

# Groton Daily Independent

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## Groton Community Calendar 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.

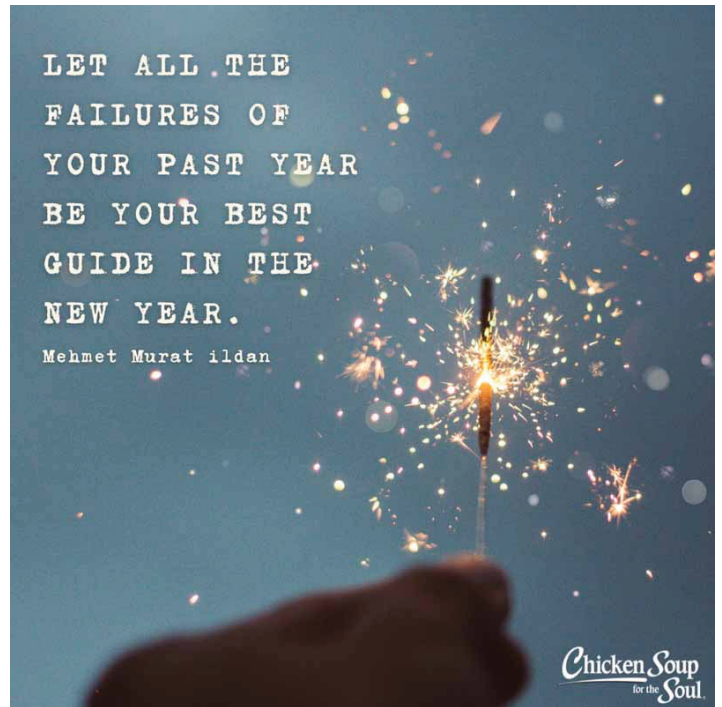
United Methodist: Conde worship with communion, 8:30 a.m.; Coffee hour, 9:30 a.m.; Groton worship with communion, 10:30 a.m.

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

**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.



Mass, 8:30 a.m.; Turton Confession, 10:30-10:45 a.m.; Turton Mass, 11 a.m.

## 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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“Plant seeds every single day that you know who you are, you know what you’re about and you know what goals you’ve set for yourself.”

—Stephen Curry, athlete

We’re proud to work with generations of farmers in the most complex and rewarding industry on earth.

**HAPPY  
NEW  
YEAR!**



Seed  
Chemical  
Fertilizer

Joel Bierman    Dylan Vogel  
Jordan Steen    Kent Webb



**PIONEER**

*Happy  
New Year!*



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# GDILIVE.COM

**Girls' Basketball at the Groton Area Arena  
Friday, Dec. 30, 2022**



**Groton Area Tigers  
vs.  
Waverly-South  
Shore Coyotes**



**Junior Varsity starts at 5 p.m.**  
Broadcast Sponsored by Bob and Ginny Neisen

**Varsity to follow**  
Broadcast Sponsored by  
Bary Keith at Harr Motors  
Bierman Farm Service  
Blocker Construction  
Dacotah Bank  
Groton Chamber of Commerce  
Groton Ford  
John Sieh Agency  
Locke Electric  
Spanier Harvesting & Trucking  
Bahr Spray Foam  
Thunder Seed with John Wheeting

## Disaster Assistance Available for Livestock Losses

The Livestock Indemnity Program (LIP) provides assistance to you for livestock deaths in excess of normal mortality caused by adverse weather, disease and attacks by animals reintroduced into the wild by the federal government or protected by federal law.

For disease losses, FSA county committees can accept veterinarian certifications that livestock deaths were directly related to adverse weather and unpreventable through good animal husbandry and management.

For 2022 livestock losses, you must file a notice within 30 calendar days of when the loss is first apparent. You then must provide the following supporting documentation to your local FSA office no later than 60 calendar days after the end of the calendar year in which the eligible loss condition occurred.

Proof of death documentation (pictures with date, producer contemporaneous records at the time of the event, rendering truck receipts, etc.)

Copy of grower's contracts

Proof of normal mortality documentation (vet records, loan/bank documents, purchase receipts, birth records, etc.)

USDA has established normal mortality rates for each type and weight range of eligible livestock, i.e. Adult Beef Cow = 1.5% and Non-Adult Beef Cattle (less than 250 pounds) = 5%. These established percentages reflect losses that are considered expected or typical under "normal" conditions.

In addition to filing a notice of loss, you must also submit an application for payment by March 1, 2023.

For more information, contact your local County USDA Service Center or visit [fsa.usda.gov](https://fsa.usda.gov).

USDA is an equal opportunity provider, employer and lender.

## Creativity flourishes in 3rd Annual SDDOT snowplow naming contest

PIERRE, S.D. – The third annual Name the Snowplow Contest began in November, before the snow began to fly in earnest. The contest was created by the South Dakota Department of Transportation (SDDOT) to engage people across the state in winter driving safety awareness. The SDDOT encourages travelers to use SD511 resources to make informed travel decisions during winter weather. Travelers can sign up for customized notifications on <https://sd511.org> to receive text messages and/or email notifications for road closure updates and travel advisories along pre-selected travel routes.

“As the recent December storms clearly demonstrated, our state public transportation system is vital not only for the citizens of South Dakota, but for those who rely on it from out-of-state as well,” said Transportation Secretary Joel Jundt. “I want to publicly thank our SDDOT winter maintenance staff, and all public servants, for their dedicated efforts to keep our roads clear, and travelers safe, in some of the toughest winter weather conditions we’ve experienced in years.”

When the snowplow naming contest ended on Nov. 30, 2022, over 650 entries had been submitted by individuals, families, elementary classrooms, senior living centers, and businesses across the entire state. SDDOT staff then voted on the submissions. In January, the contest winners will officially meet and take photos with their locally named snowplow.

Following is the list of winning plow names for the 12 SDDOT Areas:

Aberdeen Area: Luke Ice Walker  
Belle Fourche Area: Catch My Drift  
Custer Area: Black Hills Cold Rush  
Huron Area: Thawsome  
Mitchell Area: Sleetwood Mac  
Mobridge Area: Snow Force One  
Pierre Area: Little Plow on the Prairie  
Sioux Falls Area: Blizzard Buster  
Rapid City Area: Betty White-Out  
Watertown Area: Snowmagator  
Winner Area: Plowabunga  
Yankton Area: 605 Polar Express

“My classrooms have taken part in the contest each of the three years since the contest began as I feel my kids don’t always know how important our plow drivers are,” said Tarra White, first grade teacher for Tiospa Zina Tribal School. “By engaging in this fun activity, it gives me a chance to explain to the students what operators do, why they do it, and how it all works.”

White’s first graders chose the name Snowmagator to submit to the contest this year. She added, “Pitamaya (thanks) to all the SDDOT snowplow operators for their hard work, we are excited that our class submission was chosen to be featured on a local snowplow.”

Snowplow naming photos and local stories will be shared on the SDDOT website at <https://dot.sd.gov/inside-sddot/of-interest/sddot-snowplow-naming-contest>.

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## Skating Rink nearing to opening

After the last blizzard and equipment on the ice clearing off the snow, damage was done to the ice rink which needed repairs. The weather was perfect for flooding the pond, but the freezing part is taking longer due to the temperature not being too cold. The rink could open on Saturday.

## Groton Prairie Mixed Bowling League Week #9 Results

**Team Standings:** Chipmunks – 6, Coyotes – 5, Jackelopes, 4, Cheetahs – 4, Foxes – 4, Shihtzus – 1  
**Men's High Games:** Mike Siegler – 207, Tony Waage & Lance Frohling – 191, Brad Larson – 185  
**Women's High Games:** Vicki Walter – 172, Brenda Waage & Alexa Schuring – 152, Sue Stanley – 149  
**Men's High Series:** Mike Siegler – 552, Lance Frohling – 539, Randy Stanley – 526  
**Women's High Series:** Vicki Walter – 441, Alexa Schuring – 429, Karen Spanier – 409

**Weekly Fun Game High Series:** Chipmunks!





## SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

# State responds to criticism, says it answered tribal storm needs

BY: JOHN HULT AND JOSHUA HAIAR - DECEMBER 29, 2022 6:58 PM

The state has responded to Rosebud Sioux Tribe officials' frustrations with its response to recent winter storms.

The tribe issued an emergency declaration in response to the storms, which partially buried homes across the reservation and resulted in at least six deaths.

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 made his emergency declaration.

State officials, however, said this week that its emergency response crews began coordinating with Rosebud and the state's other tribes before the first storm began on Dec. 13.

The state Department of Public Safety (DPS) reached out to emergency managers at all nine tribes in the state, including Rosebud, on Dec. 12, according to Secretary Craig Price.

"We were helping before their emergency declaration and have continued to provide assistance since," Price said in a statement sent Wednesday evening.

On Thursday, DPS spokesman Tony Mangan sent a timeline of events that begins with the coordination call on Dec. 12. In it, the DPS also outlines conversations between Rosebud officials and state officials on Dec. 16, the day Herman signed the tribal disaster declaration and Noem issued a disaster declaration to speed deliveries of propane and heating fuel statewide.

Herman spoke with Tribal Relations Secretary Dave Flute that day and told him that "any assistance would be appreciated," according to the DPS timeline. Jason Bauder of the state Office of Emergency Management (OEM) spoke with Rosebud Emergency Preparedness Program Coordinator Robert Oliver that day, as well.

The state's timeline notes that Rosebud officials declined help with dialysis patients and "had no other



**Wayne Boyd, chief of staff to the president of the Rosebud Sioux Tribe, looks at a map showing cleared and uncleared roads on Dec. 27, 2022, after winter storms.** (Joshua Haiar/SD Searchlight)

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resource requests" on Dec. 17 after being connected with a contractor for snow removal. The timeline quotes Oliver telling Bauder that the tribe "was fine with the equipment that it had leased/purchased."

Price and other state officials spoke with Herman again on Dec. 20 about the tribe's needs for snow removal and firewood, according to the timeline. The state continued to work on firewood deliveries.

Wood, propane and food were delivered on Dec. 21, the timeline said. On Dec. 22, Noem activated the National Guard, which sent heavy snow removal equipment to the reservation and continues, along with state OEM staff, to work across Rosebud.

"Communication remained robust and consistent throughout, up to this very day," according to a statement attached to the timeline. "Every need that the tribes articulated was addressed."

South Dakota Searchlight initially requested information on the state's response to the storm over the phone on Tuesday, after nearly three hours of in-person interviews with Rosebud officials.

Noem spokesman Ian Fury, who did not respond to emailed and texted requests for comment on Wednesday about the situation in Rosebud, tweeted about the Searchlight's coverage at noon on Thursday, and tweeted the timeline sent to Searchlight a few hours later.

Herman disputes parts of the timeline and said the state did not reach out to Rosebud officials on Dec. 12. "Our timelines don't jive," Herman said.

Herman said the tribe's first contact with the state was Dec. 13 or 14 when he called the Office of Tribal Relations to give Dave Flute a brief about the situation.

Other parts of the state's timeline are missing context, Herman said. The tribe did tell the state it didn't need help with dialysis patients and "had no other resource requests" on Dec. 17, but the tribe still needed help delivering those resources and clearing roads, according to Herman.

When Oliver told Bauder the tribe "was fine with the equipment that it had leased/purchased," Herman said, that was because the tribe had expected three plows to arrive – but only one showed up, and it was only available for a day and a half.

Herman's frustration was not only with the state, but also with the federal government and private contractors as he and other tribal officials scrambled to get assistance responding to the storms. It took two weeks to get all the assistance the tribe needed, and he said the effect of that delay was evident in the six deaths.

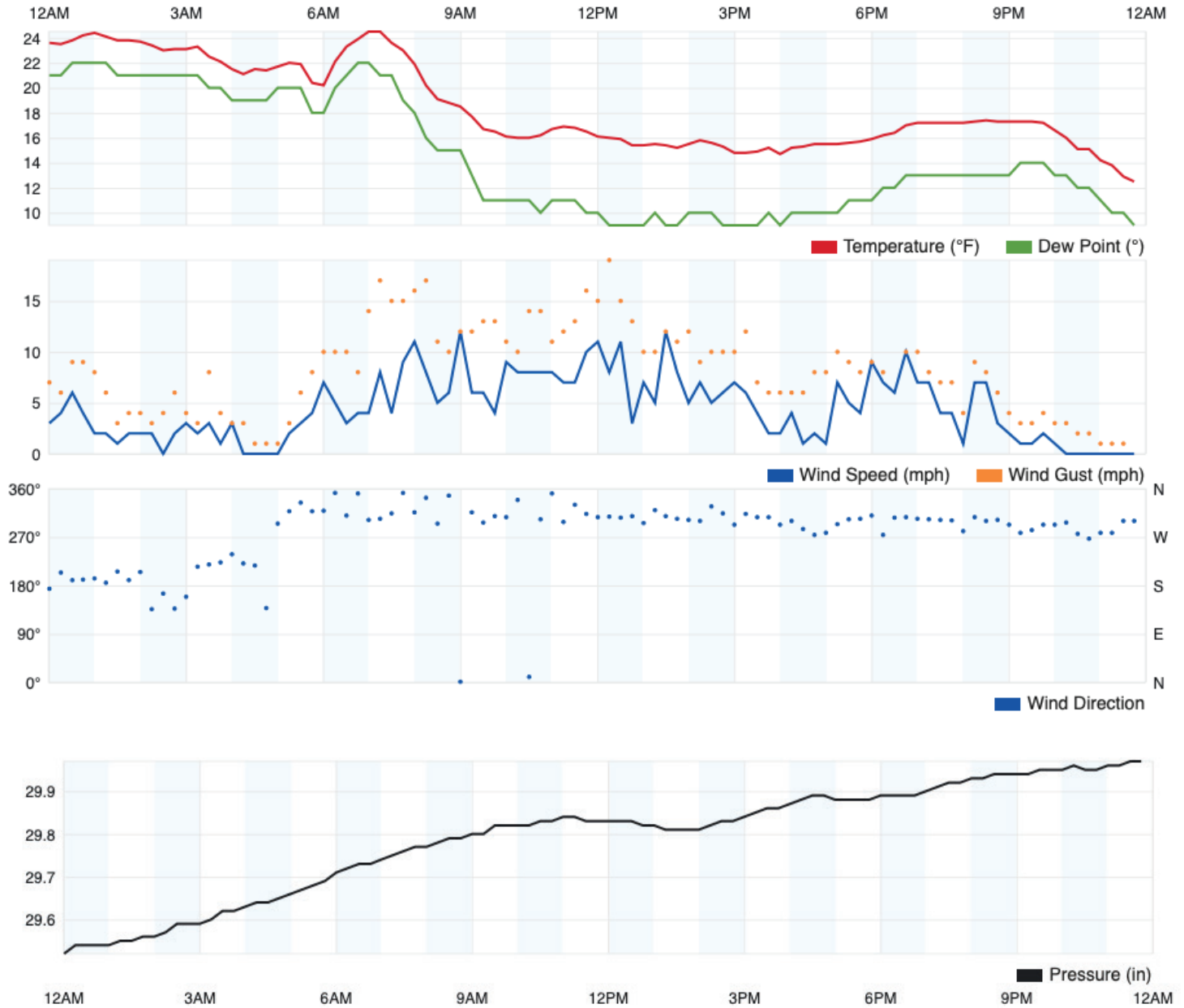
And despite the difficulties, Herman said, the tribe is grateful for the assistance the state provided.



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## Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Today	Tonight	Saturday	Saturday Night	New Year's Day	Sunday Night	Monday
						
Partly Sunny	Mostly Cloudy	Mostly Cloudy	Partly Cloudy	Partly Sunny	Mostly Cloudy	Chance Snow
High: 24 °F	Low: 12 °F	High: 23 °F	Low: 10 °F	High: 23 °F	Low: 8 °F	High: 19 °F



## Seasonal For the Rest of this Week

December 29, 2022  
2:09 PM

### Tonight

→ *Mostly cloudy. Lows 0-19°*

### Friday

→ *Partly sunny. Highs 20-39°*

### Saturday

→ *Decreasing clouds. Highs 21-41°*

### Sunday

→ *Chance of snow west. Highs 20-38°*

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

National Weather Service  
Aberdeen, SD

Seasonal temperatures for the rest of the week.

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## Little Confidence For Next Week's System

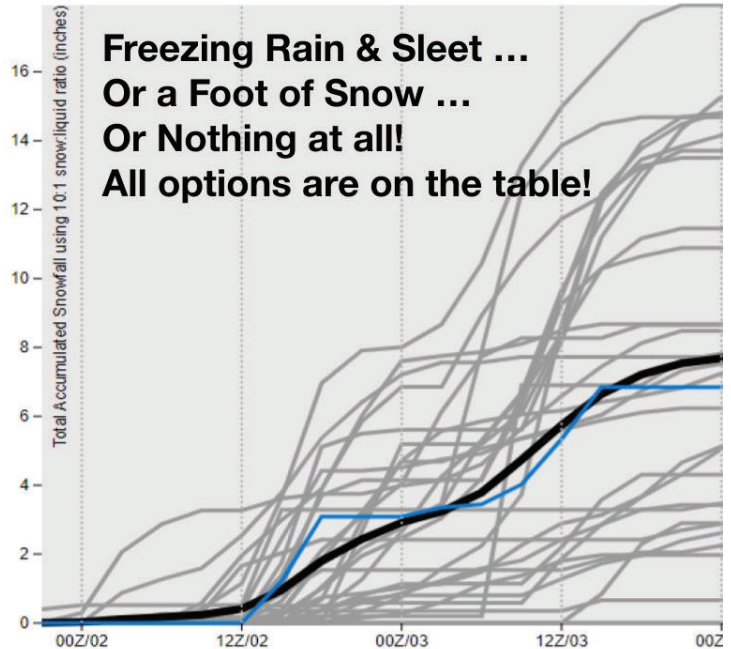
December 29, 2022  
9:44 AM

### What We Know:

- There is a system...

### What Is Uncertain:

- Storm Track -
  - Could Track Across Area (Lots of Moisture)
  - Could Track South (Little Moisture Up Here)
- Track affects Precipitation Type -
  - Will it be snow or a wintry mix?
  - Will any new snow blow?



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

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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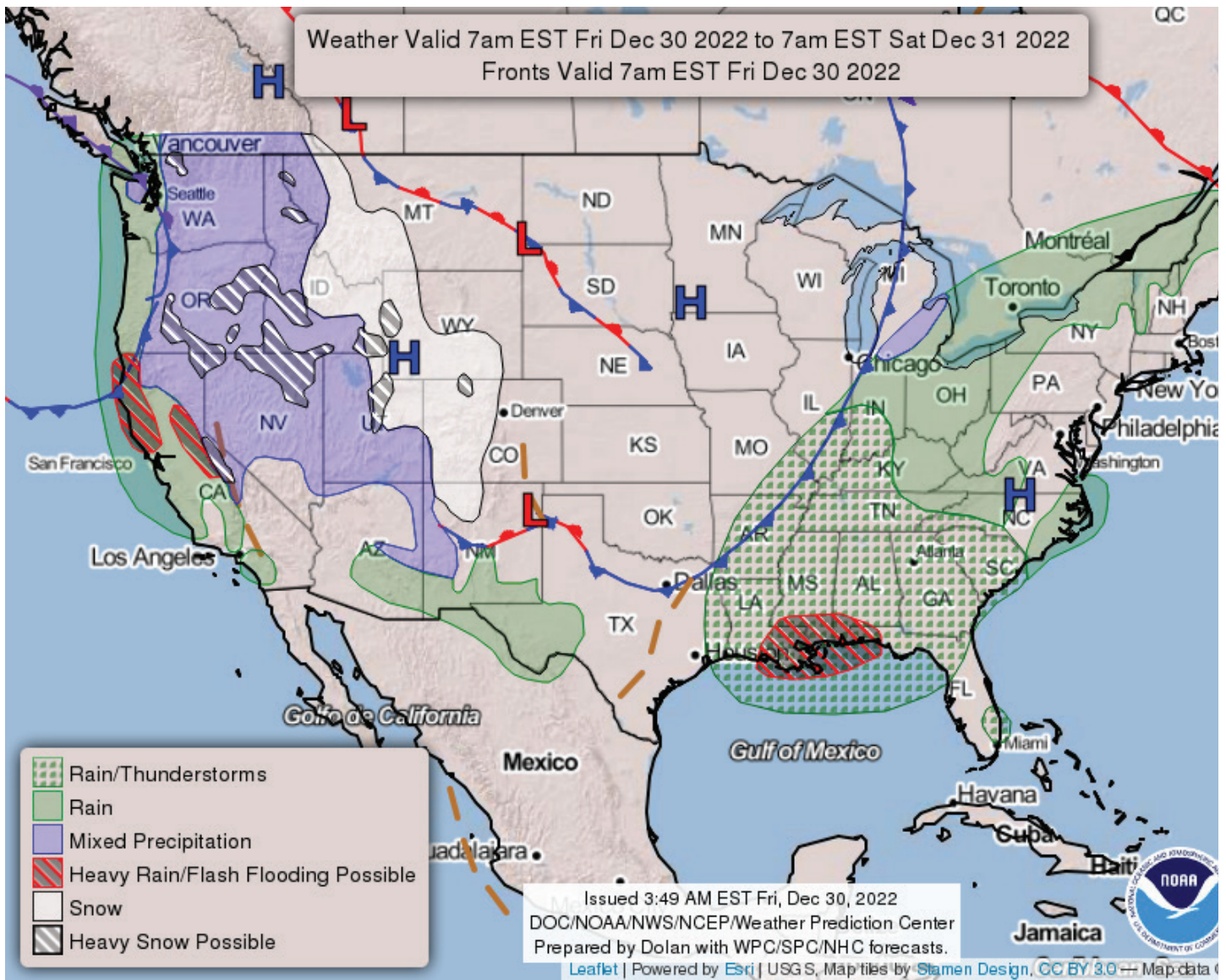
## Yesterday's Groton Weather

**High Temp: 25 °F at 7:02 AM**  
**Low Temp: 12 °F at 11:58 PM**  
**Wind: 19 mph at 12:09 PM**  
**Precip: : 0.00**

Day length: 8 hours, 49 minutes

## Today's Info

Record High: 52 in 1980  
Record Low: -34 in 1917  
Average High: 24°F  
Average Low: 4°F  
Average Precip in Dec.: 0.59  
Precip to date in Dec.: 2.82  
Average Precip to date: 21.80  
Precip Year to Date: 20.32  
Sunset Tonight: 4:59:43 PM  
Sunrise Tomorrow: 8:10:25 AM



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## Today in Weather History

December 30, 1985: Winds gusted to 40 to 50 mph over northern South Dakota through the day and into the southern part of the state by late afternoon. The high winds lowered visibilities to near zero at times between Lemmon in Perkins County and Faith in Meade County. The strongest wind gusts were to 63 mph at Mitchell. At 9:33 pm CST, the strong winds blew a semi-tractor trailer off the highway one mile east of Aberdeen.

