blanchard, who got emotional in the courtroom when speaking about Croft's three children, told reporters outside the courthouse that the sentence means Croft will not get to see his kids grow up.

Blanchard also maintained that Croft wasn't the "ideas guy" he's been portrayed as. He insisted that "most of what Mr. Croft said was excluded because the government didn't want the jury to hear it."

Two men who pleaded guilty and testified against Fox and Croft received substantial breaks: Ty Garbin already is free after a 2 1/2-year prison term, while Kaleb Franks was given a four-year sentence.

In state court, three men recently received lengthy sentences for assisting Fox in the summer of 2020. Five more are awaiting trial in Antrim County, where Whitmer's vacation home is.

When the plot was extinguished, Whitmer blamed then-President Donald Trump, saying he had given "comfort to those who spread fear and hatred and division." In August, 19 months after leaving office, Trump said the kidnapping plan was a "fake deal."

## Rocky ride: Tesla stock on pace for worst year ever

By ALEX VEIGA AP Business Writer

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Owning Tesla stock this year has been anything but a smooth ride for investors. Shares in the electric vehicle maker are down nearly 70% since the start of the year, on pace to finish in the bottom five biggest decliners among S&P 500 stocks. By comparison, the benchmark index is down about 20%.

While Tesla has continued to grow its profits, signs of softening demand and heightened competition have investors increasingly worried. And then there's CEO Elon Musk's acquisition of Twitter. Some of Musk's actions since taking over the social media company, including doing away with a content moderation structure created to address hate speech and other problems on the platform, have unnerved Twitter's advertisers and turned off some users.

That's stoked concerns on Wall Street that Twitter is taking too much of the billionaire's attention, and possibly offending loyal Tesla customers.

Musk's acquisition of Twitter opened up a political firestorm and has caused Musk and Tesla's brand to deteriorate, leading to a "complete debacle for the stock," Wedbush analyst Dan Ives wrote in a research note this week.

Musk has said that he plans to remain as Twitter's CEO until he can find someone willing to replace him in the job.

Despite Musk's focus on Twitter, Tesla's results have been solid this year. The Austin, Texas, company posted year-over-year profit and revenue growth through the first three quarters of 2022, including more than doubling its third-quarter profit from a year earlier.

Still, electric vehicle models from other automakers are starting to chip away at Tesla's dominance of the U.S. EV market. From 2018 through 2020, Tesla had about 80% of the EV market. Its share dropped to 71% in 2021 and has continued to decline, according to data from S&P Global Mobility.

This month, in a rare move, Tesla began offering discounts through the end of the year on its two top-selling models, a sign that demand is slowing for its electric vehicles.

Ives predicts that Tesla will likely miss Wall Street's estimates when the company reports its fourth-quarter results, citing higher inventory levels, the recent price cuts and overall production slowdowns in China. He also expects a "softer trajectory for 2023."

"The reality is that after a Cinderella story demand environment since 2018, Tesla is facing some serious macro and company specific EV competitive headwinds into 2023 that are starting to emerge both in the U.S. and China," Ives wrote.

Still, Ives is optimistic that Tesla's long-term prospects remain solid as the global market for electric vehicles grows — and Musk refocuses on Tesla.

"However, any further Musk strategic missteps will be carefully scrutinized by the Street and further weigh on shares," he wrote.

## Mexico draws more asylum-seekers despite grisly violence

By ELLIOT SPAGAT Associated Press

TIJUANA, Mexico (AP) — Albert Rivera knows well how dangerous Mexico can be: He sometimes wears a bulletproof vest around the compound of bright yellow buildings that he built into one of the nation's largest migrant shelters.

His phone stores more evidence in the form of stomach-churning videos that gangs sent migrants to warn of consequences for disobeying demands. The images include severed limbs being thrown in a pile, a decapitated head getting tossed in a barrel of steaming liquid and a woman squirming while her head is sawed off.

But across town from the Agape Mision Mundial shelter, many migrants are grateful for a chance to settle here. That's where Mexico's asylum office greets foreigners who consider the border city of Tijuana a relatively safe place to live with an abundance of jobs.

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The jarring contrast speaks to Mexico's conflicted status. It is a country where violence and inequality chase many people to seek a better life in the United States. For others it offers a measure of peace and prosperity beyond what's available in their homelands.

A safe, robust asylum system in Mexico eases pressure on the United States, which is looking more to other governments to manage migration. A U.S. Supreme Court ruling issued Tuesday kept pandemic-era limits on asylum in place for now.