December 30, 2010: A strong upper-level low-pressure trough and associated surface low-pressure area moved across the region bringing the first of two consecutive blizzards to central and northeast South Dakota. Snowfall amounts of 3 to 6 inches combined with bitter cold north winds of 25 to 40 mph caused widespread blizzard conditions across central and northeast South Dakota from the late morning until the evening hours. Near zero visibilities caused dangerous travel conditions resulting in the closing of Interstates 29 and 90 along with several highways across the region. Several hundred people were stranded in the aftermath of the storm. A group of fishermen had to be rescued in Day County when they became stranded on the ice. The snowfall began across the area anywhere from 7 to 11 am CST and ended between 10 pm and 1 am CST.

1880 - The temperature at Charlotte, NC, plunged to an all-time record cold reading of 5 degrees below zero, a record which was equalled on the 21st of January in 1985. (The Weather Channel)

1917 - A great cold wave set many records in the northeastern U.S. The mercury plunged to 13 degrees below zero at New York City, and to 15 degrees below zero at Boston. Temperature readings dipped below zero at Boston five nights in a row. Berlin NH hit 44 degrees below zero in the "Great World War I Cold Wave," and Saint Johnsbury VT reached 43 degrees below zero. (David Ludlum)

1960: A massive accumulation of snow, 68.2 inches to be exact, buries the Japanese city of Tsukayama in 24 hours. Tsukayama is located in the coastal mountains inland from the Sea of Japan along Honshu's west coast and subject to significant sea-effect snowfalls.

1933 - The temperature reached 50 degrees below zero at Bloomfield, VT. It was the coldest reading in modern records for New England. The temperature at Pittsborough NH reached 44 degrees below zero. (David Ludlum)

1955 - Anchorage, AK, reported an all-time record snow depth of 47 inches. (30th-1st) (The Weather Channel)

1987 - A storm in the western U.S. produced heavy snow in Utah, with 28 inches reported in the Mount Holly and Elk Meadows area. Strong winds prevailed ahead of a cold front in the central U.S. Winds gusted to 46 mph at Dodge City KS, and reached 80 mph at Ruidoso NM. Strong northerly winds, ushering arctic cold into the north central U.S., created blizzard conditions in western Minnesota and central and eastern South Dakota. (Storm Data) (The National Weather Summary)

1988 - Unseasonably cold weather prevailed in the southwestern U.S. A week of subfreezing temperatures in southern California claimed the lives of five people. Redding CA was blanketed with four inches of snow. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 - Extreme cold continued across northern Maine. Milo ME was the cold spot in the nation with a morning low of 38 degrees below zero, and the low of 31 degrees below zero at Caribou ME was a December record for that location. Freezing rain spread across much of Lower Michigan, knocking out electrical power to 1.9 million customers in southeastern Lower Michigan. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

2003: The first time in five years, sections of Las Vegas receive an inch or two of snow on cars, roads, sidewalks, and trees, while snow flurries fell on downtown and the Strip.

2008 - Severe to extreme drought was observed across parts of the Hawaiian Islands, the western continental U.S., and parts of Georgia and South Carolina. Meanwhile, severe to exceptional drought conditions were present across southern Texas. (NCDC)

2014: Steam Devils were seen over Lake Superior near Saginaw, Minnesota.

2017: Funnels/steam devils were observed on Lake McConaughy, Nebraska in the morning. A boundary moved over the lake's 'warmer' water (compared to the surrounding air). The combination of converging winds and energy added by the lake helped spin these up.



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Daily Devotionals

## Seeds of Hope

### SOME FINAL WORDS

Often what we find depends on what we look for. Here are a few things to look for in the days we will face in the year to come:

Look for God's presence. When fear grips us or failure would defeat us, or if life's challenges seem to be larger than we are, or the nights are longer than usual, remember, we are never alone if Jesus rules and reigns in our lives. He promised that "He will never leave us nor forsake us." When life turns to shambles, He will wrap His loving arms around us and protect us because He is with us.

Look for God's power. The psalmist said that "God is our refuge and strength." Often we look to people for insights and advice when we are faced with difficult problems. But their solutions are never as good as the solutions that come from God. God is the greatest asset any Christian has but we must go to Him and draw from His strength and power.

Look for God's provision. "My God shall supply all your needs." Though we may fail Him, He will not fail us. Though we may fail to claim His promises, it does not mean they are not available. If we look to and trust in Him, He will not let us down.

Prayer: Father, we look to You in faith believing that You will meet our every need if we trust You. Lord, help our unbelief! In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scriptures For Today: 1 Kings 8:56-58; Psalm 46:1-3; Philippians 4:19



We all need the encouragement, comfort, and peace that comes through God's grace. Our daily devotionals, known as Seeds of Hope, have been a means through which thousands of people have experienced this grace. Each devotional comes from God's Word and we pray this good "seed" finds good soil in your heart. Our aim is that the Seeds of Hope will be a great source of daily encouragement to you and that God will use them to draw you near to Him



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## 2022-23 Community Events

- 07/21/2022: Pro Am Golf Tourney at Olive Grove Golf Course  
07/22/2022: Ferney Open Golf Tourney at Olive Grove Golf Course 9am Start  
07/24/2022: Moonlight Swim at the Swimming Pool 9-11pm for 9th grade to age 20  
07/27/2022: Golf Fundraiser Lunch at Olive Grove Golf Course 11a-1pm  
08/05/2022: Wine on Nine at Olive Grove Golf Course 6pm  
08/12/2022: GHS Basketball Golf Tournament  
No Date Set: Groton Firemen Summer Splash Day 4-5pm GHS Parking Lot  
09/10/2022: Lions Club Fall Citywide Rummage Sale 8am-3pm (1st Saturday after Labor Day)  
09/11/2022: 6th Annual Doggie Day at the Swimming Pool 3-5pm  
09/11/2022: Couples Sunflower Tourney at Olive Grove Golf Course 10 a.m.  
09/02-04: Groton Airport Fly-In/Drive-In, Groton Municipal Airport  
10/01/2022: Pumpkin Fest at the City Park 10am-3pm  
10/07/2022: Lake Region Marching Band Festival 10am  
10/31/2022: Downtown Trick or Treat 4-6pm (working day on or closest to Halloween)  
10/31/2022: United Methodist Church Trunk or Treat 5:30-7pm  
11/13/2022: Snow Queen Contest  
11/19/2022: Legion Post #39 Turkey Party 6:30pm (Saturday closest to Veteran's Day)  
11/24/2022 Community Thanksgiving at the Community Center 11:30am-1pm (Thanksgiving)  
12/03/2022 Tour of Homes & Holiday Party at Olive Grove Golf Course  
12/10/2022: Santa Claus Day at Professional Management Services 9am-12pm  
01/29/2023 Groton Robotics Pancake Feed, 10am-1pm, Community Center  
01/29/2023 85th Carnival of Silver Skates 2pm & 6:30pm (Last Sunday of January)  
04/01/2023 Lion's Club Easter Egg Hunt 10am Sharp at the City Park (Saturday a week before Easter)  
04/22/2023 Firemen's Spring Social at the Fire Station 7pm-12:30am (Same Saturday as GHS Prom)  
04/23/2023 Princess Prom 4:30-8pm (Sunday after GHS Prom)  
05/06/2023 Lion's Club Spring Citywide Rummage Sale 8am-3pm (1st Saturday in May)  
05/29/2023 Legion Post #39 Memorial Day Services (Memorial Day)  
07/04/2023 Firecracker Couples Tourney at Olive Grove Golf Course 9am Registration, 10am Start (4th of July)  
07/09/2023 Lion's Club Summer Fest/Car Show at the City Park 9am-4pm (Sunday Mid-July)  
09/09/2023 Lion's Club Fall Citywide Rummage Sale 8am-3pm (1st Saturday after Labor Day)  
10/31/2023 Downtown Trick or Treat 4-6pm (working day on or closest to Halloween)  
10/31/2023 United Methodist Church Trunk or Treat 5:30-7pm  
11/23/2023 Community Thanksgiving at the Community Center 11:30am-1pm (Thanksgiving)

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## The Groton Independent Printed & Mailed Weekly Edition

### Subscription Form

All prices listed include 6.5% Sales Tax

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

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

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Mailing Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_

State, Zip Code \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail \_\_\_\_\_

Phone Number \_\_\_\_\_

Mail Completed Form to:

Groton Independent

P.O. Box 34

Groton, SD 57445-0034

or scan and email to [paperpaul@grotonsd.net](mailto:paperpaul@grotonsd.net)

## Groton Daily Independent

[www.397news.com](http://www.397news.com)

### Subscription Form

This option will grant you access to the GDI/Video Archives.

- 1 Month ..... \$15.98
- 3 Months ..... \$26.63
- 6 Months ..... \$31.95
- 9 Months ..... \$42.60
- 12 Months ..... \$53.25

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State, Zip Code \_\_\_\_\_

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Pay with Paypal. Type the following into your browser window:

[paypal.me/paperpaul](https://paypal.me/paperpaul)



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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 16 Hrs 13 Mins 20  
DRAW: 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 1 Days 16 Hrs 13  
DRAW: Mins 20 Secs

GAME DETAILS

### LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS:  
12.29.22

7 9 11 23 32 12

TOP PRIZE:  
**\$7,000/week**

NEXT 15 Hrs 43 Mins  
DRAW: 20 Secs

GAME DETAILS

### DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS:  
12.28.22

2 7 9 15 22

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

NEXT 1 Days 16 Hrs 13  
DRAW: Mins 20 Secs

GAME DETAILS

### POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS:  
12.28.22

4 10 14 41 56 16

TOP PRIZE:  
**\$10,000,000**

NEXT 1 Days 16 Hrs 12  
DRAW: Mins 20 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 1 Days 16 Hrs 12  
DRAW: Mins 20 Secs

GAME DETAILS



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## News from the Associated Press

### Branch scores as South Dakota downs St. Thomas 92-84

By The Associated Press undefined  
VERMILLION, S.D. (AP) — Miles Brach's points helped South Dakota defeat St. Thomas 92-84 on Thursday night.

Branch went of from the field for the Coyotes (6-8, 1-1 Summit League). Tasos Kamateros scored 21 points and added six rebounds. Kruz Perrott-Hunt was 7 of 14 shooting (4 for 5 from distance) to finish with 19 points.

Andrew Rohde finished with 22 points and five assists for the Tommies (11-5, 2-1). Parker Bjorklund added 17 points, seven rebounds and two blocks for St. Thomas. Brooks Allen also had 17 points.

#### NEXT UP

Both teams play again on Saturday. South Dakota hosts Western Illinois and St. Thomas travels to play South Dakota State.

The Associated Press created this story using technology provided by Data Skrive and data from Sportradar.

### Mayo has 33, South Dakota State defeats W. Illinois 71-64

BROOKINGS, S.D. (AP) — Zeke Mayo's 33 points led South Dakota State over Western Illinois 71-64 on Thursday night.

Mayo was 11 of 21 shooting, including 4 for 9 from distance, and went 7 for 8 from the line for the Jackrabbits (6-8, 1-1 Summit League). Matthew Mors was 4 of 8 shooting and 4 of 4 from the free throw line to add 12 points. Matt Dentlinger finished 5 of 9 from the field to finish with 10 points, while adding nine rebounds.

The Leathernecks (8-5, 1-1) were led by Elijah Farr, who posted 16 points. Western Illinois also got 15 points, six rebounds, six assists and two steals from Trenton Massner. In addition, Quinlan Bennett finished with 15 points. The loss ended a six-game winning streak for the Leathernecks.

#### NEXT UP

Both teams next play Saturday. South Dakota State hosts St. Thomas while Western Illinois visits South Dakota.

The Associated Press created this story using technology provided by Data Skrive and data from Sportradar.

## Thursday's Scores

The Associated Press

GIRLS PREP BASKETBALL=

Arlington 57, Castlewood 38

Bon Homme 41, Gayville-Volin 34

Bridgewater-Emery 47, Oldham-Ramona/Rutland 43

Campbell County, Wyo. 56, Viborg-Hurley 55

Chester County, Tenn. 68, Mitchell Christian 31

Deubrook 44, Alcester-Hudson 36

Deuel 47, Redfield 41

Ethan 46, Scotland 35

Faulkton 61, Lower Brule 37

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Flandreau 61, Dell Rapids 42  
Florence/Henry 50, Milbank 39  
Hanson 69, Irene-Wakonda 42  
Harrisburg 53, Sioux Falls Roosevelt 31  
Hitchcock-Tulare 55, Crazy Horse 28  
Howard 54, Lyman 31  
Iroquois/ Lake Preston Co-op 50, Highmore-Harrold 40  
James Valley Christian 60, DeSmet 48  
Jones County 53, Colman-Egan 30  
Lemmon 33, Langford 28  
Little Wound 51, Parshall, N.D. 49  
Miller 46, Milbank 43  
New Underwood 32, Harding County 26  
Philip 52, Colome 19  
Pine Ridge 67, Wakpala 31  
Platte-Geddes 58, Canistota 33  
Potter County 62, White River 48  
Providence Academy, Minn. 58, Brandon Valley 32  
Rapid City Stevens 60, Rapid City Central 37  
Sanborn Central/Woonsocket 50, Elkton-Lake Benton 25  
Sioux Falls Jefferson 67, West Central 35  
Sioux Valley 63, Baltic 45  
Spearfish 51, Hot Springs 28  
St. Francis Indian 49, Mandaree, N.D. 43  
Timber Lake 59, North Central Co-Op 35  
Wagner 62, Sioux Falls Christian 29  
Warner 52, Burke 41  
Waubay/Summit 38, Wilmot 29  
Winner 52, Stanley County 15  
Wolsey-Wessington 56, Kadoka Area 38  
Chadron Rotary Tournament=  
Custer 33, Valentine, Neb. 31  
POSTPONEMENTS AND CANCELLATIONS=  
Takini vs. Santee, Neb., ccd.

BOYS PREP BASKETBALL=  
Bon Homme 55, Gayville-Volin 37  
Castlewood 76, Arlington 22  
DeLaSalle, Minn. 42, Harrisburg 41  
Deubrook 60, Alcester-Hudson 28  
Deuel 62, Redfield 23  
Ethan 69, Scotland 46  
Faith 63, Leola/Frederick 52  
Harding County 52, New Underwood 38  
Highmore-Harrold 60, Iroquois/ Lake Preston Co-op 37  
Hitchcock-Tulare 69, Potter County 28  
Hot Springs 61, Spearfish 56  
Irene-Wakonda 65, Hanson 57  
Lemmon 62, Langford 49  
Lennox 75, Waconia, Minn. 73

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Little Wound 68, Mandaree, N.D. 27  
Mt. Vernon/Plankinton 70, Miller 43  
Pine Ridge 107, Solen, N.D. 14  
Sioux Falls Jefferson 63, Orono, Minn. 43  
Sioux Falls O'Gorman 66, Tea Area 55  
Sioux Valley 73, Baltic 31  
St. Francis Indian 44, Wakpala 32  
Timber Lake 57, North Central Co-Op 54  
Waubay/Summit 56, Wilmot 23  
Webster 59, Aberdeen Roncalli 53  
White River 71, Campbell County, Wyo. 66  
White Shield, N.D. 66, McLaughlin 40  
Winner 58, Stanley County 25  
Wolsey-Wessington 59, Kadoka Area 26  
Chadron Rotary Tournament=  
Custer 75, Valentine, Neb. 50

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

## Pipeline section in Kansas with oil spill is back in service

By JOHN HANNA Associated Press

TOPEKA, Kan. (AP) — A pipeline operator put a damaged section in Kansas back into service Thursday, a little more than three weeks after a spill dumped 14,000 bathtubs' worth of crude oil into a rural creek.

Canada-based T.C. Energy announced that it had completed repairs, inspections and testing on its Keystone pipeline in northeast Kansas to allow a "controlled restart" of the section from Steele City, Nebraska, near the Kansas line, to Cushing, in northern Oklahoma. The 2,700-mile (4,345-kilometer) Keystone system carries heavy crude oil extracted from tar sands in western Canada to the Gulf Coast and to central Illinois.

A spill on Dec. 7 shut down the Keystone system after dumping 14,000 barrels of crude oil into a creek running through rural pastureland in Washington County, about 150 miles (240 kilometers) northwest of Kansas City. Each barrel is 42 gallons, the size of a household bathtub.

The U.S. Department of Transportation's pipeline safety arm gave TC Energy permission last week to restart the section of pipeline after telling the company that it would have to operate it at lower pressure than before. The company's announcement disclosed that it still is working to determine the cause of the spill.

"We recognize that incidents like this raise questions. We have questions too. We are committed to asking those tough questions, fully investigating and sharing our learnings and actions," Richard Prior, the company's president for liquids pipelines, said in an online message.

The rupture occurred on local farmer Bill Pannbacker's land, and he said he's bothered the company reopened the section of pipeline when "they haven't at least given an official cause" of the accident.

The company reported that as of last week, it had recovered almost 7,700 barrels of the spilled crude oil, or a little more than half. The company and government officials have said drinking water supplies were not affected. No one was evacuated, and most of the Keystone system was back in operation in eight days.

"We will not rest until we have recovered and remediated the areas affected by this incident," Prior said in his message. "No incident is ever acceptable to us."

The spill was the largest onshore in nine years and larger than 22 previous spills on the Keystone system combined, according to U.S. Department of Transportation data.

"If previous tests showed that everything was fine and now tests show everything is fine, yet we've had failures in between-time, what real assurance do we have that there is not another accident waiting to happen?" said Zack Pistora, who lobbies for the Sierra Club's state chapter.



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

## Putin, Xi hold talks as Russia fires another Ukraine barrage

By FELIPE DANA Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Russian President Vladimir Putin and Chinese leader Xi Jinping vowed Friday to deepen their bilateral cooperation against the backdrop of Moscow's 10-month war in Ukraine, which weathered another night of drone and rocket attacks following a massive missile bombardment.

Putin and Xi made no direct mention of Ukraine as they held bilateral talks via videoconference. But they hailed strengthening ties between Moscow and Beijing amid what they called "geopolitical tensions" and a "difficult international situation."

"In the face of increasing geopolitical tensions, the significance of the Russian-Chinese strategic partnership is growing as a stabilizing factor," Putin said. He invited Xi to visit Moscow in the spring.

In Ukraine, authorities reviewed the toll from a widespread Russian missile attack on power stations and other vital infrastructure Thursday that was the biggest such bombardment in weeks. Four civilians were killed during the barrage, according to Kyrylo Tymoshenko, the deputy head of the Ukrainian president's office.

The General Staff of the Armed Forces of Ukraine said in its Friday morning update that Russian forces had unleashed a total of 85 missiles and 35 airstrikes on Ukrainian targets in the previous 24 hours. Russia also launched 63 attacks from multiple launch rocket systems, the military report said.

Following the first waves of missiles on Thursday morning, Russian forces attacked Ukraine with Iranian-made Shahed-131/136 drones on Thursday night and early Friday, all of which were shot down, the Ukrainian air force said.

Some were aimed at Kyiv, Mayor Vitali Klitschko said Friday. Of seven kamikaze drones launched against the Ukrainian capital, two were shot down on the approach to the city and five over Kyiv itself, according to Klitschko.

Windows in a residential building and one non-residential building were damaged as a result of falling debris, but no casualties were reported, he said.

Further east, the Ukrainian military reported its forces shot down 10 attack drones in the central-eastern Dnipropetrovsk province and southeastern Zaporizhzhia provinces.

Almost 30 Russian shells were fired at Marhanets in Dnipropetrovsk province on Thursday night, according to regional Gov. Valentyn Reznichenko. Marhanets is located directly across the Dnieper River from the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant, Europe's largest nuclear power station.

The city of Bakhmut in Donetsk province continued to be a key target of Russia's grinding offensive in the industrial east, Ukrainian Defense Ministry spokesperson Oleksandr Shtupun said.

Other populated places in Donetsk, neighboring Luhansk province, northern Ukraine's Chernihiv, Sumy and Kharkiv provinces, and Zaporizhzhia and Kherson provinces in the south all came under attack.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said in his nightly video address that Russia hasn't abandoned plans to capture all of Donetsk, aiming to accomplish the goal by New Year's Day. Zelenskyy also warned Ukrainians there could be another widespread air assault.

"There are two days left in this year. Perhaps the enemy will try once again to make us celebrate the New Year in the dark. Perhaps, the occupants are planning to make us suffer with the next strikes on our cities," he said. "But no matter what they plan, we know one thing about ourselves: we will survive. We will. We will drive them out. No doubt about it. And they will be punished for this terrible war."

Putin, during his call with Xi, noted that military cooperation has a "special place" in the relationship between their countries. He said the Kremlin aimed to "strengthen the cooperation between the armed forces of Russia and China."

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Xi, in turn, said through a translator that "in the face of a difficult and far from straightforward international situation," Beijing was ready "to increase strategic cooperation with Russia, provide each other with development opportunities, be global partners for the benefit of the peoples of our countries and in the interests of stability around the world."

Ties between Moscow and Beijing have grown stronger since Putin sent his troops into Ukraine on Feb. 24. Just last week, Moscow and Beijing held joint naval drills in the East China Sea.

China, which has promised a "no limits" friendship with Russia, has pointedly refused to criticize Moscow's actions in Ukraine, blaming the U.S. and NATO for provoking the Kremlin, and has blasted the punishing sanctions imposed on Russia.

Russia, in turn, has strongly backed China amid the tensions with the U.S. over Taiwan.

Russia and China are both facing domestic difficulties. Putin is trying to maintain domestic support for a war that has lasted longer than anticipated, while a surge in COVID-19 cases has overwhelmed hospitals in China.

## Court in Myanmar again finds Suu Kyi guilty of corruption

By GRANT PECK Associated Press

BANGKOK (AP) — A court in military-ruled Myanmar convicted the country's ousted leader Aung San Suu Kyi of corruption Friday, sentencing her to seven years in prison in the last of a string of criminal cases against her, a legal official said.

The court's action leaves her with a total of 33 years to serve in prison after a series of politically tinged prosecutions since the army toppled her elected government in February 2021.

The case that ended Friday involved five offenses under the anti-corruption law and followed earlier convictions on seven other corruption counts, each of which was punishable by up to 15 years in prison and a fine.

The 77-year-old Suu Kyi has also been convicted of several other offenses, including illegally importing and possessing walkie-talkies, violating coronavirus restrictions, breaching the country's official secrets act, sedition and election fraud.

Her previous convictions had landed her with a total of 26 years' imprisonment.

Suu Kyi's supporters and independent analysts say the numerous charges against her and her allies are an attempt to legitimize the military's seizure of power while eliminating her from politics before an election it has promised for 2023.

In the five counts of corruption decided Friday, Suu Kyi was alleged to have abused her position and caused a loss of state funds by neglecting to follow financial regulations in granting permission to Win Myat Aye, a Cabinet member in her former government, to hire, buy and maintain a helicopter.

Suu Kyi was the de facto head of government, holding the title of state counsellor. Win Myint, who was president in her government, was a co-defendant in the same case.

Friday's verdict in the purpose-built courtroom in the main prison on the outskirts of the capital, Nay-pyitaw, was made known by a legal official who insisted on anonymity for fear of being punished by the authorities. The trial was closed to the media, diplomats and spectators, and her lawyers were barred by a gag order from talking about it.

The legal official said Suu Kyi received sentences of three years for each of four charges, to be served concurrently, and four years for the charge related to the helicopter purchase, for a total of seven years. Win Myint received the same sentences.

Win Myat Aye, at the center of the case, escaped arrest and is now Minister of Humanitarian Affairs and Disaster Management in the National Unity Government, established by the military's opponents as a parallel administration by elected legislators who were barred from taking their seats when the army seized power last year. The military has declared NUG to be an outlawed "terrorist organization."

The defendants denied all charges, and her lawyers are expected to appeal in the coming days. The official also said both Suu Kyi and Win Myint appeared to be in good health.

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"From start to finish, the junta grabbed whatever it could to manufacture cases against her with full confidence that the country's kangaroo courts would come back with whatever punitive judgments the military wanted," Phil Robertson, deputy Asia director of Human Rights Watch, said in an emailed statement. "Due process and a free and fair trial were never remotely possible under the circumstances of this political persecution against her."

The end of the court cases against Suu Kyi, at least for now, raises the possibility that she would be allowed outside visitors, which she has been denied since she was detained.

The military government has repeatedly denied all requests to meet with her, including from the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, which seeks to help mediate an end to the crisis in Myanmar that some United Nations experts have characterized as a civil war because of the armed opposition to military rule.

The U.N., after its special envoy Noeleen Heyzer met in August with Senior Gen. Min Aung Hlaing, announced the head of Myanmar's military-installed government, that he "expressed openness to arranging a meeting at the right time" between her and Suu Kyi.

A statement from the military government said: "Depending on the circumstances after the completion of the judiciary process, we will consider how to proceed."

Due to her age, the 33 years in prison that Suu Kyi now faces "amount to an effective life sentence against her," said Robertson.

"The Myanmar junta's farcical, totally unjust parade of charges and convictions against Aung San Suu Kyi amount to politically motivated punishment designed to hold her behind bars for the rest of her life," he said. "The convictions aim to both permanently sideline her, as well as undermine and ultimately negate her NLD party's landslide victory in the November 2020 election."

Suu Kyi is currently being held in a newly constructed separate building in the prison in Naypyitaw, near the courthouse where her trial was held, with three policewomen whose duty is to assist her.

Allowing access to Suu Kyi has been a major demand of the many international critics of Myanmar's military rulers, who have faced diplomatic and political sanctions for their human rights abuses and suppression of democracy.

Suu Kyi, the daughter of Myanmar's martyred independence hero Gen. Aung San, spent almost 15 years as a political prisoner under house arrest between 1989 and 2010.

Her tough stand against the military rule in Myanmar turned her into a symbol of nonviolent struggle for democracy, and won her the 1991 Nobel Peace Prize.

Her National League for Democracy party initially came to power after easily winning the 2015 general election, ushering in a true civilian government for the first time since a 1962 military coup.

But after coming to power, Suu Kyi was criticized for showing deference to the military while ignoring atrocities it is credibly accused of committing in a 2017 crackdown on the Muslim Rohingya minority.

Her National League for Democracy won a landslide victory again in the 2020 election, but less than three months afterwards, elected lawmakers were kept from taking their seats in Parliament and top members of her government and party were detained.

The army said it acted because there had been massive voting fraud in the 2020 election, but independent election observers did not find any major irregularities.

The army's takeover in 2021 triggered widespread peaceful protests that security forces tried to crush with deadly forces and that soon erupted into armed resistance.

Myanmar security forces have killed at least 2,685 civilians and arrested 16,651, according to a detailed list compiled by the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners, a non-governmental organization that tracks killings and arrests.

## China faces bumpy road to normal as infections surge

BEIJING (AP) — After three years of quarantines pushed them close to shutting down, restaurant owner Li Meng and his wife are hoping for business to rebound after China rolled back severe anti-virus controls.

As sales slowly revive, they face a new challenge: Diners are wary about the country's wave of infections. On Wednesday night at 8 p.m., only three of their 20 tables were filled.

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China is on a bumpy road back to normal life as people return to schools, shopping malls and restaurants following the abrupt end of some of the world's most severe restrictions even as hospitals are swamped with feverish, wheezing COVID-19 patients.

"Many are still watching because they are afraid of being infected," Li said. "Dining out can be put off for now."

The ruling Communist Party began to drop testing, quarantine and other restrictions in November as it tries to reverse a deepening economic slump.

The "zero COVID" strategy confined millions of families to their homes for weeks at a time, shut down most travel into and out of China, and emptied bustling streets in major cities. That kept its infection rate low but crushed economic growth and fueled protests.

"People are going back to work, and I've seen children in the malls," said Yang Mingyue, a 28-year-old Beijing resident. "Everything is back to normal. It's really pleasant."

The ruling party is shifting toward joining the United States and other governments in trying to live with the disease instead of stamping out transmission. It has launched a campaign to vaccinate elderly people, which experts say is needed to prevent a public health crisis.

Members of the public expressed unease about the wave of infections but welcomed the change in strategy.

"I'm definitely a little worried, but for the sake of living, you have to be able to work normally, right?" said Yue Hongzhu, 40, a supermarket manager.

"Since the government has allowed opening up, that means it is not so terrible, right?" Yue said. "If the virus were highly infectious and everyone's life were in danger, the government wouldn't let go."

On Tuesday, the government announced it would relax restrictions on travel out of China and resume issuing passports for tourist travel for the first time in nearly three years. That sets up a possible flood of Chinese travelers going abroad at a time when other governments are alarmed by the rise in infections.

The United States, Japan and other governments have announced virus test requirements for travelers arriving from China. They cite the lack of information from Beijing about the spread of the virus and possible mutations into new forms.

"The development of the epidemic is relatively fast," said Wu Zunyou, chief epidemiologist for the China Center for Disease Control and Prevention, at a press conference Thursday. "The flow of people and the risk of respiratory infectious diseases in winter may make the epidemic situation more complicated."

The ruling party faces increased pressure to get consumers out of their homes and spending as global demand for Chinese exports weakens after the Federal Reserve and European central banks raised interest rates to cool economic activity and tame surging inflation.

China's retail sales in November fell 5.9% from a year earlier. Imports tumbled 10.9% in a sign of a deepening downturn in Chinese domestic demand.

Exports fell 9% in November from a year earlier. Forecasters say China's economy probably contracted in the final quarter of the year. They have cut annual growth outlooks to as low as below 3%, which would be weaker than any years in decades except 2020.

The American Chamber of Commerce in China says more than 70% of companies that responded to a poll this month "were confident that China will recover from the current COVID outbreak in early 2023, allowing inbound and outbound business travel and tourism to resume thereafter."

ING economist Iris Pang wrote in a report that the export slowdown will make recovering from lockdowns harder. "The timing is not perfect," she wrote.

Li, the restaurateur, said he and his wife moved to Beijing a decade ago to open a restaurant focused on the cuisine of Yunnan province in the southwest.

They invested their savings and mortgaged their house to open two more outlets in 2019 just before the pandemic hit.

"Our priority now is to survive," said Li. He said it might take up to three months for sales, which are less than half their pre-pandemic level, to return to normal.



Shi Runfei, a waiter at a different restaurant, said anti-virus rules had blocked him from visiting his hometown in neighboring Hebei province for much of the last year/years, and when he was allowed to travel, required time-consuming quarantines.

"Now, it's different," said Shi, 35. "Of course, there are still risks, but we just need to take self-protection measures."

## Former IS families face neighbors' hatred returning home

By HOGIR AL ABDO and KAREEM CHEHAYEB Associated Press

RAQQA, Syria (AP) — Marwa Ahmad rarely leaves her run-down house in the Syrian city of Raqqa. The single mother of four says people look at her with suspicion and refuse to offer her a job, while her children get bullied and beaten up at school.

She and her children are paying the price, she says, because she once belonged to the Islamic State group, which overran a swath of Syria and Iraq in 2014 and imposed a radical, brutal rule for years.

Ahmad is among tens of thousands of widows and wives of IS militants who were detained in the wretched and lawless al-Hol camp in northeastern Syria after U.S.-led coalition and Syrian Kurdish forces cleared IS from the region in 2019.

She and a growing number of families have since been allowed to leave, after Kurdish authorities that oversee the camp determined they were no longer affiliated with the militant group and do not pose a threat to society. But the difficulties they face in trying to reintegrate back in Syria and Iraq show the deep, bitter resentments remaining after the atrocities committed by IS and the destructiveness of the long war that brought down the militants.

There also remains fear of IS sleeper cells that continue to carry out attacks. IS militants in Raqqa on Monday attacked and killed six members of the Kurdish-led security forces, known as the Syrian Democratic Forces. The attack came following a surge of SDF and U.S. raids targeting IS militants in eastern Syria.

Near Ahmad's house, an IS slogan, "The Islamic Caliphate is coming, God willing," is graffitied on the wall of a dilapidated building.

It's an ideology that Ahmad once believed in. She said she and her sister joined IS after their brother, an IS member, was killed in a U.S. airstrike in 2014. She married a member of the group, though she says he was a nurse, not a fighter. He has been detained since 2019.

Ahmed says she now rejects IS. Her community doesn't believe that though, and she claims it's because she wears the conservative niqab veil that covers most of her face.

"Now, I have to face people, and many of the people in this society have been hurt by (IS)," Ahmad said. "Of course, it was not only the organization that did so. We, the people who live in Syria, have been hurt by the Free Syrian Army, the regime, and IS, right? But they don't say that."

She says the neighborhood bakery sometimes refuses to give her bread. Even her own father, who did not approve of her joining the extremist group, threatened a shop owner who employed her that he would accuse him of communicating with IS if he didn't fire her.

After IS overran Raqqa, large parts of northern and eastern Syria and western Iraq in 2014, the group declared a so-called Islamic caliphate over the territory. Thousands came from around the world to join. Raqqa became the "Caliphate's" de facto capital.

U.S.-backed Kurdish-led authorities battled for years to roll back IS. Finally in March 2019, they captured the last sliver of IS-held territory in Syria, the small village of Bahgouz. Ahmed's husband was captured by the SDF at Bahgouz, and Ahmed and her children were sent to al-Hol camp.

Ever since, what to do with the women and children at al-Hol has been a conundrum for the Kurdish-led authorities. Most of the women are wives and widows of IS fighters. Thousands of Syrians and Iraqis have been released and sent home, as well as a number of foreigners.

Still some 50,000 Syrians and Iraqis, half of whom are children, remain crowded into tents in the fenced-in camp in a barren stretch of desert. Several thousand foreigners from dozens of countries also remain.

Conditions are dire. Kurdish-led authorities and activists blame IS sleeper cells for surging violence within

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the camp, including the beheading of two Egyptian girls, aged 11 and 13, in November. Ahmad says life in al-Hol was similar to life under IS, "except you're fenced in."

Armed militants affiliated to IS still control large parts of the camp, Human Rights Watch said in a recent report, citing camp authorities.

The U.S. Central Command said it conducted 313 raids targeting IS militants in Syria and Iraq over the past year, detaining 215 and killing 466 militants in Syria, mostly in cooperation with the SDF.

The Kurdish-led forces announced Thursday, citing a surge in IS attacks, that they launched a new military campaign against the extremist group, dubbed "Operation Al-Jazeera Thunderbolt," to target sleeper cells in al-Hol and nearby in Tal Hamis.

Despite all this, Ahlam Abdulla, another woman released from al-Hol, says life in the camp was better than in her hometown of Raqqa.

"In general, everyone is against us. We are fought wherever we go," she said. She says husband joined IS and worked in an office for the militant group, while she just looked after the house.

With the support of her tribe's elders, the mother of five returned to Raqqa in 2020 without her husband, who has been missing for four years. She says local authorities have watched their every move with suspicion and asked for their personal information.

"We are scared," she said. "If anyone asks, I just say my husband died at the Turkish border." She tells no one she was at al-Hol.

Saeed al-Borsan, an elder of the al-Walda tribe, says that reintegrating women and children from al-Hol has been a huge challenge, both because of a lack of job opportunities and because residents struggle to accept them. Tribe elders like al-Borsan have been trying to help women find housing and livelihoods.

"The children especially have faced difficulties, lack of education, and disconnection from society for five years," he explained, sitting in a room with other tribesmen with a set of prayer beads in one hand. "They're victims."

Local charities and civil society groups have tried to help the children reintegrate into schools and help their mothers improve their skills to find better jobs.

"They stayed under the rule of IS, and many of them are relatively still influenced by them," Helen Mohammed of Women for Peace, a civil society organization supporting women and children, told The Associated Press. "They were victims to extremist ideology."

But she believes the women can be successfully reintegrated with the right services and support.

Abdulla says she attended a few workshops but feels her job prospects haven't improved yet. In the meantime, she earns a little by cleaning carpets and homes and selling traditionally jarred pickled or dried seasonal food, known locally as "mouneh."

Meanwhile, Ahmad got rejected from yet another job. She said she didn't get a clear reason why, but believes it's because her husband was with IS.

"We have to live with the IS label in this society," Ahmad said as she let her kids out of her dim house to play. "No matter how hard we try to be part of this community, to embrace the people and be nice to them, they still look at us the same way."

## More victims recovered from Cambodia casino hotel fire

By HENG SINITH and SOPHENG CHEANG Associated Press

POIPET, Cambodia (AP) — The confirmed death toll from a massive fire at a casino hotel complex in western Cambodia rose to 25 on Friday as the search resumed for victims, officials said.

The blaze at the Grand Diamond City casino and hotel in the town of Poipet on the Thai border started around midnight Wednesday and was extinguished more than 12 hours later on Thursday afternoon.

By Friday morning, 25 bodies had been recovered from the site, according to Sek Sokhom, head of Banteay Meanchey province's information department. He said six bodies were found Friday morning, some in their rooms and others on stairways.

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More than 60 people were injured, he said, and the death toll was expected to rise once rescuers are able to access victims who are believed to be under debris or in locked rooms.

The Grand Diamond City casino complex has 500 employees, and it had 1,000 customers Wednesday, according to a report from Soth Kimkolmony, a spokesperson for Cambodia's National Committee for Disaster Management. It was unclear how many were present when the fire broke out, and how many managed to flee to safety.

An accurate toll of the casualties has been hard to obtain due to the chaotic rescue efforts and since many of those saved were rushed across the border for treatment in neighboring Thailand, which has better medical facilities.

Thai and Cambodian rescue teams have been working side-by-side in searching the 17-story complex, but paused their efforts overnight at the dangerously damaged site.

Many of those inside, both customers and staff, were from neighboring Thailand, which sent firetrucks and emergency workers to help.

Thailand's Sa Kaeo Provincial Disaster Prevention and Mitigation Office has counted 11 dead — all Thai — and 109 injured, including 57 in hospitals.

An initial investigation found that the fire may have been caused by New Year's holiday decorations that drew too much electricity, causing wires to overheat and burn, local authorities said.

Khmer Times, a Cambodian English-language news website, quoted Poipet city governor Keat Hul describing the chaos when the fire broke out.

"Hotel and casino workers used fire extinguishers to stop the fire but to no avail. People were panicking and rushing about everywhere but mainly for the nearest exit," he said. "I was told that there was a stampede out at the main entrance when black smoke was billowing through the building."

He was quoted saying he believed many of the deaths came from smoke inhalation and some people died when they leapt from high stories to escape the flames.

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

Casinos are illegal in Thailand. Many Thais visit neighboring countries such as Cambodia — a popular tourist destination with convenient international connections — to gamble. Poipet has more than a dozen casinos.

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

Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen made his first public comments on the tragedy in remarks to villagers Friday morning at a road repair ceremony in the southern province of Kampot.

He expressed his condolences and said the incident showed that all tall buildings in the country must have sufficient equipment to fight fires. He also gave thanks to all the people who worked in the rescue effort, including those from Thailand.

## Evidence of Russian crimes mounts as war in Ukraine drags on

By MICHAEL BIESECKER and ERIKA KINETZ Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Ten months into Russia's latest invasion of Ukraine, overwhelming evidence shows the Kremlin's troops have waged total war, with disregard for international laws governing the treatment of civilians and conduct on the battlefield.

Ukraine is investigating more than 58,000 potential Russian war crimes — killings, kidnappings, indiscriminate bombings and sexual assaults. Reporting by The Associated Press and "Frontline," recorded in a public database, has independently verified more than 600 incidents that appear to violate the laws of war. Some of those attacks were massacres that killed dozens or hundreds of civilians and as a totality it could account for thousands of individual war crimes.

As Karim Khan, chief prosecutor of the International Criminal Court in The Hague, told the AP, "Ukraine is a crime scene."

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That extensive documentation has run smack into a hard reality, however. While authorities have amassed a staggering amount of evidence — the conflict is among the most documented in human history — they are unlikely to arrest most of those who pulled the trigger or gave the beatings anytime soon, let alone the commanders who gave the orders and political leaders who sanctioned the attacks.

The reasons are manifold, experts say. Ukrainian authorities face serious challenges in gathering air-tight evidence in a war zone. And the vast majority of alleged war criminals have evaded capture and are safely behind Russian lines.

Even in successful prosecutions, the limits of justice so far are glaring. Take the case of Vadim Shishimarin, a baby-faced 21-year-old tank commander who was the first Russian tried on war crimes charges. He surrendered in March and pleaded guilty in a Kyiv courtroom in May to shooting a 62-year-old Ukrainian civilian in the head.

The desire for some combination of justice and vengeance was palpable in that courtroom. “Do you consider yourself a murderer?” a woman shouted at the Russian as he stood bent forward with his head resting against the glass of the cage he was locked in.

“What about the man in the coffin?” came another, sharper voice. A third demanded the defense lawyer explain how he could fight for the Russian’s freedom.

The young soldier was first sentenced to life in prison, which was reduced to 15 years on appeal. Critics said the initial penalty was unduly harsh, given that he confessed to the crime, said he was following orders and expressed remorse.

Ukrainian prosecutors, however, have not yet been able to charge Shishimarin’s commanders or those who oversaw him. Since March, Ukraine has named more than 600 Russians, many of them high-ranking political and military officials, as suspects, including Minister of Defense Sergei Shoigu. But, so far, the most powerful have not fallen into Ukrainian custody.