Mexico was the world's third most popular destination for asylum-seekers in 2021 after the United States and Germany, according to the United Nations. It is on pace to end the year just below an all-time high of 131,400 asylum claims in 2021, led by Hondurans, Cubans and Haitians.

Juan Pablo Sanchez, 24, followed others who left Colombia in the last two years after struggling financially as an organizer of cultural events.

For him, Tijuana is a better option than the United States. He pays \$250 a month in rent, far less than a friend who pays \$1,800 for a similar place in Illinois. Pay is lower in Mexico, but jobs are plentiful, including at export-driven manufacturing plants.

Lower expenses mean more money to send his wife and stepson in Pereira, a city in a coffee-growing region of the Andean foothills.

"The fruit (of my work) is seen in Colombia," he said after riding a motorcycle he uses for a messenger job to the Tijuana asylum office. "Making a living in the United States is precarious."

Mexico granted 61% of asylum requests from January through November, including at least 90% approvals for Hondurans and Venezuelans. Cubans and Haitians are far less successful.

The U.S. grant rate was 46% in the fiscal year that ended Sept. 30. That figure is below Mexico's rate but up from 27% two years ago, when the administration of former U.S. President Donald Trump sharply limited relief for victims of gang and domestic violence, according to data from Syracuse University's Transactional Records Access Clearinghouse.

Mexico abides by the Cartagena Declaration, which promises a safe haven to anyone threatened by "generalized violence, foreign aggression, internal conflicts, massive violation of human rights or other circumstances which have seriously disturbed public order." The U.S. observes a narrower definition that requires a person to have been individually targeted for limited reasons, as spelled out in the U.N. Refugee Convention.

Mexico's relatively generous criteria carry little weight in Rivera's shelter, where roughly 500 guests seldom venture far beyond a neighborhood store. The Puerto Rican pastor grew up in Los Angeles and ran a home in Tijuana for recovering drug addicts before converting it to a migrant shelter in 2018. He says gunmen once burst inside looking for a woman who was hiding elsewhere.

Maria Rosario Blanco, 41, came with her sister and 8-year-old grandnephew, who was riding on the back of his father's motorcycle in the Honduran capital of Tegucigalpa in 2019 when an assailant fatally shot his father. Blanco's nephew was killed a year later while working at his barber shop. The family finally left when a flood destroyed their home.

Blanco said gangs regularly threatened to kill or kidnap her even after she moved to another part of Honduras and to Palenque in southern Mexico, a town known for Mayan ruins. She says she won't feel safe until reaching the United States, where she hopes to settle in a Chicago suburb with a man she met through church.

"The gangs are everywhere," she said, describing fears about Mexico. She said Hondurans are easy targets for assailants for how they speak.

A Mexican woman who spoke on condition of anonymity for safety reasons said her troubles began when a brother joined a gang under threats to his family, but they killed him anyway. Then her 15-year-old son joined the gang to save his family. They don't know where he is but received a photo of him with an assault rifle.

"The new rule is that people are obligated to join" the gang, she said. "If you refuse, it doesn't matter. They kill you either way."



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The gang burned their house in a small village in Michoacán state, stole their farmland and threatened to kill the entire family if her husband and 12-year-old son didn't join. They hope for an exemption to the U.S. asylum ban, which was kept alive at least a few months under Tuesday's 5-4 Supreme Court ruling. Justices will hear arguments in February on so-called Title 42 authority, which will remain in force until they decide the case.

Under Title 42, migrants have been denied a chance at asylum 2.5 million times since March 2020 on grounds of preventing spread of COVID-19. Some exceptions are made those deemed particularly vulnerable in Mexico.

Amid anticipation that Title 42 was about to end, some advocates expected the Biden administration to revive a Trump policy — temporarily blocked in court — that denied asylum to non-Mexicans if they did not first apply in a country they traveled through, like Mexico.

Maureen Meyer, the Washington Office for Latin America's vice president for programs, said Mexico might agree to lesser steps, like more enforcement within its own borders or admitting some migrants who are ordered to leave the United States. Under Title 42, Mexico has taken back migrants from Honduras, Guatemala, El Salvador and, more recently, Venezuela, as well people from Mexico.

While some asylum-seekers in Mexico get permits to travel within the country, they generally must stay in the state where they apply, Meyer said. Seven of every 10 apply in Chiapas state, bordering Guatemala, where jobs are scarce.