“It would be terrible to find a scenario in which, in the end, you convict a few people of war crimes and crimes against humanity who are low-grade or mid-grade military types or paramilitary types, but the top table gets off scot-free,” said Philippe Sands, a prominent British human rights lawyer.

Throughout the war Russian leaders have denied accusations of brutality.

Moscow’s U.N. ambassador, Vassily Nebenzia, said no civilians were tortured and killed in the Kyiv suburb of Bucha despite the meticulous documentation of the atrocities by AP, other journalists, and war crimes investigators there.

“Not a single local person has suffered from any violent action,” she said, calling the photos and video of bodies in the streets “a crude forgery” staged by the Ukrainians.

Such statements have been easily rebutted by Ukrainian and international authorities, human rights groups and journalists who have meticulously documented Russian barbarity since the Kremlin ordered the unprovoked invasion in February.

Part of that effort, the AP and Frontline database called War Crimes Watch Ukraine, offers a contemporaneous catalog of the horrors of war. It is not a comprehensive accounting. AP and Frontline only included incidents that could be verified by photos, videos or firsthand witness accounts. There are hundreds of reported incidents of potential war crimes for which there was not enough publicly available evidence to independently confirm what happened.

Still, the resulting database details 10 months of attacks that appear to violate the laws of war, including 93 attacks on schools, 36 where children were killed, and more than 200 direct attacks on civilians, including torture, the kidnapping and killing of civilians, and the desecration of dead bodies. Among Russia’s targets: churches, cultural centers, hospitals, food facilities and electrical infrastructure. The database catalogs how Russia utilized cluster bombs and other indiscriminate weapons in residential neighborhoods and to attack buildings housing civilians.

An AP investigation revealed that Russia’s bombing of a theater in Mariupol, which was being used as a civilian shelter, likely killed more than 600 people. Another showed that in the first 30 days after the invasion, Russian forces struck and damaged 34 medical facilities, suggesting a pattern and intent.



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"That's a crime against the laws of war," said Stephen Rapp, a former U.S. Ambassador-at-Large for War Crimes. "Once somebody's injured, they're entitled to medical care. You can't attack a hospital. That's the oldest rule we have in international law."

Experts say Russia under President Vladimir Putin has repeatedly ignored the rules established by the Geneva Conventions, a series of treaties that dictate how warring countries should treat each other's citizens, and the Rome Statute, which established the International Criminal Court and defined specific war crimes and crimes against humanity.

"These abuses are not the acts of rogue units; rather, they are part of a deeply disturbing pattern of abuse consistent with what we have seen from Russia's prior military engagements — in Chechnya, Syria, and Georgia," said Beth Van Schaack, the U.S. Ambassador at Large for Global Criminal Justice, speaking earlier this month at the International Criminal Court in The Hague, Netherlands.

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

Short of a regime-toppling revolution in Moscow, however, it is unlikely Putin and other high-ranking Russians end up in court, whether in Ukraine or the Hague, experts say.

And even as a chorus of global leaders have joined Ukrainians in calling for legal action against the architects of this war, there is disagreement about the best way to do it.

The International Criminal Court has been investigating potential war crimes and crimes against humanity in Ukraine. But it cannot prosecute the most basic offense, the crime of aggression — the unjust use of military force against another nation — because the Russian Federation, like the United States, never gave it authority to do so.

Efforts to plug that loophole by creating a special international tribunal for the crime of aggression in Ukraine have been gaining momentum. Last month, the European Union threw its support behind the idea.

Some human rights advocates say a special tribunal would be the smartest way to proceed. Sands, the British human rights lawyer, said prosecuting Russia before such a tribunal would be a "slam dunk."

"You'd need to prove that that war is manifestly in violation of international law," he added. "That's pretty straightforward because Mr. Putin has set out the reasons for that war, and it's blindingly obvious that they don't meet the requirements of international law."

But Khan, the chief prosecutor of the International Criminal Court, has opposed the creation of a special tribunal, calling it a "vanity project."

"We are an international court," Khan told AP and Frontline in July. "We've been accepted, of course, by the Security Councilors as legitimate. They've used this court in terms of referrals. And I think we should focus on using this court effectively."

Whatever happens on the international stage, the vast majority of cases will be heard within Ukraine itself.

The daunting task of turning Ukraine's beleaguered prosecutorial service into a bureaucracy capable of building sophisticated war crimes cases falls on Yuriy Bielousov.

When he was offered the job of leading the war crimes department in the prosecutor general's office, Bielousov knew it would be tough. Just how tough became clear after Russians pulled out of Bucha last spring, leaving behind a crime scene strewn with the decomposing bodies of more than 450 men, women and children.

Bucha was the first complex case picked up by Bielousov's prosecutors, and it quickly became one of the most important. No one in Ukraine had ever dealt with something of that scale before.

"The system was not in collapse, but the system was shocked," Bielousov said. "OK, OK, let's go everyone, and just try to do our best."

Ukraine has five different investigative agencies, each assigned legal responsibility for different kinds of crimes. The crimes in Bucha cut across all those categories, tangling the bureaucracy. That has only made building tough cases even harder.

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Despite the setbacks and hurdles, Bielousov says his prosecutors remain focused on gathering evidence that will stand up in domestic and international courts. He says he is also focused on another goal -- compiling an incontrovertible record of Russia's savagery that the world cannot ignore.

Yulia Truba wants the same thing. Her husband was one of the first men Russian soldiers tortured and killed in Bucha. She said she wants to establish a single, shared truth about what happened to her husband "Russia won't recognize this as a crime," Truba said. "I just want as many people as possible to recognize it was a real murder and he was tortured. For me, this would be justice."

## Trump's tax returns to be released Friday after long fight

By MICHAEL R. SISAK and JILL COLVIN Associated Press

A House committee is set to release six years of Donald Trump's tax returns on Friday, pulling back the curtain on financial records that the former president fought for years to keep secret.

The Democratic-controlled House Ways and Means Committee voted last week to release the returns, with some redactions of sensitive information, such as Social Security numbers and contact information. Their dissemination comes in the waning days of Democrats' control of the House and as Trump's fellow Republicans prepare to retake power in the chamber.

The committee obtained six years of Trump's personal and business tax records, from 2015 to 2020, while investigating what it said in a Dec. 20 report was the Internal Revenue Service's failure to pursue mandatory audits of Trump on a timely basis during his presidency, as required under the tax agency's protocol.

The release raises the potential of new revelations about Trump's finances, which have been shrouded in mystery and intrigue since his days as an up-and-coming Manhattan real estate developer in the 1980s. The returns could take on added significance now that Trump has launched a third campaign for the White House.

Trump's tax returns are likely to offer the clearest picture yet of his finances during his time in office.

Trump, known for building skyscrapers and hosting a reality TV show before winning the White House, broke political norms by refusing to make public his returns as he sought the presidency — though he did give some limited details about his holdings and income on mandatory disclosure forms.

Instead, Trump has touted his wealth in the annual financial statements he gives to banks to secure loans and to financial magazines to justify his place on rankings of the world's billionaires.

Trump's longtime accounting firm has since disavowed the statements, and New York Attorney General Letitia James has filed a lawsuit alleging Trump and his Trump Organization inflated asset values on the statements as part of a yearslong fraud. Trump and his company have denied wrongdoing.

It will not be the first time Trump's tax returns have been under scrutiny. In October 2018, The New York Times published a Pulitzer Prize-winning series based on leaked tax records that showed that Trump received a modern-day equivalent of at least \$413 million from his father's real estate holdings, with much of that money coming from what the Times called "tax dodges" in the 1990s.

A second series in 2020 showed that Trump paid just \$750 in federal income taxes in 2017 and 2018, as well as no income taxes at all in 10 of the past 15 years because he generally lost more money than he made.

In its report last week, the Ways and Means Committee indicated the Trump administration may have disregarded a post-Watergate requirement mandating audits of a president's tax filings.

The IRS only began to audit Trump's 2016 tax filings on April 3, 2019 — more than two years into his presidency — when Ways and Means chair Rep. Richard Neal, D-Mass., asked the agency for information related to the tax returns.

By comparison, there were audits of President Joe Biden for the 2020 and 2021 tax years, said Andrew Bates, a White House spokesperson. A spokesperson for former President Barack Obama said Obama was audited in each of his eight years in office.

An accompanying report from Congress' nonpartisan Joint Committee on Taxation raised multiple red flags about aspects of Trump's tax filings, including his carryover losses, deductions tied to conservation

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and charitable donations, and loans to his children that could be taxable gifts.

The House passed a bill in response that would require audits of any president's income tax filings. Republicans strongly opposed the legislation, raising concerns that a law requiring audits would infringe on taxpayer privacy and could lead to audits being weaponized for political gain.

Republicans have argued that Democrats will regret the move once Republicans take power in January, and they warn that the committee's new GOP chair will be under pressure to seek and make public the tax returns of other prominent people.

The measure, approved mostly along party lines, has little chance of becoming law in the final days of this Congress. Rather, it is seen as a starting point for future efforts to bolster oversight of the presidency.

Every president and major-party candidate since Richard Nixon has voluntarily made at least summaries of their tax information available to the public. Trump bucked that trend as a candidate and as president, repeatedly asserting that his taxes were "under audit" and couldn't be released.

Trump's lawyers were repeatedly denied in their quest to keep his tax returns from the Ways and Means Committee. A three-judge federal appeals court panel in August upheld a lower-court ruling granting the committee access.

Trump's lawyers also tried and failed to block the Manhattan district attorney's office from getting Trump's tax records as part of its investigation into his business practices, losing twice in the Supreme Court.

Trump's longtime accountant, Donald Bender, testified at the Trump Organization's recent Manhattan criminal trial that Trump reported losses on his tax returns every year for a decade, including nearly \$700 million in 2009 and \$200 million in 2010.

Bender, a partner at Mazars USA LLP who spent years preparing Trump's personal tax returns, said Trump's reported losses from 2009 to 2018 included net operating losses from some of the many businesses he owns through the Trump Organization.

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

## California deputy killed by driver, suspect dies in shootout

JURUPA VALLEY, Calif. (AP) — A Southern California sheriff's deputy was shot and killed Thursday by a man with a violent criminal history during a traffic stop and the suspect later died in a shootout on a freeway, authorities said.

Isaiah Cordero, 32, had pulled over a pickup truck just before 2 p.m. in the city of Jurupa Valley, east of Los Angeles. As he approached the vehicle, the driver pulled a gun and shot him, Riverside County Sheriff Chad Bianco said at an evening news conference.

A witness called 911 and residents tried to help Cordero until paramedics arrived but he was pronounced dead at a hospital.

A "massive manhunt" then began for the shooter and he was spotted in neighboring San Bernardino County, sparking a chase on freeways through both counties. A spike strip disabled two rear wheels but the truck kept going, the sheriff said.

TV news showed dozens of Sheriff's Department and California Highway Patrol cars chasing the truck.

On Interstate 15 in Norco, the truck finally became disabled, losing an axle, and crashed, Bianco said.

"At the conclusion of the pursuit, the suspect fired rounds at deputies" with a handgun and they shot back, killing him, Bianco said.

The suspect, William Shae McKay, 44, of San Bernardino County, had a long and violent criminal history stretching back to before 2000 that included kidnapping, robbery and multiple arrests for assault with a deadly weapon, including the stabbing of a California Highway Patrol dog, the sheriff said.

Cordero was a motorcycle officer assigned to Jurupa Valley, a city about 45 miles (72 kilometers) east of downtown Los Angeles that contracts with the Riverside County Sheriff's Department for policing services.

Cordero joined the 4,000-member strong department as a corrections deputy, worked in local jails, became a sworn deputy in 2018 and completed motor school to become a motorcycle deputy in September,

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Bianco said.

Cordero "learned from his mother the value of serving and helping others" and his goal at the department was always to become a motor deputy, Bianco said.

"He was naturally drawn to law enforcement and certainly embodied our motto of service above self," Bianco said. "He was a jokester around the station and all of our deputies considered him their little brother."

The sheriff said McKay had been convicted of a "third strike" offense last year that should have put him in state prison for 25 years to life but a San Bernardino County judge lowered his bail, allowing his release, and later released him following an arrest for failing to appear at his sentencing.

"He should have been immediately sentenced to 25 years to life," Bianco said. "We would not be here today if the judge had done her job." Bianco said.

Several hours after the shooting, dozens of motorcycle officers and patrol cars escorted a hearse transporting the deputy's flag-draped casket from the hospital to the county coroner's office.

## Asian markets follow Wall St up but on track for annual loss

By JOE McDONALD AP Business Writer

BEIJING (AP) — Asian stock markets followed Wall Street higher on Friday following encouraging U.S. employment data but were headed for double-digit losses for the year.

Shanghai, Tokyo, Hong Kong and Sydney advanced. Oil prices edged higher.

Wall Street's benchmark S&P 500 index gained Thursday after the number of people applying for unemployment benefits rose only slightly last week despite repeated interest rate hikes to cool inflation by slowing economic activity.

"Considering the market news was sparse, the shift higher has the hallmarks of a dead cat bounce," said Stephen Innes of SPI Asset Management in a report.

The Shanghai Composite Index gained 0.4% to 3,085.96. The Chinese benchmark is on track to end 2022 down more than 14% after the world's second-largest economy was depressed by anti-virus controls and a crackdown on corporate debt.

Tokyo's Nikkei 225 gained 0.3% to 26,168.45. It is headed for an annual loss of almost 10%. The Hang Seng in Hong Kong added 0.4% to 19,803.77. It is off more than 14% this year.

Sydney's S&P-ASX 200 was 0.5% higher at 7,057.40. New Zealand declined while Southeast Asian markets rose.

South Korean markets were closed for a holiday. The country's benchmark Kospi index is headed for a loss of more than 25% for the year.

On Wall Street, the S&P 500 rose 1.7% to 3,849.28. The Dow Jones Industrial Average gained 1% to 33,220.80. The Nasdaq composite added 2.6% to 10,478.09.

Each major U.S. index is headed for a loss in December. Companies in the S&P 500 took in record profits in 2022 but the index will end the year down about 20%, which would be the benchmark's biggest annual decline since 2008.

Investors are uneasy about a string of interest rate hikes by the Federal Reserve and central banks in Europe and Asia to tame inflation that is at multi-decade highs. They worry central banks are willing to cause a recession if necessary.

The Fed's key lending rate stands at a range of 4.25% to 4.5% after seven increases this year. The U.S. central bank forecasts that will reach a range of 5% to 5.25% by the end of 2023. Its forecast doesn't call for a rate cut before 2024.

In energy markets, benchmark U.S. crude rose 19 cents to \$78.59 per barrel in electronic trading on the New York Mercantile Exchange. The contract fell 56 cents on Thursday to \$78.40. Brent crude, used as the price basis for international oil trading, advanced 10 cents to \$83.56 per barrel in London. It lost \$1 the previous session to \$82.26 a barrel.

The dollar declined to 132.57 yen from Thursday's 132.90 yen. The euro edged lower to \$1.0659 from \$1.0677.



## Vivienne Westwood, influential fashion maverick, dies at 81

By GREGORY KATZ Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — Vivienne Westwood, an influential fashion maverick who played a key role in the punk movement, died Thursday at 81.

Westwood's eponymous fashion house announced her death on social media platforms, saying she died peacefully. A cause was not disclosed.

"Vivienne continued to do the things she loved, up until the last moment, designing, working on her art, writing her book, and changing the world for the better," the statement said.

Westwood's fashion career began in the 1970s when her radical approach to urban street style took the world by storm. But she went on to enjoy a long career highlighted by a string of triumphant runway shows and museum exhibitions.

The name Westwood became synonymous with style and attitude even as she shifted focus from year to year, her range vast and her work never predictable.

As her stature grew, she seemed to transcend fashion. The young woman who had scorned the British establishment eventually became one of its leading lights, even as she kept her hair dyed that trademark bright shade of orange.

Andrew Bolton, curator of The Costume Institute at the Metropolitan Museum of New York, said Westwood and Sex Pistols manager Malcolm McLaren — her onetime partners — "gave the punk movement a look, a style, and it was so radical it broke from anything in the past."

"The ripped shirts, the safety pins, the provocative slogans," Bolton said. "She introduced postmodernism. It was so influential from the mid-70s. The punk movement has never dissipated — it's become part of our fashion vocabulary. It's mainstream now."

Westwood's long career was full of contradictions: She was a lifelong rebel honored several times by Queen Elizabeth II. She dressed like a teenager even in her 60s and became an outspoken advocate of fighting climate change, warning of planetary doom.

In her punk days, Westwood's clothes were often intentionally shocking: T-shirts decorated with drawings of naked boys and "bondage pants" with sadomasochistic overtones were standard fare in her popular London shops. But Westwood was able to transition from punk to haute couture without missing a beat, keeping her career going without stooping to self-caricature.

"She was always trying to reinvent fashion. Her work is provocative, it's transgressive. It's very much rooted in the English tradition of pastiche and irony and satire. She is very proud of her Englishness, and still she sends it up," Bolton said.

One of those contentious designs featured a swastika, an inverted image of Jesus Christ on the cross and the word "Destroy." In an autobiography written with Ian Kelly, she said it was meant as part of a statement against politicians torturing people, citing Chile's Augusto Pinochet. When asked if she regretted the swastika in a 2009 interview with Time magazine, Westwood said no.

"I don't, because we were just saying to the older generation, 'We don't accept your values or your taboos, and you're all fascists,'" she responded.

She approached her work with gusto in her early years, but later seemed to tire of the clamor and buzz. After decades of designing, she sometimes spoke wistfully of moving beyond fashion so she could concentrate on environmental matters and educational projects.

"Fashion can be so boring," she told The Associated Press after unveiling one of her new collections at a 2010 show. "I'm trying to find something else to do."

Her runway shows were always the most chic events, drawing stars from the glittery world of film, music, and television who wanted to bask in Westwood's reflected glory. But still she spoke out against consumerism and conspicuous consumption, even urging people not to buy her expensive, beautifully made clothes.

"I just tell people, stop buying clothes," she said. "Why not protect this gift of life while we have it? I don't take the attitude that destruction is inevitable. Some of us would like to stop that and help people survive."

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Westwood's activism extended to supporting Wikileaks founder Julian Assange, posing in a giant birdcage in 2020 to try to halt his extradition to the U.S. She even designed the dress Stella Moris wore when she married Assange this past March at a London prison.

Westwood was self-taught, with no formal fashion training. She told Marie Claire magazine that she learned how to make her own clothes as a teenager by following patterns. When she wanted to sell 1950s-style clothes at her first shop, she found old clothes in markets and took them apart to understand the cut and construction.

Westwood was born in the Derbyshire village of Glossop on April 8, 1941. Her family moved to London in 1957 and she attended art school for one term.

She met McLaren in the 1960s while working as a primary school teacher after separating from her first husband, Derek Westwood. She and McLaren opened a small shop in Chelsea in 1971, the tail end of the "Swinging London" era ushered in by the Beatles and the Rolling Stones.

The shop changed its name and focus several times, operating as "SEX" — Westwood and McLaren were fined in 1975 for an "indecent exhibition" there — and "World's End" and "Seditionaries."

Among the workers at their shop was Sex Pistols bassist Glen Matlock, who called Westwood "a one off, driven, single minded, talented lady" in a statement to The Associated Press.

He said it was a privilege "to have rubbed shoulders with her in the mid '70s at what was the birth of punk and the worldwide waves it created that still continue to echo and resound today for the disaffected, hipper and wised up around the globe."

"Vivienne is gone and the world is already a less interesting place," tweeted Chrissie Hynde, the front-woman of the Pretenders and another former employee.

Westwood moved into a fresh type of designing with her "Pirates" collection, exhibited in her first catwalk show in 1981. That breakthrough is credited with taking Westwood in a more traditional direction, showing her interest in incorporating historical British designs into contemporary clothes.

It was also an important step in an ongoing rapprochement between Westwood and the fashion world. The rebel eventually became one of its most celebrated stars, known for reinterpreting opulent dresses from the past and often finding inspiration in 18th century paintings.

But she still found ways to shock: Her Statue of Liberty corset in 1987 is remembered as the start of "underwear as outerwear" trend.

She eventually branched out into a range of business activities, including an alliance with Italian designer Giorgio Armani, and developed her ready-to-wear Red Label line, her more exclusive Gold Label line, a menswear collection and fragrances called Boudoir and Libertine. Westwood shops opened in New York, Hong Kong, Milan and several other major cities.

She was named designer of the year by the British Fashion Council in 1990 and 1991.

Her uneasy relationship with the British establishment is perhaps best exemplified by her 1992 trip to Buckingham Palace to receive an Order of the British Empire medal: She wore no underwear, and posed for photographers in a way that made that abundantly clear.

Apparently the queen was not offended: Westwood was invited back to receive the even more auspicious designation of Dame Commander of the British Empire — the female equivalent of a knighthood — in 2006.

Westwood is survived by her second husband, the Austrian-born designer Andreas Kronthaler who had a fashion line under her brand, and two sons.

The first, fashion photographer Ben Westwood, was her son with Derek Westwood. The second, Joe Corre — her son with McLaren — co-founded the upscale Agent Provocateur lingerie line and once burned what he said was a collection of punk memorabilia worth millions: "Punk was never, never meant to be nostalgic," he said.

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## Biden signs \$1.7 trillion bill funding government operations

By DARLENE SUPERVILLE Associated Press

KINGSHILL, U.S. Virgin Islands (AP) — President Joe Biden on Thursday signed a \$1.7 trillion spending bill that will keep the federal government operating through the end of the federal budget year in September 2023, and provide tens of billions of dollars in new aid to Ukraine for its fight against the Russian military.

Biden had until late Friday to sign the bill to avoid a partial government shutdown.

The Democratic-controlled House passed the bill 225-201, mostly along party lines, just before Christmas. The House vote came a day after the Senate, also led by Democrats, voted 68-29 to pass the bill with significantly more Republican support.

Biden had said passage was proof that Republicans and Democrats can work together.

Rep. Kevin McCarthy, the House Republican leader who hopes to become speaker when a new session Congress opens on Jan. 3, argued during floor debate that the bill spends too much and does too little to curb illegal immigration and the flow of fentanyl into the U.S. from Mexico.

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

McCarthy is appealing for support from staunch conservatives in the GOP caucus, who have largely blasted the bill for its size and scope. Republicans will have a narrow House majority come Jan. 3 and several conservative members have vowed not to vote for McCarthy to become speaker.

The funding bill includes a roughly 6% increase in spending for domestic initiatives, to \$772.5 billion. Spending on defense programs will increase by about 10%, to \$858 billion.

Passage was achieved hours before financing for federal agencies was set to expire. Lawmakers had approved two short-term spending measures to keep the government operating, and a third, funding the government through Dec. 30, passed last Friday. Biden signed it to ensure services would continue until Congress sent him the full-year measure, called an omnibus bill.

The massive bill, which topped out at more than 4,000 pages, wraps together 12 appropriations bills, aid to Ukraine and disaster relief for communities recovering from natural disasters. It also contains scores of policy changes that lawmakers worked to include in the final major bill considered by that session of Congress.

Lawmakers provided roughly \$45 billion for Ukraine and NATO allies, more than even Biden had requested, an acknowledgment that future rounds of funding are not guaranteed when Republicans take control of the House next week following the party's gains in the midterm elections.

Though support for Ukraine aid has largely been bipartisan, some House Republicans have opposed the spending and argued that the money would be better spent on priorities in the United States.

McCarthy has warned that Republicans will not write a "blank check" for Ukraine in the future.

The bill also includes about \$40 billion in emergency spending, mostly to help communities across the U.S. as they recover from drought, hurricanes and other natural disasters.

The White House said it received the bill from Congress late Wednesday afternoon. It was delivered to Biden for his signature by White House staff on a regularly scheduled commercial flight.

Biden signed the bill Thursday in the U.S. Virgin Islands, where he is spending time with his wife, Jill, and other family members on the island of St. Croix. The Bidens are staying at the home of friends Bill and Connie Neville, the White House said. Bill Neville owns US Viking, maker of ENPS, a news production software system that is sold by The Associated Press.

Also in the bill are scores of policy changes that are largely unrelated to spending, but lawmakers worked furiously behind the scenes to get the added to the bill, which was the final piece of legislation that came out of that session of Congress. Otherwise, lawmakers sponsoring these changes would have had to start from scratch next year in a politically divided Congress in which Republicans will return to the majority in the House and Democrats will continue to control the Senate.

One of the most notable examples was a historic revision to federal election law to prevent a future president or presidential candidate from trying to overturn an election.

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

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

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

## NY opens its first legal recreational marijuana dispensary

By BOBBY CAINA CALVAN Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — The first legal dispensary for recreational marijuana in New York rung up its first sales on Thursday, opening up what is expected to be one of the country's most lucrative markets for cannabis — underscored by the dozens of unauthorized shops that have operated in the open for years.

The widely anticipated opening of the first state-sanctioned dispensary, which is operated by the nonprofit Housing Works, paves the way for a string of openings expected in the coming months in New York. The state legalized recreational marijuana use in March 2021.

A line of hundreds snaked around the block, many giddy with excitement over the opening. The whiff of marijuana filled the air.

Lino Pastrana was among those waiting his turn after the store opened to the public at 4:20 Thursday afternoon.

"This is historical. It's really important for us who buy and smoke weed because we can buy quality, instead of buying random weed that you don't know what it's mixed with," Pastrana said.

That's something he risked, he said. "You can buy weed anywhere in New York," he said, saying that he expects to buy his merchandise from legal dispensaries from now on.

That's exactly the hope of New York marijuana regulators, who say that a supervised industry will help ensure that cannabis users are buying safe products.

That, too, was the hope of Housing Works officials, who said that having a marijuana business will help fund its programs.

"We're absolutely thrilled to be the first and hopefully setting a model that other folks will have to follow," said Charles King, the chief executive officer of Housing Works, a minority-controlled social-service agency that serves people with HIV and AIDS, as well as those who are homeless and formerly incarcerated.

The lower Manhattan store is the first of 36 recently licensed dispensaries to open, with an additional 139 licenses yet to be issued by the state Office of Cannabis Management and 900 applicants still awaiting word. Among the first round of licensees were eight nonprofits that included Housing Works.

The cannabis storefront abuts the sprawling urban campus of New York University, whose students could provide a ready supply of customers.

"This location is a perfect location. We're between the West Village, the East Village," King said at a news conference Thursday morning. "Tourists can come by here easily. So we think we're going to ring up a lot of sales here."

Facing a cluster of cameras, Chris Alexander, the inaugural executive director of the state cannabis office, made the first purchase Thursday morning: watermelon-flavored gummies and a tin of marijuana flowers.

"It's been a lot of work that's come to get us to this point," Alexander said. "We do have a lot more work to do, a lot more stores to open."

New York City Councilmember Carlina Rivera also bought gummies, and said she no longer needs to travel out of state for legal cannabis. She predicted that more openings will be a boon to the state and



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city economy.

"We are the financial center of the world, the greatest city on earth, and I think people will now come here to enjoy all types things," she said.

New York joined nearly two dozen other states in the U.S. to legalize recreational marijuana. But unlike many other states, New York has reserved its first round of retail licenses for nonprofits, as well as applicants with marijuana convictions and their relatives — an acknowledgement of the inequities produced by the country's war on drugs.

It also planned a \$200 million public-private fund to aid social equity businesses, which the law defined as those owned by women or minorities, struggling farmers, disabled veterans and people from communities that endured heavy pot policing.

"We have seen firsthand the ravages of the war on drugs, on people who use drugs, particularly the most marginalized people, low income people," King said.

King said that his nonprofit is hiring people who have been criminalized because of marijuana. Housing Works pursued getting a license because they wanted "to have the opportunity to ameliorate some of the harsh circumstances implicated in both the criminalization of cannabis as well as other drugs," he said.

"Today marks a major milestone in our efforts to create the most equitable cannabis industry in the nation," said New York City Mayor Eric Adams in a statement. "The opening of the first legal dispensary in our state right here in New York City is more than just a promising step for this budding industry — it represents a new chapter for those most harmed by the failed policies of the past."

Adams won his seat on a tough-on-crime platform that rejected progressive activists' calls to defund the police. He promised to strike the right balance between fighting crime and ending racial injustice in policing. As mayor, he has proposed boosting police and jail spending.

Gov. Kathy Hochul called the first legal sale of adult-use cannabis "a historic milestone in New York's cannabis industry."

Housing Works officials said that the dispensary had already received more than 2,000 reservations from people wanting to make purchases.

Adriana Myles, who works in the cannabis industry, didn't want to miss out on the historic day.

"I just wanted to be out here to show support," she said. "This is the one to be at — the first one."

## **Probe: Alzheimer's drug approval 'rife with irregularities'**

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Food and Drug Administration's contentious approval of a questionable Alzheimer's drug took another hit Thursday as congressional investigators called the process "rife with irregularities."

The 18-month investigation by two House committees detailed "atypical collaboration" between FDA regulators and a company it's supposed to oversee -- Aduhelm manufacturer Biogen. The probe also cited Biogen documents saying the company intended to "make history" when it set what investigators called an "unjustifiably high" initial price of \$56,000 a year for the drug.

The criticism comes as the FDA is expected to decide whether to approve another new Alzheimer's drug in January. Thursday's report urged the agency to "take swift action" to ensure that any future Alzheimer's approvals aren't met with "the same doubts about the integrity of FDA's review."

The FDA and Biogen issued statements Thursday defending the Aduhelm approval process.

In 2021, the FDA overruled its own independent scientific advisers when it approved Aduhelm even though research studies failed to prove it really helped patients. Biogen had halted two studies after disappointing results suggested the drug wasn't slowing Alzheimer's inevitable worsening -- only to later contend that a new analysis of one study showed higher doses offered an incremental benefit.

The FDA argued the drug's ability to reduce a hallmark of Alzheimer's, a buildup of plaque in the brain, suggested it was likely to slow the disease. Backlash was immediate as three FDA advisers resigned in protest and the agency's then-acting chief called for an internal investigation. Eventually Medicare refused to pay for the drug -- even after the yearly price was dropped to \$28,000 -- unless patients enrolled in

clinical trials to prove if it indeed slowed cognitive decline.

Thursday's report said FDA and Biogen engaged in an unusually high volume of phone calls, meetings and emails, some of them not properly documented. In addition, the regulators and company spent months working together to prepare a briefing document for FDA's advisers that didn't adequately represent substantial disagreement within the FDA about how to handle Aduhelm, the report said.

The investigators recommended that FDA take steps to restore trust in the approval process that include properly documenting interactions with drugmakers. They also urged manufacturers to take into account advice from patient groups and other outside experts on fair drug pricing.

In a statement Thursday, FDA said the Aduhelm decision "was based on our scientific evaluation of the data" and that the agency's own internal review found its interactions with Biogen were appropriate. But it said it plans to update guidance on Alzheimer's drug development and will review the investigation's findings.

In its own statement, Biogen said: "Alzheimer's is a highly complex disease and we have learned from the development and launch of Aduhelm" but that it "stands by the integrity of the actions we have taken."

## Report shines new light on execution secrecy in Tennessee

By KIMBERLEE KRUESI and JONATHAN MATTISE Associated Press

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (AP) — When multiple pharmaceutical companies objected to Tennessee using their drugs to kill death row inmates several years back, the scramble to find lethal injection chemicals needed to carry out state-sanctioned executions grew frantic.

"What are your thoughts on acquiring it through a veterinarian?" an unidentified official wrote in a 2017 text. "They sometimes have better access to it since it's widely used for euthanasia in animals."

"How would that even work?" asked a separate employee.

"They buy the stuff by the case," the first official later responded.

These text messages emerged among hundreds of documents released this week as part of a blistering independent report on Tennessee's lethal injection system. The communications span years, depicting a state determined to push forward with executions despite roadblocks to obtaining the drugs and questions about whether revamped procedures would keep inmates from feeling pain as they are put to death.

The result: The state put a single employee with no medical background in charge of procuring the drugs, and the state's own flawed lethal injection rules and communication lapses meant one of the required tests for the drugs wasn't conducted during any of seven executions since 2018 — two by lethal injection, five by electric chair. Under Tennessee's rules, the drugs need to be tested regardless of the method selected.

Additionally, the protocol offered no guidelines on basic precautions needed to keep the chemicals from going bad, like temperature or thawing requirements.

Earlier this year, Republican Gov. Bill Lee paused all executions after confirming the state failed to ensure its lethal injection drugs were properly tested before the scheduled execution of Oscar Smith. Lee halted Smith's execution an hour before he was supposed to die.

The governor later called for the third-party investigation and report, which was released Wednesday.

That independent review also found no evidence the state provided the pharmacy in charge of testing the drugs with a copy of its lethal injection protocol. Nor was there any evidence the state ever told the pharmacy it had to test for endotoxins on all injection chemicals until the night before Smith's planned execution, the report said.

Other revelations about the typically secretive execution process included:

— A text exchange showing the state spent more than \$1,000 for an overnight shipment of a key sedative for the lethal injection of Donnie Johnson in 2019.

— A separate text exchange between the state's lethal drug procurer and the owner of the supply pharmacy showed them chatting about whiskey and beer as they conferred on key details about testing execution drugs.

— An unidentified state official, sending a text message hours before the Smith execution was paused,

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warned: "We are preserving everything so don't throw anything away or alter any stuff."

The report showed that the state ultimately opted not to buy pentobarbital from a veterinarian 2017, but did consider importing the barbiturate internationally before scuttling that over logistical concerns.

These discussions occurred while Tennessee was still relying on pentobarbital as the lone execution drug. When it became nearly impossible to obtain around 2017, the state pivoted to a three-drug process using midazolam — a short-acting sedative used in a clinical setting to help patients feel sleepy and relaxed before surgery.

Reliance on midazolam has faced growing criticism after its use with other chemicals in executions that went wrong in other states.

The report says state correction officials were warned in 2017 by a pharmacy's then-owner that midazolam "does not elicit strong analgesic effects," meaning "the subjects may be able to feel pain from ... the second and third drugs."

The question about pain remains a key point of contention in the ongoing national debate about whether lethal injection violates constitutional protections against cruel and unusual punishment. But after the state's drug procurer promised to inform correction leaders of this warning, the department still chose to press ahead with a three-drug protocol using midazolam, vecuronium bromide and potassium chloride.

Following the review, Lee said he plans leadership changes in the department and will hire a permanent commissioner in January to replace the interim one. The new leaders, he said, will rework the lethal injection protocol in cooperation with the governor's and attorney general's offices. They'll also revise training specifics.

Meanwhile, Lee's temporary pause on executions expires next week, with no executions scheduled for 2023. The Tennessee Supreme Court, which sets execution dates, hasn't commented publicly on how it will proceed. But under an agreement in federal court between the state and attorneys representing two death row inmates, executions are expected to remain paused to give public defenders time to challenge any new execution protocol via the courts.

Lee delayed execution dates during the COVID-19 pandemic and offered reprieves during the recent investigation, but he hasn't taken anyone off death row permanently.

So far, the review has cost the state more than \$219,000, according to records obtained by The Associated Press in a public records request.

## Southwest: Normal flight operations to resume Friday

By DAVID KOENIG AP Airlines Writer

DALLAS (AP) — Southwest Airlines said it expects to return to normal operations Friday after more than a week of widespread flight cancellations that started with a winter storm and spiraled out of control because of a breakdown with staffing technology.

If Thursday turns out to be the last day of the Southwest crisis, it will be marked by about 2,350 canceled flights, nearly 60% of the airline's schedule.

Southwest declined to say how many people have been affected, but it is likely that far more than 1 million have had a flight canceled.

The airline has scrapped more than 13,000 flights since Dec. 22, according to tracking service FlightAware. Its planes have 143 to 175 seats and were likely nearly fully booked around the Christmas and New Year's holidays.

Airline executives said that crew-scheduling technology — a major cause of the meltdown — has caught up with the backlog of pilots and flight attendants stranded in wrong locations. Southwest operated 1,600 flights on Thursday, including 104 that carried no passengers but instead served to put planes and crews in position for full operations on Friday.

Southwest leaders believe they will have enough empty seats over the next several days to accommodate any stranded passengers still wishing to fly on the airline — while conceding that many had either given up or found other transportation.

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Southwest will refund tickets on canceled flights, and executives repeated a promise to reimburse travelers who were forced to pay for hotel rooms, meals and flights on other airlines. The airline's chief commercial officer said that process will take several weeks. Executives said the airline also will pay to ship baggage that has piled up at airports around the country.

Southwest lost \$75 million during a much smaller disruption in October 2021 that resulted in about 2,000 canceled flights over a four-day stretch.

CEO Robert Jordan said it was too early to say how much the company will lose in revenue and incur in extra costs because of the current crisis. Jordan told reporters that events of the last week will likely cause Southwest to re-examine priorities and spending levels for technology improvements that were already underway, but he offered no specifics.

"This has been an incredible disruption, and we can't have this again," he said.

Southwest has struggled to recover after being overwhelmed by a winter storm that swept the country last week. Other airlines bounced back within a couple days, but Southwest ran short of ground workers at airports in Denver and Chicago, and its problems exploded from there.

On Thursday, Southwest accounted for about 95% of all canceled flights in the United States. Executives said they had canceled only 39, or less than 1% of the schedule, for Friday.

Jordan faces a crisis just 11 months after he became CEO, replacing longtime leader Gary Kelly. Southwest had 88 planes and 7,000 employees when Jordan joined 35 years ago. Now it has more than 700 planes and more than 60,000 employees.

Speaking to reporters a month ago at Southwest headquarters in Dallas, a relaxed and jocular Jordan spoke in glowing terms about the airline's culture and customer service. He outlined five priorities, including modernizing the airline's technology for scheduling pilots and flight attendants.

Under Southwest's system, which dates to the 1990s, when crew members are reassigned to a different flight or even change hotels, "somebody needs to call them or basically in the airport chase them down and tell them what their re-route looks like," Jordan said.

"I do think the scale and the growth of the airline got ahead of the tools that we have," he said. "No fault of anybody — takes investment — and we'll get all this done."

The federal government is investigating what happened at Southwest. Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg took fresh swipes at the airline on Thursday, tweeting that he would hold Southwest responsible for "unacceptable performance." He asked followers to tell his department if Southwest fails to reimburse them for travel costs.

Southwest added a page to its website specifically for stranded travelers, and it invited customers to submit receipts for unexpected expenses. The airline said it would consider reimbursing "reasonable" expenses for meals, hotel rooms and alternate transportation incurred between Dec. 24 and Jan. 2. Consumer advocates criticized the use of the word "reasonable" as too vague.

Investors cheered signs that Southwest might finally be getting a handle on the crisis. The company's shares rose nearly 4%, but were still down nearly 8% for the week.

Southwest has been the most profitable U.S. airline so far this year, earning \$759 million in net income through September.

Raymond James airline analyst Savanthi Syth said Thursday that she still expects the company to post a small profit in the fourth quarter, but that some consumers are likely to switch from Southwest to other airlines over the next few months when booking travel.

Another airline analyst, Colin Scarola of CFRA, said he too didn't expect the "Christmas week fiasco" to have a lasting impact because Southwest often has lower fares than its three largest rivals: American, United and Delta.

"History shows customers tend not to permanently ditch an airline even after an awful experience due to the commodity-like nature of the product," he wrote in a note to clients.



## Airline breakdown upends holiday leave for service members

By LEAH WILLINGHAM Associated Press

Amiah Manlove used most of her savings to buy a \$711 airline ticket to go home for the holidays. Then the Army private got stuck midway through the over 4,000-mile journey from Hawaii to Indianapolis and had to sleep on an airport floor.

Manlove, 20, an active-duty soldier stationed in Oahu, was among the many travelers whose holiday plans were upended when Southwest Airlines canceled wave after wave of flights across the country. Her father then spent his rent money to buy her a new flight after she was stranded at the Phoenix airport.

"This is the only time that I have to come home, the time we were going to cherish most for the next year — and to lose any of it is just devastating," said Manlove, who was finally able to make it home the afternoon of Christmas Day. "They would have done anything in their power to get me home."

Travelers who are in the military are often on fixed schedules that make it challenging to roll with the punches of chaotic airline breakdowns.

The Army typically shuts down basic training and advanced individual training schools for a 10-day break during the Christmas season. Active-duty soldiers can use some of their 30 days of accrued annual leave if they want to travel home during that period, but transportation costs aren't covered.

While she was stranded, Manlove's family searched frantically for solutions, and her father, a home health aide who relies on disability payments, used the \$650 he saved for rent to purchase the only flight he could find — a one-way flight to Louisville, Kentucky, a two-hour drive from Indianapolis.

When he came to pick her up, they were so happy to be reunited that he was in tears before she opened the door to get in the car, she said.

"It was heartbreaking," she said.

Manlove, who is scheduled to fly back to Hawaii on Sunday, said she has not been able to reach Southwest on the phone to get a refund. She called more than 10 times and reached out on social media. The airline expected to resume normal operations on Friday.

The family still doesn't know how her father is going to pay rent, she said. For now, they've just been trying to enjoy the time they have together.

"It put a lot of stress on me because I have so many friends and family to see, and 10 days is not a lot," she said. "It's not like I can just call my leadership and be like, 'Oh, hey, can I have some more time?' That's not how that works."

"I'm sure their hearts would be just as heavy as mine, telling them what happened, but I have a duty and a job to do, and I can't spend all the time in the world here at home."

Crystal and Steve Molidor in Trout Creek, Montana, said they've been waiting 15 months to see their son, who serves in the Air Force and just returned to the U.S. from being deployed. He is now stationed in Anchorage, Alaska, and his mother said his flight home on Southwest Airlines has been canceled at least four times already.

"We lost four plus days and Christmas with him due to their complete incompetence," she said. "We can't extend his trip because he can't change up his leave dates at this point."

Crystal Molidor said she was on hold with Southwest for six hours Tuesday night and into the early hours of Wednesday morning trying to reach a customer service representative, but wasn't able to get through to anyone. When she woke up Wednesday, she tried again but gave up after a few more hours of silence.

She said the family finally decided to spend a couple hundred dollars to schedule a flight home for him on a different airline for Thursday, she said.

"I know this isn't a lot of money — it's more the stress they've caused our family and the principle of it," she said. "To continue to let people rebook instead of looking at other options when they knew the flights would be canceled is wrong. Had they been honest upfront, we could have gotten him here a few days sooner."

"I'll just be glad when he's home," she said.

Veterans have faced their own challenges. Air Force veteran Kevin Moffitt was finally able to schedule a flight home to Atlanta for Thursday after being stuck since Monday in Philadelphia, where he flew last

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week to visit family for Christmas.

The 51-year-old, who served in Afghanistan and now works in law enforcement, said the delays caused him to miss work and a long-awaited appointment for a scan he needs for back pain at the veteran's hospital.