Jobs are abundant in Tijuana, but the city's Mexican Commission for Refugee Aid office is relatively small. One Venezuelan who visited the office after being expelled from the United States under Title 42 said Mexico was "10 times better" than home.

Migrants arrive fatigued, said Efrén González, director of the commission's Tijuana office. "They stop and plan their next steps, and I think Tijuana is a good place to do that."

## Supreme Court asked to bar punishment for acquitted conduct

By MARK SHERMAN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — A jury convicted Dayonta McClinton of robbing a CVS pharmacy but acquitted him of murder. A judge gave McClinton an extra 13 years in prison for the killing anyway.

In courtrooms across America, defendants get additional prison time for crimes that juries found they didn't commit.

The Supreme Court is being asked, again, to put an end to the practice. It's possible that the newest member of the court and a former federal public defender, Justice Ketanji Brown Jackson, could hold a pivotal vote.

McClinton's case and three others just like it are scheduled to be discussed when the justices next meet in private on Jan. 6.

Sentencing a defendant for what's called "acquitted conduct" has gone on for years, based on a Supreme Court decision from the late 1990s. And the justices have turned down numerous appeals asking them to declare that the Constitution forbids it.

The closest the court came to taking up the issue was in 2014, when Justices Antonin Scalia, Clarence Thomas and Ruth Bader Ginsburg provided three of the four votes necessary to hear an appeal.

"This has gone on long enough," Scalia wrote in dissent from the court's decision to reject an appeal from defendants who received longer prison terms for conspiring to distribute cocaine after jurors acquitted them of conspiracy charges.

Scalia and Ginsburg have since died, and Thomas remains on the court. But two other justices, Neil Gorsuch and Brett Kavanaugh, have voiced concerns while serving as appeals court judges. "Allowing judges to rely on acquitted or uncharged conduct to impose higher sentences than they otherwise would impose seems a dubious infringement of the rights to due process and to a jury trial," Kavanaugh wrote in 2015.

Jackson, who also previously served on the U.S. Sentencing Commission, could provide a fourth vote to take up the issue, said Douglas Berman, an expert on sentencing at the Ohio State University law school.

"She is someone who we'd have good reason to believe would be troubled by the continued use of acquitted conduct," said Berman, who filed a brief calling on the court to take up McClinton's case.

Jackson replaced Justice Stephen Breyer, who generally favored giving judges discretion in imposing prison terms. Reining in the use of acquitted conduct in sentencing would restrict judicial discretion.

McClinton, then 17, was part of an armed group that robbed a CVS pharmacy in Indianapolis in 2015 in search of prescription medicines, including opioids. The take was meager, about \$68 worth of drugs, McClinton's lawyers said in court papers. After one member of the group refused to share the proceeds, he was fatally shot in the back of the head at close range.

The reputed leader and other members of the group testified against McClinton at trial, as part of their bid for reduced prison terms, McClinton's lawyers wrote.

Even with the testimony, jurors acquitted McClinton of the most serious charges against him. He should have faced six years in prison, at most.

Instead, the trial judge gave McClinton 19 years, finding that it was more likely than not that McClinton was responsible for the killing. The legal standard in a jury trial is higher, proof beyond a reasonable doubt.

Upholding McClinton's prison term, Judge Ilana Rovner wrote for a unanimous three-judge panel of the Chicago-based 7th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals that lower-court judges are bound by a 1997 Supreme Court ruling that "a jury's verdict of acquittal does not prevent the sentencing court from considering conduct underlying the acquitted charge, so long as that conduct has been proved by a preponderance of the evidence."

But Rovner noted that a growing number of federal judges "have questioned the fairness and constitutionality of allowing courts to factor acquitted conduct into sentencing calculations."

Seventeen former federal judges also signed on to a brief in support of McClinton.

McClinton's lawyers argue that the high court's intervention is past due. "Unless this Court resolves this issue, tens of thousands of criminal defendants will continue to be sentenced using sentencing practices that are impossible to square with the Constitution," they wrote.

The Justice Department urged the court to reject the appeal, as it did in many similar cases in the past.

There's no certainty about what the justices will do. Berman, the sentencing expert, said there are reasons the court could take a pass again, including a preference for Congress to deal with the issue by legislation or for the Sentencing Commission to address it.

Neither has, over more than two decades, though the House in March passed legislation prohibiting punishment of acquitted conduct. The Senate has not taken any action.

Another reason for caution, Berman said, is that some justices might feel that they would craft at best a rough rule with the potential for unintended consequences that include restricting judicial discretion more than they want.

Jackson also might have to weigh whether this is a topic she wants to take on in her first term, already filled with consequential cases on race, elections and the latest dispute involving people with religious objections to same-sex marriage.

## Florida police officer drags woman into jail, is fired

TAMPA, Fla. (AP) — A police officer in Tampa, Florida, who was videotaped dragging a handcuffed woman into jail has been fired, authorities said.

An internal investigation determined that former officer Gregory Damon violated department policies during the Nov. 17 incident, the Tampa Police Department announced Tuesday in a news release.

The woman was being arrested for trespassing, according to the release. A body camera video shows her refusing to leave Damon's vehicle while parked at the Orient Road Jail and telling the officer, "I want you to drag me."

Damon then removes the woman from the vehicle and pulls her by the arm across a concrete floor, stopping once to tell her to get up but the woman refuses. Damon drags the woman to a doorway then buzzes for additional officers to assist him before the body camera video released by the Tampa Police

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Department cuts off.

The agency said it revised policy in 2013 to forbid officers from dragging uncooperative suspects on the ground. Officers should instead seek assistance from jail booking staff or other law enforcement, police said.

Damon had been with the Tampa Police Department since 2016.

## Southwest Airlines flight cancellations continue to snowball

By DAVID KOENIG AP Airlines Writer

DALLAS (AP) — Families hoping to catch a Southwest Airlines flight after days of cancellations, missing luggage and missed family connections suffered through another wave of scrubbed flights, with another 2,500 pulled from arrival and departure boards Wednesday.

Exhausted travelers sought passage by other means using different airlines, rental cars, or trains — or they've simply given up.

According to the FlightAware tracking service, more than 91% of all canceled flights in the U.S. early Wednesday were from Southwest, which has been unable to recover from ferocious winter storms that raked large swaths of the country over the weekend.

The operational systems of Southwest have been uniquely effected, so much so that the federal government is now investigating what happened at the Dallas carrier, which has frustrated its own flight and ground crews as well.

This week, with cancellations from other major airlines ranging from none to 2%, Southwest has canceled nearly 10,000 flights as of Wednesday and warned of thousands more Thursday and Friday, according to FlightAware.

In a video that Southwest posted late Tuesday, CEO Robert Jordan said Southwest would operate a reduced schedule for several days but hoped to be "back on track before next week."

Jordan blamed the winter storm for snarling the airline's "highly complex" network. He said Southwest's tools for recovering from disruptions work "99% of the time, but clearly we need to double down" on upgrading systems to avoid a repeat of this week.

"We have some real work to do in making this right," said Jordan, a 34-year Southwest veteran who became CEO in February. "For now, I want you to know that we are committed to that."

The airline is now drawing unwanted attention from Washington.

Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg, who has criticized airlines for previous disruptions, said his agency would examine the causes of Southwest's widespread cancellations and whether the airline was meeting its legal obligations to stranded customers.

"Because what we're seeing right now, from the system and the flights themselves to the inability to reach anybody on a customer service phone line, it is just completely unacceptable," Buttigieg told CBS early Wednesday.

In Congress, the Senate Commerce Committee also promised an investigation. Two Senate Democrats called on Southwest to provide "significant" compensation for stranded travelers, saying that the airline has the money because it plans to pay \$428 million in dividends next month.

## Katie Ledecky earns AP female athlete of year for 2nd time

By PAUL NEWBERRY AP National Writer

A change of scenery worked out just fine for Katie Ledecky.

Shifting coasts and coaches after last summer's Tokyo Olympics, the American swimmer turned in another stellar performance at the world championships, set a pair of world records and capped 2022 as The Associated Press Female Athlete of the Year, selected by a panel of 40 sports writers and editors from news outlets across the country.

Ledecky, who previously won the award in 2017, edged out American track star Sydney McLaughlin in balloting announced Wednesday.

The two tied in total points, but Ledecky got the nod based on 10 first-place votes to McLaughlin's nine.

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Basketball standout A'ja Wilson finished third.

"I know so many great athletes have won this honor," Ledecky said. "I'm really happy — happy with how my year went, and also excited about the future."

Ledecky, who won her first Olympic gold medal in 2012 at age 15, has managed to stay on top in female freestyle swimming's longest pool events for the better part of a decade.