He said he had to spend \$579 with Delta for his new flight after being rescheduled multiple times by Southwest. He said he tried calling Southwest five times to discuss a refund but to no avail. On Wednesday, he received an email from the airline telling him he was getting a \$15 refund with no context explaining what it was for.

Meanwhile, he's been paying to park his car at the Atlanta airport on top of a \$50-a-day charge to board his dog.

But he said his biggest concern was that he ran out of medication he relies on to treat his PTSD. When he misses a day, he experiences nausea, vomiting and severe headaches, among other symptoms.

"Hopefully nothing goes wrong," he said of his next flight. "I'm hoping and praying nothing happens."

## **Brazil's Lula picks Amazon defender for environment minister**

By FABIANO MAISONNAVE Associated Press

RIO DE JANEIRO (AP) —

Brazil's President-elect Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva announced Thursday that Amazon activist Marina Silva will be the country's next minister of environment. The announcement indicates the new administration will prioritize cracking down on illegal deforestation even if it means running afoul of powerful agribusiness interests.

Both attended the recent U.N. climate conference in Egypt, where Lula promised cheering crowds "zero deforestation" in the Amazon, the world's largest rainforest and a key to fighting climate change, by 2030. "There will be no climate security if the Amazon isn't protected," he said.

Silva told the news network Globo TV shortly after the announcement that the name of the ministry she will lead will be changed to the Ministry of Environment and Climate Change.

Many agribusiness players and associated lawmakers resent Silva. That stems from her time as environment minister during most of Lula's prior presidency, from 2003 to 2010.

Lula also named Sonia Guajajara, an Indigenous woman, as Brazil's first minister of Indigenous peoples, and Carlos Fávaro, a soybean producer, as agriculture minister.

Silva was born in the Amazon and worked as a rubber tapper as an adolescent. As environment minister she oversaw the creation of dozens of conservation areas and a sophisticated strategy against deforestation, with major operations against environmental criminals and new satellite surveillance. She also helped design the largest international effort to preserve the rainforest, the mostly Norway-backed Amazon Fund. Deforestation dropped dramatically.

But Lula and Silva fell out as he began catering to farmers during his second term and Silva resigned in 2008.

Lula appears to have convinced her that he has changed tack, and she joined his campaign after he embraced her proposals for preservation.

"Brazil will return to the protagonist role it previously had when it comes to climate, to biodiversity," Silva told reporters during her own appearance at the U.N. summit.

This would be a sharp turnabout from the policies of the outgoing president, Jair Bolsonaro, who pushed for development in the Amazon and whose environment minister resigned after national police began investigating whether he was aiding the export of illegally cut timber.

Bolsonaro froze the creation of protected areas, weakened environmental agencies and placed forest management under control of the agriculture ministry. He also championed agribusiness, which opposes the creation of protected areas such as Indigenous territories and pushes for the legalization of land grabbing. Deforestation in Brazil's Amazon reached a 15-year high in the year ending in July 2021, though the devastation slowed somewhat in the following 12 months.

In Egypt, Lula committed to prosecuting all crimes in the forest, from illegal logging to mining. He also said he would press rich countries to make good on promises to help developing nations adapt to climate

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change. And he pledged to work with other nations home to large tropical forests — the Congo and Indonesia — in what could be coordinated negotiating positions on forest management and biodiversity protection.

As environment minister, Silva would be charged with carrying out much of that agenda.

Silva is also likely to face resistance from Congress, where the farm caucus next year will account for more than one-third of the Lower House and Senate.

Two lawmakers allied with Lula who come from the nation's agriculture sector told The Associated Press before the announcements they disagree with Silva's nomination given the conflict of her prior tenure. They spoke on condition of anonymity due to fear of reprisals.

Others were more hopeful. Neri Geller, a lawmaker of the agribusiness caucus who acted as a bridge to Lula during the campaign, said things had changed since Silva's departure in 2008.

"At the time, Marina Silva was perhaps a little too extremist, but people from the agro sector also had some extremists," he said, citing a strengthened legal framework around environmental protection as well. "I think she matured and we matured. We can make progress on important agenda items for the sector while preserving (the environment) at the same time."

Silva and Brazil stand to benefit from a rejuvenated Amazon Fund, which took a hit in 2019 when Norway and Germany froze new cash transfers after Bolsonaro excluded state governments and civil society from decision-making. The Norwegian Embassy in Brazil praised "the clear signals" from Lula about addressing deforestation.

"We think the Amazon Fund can be opened quickly to support the government's action plan once the Brazilian government reinstates the governing structure of the fund," the embassy said in a statement to the AP.

The split between Lula and Marina in his last administration came as the president was increasingly kowtowing to agribusiness, encouraged by voracious demand for soy from China. Tension within the administration grew when Mato Grosso state's Gov. Blairo Maggi, one of the world's largest soybean producers, and others lobbied against some of the anti-deforestation measures.

Lula and Silva were also at odds over the mammoth Belo Monte Dam, a project that displaced some 40,000 people and dried up stretches of the Xingu River that Indigenous and other communities depended upon for fish. Silva opposed the project; Lula said it was necessary to meet the nation's growing energy needs and hasn't expressed any regret since, despite the plant's impact and the fact it is generating far below installed capacity.

After Silva resigned, she quit Lula's Workers' Party and became a fierce critic of him and his successor, Dilma Rousseff. Silva and Lula didn't begin to reconcile until this year's presidential campaign, finding common cause in defeating Bolsonaro, whom they deemed an environmental villain and would-be authoritarian.

Caetano Scannavino, coordinator of Health and Happiness, an Amazon nonprofit that supports sustainable projects, said Silva "grew to become someone larger than only an environment minister."

"This is important, as the challenges in the environmental area are even greater than two decades ago," Scannavino said, citing growing criminal activities in the Amazon and increasing pressure from agribusiness eager to export to China and Europe. "Silva's success is Brazil's success in the world, too. She deserves all support."

## **Pelé, Brazil's mighty king of 'beautiful game,' has died**

By TALES AZZONI and MAURICIO SAVARESE Associated Press

SAO PAULO (AP) — Pelé, the Brazilian king of soccer who won a record three World Cups and became one of the most commanding sports figures of the last century, died Thursday. He was 82.

The standard-bearer of "the beautiful game" had undergone treatment for colon cancer since 2021. The medical center where he had been hospitalized for the last month said he died of multiple organ failure as a result of the cancer.

"Pelé changed everything. He transformed football into art, entertainment," Neymar, a fellow Brazilian

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soccer star, said on Instagram. "Football and Brazil elevated their standing thanks to the King! He is gone, but his magic will endure. Pelé is eternal!"

A funeral was planned for Monday and Tuesday, with his casket to be carried through the streets of Santos, the coastal city where his storied career began, before burial.

Widely regarded as one of soccer's greatest players, Pelé spent nearly two decades enchanting fans and dazzling opponents as the game's most prolific scorer with Brazilian club Santos and the Brazil national team.

His grace, athleticism and mesmerizing moves transfixed players and fans. He orchestrated a fast, fluid style that revolutionized the sport — a samba-like flair that personified his country's elegance on the field.

He carried Brazil to soccer's heights and became a global ambassador for his sport in a journey that began on the streets of Sao Paulo state, where he would kick a sock stuffed with newspapers or rags.

In the conversation about soccer's greatest players, only the late Diego Maradona, Lionel Messi and Cristiano Ronaldo are mentioned alongside Pelé.

Different sources, counting different sets of games, list Pelé's goal totals anywhere between 650 (league matches) and 1,281 (all senior matches, some against low-level competition.)

The player who would be dubbed "The King" was introduced to the world at 17 at the 1958 World Cup in Sweden, the youngest player ever at the tournament. He was carried off the field on teammates' shoulders after scoring two goals in Brazil's 5-2 victory over the host country in the final.

Injury limited him to just two games when Brazil retained the world title in 1962, but Pelé was the emblem of his country's World Cup triumph of 1970 in Mexico. He scored in the final and set up Carlos Alberto with a nonchalant pass for the last goal in a 4-1 victory over Italy.

The image of Pelé in a bright, yellow Brazil jersey, with the No. 10 stamped on the back, remains alive with soccer fans everywhere. As does his trademark goal celebration — a leap with a right fist thrust high above his head.

Pelé's fame was such that in 1967 factions of a civil war in Nigeria agreed to a brief cease-fire so he could play an exhibition match in the country. He was knighted by Britain's Queen Elizabeth II in 1997. When he visited Washington to help popularize the game in North America, it was the U.S. president who stuck out his hand first.

"My name is Ronald Reagan, I'm the president of the United States of America," the host said to his visitor. "But you don't need to introduce yourself because everyone knows who Pelé is."

Pelé was Brazil's first modern Black national hero but rarely spoke about racism in a country where the rich and powerful tend to hail from the white minority.

Opposing fans taunted Pelé with monkey chants at home and all over the world.

"He said that he would never play if he had to stop every time he heard those chants," said Angelica Basthi, one of Pelé's biographers. "He is key for Black people's pride in Brazil, but never wanted to be a flagbearer."

Pelé's life after soccer took many forms. He was a politician -- Brazil's Extraordinary Minister for Sport -- a wealthy businessman, and an ambassador for UNESCO and the United Nations.

He had roles in movies, soap operas and even composed songs and recorded CDs of popular Brazilian music.

As his health deteriorated, his travels and appearances became less frequent. He was often seen in a wheelchair during his final years and did not attend a ceremony to unveil a statue of him representing Brazil's 1970 World Cup team. Pelé spent his 80th birthday isolated with a few family members at a beach home.

Born Edson Arantes do Nascimento, in the small city of Tres Coracoes in the interior of Minas Gerais state on Oct. 23, 1940, Pelé grew up shining shoes to buy his modest soccer gear.

Pelé's talent drew attention when he was 11, and a local professional player brought him to Santos' youth squads. It didn't take long for him to make it to the senior squad.

Despite his youth and 5-foot-8 frame, he scored against grown men with the same ease he displayed against friends back home. He debuted with the Brazilian club at 16 in 1956, and the club quickly gained worldwide recognition.



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The name Pelé came from him mispronouncing the name of a player called Bilé.

He went to the 1958 World Cup as a reserve but became a key player for his country's championship team. His first goal, in which he flicked the ball over the head of a defender and raced around him to volley it home, was voted as one of the best in World Cup history.

The 1966 World Cup in England — won by the hosts — was a bitter one for Pelé, by then already considered the world's top player. Brazil was knocked out in the group stage and Pelé, angry at the rough treatment, swore it was his last World Cup.

He changed his mind and was rejuvenated in the 1970 World Cup. In a game against England, he struck a header for a certain score, but the great goalkeeper Gordon Banks flipped the ball over the bar in an astonishing move. Pelé likened the save — one of the best in World Cup history — to a "salmon climbing up a waterfall." Later, he scored the opening goal in the final against Italy, his last World Cup match.

In all, Pelé played 114 matches with Brazil, scoring a record 95 goals, including 77 in official matches.

His run with Santos stretched over three decades until he went into semi-retirement after the 1972 season. Wealthy European clubs tried to sign him, but the Brazilian government intervened to keep him from being sold, declaring him a national treasure.

On the field, Pelé's energy, vision and imagination drove a gifted Brazilian national team with a fast, fluid style of play that exemplified "O Jogo Bonito" -- Portuguese for "The Beautiful Game." His 1977 autobiography, "My Life and the Beautiful Game," made the phrase part of soccer's lexicon.

In 1975, he joined the New York Cosmos of the North American Soccer League. Although 34 and past his prime, Pelé gave soccer a higher profile in North America. He led the Cosmos to the 1977 league title and scored 64 goals in three seasons.

Pelé ended his career on Oct. 1, 1977, in an exhibition between the Cosmos and Santos before a crowd in New Jersey of some 77,000. He played half the game with each club. Among the dignitaries on hand was perhaps the only other athlete whose renown spanned the globe — Muhammad Ali.

Pelé would endure difficult times in his personal life, especially when his son Edinho was arrested on drug-related charges. Pelé had two daughters out of wedlock and five children from his first two marriages, to Rosemeri dos Reis Cholbi and Assiria Seixas Lemos. He later married businesswoman Marcia Cibele Aoki.

## As 'The King,' Pelé enchanted fans and dazzled opponents

By TALES AZZONI and MAURICIO SAVARESE Associated Press

SAO PAULO (AP) — Pelé was simply "The King." He embraced "the beautiful game" of soccer in his 1958 World Cup debut for Brazil and never really let go.

He won a record three World Cups and was widely regarded as one of his sport's greatest players. His majestic and galvanizing presence set him among the most recognizable figures in the world.

Pelé died Thursday at 82. He had undergone treatment for colon cancer since 2021.

Pelé was among the game's most prolific scorers and spent nearly two decades enchanting fans and dazzling opponents. His grace, athleticism and moves on soccer's highest stage transfixed all. He orchestrated a fast, fluid style of play that revolutionized the sport — a flair that personified Brazilian elegance on the field.

He carried his country to soccer's heights and became a global ambassador for his sport in a journey that began on the streets of Sao Paulo state, where he would kick a sock stuffed with newspapers or rags.

"Pelé changed everything. He transformed football into art, entertainment," Neymar, a fellow Brazilian soccer player, said on Instagram. "Football and Brazil elevated their standing thanks to the King! He is gone, but his magic will endure. Pelé is eternal!"

In the conversation about soccer's greatest player, only the late Diego Maradona, Lionel Messi and Cristiano Ronaldo are mentioned alongside him.

Different sources, counting different sets of games, list Pelé's goal totals anywhere between 650 (league matches) to 1,281 (all senior matches, some against low-level competition). When Maradona once interviewed Pelé, he playfully asked the Brazilian how he accumulated so many goals.

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The player who would be dubbed "The King" was introduced to the world at 17 at the 1958 World Cup in Sweden, the youngest player ever at the tournament.

Pelé was the emblem of his country's World Cup triumph of 1970 in Mexico. He scored in the final and set up Carlos Alberto with a nonchalant pass for the last goal in a 4-1 victory over Italy.

The image of Pelé in a bright-yellow Brazil jersey, with the No. 10 stamped on the back, remains alive with soccer fans everywhere. As does his trademark goal celebration — a leap with a right fist thrust high above his head.

Pelé's fame was such that in 1967 factions of a civil war in Nigeria agreed to a brief cease-fire so he could play an exhibition match in the country. He was knighted by Britain's Queen Elizabeth II in 1997. When Pelé visited Washington to help popularize the game in North America, it was the U.S. president who stuck out his hand first.

"You don't need to introduce yourself because everyone knows who Pelé is," Ronald Reagan said.

Pelé was Brazil's first modern Black national hero but rarely spoke about racism in a country where the rich and powerful tend to hail from the white minority.

Opposing fans taunted Pelé with monkey chants at home and all over the world.

"He said that he would never play if he had to stop every time he heard those chants," said Angelica Basthi, one of Pelé's biographers. "He is key for Black people's pride in Brazil, but never wanted to be a flagbearer."

Pelé's life after soccer took many forms. He was a politician — Brazil's Extraordinary Minister for Sport — a wealthy businessman, and an ambassador for UNESCO and the United Nations.

He had roles in movies, soap operas and even composed songs and recorded CDs of popular Brazilian music.

Pelé was an ambassador for his sport until his final years but as his health deteriorated his travels and appearances became less frequent. After needing a hip replacement, he started using a cane.

He was often seen in a wheelchair during his final years and did not attend a ceremony to unveil a statue of him representing Brazil's 1970 World Cup team.

"He gets very shy, he gets very embarrassed," his son Edinho told Globoesporte.com. "He doesn't want to go out."

Pelé spent his 80th birthday with a few relatives.

Pelé spent a month hospitalized in 2021 after surgery to remove a tumor from his colon. Pelé said he was ready "to play 90 minutes, plus extra time," but soon started chemotherapy.

Born Edson Arantes do Nascimento, in the small city of Tres Coracoes in the interior of Minas Gerais state on Oct. 23, 1940, Pelé grew up shining shoes to buy his modest soccer gear. His father was also a player.

Pelé's talent drew notice when he was 11, and a local professional player brought him to Santos' youth squads. Despite his youth and 5-foot-8 frame Pelé scored against grown men with the same ease he displayed against friends back home. He debuted with the Brazilian club at 15 in 1956, and the club quickly gained worldwide recognition.

The name Pelé came from him mispronouncing the name of a player called Bilé. He later became known simply as 'O Rei' — The King.

Pelé went to the 1958 World Cup as a reserve but became a key part for his country's championship team. His first goal, in which he flicked the ball over the head of a defender and raced around him to volley it home, was voted as one of the best in World Cup history.

"When Pelé scored," veteran Swedish midfielder Sigge Parling said, "I have to be honest and say I felt like applauding."

The 1966 World Cup in England — won by the hosts — was a bitter one for Pelé, by then already considered the world's top player. Brazil was knocked out at the group stage and Pelé, angry at fouls and hard tackles by Portugal, swore it was his last World Cup.

He changed his mind and was rejuvenated in the 1970 World Cup. In a game against England, he struck a header for a certain score, but the great goalkeeper Gordon Banks flipped the ball over the bar in an

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astonishing move. Pelé likened the save — one of the best in World Cup history — to a “salmon climbing up a waterfall.” Later, he scored the opening goal in the final against Italy, his last World Cup match.

In all, Pelé played 114 matches with Brazil, scoring a record 95 goals — including 77 in official matches. Most of his goals came with Santos, which he led to five national titles, two Copa Libertadores trophies and two club world championships — all in the 1960s.

His run with Santos stretched over three decades until he went into semi-retirement after the 1972 season. Wealthy European clubs tried to sign him, but the Brazilian government intervened to keep him from being sold, declaring him a national treasure.

On the field, Pelé’s energy, vision and imagination drove a gifted Brazilian national team, with intricate passing combinations slicing defenses while leaving room for players to showcase flashy skills.

The fast, fluid style of play exemplified “O Jogo Bonito” — Portuguese for “The Beautiful Game.” And at the center of it all, like a maestro in command of his orchestra, was Pelé. It was his 1977 autobiography, “My Life and the Beautiful Game,” that made the phrase part of soccer’s lexicon.

In 1975, he joined the New York Cosmos of the North American Soccer League. Although he was past his prime at 34 years old, Pelé briefly gave soccer a higher profile in North America before ending his career on Oct. 1, 1977, in an exhibition between the Cosmos and Santos. Among the dignitaries on hand was perhaps the only other athlete whose renown spanned the globe — Muhammad Ali.

Pelé had two daughters out of wedlock and five children from his first two marriages, to Rosemeri dos Reis Cholbi and Assiria Seixas Lemos. He later married businesswoman Marcia Cibebe Aoki.

## Death toll climbs as blizzard-battered Buffalo area digs out

By CAROLYN THOMPSON and JENNIFER PELTZ Associated Press

BUFFALO, N.Y. (AP) — Roads reopened Thursday in storm-besieged Buffalo as authorities continued searching for people who may have died or are stuck and suffering after last week’s blizzard.

The driving ban in New York’s second-most-populous city was lifted just after midnight Thursday, Mayor Byron Brown announced.

At least 40 deaths in western New York, most of them in Buffalo, have been reported from the blizzard that raged across much of the country, with Buffalo in its crosshairs on Friday and Saturday.

“Significant progress has been made” on snow removal, Brown said at a news conference late Wednesday. Suburban roads, major highways and Buffalo Niagara International Airport had already reopened.

Still, Brown urged residents not to drive if they didn’t have to.

The National Guard was going door-to-door to check on people who lost power, and authorities faced the possibility of finding more victims as snow melted amid increasingly mild weather. Buffalo police and officers from other law enforcement agencies also searched for victims, sometimes using officers’ personal snowmobiles, trucks and other equipment.

Some victims have yet to be identified, Erie County Executive Mark Poloncarz said at a storm briefing Thursday.

“There are families in this community who still have not been able to identify where a loved one is, they’re missing,” he said.

With the death toll already surpassing that of the area’s notorious Blizzard of 1977 and rising daily, local officials faced questions about the response to last week’s storm. They insisted that they prepared but 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 said Wednesday.

Meanwhile, officials watched a forecast that calls for some rain later in the week as snow melts in temperatures approaching or topping 50 degrees (10 Celsius).

The National Weather Service forecast that any flooding would be minor, but state and local officials said they were preparing nonetheless. Gov. Kathy Hochul said the state was ready to deploy nearly 800,000 sandbags and more than 300 pumps and generators for flooding response efforts if needed.

During his briefing, Poloncarz apologized for publicly criticizing the city of Buffalo’s snow removal efforts

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as too slow, even “embarrassing,” a day earlier.

“We’ve been dealing with much, including the unfolding issues associated with the deaths, the identification of bodies, individuals who have not yet been identified, and new deaths that are coming in that are absolutely heartbreaking,” said Poloncarz, adding that he was trying to contact Brown to make amends. “I basically lost my focus.”

Brown had rebuffed Poloncarz’s complaints, saying Wednesday that the city had been “working diligently, working around the clock” to clear snow and strove to work cooperatively with others in government and the community.

Brown, Poloncarz and Hochul all are Democrats.

A company that estimates damage from natural disasters said insured losses from the winter storm would be \$5.4 billion across 42 states. Karen Clark & Co. said New York, Texas, Georgia, Tennessee and North Carolina sustained the most storm damage, with freezing temperatures, which can result in infrastructure disruptions and burst pipes, accounting for the vast majority of the loss.