She has held the long-course world record in both the 800- and 1,500-meter free since 2013, rarely facing a serious challenge in either of those grueling races.

At this year's world aquatics championships in Budapest, Hungary, Ledecky touched first in the 800 by more than 10 seconds and won the 1,500 by nearly 15 seconds. She also claimed gold in the 400 free and was part of the winning U.S. team in the 4x200 free relay.

Before 2022 was done, Ledecky added two more world records to her ledger. She set short-course marks in both the 800 and 1,500 a week apart — even though she rarely competes in the 25-meter pool.

But the real enjoyment for Ledecky comes when no one is cheering her on, when it's just her and her coaches and teammates, putting in the long, lonely hours of training.

"I might be one of the few swimmers who loves the training even more than the racing," she said. "Don't get me wrong: I love the racing, too. But I truly enjoy going to practice every day. I'm excited when I go to bed for practice in the morning."

Last year, after an Olympic performance that was a slight disappointment by her lofty standings, Ledecky left coach Greg Meehan and the Stanford University team where she had competed and trained while earning a psychology degree.

Her top priority was getting closer to her family in the Washington, D.C., area. She was intrigued by the program that Anthony Nesty, a rising star in the coaching ranks, had built at the University of Florida.

One of Nesty's freestylers, Bobby Finke, surprisingly swept gold in the men's 800 and 1,500 free at Tokyo. Another, Kieran Smith, captured an unexpected bronze.

So, Ledecky moved nearly 2,800 miles (4,500 kilometers) from Palo Alto, California, to Gainesville, Florida.

"It's been a lot of fun every day," she said. "This is the right place for me to be at this point in my career. I'm training really well and learning a lot along the way."

The shift to Nesty and a program where she usually trains with the men seems to have pushed the 25-year-old Ledecky to even greater heights.

Nesty said one of his main challenges is making sure Ledecky doesn't train too hard.

"She needs to understand that once you get older, the body is different," the coach said. "I have to tell her, 'Katie, you've got to understand you're not 18 anymore.' The body will get tired. When it gets tired, it's OK to throttle back a little bit."

Moving to Florida has led to other changes.

Always a bit reserved, Ledecky now seems far more willing to speak up — even holding her own in good-natured trash talk with her male teammates, according to Nesty.

"This group is a very competitive group, a fun group and, at times, pretty chatty," he said. "It seems to have made her pretty chatty. You've gotta be with our group. I think our group has kind of made her come out of her shell a little bit."

Ledecky agreed.

"Guys are guys. They love to trash-talk with each other," she said with a smile. "I'll poke a little fun at the some of the guys, give them a little push here and there. I'm definitely pretty comfortable in this environment now."

Ledecky tackled a brutal program at the Tokyo Games, where women competed in the 1,500 free for the first time. As expected, she swept the 800-1,500 double but came up short to Australian rival Ariarne Titmus in two shorter freestyle events.

Ledecky settled for silver behind Titmus in the 400 and didn't even win a medal in the 200, finishing 1 1/2 seconds behind the Aussie in fifth place.

It was the first time Ledecky failed to win a medal in an Olympic race.

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"There were some things I would've liked to be better in Tokyo," she conceded. "But also, I was really stretching myself, I was swimming 1,500 at the Olympics for the first time, while also swimming the 200 free. The events were even on the same day, which is something I don't think anyone else was doing. It was a challenge I had set my mind to for many years, something I wanted to take on. I don't regret taking that on."

The fifth-place finish was certainly an anomaly in Ledecy's stellar career.

Over three Olympic appearances, she has claimed seven gold medals and three silvers. At the biennial world championships, Ledecy has piled up a staggering 19 gold medals along with three silvers.

She has every intention of going faster.

Ledecy is focused squarely on the 2024 Paris Games, where she'll likely compete in at least four events. She even is glimpsing ahead to her home-country Olympics at Los Angeles in 2028.

She'll be 31 by then but sees no reason why she can't stay on top.

"I'm always setting new goals for myself," Ledecy said. "I enjoy the process more and more every year. What it takes to stay at this level. What it takes to continue to have your eyes set on something that's a couple of years away."

## Today in History: December 29, Texas becomes a state

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Thursday, Dec. 29, the 363rd day of 2022. There are two days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On Dec. 29, 1845, Texas was admitted as the 28th state.

On this date:

In 1170, Thomas Becket, the Archbishop of Canterbury, was slain in Canterbury Cathedral by knights loyal to King Henry II.

In 1812, during the War of 1812, the American frigate USS Constitution engaged and severely damaged the British frigate HMS Java off Brazil.

In 1851, the first Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) in the United States was founded in Boston.

In 1890, the Wounded Knee massacre took place in South Dakota as an estimated 300 Sioux Indians were killed by U.S. troops sent to disarm them.

In 1940, during World War II, Germany dropped incendiary bombs on London, setting off what came to be known as "The Second Great Fire of London."

In 1972, Eastern Air Lines Flight 401, a Lockheed L-1011 Tristar, crashed into the Florida Everglades near Miami International Airport, killing 101 of the 176 people aboard.

In 1978, during the Gator Bowl, Ohio State University coach Woody Hayes punched Clemson player Charlie Bauman, who'd intercepted an Ohio State pass. (Hayes was fired by Ohio State the next day.)

In 1989, dissident and playwright Vaclav Havel (VAHTS'-lahv HAH'-vel) assumed the presidency of Czechoslovakia.

In 1992, the United States and Russia announced agreement on a nuclear arms reduction treaty.

In 2006, word reached the United States of the execution of former Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein (because of the time difference, it was the morning of Dec. 30 in Iraq when the hanging took place). In a statement, President George W. Bush called Saddam's execution an important milestone on Iraq's road to democracy.

In 2007, the New England Patriots ended their regular season with a remarkable 16-0 record following a 38-35 comeback victory over the New York Giants. (New England became the first NFL team since the 1972 Dolphins to win every game on the schedule.)

In 2016, the United States struck back at Russia for hacking the U.S. presidential campaign with a sweeping set of punishments targeting Russia's spy agencies and diplomats.

Ten years ago: Maine's same-sex marriage law went into effect. Shocked Indians mourned the death of a woman who'd been gang-raped and beaten on a bus in New Delhi nearly two weeks earlier; six suspects

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were charged with murder. (Four were later sentenced to death; one died in prison; the sixth, a juvenile at the time of the attack, was sentenced to a maximum of three years in a reform home.)

Five years ago: Puerto Rico authorities said nearly half of the power customers in the U.S. territory still lacked electricity, more than three months after Hurricane Maria.

One year ago: British socialite Ghislaine Maxwell was convicted in New York of helping lure teenage girls to be sexually abused by the late Jeffrey Epstein; the verdict capped a monthlong trial featuring accounts of the sexual exploitation of girls as young as 14. (Maxwell would be sentenced to 20 years in prison.) More than a year after a vaccine was rolled out, new cases of COVID-19 in the U.S. were soaring to their highest levels on record at over 265,000 per day; the surge was driven largely by the highly contagious omicron variant. Candace Parker, who helped the Chicago Sky win the franchise's first WNBA championship, was named The Associated Press' Female Athlete of the Year for a second time.

Today's Birthdays: Actor Inga Swenson is 90. Retired ABC newscaster Tom Jarriel is 88. Actor Barbara Steele is 85. Actor Jon Voight is 84. Singer Marianne Faithfull is 76. Retired Hall of Fame Jockey Laffit Pincay Jr. is 76. Actor Ted Danson is 75. Singer-actor Yvonne Elliman is 71. The president of the International Olympic Committee, Thomas Bach, is 69. Actor Patricia Clarkson is 63. Comedian Paula Poundstone is 63. Rock singer-musician Jim Reid (The Jesus and Mary Chain) is 61. Actor Michael Cudlitz is 58. Rock singer Dexter Holland (The Offspring) is 57. Actor-comedian Mystro Clark is 56. Actor Jason Gould is 56. News anchor Ashleigh Banfield is 55. Movie director Lilly Wachowski is 55. Actor Jennifer Ehle is 53. Actor Patrick Fischler is 53. Rock singer-musician Glen Phillips is 52. Actor Kevin Weisman is 52. Actor Jude Law is 50. Actor Maria Dizzia is 48. Actor Mekhi Phifer (mih-KY' FY'-fuhr) is 48. Actor Shawn Hatosy is 47. Actor Katherine Moennig is 45. Actor Diego Luna is 43. Actor Alison Brie is 40. Country singer Jessica Andrews is 39. Actor Iain de Caestecker is 35. Actor Jane Levy is 33. Singer-actor-dancer Ross Lynch is 27. Rock musician Danny Wagner is 24.