## Sarajevo’s agony echoes as Ukraine braces for a dark winter

By BEATRICE DUPUY, RICHARD LARDNER and SABINA NIKSIC Associated Press

SARAJEVO, Bosnia-Herzegovina (AP) — Vildana Mutevelić huddled in her apartment with her two young children and elderly cousins. They had no heat, electricity or running water as artillery shells tore the roof off their building and almost took their lives.

To survive, she improvised.

Mutevelić made a lamp out of used engine oil, water and a shoelace for a wick. She cooked on a fire fueled by books, furniture, shoes or clothes. A plastic spoon, she discovered, when lit, worked well as a temporary flashlight if she ventured outside. Plastic sheets covered the blown-out windows, a flimsy buffer against the bitter cold. Her news of the world came from a neighbor who powered a radio with a car battery.

“The electricity failed right away,” Mutevelić, 70, said through a translator. “And everything we had in our freezers, it melted. Those were our stocks, basically. That’s all.”

For Mutevelić, these are memories from three decades ago, when Bosnian Serbs besieged Sarajevo, causing thousands of civilian casualties. But it’s all happening again in Ukraine. Russia’s armed forces have aimed their firepower at Ukraine’s energy infrastructure as winter weather sets in.

Ukraine President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, who has accused Russia of “energy terrorism,” said earlier this week that about 9 million people were without electricity. The country’s prosecutor general, Andriy Kostin, told The Associated Press that Russia’s deliberate targeting of Ukraine’s essential utilities is another act of genocide, the most heinous of war crimes.

“We are convinced that the crimes (Russia) is committing in Ukraine bear all the hallmarks of genocide,” Kostin said in a statement. “The aggressor state is ‘weaponizing winter,’ depriving Ukrainians of the basics — electricity, water and heating.”

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This story is part of an AP/FRONTLINE investigation that includes the War Crimes Watch Ukraine interactive experience and the documentary “Putin’s Attack on Ukraine: Documenting War Crimes” on PBS.

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To make civilians suffer and die as a way to force their government to yield isn’t a new wartime strategy. But it’s prone to failure. Families, neighbors and entire communities band together, brainstorm and resist. As Sarajevo did. And as Britain did when the island nation refused to buckle under Nazi Germany’s withering assaults 80 years ago.

“The ability of a modern population to survive under duress and under aggression because of the mere willingness to continue to exist is sometimes underestimated,” said Bruno Tertrais, adviser for geopolitics at the Institut Montaigne, a Paris-based think tank.

Ukrainians are displaying the same resolve and ingenuity. Larysa Shevtsova’s apartment in Ukraine’s



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southern city of Kherson lost its electricity and water. But gas still flowed into a stove in the cramped kitchen. With two fire-resistant bricks and advice from a family friend, she and her husband were able to keep the temperature bearable in their home without being confined to the kitchen.

They'd set a brick directly on one of the stove's four burners, the three others covered by large pots and a kettle. When the rectangular block was hot enough, it was carried carefully into the living room and set on top of a Soviet-era space heater that no longer worked. Shevtsova, her husband and two sons, one of them 3 years old, huddled around the brick for warmth that would last for about 30 minutes.

"We use this method to heat the room," Shevtsova said. "Before that we just froze."

The Associated Press and the PBS series "Frontline," drawing from a variety of sources, have independently documented more than 40 attacks by Russia on Ukraine's electrical power, heat, water and telecommunications facilities since February.

The extent of Russia's path of destruction is not limited to one region of Ukraine. From the east to west, Russia has unleashed an onslaught of drone and missile attacks meant to inflict maximum damage to Ukraine's energy infrastructure with a drastic uptick in strikes since September, according to AP's analysis of the data.

The repeated attacks have left Ukrainians accustomed to daily blackouts to prevent overloading the system as temperatures continue to drop.

"We should be clear about what Russia is doing," President Joe Biden said last week at the White House during a joint news conference with Zelenskyy. "It is purposefully attacking Ukraine's critical infrastructure, destroying the systems that provide heat and light to the Ukrainian people during the coldest, darkest part of the year."

Russia isn't slowing down its attacks on Ukraine's energy grid. On Thursday, Russian missiles damaged power stations and other critical infrastructure in the biggest wave of strikes in weeks. Ukrainian military chief Gen. Valerii Zaluzhnyi said Russia fired 69 missiles at energy facilities and Ukrainian forces shot down 54.

In a tweet, Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba called the latest barrage of missiles "senseless barbarism."

Russian President Vladimir Putin has said the attacks are a response to an Oct. 8 truck bombing of the bridge connecting Russia's mainland with the Crimean Peninsula, which Moscow annexed from Ukraine in 2014.

The World Health Organization has estimated that 2 million to 3 million Ukrainians will leave their homes this winter in search of warmth and safety.

"It is absolutely the case that terrorizing the civilian population, to break their morale, to get them to demand of their leaders that they surrender, is not a form of military necessity," said Mary Ellen O'Connell, a University of Notre Dame law professor and expert on international law. "Even if you're attacking a military objective, if the intent in doing so is to terrorize civilians then you have committed a war crime."

Since the start of Russia's invasion in February, Moscow has launched 168 missile strikes on Ukraine's energy infrastructure, with nearly 80 percent of the attacks occurring in October, November and December, according to Kostin. Ukraine's state-controlled Naftogaz oil and gas company reported earlier this month that more than 350 of its facilities and 450 kilometers (279 miles) of gas pipelines had sustained damage.

Russia made Ukraine's electrical grid its primary target "because it's the easiest way to disrupt civilization and to create humanitarian catastrophe," Volodymyr Kudrytskyi, the CEO of state-owned power grid operator NEC Ukrenergo, told the AP. Without electricity, he said, basic utilities and other critical infrastructure sectors, such as communications and health care, are crippled.

"No transmission system operator in the world ever encountered this large scale of destruction," Kudrytskyi said.

NEC Ukrenergo has described on Facebook how hundreds of its technicians and specialists are dispatched to restore power when it's knocked out by "patching what can be patched and replacing what can be replaced." But it can be at times a Sisyphean task. Russian shelling in early December cut off power in much of the newly liberated Ukrainian city of Kherson just days after it had been restored.

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Sarajevans experienced the same descent into darkness and cold in the mid-1990s when Serb forces laid siege to the Bosnian capital during the bloody breakup of Yugoslavia. Like Ukraine, Bosnia faced an existential threat from a neighboring nation that sought to control the country by carving it up.

A glaring difference between Sarajevo and Ukraine is the Western world's response.

For nearly four years, Sarajevo's roughly 350,000 residents were trapped and faced daily shelling and sniper attacks. Cut off from regular access to electricity, heat and water, they survived on limited humanitarian aid from the United Nations while drinking from wells and foraging for food.

Fearing more bloodshed and seeking a political solution, the United States and the European Community, the European Union's predecessor, backed a U.N. arms embargo on the former Yugoslavia that blocked the Bosnian government from acquiring weapons to fight back against Serb attacks.

For Ukraine, money and weapons are flowing. The United States has delivered or pledged billions of dollars in military aid, including a Patriot surface-to-air missile battery, the most powerful such weapon committed to Ukraine yet.

"Ukraine has weapons. And what we got back then was an embargo on weapons," said Mirza Mutevelić, the 38-year-old son of Vildana Mutevelić. "I perceive this as another injustice."

Lamija Polic, a retired nurse in Sarajevo, dodged bullets to get water and used a metal garbage can as a stove. Firewood was hard to come by. By the summer of 1993, most of Sarajevo's trees were gone and people were digging up tree stumps.

"So we burned everything we had: slippers, shoes, old clothes, books, you name it," Polic said. "We heated the smallest room in our flat, the kitchen, and we spent all the time there. You build a fire, but it lasts for just a few minutes and then you wait until you can no longer stand the cold to build another one. I remember that our blankets and sheets were so cold that you had a sense they were wet."

Some residents of Kherson, a city on the Dnieper River in southern Ukraine, are facing similar hardship. The city was the only regional capital that Moscow's forces seized, falling into Russian hands in the first days of the invasion, and it was occupied for nearly nine months.

As they retreated in November, Russian forces wrecked power lines and other key infrastructure, sending thousands of Kherson's newly liberated residents into the dark.

Larysa, who declined to use her last name for fear of reprisals against her family, told the AP in late November that at times she felt like she was having a nervous breakdown.

Unlike many houses that are able to use gas, Larysa's home relied solely on electricity. So when Russian soldiers damaged energy supply lines, she and her husband were left in the dark, unable to cook or take hot showers. So they ate canned mackerel, pates and porridge without meat in the dark in their freezing apartment.

About once a week, Larysa went to a friend's house that still had gas to wash her hair in warm water and eat a home-cooked meal. She and her husband wanted to buy a portable generator, but prices had spiked from about \$190 to more than \$1,600, Larysa said.

"I am tired of all of this and want my old life back," Larysa said.

In Kyiv, Ukraine's capital, Mariia Modzolevska has relied on a generator and a car battery to keep her cafe, Blukach, up and running through the almost daily power outages.

Customers still come in. They charge their mobile phones and other gadgets while drinking the cafe's coffee and eating its sweet small bites. Modzolevska, 34, devised ways to keep her shop powered. An old, recharged car battery keeps the credit card machine running. A diesel generator powers the espresso machines.

"We were making money until the first drone attack and blackouts, then income dropped by 30-plus percent," she said. "It's come back up ever since we equipped the coffee shop with power and internet. I don't know for how long we may operate in (the) future."

Tetiana Boichenko's corner apartment in Kyiv faces north. Even in November, her bedroom was cold. Heat and electricity came and went in her neighborhood, depending on whether Russian missiles hit their targets.

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Boichenko bought a small tent for \$10 and set it up on top of her bed. Inside the tent, on top of a few blankets, Boichenko was 3 to 4 degrees warmer than the temperature of her room. Boichenko said she doesn't plan to take down her tent until spring.

"I will sleep in it because it is warm," she said.

## Israel's Netanyahu back in power with hard-line government

By ISABEL DEBRE and JOSEF FEDERMAN Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — Benjamin Netanyahu on Thursday returned to power for an unprecedented sixth term as Israel's prime minister, taking the helm of the most right-wing and religiously conservative government in the country's 74-year history.

The swearing-in ceremony capped a remarkable comeback for Netanyahu, who was ousted last year after 12 consecutive years in power. But he faces numerous challenges, leading an alliance of religious and far-right parties that could cause domestic and regional turmoil and alienate Israel's closest allies.

His new government has pledged to prioritize settlement expansion in the occupied West Bank, extend massive subsidies to his ultra-Orthodox allies and push for sweeping reform of the judicial system that critics say could endanger the country's democratic institutions. The plans have sparked an uproar in Israeli society, prompting criticism from the military, LGBTQ rights groups, the business community and others, and raised concerns abroad.

In a stormy parliamentary session before his swearing in, the combative Netanyahu took aim at his critics, accusing the opposition of trying to scare the public.

"I hear the constant cries of the opposition about the end of the country and democracy," Netanyahu said from the podium. "Opposition members: to lose in elections is not the end of democracy, this is the essence of democracy."

His speech was interrupted repeatedly by boos and jeers from his opponents, who chanted "weak, weak" — an apparent reference to the numerous concessions he made to his new governing partners.

Later, Netanyahu held a brief meeting with his new Cabinet, saying his priorities would include halting Iran's nuclear program, strengthening law and order and combatting the country's high cost of living, and expanding Israel's burgeoning relations with the Arab world.

"I am emotional because of the great trust the people of Israel gave us," he told the ministers, adding that he was excited to work with the "excellent team" he has assembled. "Let's get to work."

Netanyahu is the country's longest serving prime minister, having held office for a total of 15 years, including a stint in the 1990s. After four consecutive inconclusive elections, he was ousted last year by a coalition of eight ideologically diverse parties united by little more than their opposition to his rule.

That coalition collapsed in June, and Netanyahu and his ultranationalist and ultra-Orthodox allies secured a clear parliamentary majority in November's election.

The country remains deeply divided over Netanyahu, who remains on trial for charges of fraud, breach of trust and accepting bribes in three corruption cases. He denies all charges, saying he is the victim of a witch hunt orchestrated by a hostile media, police and prosecutors.

Netanyahu now heads a government comprised of a hard-line religious ultranationalist party dominated by West Bank settlers, two ultra-Orthodox parties and his nationalist Likud party. They have endorsed a set of guidelines and coalition agreements that go far beyond the goals he outlined on Thursday and, some say, risk imperiling Israel's democratic institutions and deepening the conflict with the Palestinians.

Long a hard-liner toward the Palestinians, Netanyahu already is a strong proponent of Israel's West Bank settlements. That is only expected to be kicked into overdrive under the new government. Netanyahu has created a special ministerial post giving a firebrand settler leader widespread authority over settlement policies. The coalition's platform says that "the Jewish people have exclusive and indisputable rights" over the entirety of Israel and the Palestinian territories and promises to make settlement expansion a top priority.

That includes legalizing dozens of wildcat outposts and a commitment to annex the entire territory, a step that would snuff out any remaining hopes for Palestinian statehood and draw heavy international

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opposition.

Israel captured the West Bank in 1967 along with the Gaza Strip and east Jerusalem — territories the Palestinians seek for a future state. Israel has constructed dozens of Jewish settlements that are 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.

President Joe Biden on Thursday called Netanyahu his "friend for decades" and said he looked forward to working with him "to jointly address the many challenges and opportunities facing Israel and the Middle East region, including threats from Iran."

But, Biden warned, the U.S. will "continue to support the two state solution and to oppose policies that endanger its viability or contradict our mutual interests and values."

At home, the new government has alarmed good-governance groups with its plans to overhaul the legal system — including a proposal that would curb the power of the independent judiciary by allowing parliament to overturn Supreme Court rulings. Critics say this will destroy the country's system of checks and balances and clear the way for Netanyahu's criminal trial to be dismissed.

There are also concerns about the rollback of minority and LGBTQ rights. Members of the Religious Zionism party said they would advance an amendment to the country's anti-discrimination law that would allow businesses and doctors to discriminate against the LGBTQ community on the basis of religious faith.

Outside parliament, several thousand demonstrators waved Israeli and rainbow gay pride flags. "We don't want fascists in the Knesset!" they chanted. Crowds of LGBTQ supporters shouting "Shame!" blocked the entrance to a major intersection and highway in Tel Aviv.

Netanyahu has promised he will protect minorities and LGBTQ rights. Amir Ohana, a Netanyahu loyalist, was voted in as the first openly gay speaker of parliament on Thursday as his partner and their two children watched from the audience.

Onstage, Ohana turned to them and promised the new government would respect everyone. "This Knesset, under the leadership of this speaker, won't hurt them or any child or any other family, period," he said.

LGBTQ groups welcomed Ohana's appointment, but fear the new government is using his appointment as a smokescreen to reverse gains the community has made in recent years.

Yair Lapid, the outgoing prime minister who is now in the post of opposition leader, told parliament that he was handing the new government "a country in excellent condition, with a strong economy, with improved defensive abilities and strong deterrence, with one of the best international standings ever."

"Try not to destroy it. We'll be back soon," Lapid said.

## Time of triumph for GOP turns into 'distraction' with Santos

By FARNOUSH AMIRI and MICHAEL BALSAMO Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — It should be a time of triumph for Republicans ready to take back control of the House in the new Congress next week, but their leaders are struggling with an embarrassing distraction about one of their own: What to do about George Santos?

Weeks after winning a district that helped Republicans secure their razor-thin House majority, the congressman-elect is under investigation in New York after acknowledging he lied about his heritage, education and professional pedigree as he campaigned for office.

The top House Republican Rep. Kevin McCarthy of California, and his leadership team have kept silent about Santos, who is set to take the oath of office Tuesday, even after he publicly admitted to fabricating swaths of his biography. The now-embattled Republican has shown no signs of stepping aside, punting the decision to hold him accountable to his party and to the Congress, where he could quickly face a House ethics committee investigation once sworn into office.

Representatives for McCarthy, who is running to become the next House speaker, did not respond when asked what action he may take relating to Santos. On Tuesday, Santos was asked on Fox News about the



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"blatant lies" and responded that he had "made a mistake."

Democrats, who will be in the minority during the upcoming session, are expected to pursue several avenues against the 34-year-old Santos, including a potential complaint with the Federal Election Commission and introducing a resolution to expel him once he's a sitting member of Congress, according to a senior Democratic aide who spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss internal deliberations.

"We need answers from George Santos. He appears to be a complete and utter fraud. His whole life story is made up," the incoming House Democratic leader, Rep. Hakeem Jeffries of New York, told reporters last week. "He's gonna have to answer that question: Did you perpetrate a fraud on the voters of the 3rd Congressional District of New York?"

Questions were first raised about Santos earlier this month when The New York Times published an investigation into his resume and found a number of major discrepancies. Since then, Santos has admitted lying about having Jewish ancestry, lying about working for Wall Street banks and lying about obtaining a college degree.

Santos has yet to address other lingering questions, including the source of a personal fortune he appears to have amassed quickly despite recent financial problems, including evictions and owing thousands in back rent.

Santos in November won a seat in the Long Island area represented by Democratic Rep. Tom Suozzi, making headlines as the first non-incumbent, openly gay Republican to be elected to Congress.

If Santos assumes office, he could still face an investigation by the House ethics committee, which is responsible for reviewing allegations of misconduct by lawmakers. The committee, evenly divided between the parties, has the authority under the chamber's rules to subpoena members for testimony or documents, and lawmakers are required to comply.

Tom Rust, a committee spokesman, declined to comment this week on whether the committee can or would investigate Santos. Despite his actions occurring before joining the House, the committee has over the years held that it may investigate matters that violated laws, regulations or standards of conduct during an initial campaign for the House.

But an ethics complaint may end up being the least of Santos' problems.

Federal prosecutors in New York have started to examine Santos' background and his financial dealings, a person familiar with the matter said Thursday. The person, who cautioned the review was in its early stages, said prosecutors were specifically interested in earnings that Santos accrued and are reviewing campaign finance filings.

The person was not authorized to publicly discuss details of the ongoing review and spoke on condition of anonymity.

The district attorney in Nassau County, New York, announced on Wednesday an investigation into the fabrications Santos made while campaigning to represent the state's 3rd district, which includes some Long Island suburbs and a small part of the New York City borough of Queens.

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."

And on Thursday, the Queens County district attorney's office said it was looking into whether any laws were broken by Santos.

"We are reviewing whether Queens County has jurisdiction over any potential criminal offenses," said a spokesperson for the agency, who did not want to be named because they were speaking about an open investigation.

Rep.-elect Nick LaLota, a Republican whose district borders Santos', issued a statement Wednesday calling for an ethics investigation into the allegations. "New Yorkers deserve the truth and House Republicans deserve an opportunity to govern without this distraction."

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## Biden outpacing Trump, Obama with diverse judicial nominees

By SEUNG MIN KIM and COLLEEN LONG Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — For the Biden White House, a quartet of four female judges in Colorado encapsulates its mission when it comes to the federal judiciary.

Charlotte Sweeney is the first openly LGBT woman to serve on the federal bench west of the Mississippi River and has a background in workers' rights. Nina Wang, an immigrant from Taiwan, is the first magistrate judge in the state to be elevated to a federal district seat.

Regina Rodriguez, who is Latina and Asian American, served in a U.S. attorney's office. Veronica Rossman, who came from the former Soviet Union with her family as refugees, is the first former federal public defender to be a judge on the 10th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals.

With these four women, who were confirmed during the first two years of President Joe Biden's term, there is a breadth of personal and professional diversity that the White House and Democratic senators have promoted in their push to transform the judiciary.

"The nominations send a powerful message to the legal community that this kind of public service is open to a lot of people it wasn't open to before," Ron Klain, the White House chief of staff, told The Associated Press. "What it says to the public at large is that if you wind up in federal court for whatever reason, you're much more likely to have a judge who understands where you came from, who you are, and what you've been through."

Klain said that "having a more diverse federal bench in every single respect shows more respect for the American people."

The White House and Democratic senators are closing out the first two years of Biden's presidency having installed more federal judges than did Biden's two immediate predecessors. The rapid clip reflects a zeal to offset Donald Trump's legacy of stacking the judiciary with young conservatives who often lacked in racial diversity.

So far, 97 lifetime federal judges have been confirmed under Biden, a figure that outpaces both Trump (85) and Barack Obama (62) at this point in their presidencies, according to data from the White House and the office of Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y. The 97 from the Biden presidency includes Supreme Court Justice Ketanji Brown Jackson, that court's first Black woman, as well as 28 circuit court judges and 68 district court judges.

Three out of every four judges tapped by Biden and confirmed by the Senate in the past two years were women. About two-thirds were people of color. The Biden list includes 11 Black women to the powerful circuit courts, more than those installed under all previous presidents combined. There were also 11 former public defenders named to the circuit courts, also more than all of Biden's predecessors combined.

"It's a story of writing a new chapter for the federal judiciary, with truly extraordinary folks representing the broadest possible types of diversity," said Paige Herwig, a senior White House counsel.

The White House prioritized judicial nominations from the start, with Biden transition officials soliciting names of potential picks from Democratic senators in late 2020. Sen. Dick Durbin, D-Ill., chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee, swiftly moved nominees through hearings and Schumer set aside floor time for votes.

Particular focus was placed on nominees for the appellate courts, where the vast majority of federal cases end, and those coming from states with two Democratic senators, who could find easier consensus in a process where there's still significant deference given to home-state officials.

Democrats hope to speed up the tempo of confirmations next year, a goal more easily accomplished by a 51-49 Senate that will give them a slim majority on committees. In the past two years, votes on some of Biden's more contested judicial nominees would deadlock in committee votes, requiring more procedural steps that ate up valuable Senate floor time.

Republicans had also picked up the confirmation pace considerably in Trump's final two years in office, after GOP senators put in place a rule change — now being used by Democrats — that significantly shortened the time required to process district court nominees.

Schumer said he also hopes to install more judges in appeals courts that shifted rightward under Trump, an effort that the majority leader described as rebalancing those courts.

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"Trump loaded up the bench with hard right 'MAGA' type judges who are not only out of step with the American people, they were even out of step with the Republican Party," Schumer said in an interview, using shorthand for Trump's 2016 campaign slogan, "Make America Great Again."

Schumer added: "We had a mission, it's not just a predilection. It was a mission to try and redress that balance."

Despite their limited power to actually derail Biden's judicial picks, some Republicans have fought ferociously against many of them, arguing that their views were out of the legal mainstream despite Democratic arguments otherwise. The precarious 50-50 Senate, where Schumer's plans were often thwarted by ailments or absences, meant several Biden nominees languished for months and were never confirmed before the Senate wrapped up its work this year.

Democrats also say certain judicial nominees, particularly women of color, were unfairly targeted by their GOP critics, leading to tense fights in the Judiciary Committee.

"The Republicans have just got a problem with this. Not all of them, some do," Durbin said in an interview. "And when you call them out on it ... 'Why is it consistently women of color that are the object of your wrath?' and they can't answer."

Sen. Josh Hawley, R-Mo., a committee member, said Biden's picks were "very, very left, but unapologetically so." He said Durbin's assertions about Republicans were "absurd."

"I think the president made a commitment to his base that he was going to put people who shared a very left-wing worldview, who are generally quite critical of, for instance, the criminal justice system, think that it is systemically racist," Hawley said.

Despite the strengthened Democratic majority, the White House could nonetheless confront some challenges when it comes to nominating and confirming judges over the next two years.

For instance, Biden has made barely a dent in the number of vacancies for district court judges in states that have two Republican senators, confirming just one such person: Stephen Locher, now a judge in the Southern District of Iowa. Senators still adhere to a practice that allows home-state senators virtual veto power over district court picks — a process known colloquially as the "blue slip" — and Democrats are facing an increased push from advocates to discard the tradition, arguing that it only allows for Republican obstructionism.

For instance, Republican Sen. Ron Johnson of Wisconsin earlier this year blocked action on William Pocan, nominated to serve in the Eastern District of Wisconsin, after initially recommending him as part of a bloc of nominees to the White House. Durbin has said he would reconsider the current "blue slip" practice if he sees systematic abuse by senators, especially based on a nominee's race, gender or sexual orientation.

But cases like Pocan's have been rare, Durbin said, and other influential Republicans are affording some level of deference to the Biden White House when it comes to judges.

"I can't think of a system where Republicans get all their judges and Democrats get none of theirs," said South Carolina Sen. Lindsey Graham, who will be the top Republican on the Judiciary Committee next year. "That's not a viable system."

One matter Biden has not been willing to address: the structure of the Supreme Court.

Any push to change the highest court in the land, even in small ways, has found little footing at the White House, with Biden aides instead highlighting the president's push to nominate federal judges as the best and most substantial way to secure a Democratic legacy in the judiciary.

As Biden took office in 2021, calls for changes to the Supreme Court were growing louder, after Trump named three new justices that tilted the court's makeup far to the right.

In June, the 6-3 conservative majority overturned the landmark decision *Roe v. Wade*, eliminating the constitutional protections for abortion that had existed for nearly 50 years. It did so despite a majority of people in the United States believing abortion should be legal. In the same term, the justices also weakened gun control and curbed the Environmental Protection Agency's ability to manage climate change.

Polls have shown a dip in approval for the court and respect for it. A Gallup Poll found Americans had the lowest level of trust in the court in 50 years.

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Biden has spoken out about the rulings, and argued the court is more of an "advocacy group these days." But he has not embraced calls to expand the court or even to subject justices to a code of conduct that binds other federal judges. He has not spoken publicly about a study he commissioned on the future of the Supreme Court that finished last year and suggested term limits, mandatory retirement and judicial ethics codes as ways to restore trust in the institution.

White House officials similarly have declined to weigh in on potential changes, even as those advocating for change believe the push will grow stronger this term, as voting rights, clean water, immigration and student loan forgiveness come before the justices.

"I wouldn't, in any way minimize the progress and the importance of what President Biden is doing on the lower courts," said Chris Kang of Demand Justice, an advocacy group leading the push to expand the court. "But at the same time, we need to look at the core problem, which is the Supreme Court, and what can be done to fix the issues."

For now, the White House's focus will remain on the people who sit on the courts.

It's a particularly meaningful achievement for Biden, a former Judiciary Committee chairman himself, and for Klain, who was chief counsel for Biden on that committee and a lawyer who worked on judicial nominations in the Clinton White House.

"With all due respect to my predecessors, I'm sure this is a higher priority for me," said Klain, who meets weekly with the judicial nominations team. But, referring to Biden, Klain added: "The fact that he makes it such a priority, makes it a big priority for me."

## Russia hits key infrastructure with missiles across Ukraine

By RENATA BRITO and HANNA ARHIROVA Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Russian missiles hit Ukraine Thursday in the biggest wave of strikes in weeks, damaging power stations and other critical infrastructure during freezing winter weather.

Russia fired 69 missiles at energy facilities and Ukrainian forces shot down 54, Ukrainian military chief Gen. Valerii Zaluzhnyi said. Local officials said attacks killed at least two people around Kharkiv, Ukraine's second-largest city. The strikes also wounded at least seven people across the country, although the toll of the attacks was growing as officials assessed the day's events.

Russia dispatched explosive drones to selected regions overnight before broadening the barrage with air and sea-based missiles, the Ukrainian air force said. Air-raid sirens rang out across the country, and the military activated air-defense systems in Kyiv, the regional administration said.

Ukraine's defense ministry said the attack damaged 18 residential buildings and 10 pieces of critical infrastructure in 10 regions.

Russia has attacked Ukrainian power and water supplies almost weekly since October while its ground forces struggle to hold ground and advance. Mayor Vitali Klitschko warned of power outages in the capital, asking people to stockpile water and to charge their electronic devices.

In the southeastern Kyiv district of Bortnychi, an explosion flattened at least one house and broke the doors, roofs and windows of several others nearby.

Yana Denysenko went through broken glass inside her grandparent's home to collect personal items. Though she does not live there, she came immediately after the explosion and found her wounded mother, sister and 14-year-old niece in ambulances.

Denysenko hugged her tearful grandmother Anhelina, who was at work when the explosion happened.

"I'm scared to see all this, how many mothers are crying?" Anhelina said. "I want my children to recover."

Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba called the attacks "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 Russia attempts to seize all of the industrial Donbas region in the east.



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At the same time, Moscow has 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. The time between strikes has increased in recent weeks, though, leading some commentators to theorize Russia is trying to ration its missile supply.

The Ukrainian military has reported success in shooting down incoming Russian missiles and explosive drones in earlier attacks but many cities have gone without heat, internet and electricity for hours or days at a time.

Ukrainian Prime Minister Denys Shmyhal said a number of energy facilities were damaged during what he said was the 10th such large-scale attack on his country.

"Russia is trying to deprive Ukrainians of light before the New Year," Shmyhal wrote in a Telegram post. He said that emergency blackouts may be necessary "in some areas."

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.

Most of the southern city of Odesa and nearby areas were left without power, Odesa regional Gov. Maksym Marchenko said in a video statement on Thursday evening. Ukrainian air defense systems shot down 21 Russian missiles, he said, but some hit infrastructure.

Meanwhile, a Telegram channel affiliated with the presidential press service of Belarus said a Ukrainian S-300 air defense missile landed in Belarusian territory of Belarus early Thursday. It said the missile could have veered off course accidentally and there were no casualties.

The Belarusian Defense Ministry said later that the missile was downed by the Belarusian air defense over the western Brest region and fell into a field, according to a statement carried by the state Belta news agency.

Belarus, Russia's close ally, served as a staging ground for Russia's Feb. 24 invasion of Ukraine.

Belarus' foreign ministry summoned the Ukrainian ambassador to express "strong protest," it said, demanding that Ukraine "conduct a thorough investigation" and "hold those responsible to account."

In response, Ukraine's Defense Ministry said that Kyiv was "ready to conduct an objective investigation" of the incident and to invite "authoritative experts" from abroad to participate in it, with a caveat that these experts should come from countries that do not support Russia.

The United States said this month that it would 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."

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."

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.

A 10-point peace plan Zelensky's first presented at a November Group of 20 summit in Bali includes the full restoration of Ukraine's territorial integrity, the withdrawal of Russian troops, the release of all prisoners, a tribunal for those responsible for the aggression and security guarantees for Ukraine.

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## Vatican: Benedict XVI lucid, stable, but condition 'serious'

By NICOLE WINFIELD Associated Press

VATICAN CITY (AP) — Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI is lucid, alert and stable but his condition remains serious, the Vatican said Thursday, a day after it revealed that the 95-year-old's health had deteriorated recently.

A statement from Vatican spokesman Matteo Bruni said Pope Francis asked for continued prayers "to accompany him in these difficult hours."

On Wednesday Francis revealed that Benedict was "very ill" and went to see Benedict at his home in the Vatican where he has lived since retiring in 2013, sparking fears that he was near death.

The Vatican later said Benedict's health had deteriorated in recent hours but that the situation was under control as doctors monitored him.

Benedict in 2013 became the first pope in 600 years to resign, and he chose to live out his retirement in seclusion in a converted monastery in the Vatican Gardens. Few had expected his retirement — now in its 10th year — to last longer than his eight-year reign as pope.

Bruni said Thursday that Benedict "managed to rest well last night, is absolutely lucid and alert and today, while his condition remains grave, the situation at the moment is stable."

"Pope Francis renews the invitation to pray for him and accompany him in these difficult hours," he said.

Responding to that call, the diocese of Rome scheduled a special Mass in honor of Benedict on Friday at St. John Lateran, Benedict's former cathedral in his capacity as the bishop of Rome. The pope's vicar for Rome, Cardinal Angelo De Donatis, was to celebrate.

Word of Benedict's declining health immediately posed questions about what would happen when he dies, given the unprecedented reality of having a reigning pope presumably presiding over the funeral of a former pope.

Most Vatican experts expect any funeral would resemble that for any retired bishop of Rome, albeit with the caveat that there would be official delegations to honor a former head of state, as well as pilgrims from Germany — homeland of Benedict, the former Joseph Ratzinger — and beyond.

In Germany on Thursday, bishops asked for prayers and some of the faithful headed to the Chapel of Grace on the town square in Altoetting, a major pilgrimage destination a few miles from Benedict's hometown of Marktl am Inn that he visited many times in his life.

"I know that he has been preparing for his coming home in the eternal world," said Herbert Hofauer, the retired mayor of the deeply Catholic town who said he saw Benedict last in the spring. "I believe that he is very calmly looking forward to this encounter."

At the St. Oswald church in Marktl, where Benedict was baptized, lay head of the local congregation Sandra Maier put up a framed picture of the former pope and arranged a small pew so parishioners could kneel and pray for him.

Maier said she was "shaken and deeply moved by the news" on Benedict's health. "I wish for him to have an easy time now and not suffer so much," she said.

"We are proud here in Marktl that we have a Bavarian pope," Maier, 50, said, recalling the two times she met him personally. "He's a good man and was a great pope."

While St. Peter's Square in the Vatican was mostly filled with visitors from abroad on Thursday — during peak Christmas tourist season — some Italians were out to pay their respects or at least offer a prayer.

"Obviously it is a bad situation, we are all close to Pope Ratzinger, we are sad about the situation, so we came here to make our small contribution," said one pilgrim, Giorgio Gibin.

Another visitor to the square, Anna Małcka, noted Benedict's advanced age and wished him well.

"I think by now he has lived about long enough, poor thing, and since he is sick, he is not well, if God wishes, he will take him away," she said.

Otherwise, while the Vatican newspaper L'Osservatore Romano headlined its Thursday editions with news of Benedict's health, life continued as normal in the tiny city-state that Benedict and Pope Francis call home.

Francis had a seemingly routine day of audiences Thursday, meeting with his ambassador to Madagascar,

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the commander of the Swiss Guards and a fellow Jesuit.

In the square, the line of tourists waiting to get into St. Peter's Basilica wrapped almost entirely around the piazza, with couples and families stopping to pose for selfies in front of the life-sized Nativity scene and Christmas tree set up in the square.

Small groups of nuns hurried across the cobblestones and tour guides holding flags herded their charges, while nearby souvenir sellers did brisk business hawking Vatican magnets, rosaries and bobblehead Francis statues.

"We hadn't heard the news," said Liam Marchesano, a 22-year-old economics student from Mantova who was waiting to see the basilica with his girlfriend. "Maybe that's why there's such a long line."

## Jan. 6 panel drops Trump subpoena as it wraps up work

By MARY CLARE JALONICK and ERIC TUCKER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The House Jan. 6 committee has dropped its subpoena against former President Donald Trump as it wraps up work and prepares to dissolve next week.

Mississippi Rep. Bennie Thompson, the committee's Democratic chairman, wrote in a letter to Trump lawyer David Warrington on Wednesday that he is formally withdrawing the subpoena.

"As you may know, the Select Committee has concluded its hearings, released its final report and will very soon reach its end," Thompson wrote. "In light of the imminent end of our investigation, the Select Committee can no longer pursue the specific information covered by the subpoena."

The committee had voted to subpoena Trump during its final televised hearing before the midterm elections in October, demanding testimony and documents from the former president as it has investigated his role in the Jan. 6, 2021 Capitol insurrection and efforts to overturn his 2020 defeat.

Lawmakers on the panel have acknowledged the subpoena would be difficult to enforce, especially as Republicans are poised to take over the House in January. But the move had political and symbolic value.

"We are obligated to seek answers directly from the man who set this all in motion," Wyoming Rep. Liz Cheney, the panel's vice chairwoman and one of two Republicans on the nine-member committee, said at the time. "And every American is entitled to those answers."

Trump then sued the panel in November to avoid cooperating. The lawsuit contended that while former presidents have voluntarily agreed to provide testimony or documents in response to congressional subpoenas in the past, "no president or former president has ever been compelled to do so."

The committee's request for documents was sweeping, including personal communications between Trump and members of Congress as well as extremist groups. Trump's attorneys said it was overly broad and framed it as an infringement of his First Amendment rights.

While the panel never gained Trump's testimony, the committee interviewed more than 1,000 witnesses, including most of his closest White House aides and allies. Many of those witnesses provided substantive detail about his efforts to sway state legislators, federal officials and lawmakers to help him overturn his defeat. And White House aides who were with him on Jan. 6 told the panel about his resistance to tell the violent mob of his supporters to leave the Capitol after they had broken in and interrupted the certification of President Joe Biden's victory.

In its final report issued last week, the committee concluded that Trump engaged in a "multi-part conspiracy" to upend the 2020 election and failed to act on the violence. The panel also recommended that the Justice Department investigate the former president for four separate crimes, including aiding an insurrection.

On social media Wednesday evening, Trump and his lawyers construed the move as a victory. "They probably did so because they knew I did nothing wrong, or they were about to lose in Court," Trump wrote on his social media site. He called the panel "political Thugs."

On Twitter, Trump lawyer Harmeet Dhillon said the panel had "waved the white flag."

## Prayers for ailing Benedict in retired pope's native Bavaria

By KIRSTEN GRIESHABER and GEIR MOULSON Associated Press

MARKTL AM INN, Germany (AP) — People in Pope Benedict XVI's Bavarian homeland prayed Thursday for the retired pontiff, a favorite son of the region even 40 years after he left Germany for the Vatican and nearly a decade after his resignation stunned the world.

At the St. Oswald church in the small town of Marktl am Inn, where a future pope named Joseph Ratzinger was baptized more than 95 years ago, Sandra Maier, the lay head of the local congregation, put up a framed picture of Benedict, lit a red candle and arranged a small pew so parishioners could kneel and pray for him.

Maier, who was also baptized at the church, said she was "shaken and deeply moved by the news" from the Vatican on Wednesday that Benedict's health had deteriorated. "I wish for him to have an easy time now and not suffer so much," she said.

"We are proud here in Marktl that we have a Bavarian pope," Maier, 50, said, recalling the two times she met him personally. "He's a good man and was a great pope."

The German Catholic Church's leadership called for prayers for Benedict after the Vatican's announcement. "Pope Benedict XVI has prayed for us these many years; now let us pray for him," said Bishop Rudolf Voderholzer of Regensburg, a city where Ratzinger taught at the university in the 1970s.

Bishop Stefan Oster of Passau, the diocese where Marktl is located, said Benedict was alert but physically very weak when he saw him in November. "If he is now getting even weaker, it is easy to imagine that he is on the last stretch of his earthly way," Oster said. "Please all accompany him in prayers."

The Vatican said Thursday that Benedict was lucid, conscious and stable but his condition "remains grave."

In Altoetting, a major pilgrimage destination a few miles from Marktl that he visited many times in his life, including as pope in 2006, some locals headed to the Chapel of Grace on the town square to pray for Benedict.

Herbert Hofauer, the retired mayor of the deeply Catholic town, has known the pope emeritus for 40 years. He said he last saw Benedict during a private spring visit in Rome, but news of his worsening health "still came as a surprise."

"I know that he has been preparing for his coming home in the eternal world," Hofauer, 66, told The Associated Press. "He has been preparing for a long time for the meeting with the eternal judge ... and I believe that he is very calmly looking forward to this encounter."

Hofauer, who was mayor of Altoetting from 1995 to 2020, lauded Benedict for never forgetting his Bavarian roots. The future pope made many pilgrimages to the town starting when he was a child, coming with his parents to pray to the wooden statue of the Virgin Mary in the Chapel of Grace, Hofauer said.

Benedict's presence looms large in Altoetting. A life-sized golden statue of the retired pontiff was erected on the market square in 2016. Tourist stores sell little clay figures of him, and his image hangs in the town's churches.

Ingrid Simmel, who was on a day trip to buy a wood-carved sculpture of Jesus Christ as a newborn in his crib, said she was worried but not surprised about the retired pope's worsening health.

"He's very old and has been ill for a long time," said Simmel, 81, who came to Altoetting from a town across the nearby Austrian border. "I will include him in my prayers here and wish him that he will go to heaven — where we all want to go eventually."

While Benedict has a place in the heart of this very Catholic corner of Bavaria and there was national pride in a German pope, he has long drawn mixed reviews in Germany as a whole — a country where Christians are roughly evenly split between Catholics and Protestants and where many didn't appreciate his conservative approach.

Years after he resigned as pope in 2013, deep divisions are apparent in the German church between relative liberals and traditionalists in Benedict's mold as bishops and lay representatives engage in a potentially trailblazing reform process that has drawn suspicion from the Vatican.

The process was launched in response to the child sex abuse scandal that has rocked the church in Germany and elsewhere in recent years, contributing to large numbers of Germans formally leaving the



church. In January, a report on decades of abuse cases commissioned by the Munich diocese, where Benedict was archbishop from 1977 to 1982, faulted the then-Cardinal Ratzinger's handling of four cases.

Benedict, who turned around the church's approach to clergy sexual abuse in his time at the Vatican, asked forgiveness for any "grievous faults" in his handling of cases but denied any personal or specific wrongdoing.

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

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, 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."

Italy's health minister told the Senate that sequencing indicates that the variants detected in passengers arriving from China are already in circulation in Europe. "This is the most important and reassuring news," Orazio Schillaci said.

That squares with what the European Union's executive branch has said. The EU refrained Thursday from immediately following member Italy in requiring tests for visitors from China, but is assessing the situation.

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.

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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.

## **'Not just the ramp.' Worship spaces need more accessibility**

By HOLLY MEYER The Associated Press

NASHVILLE, Tennessee (AP) — Jerry Lamb could not maneuver his wheelchair into the rows of pews at his church. It wouldn't fit. Nor could he sit in the aisles without awkwardly blocking the way.

So he adapted. It's a regular part of his new life with limited mobility that requires near-constant calculations of how to navigate a world no longer set up for him. That included his longtime church in Camden, Tennessee — one of the many U.S. houses of worship with accessibility limitations.

Instead, on Sundays, he worshipped in the narthex at the back of Camden First United Methodist Church, separated from the rest of the congregation, with his family at his side in folding chairs. It didn't really bother Lamb, 66, who "was already over it," having struggled to walk since 2019 due to a worsening spine condition.

But it bothered the Rev. Adam Kelchner, the new pastor: "I was preaching one Sunday and was rather distraught that one of our families literally could not be in the same worship space just because we didn't have a seating arrangement that made sense."

So Kelchner made one that did. He secured trustees' approval and hired a company to cut up a few pews, making space for Lamb -- and anyone else using a wheelchair or walker -- to worship alongside the rest of the congregation.

"It blew us out of the water," said Lamb.

Except as employers, religious entities are exempt from the Americans with Disabilities Act, the 32-year-old landmark civil rights law that included access requirements for public spaces. Nonetheless, most have made their buildings accessible in some fashion.

But there is much room for improvement, said Scott Thumma, a sociology of religion professor and director of the Hartford Institute for Religion Research.

Thumma also co-leads Faith Communities Today, a research project that surveyed more than 15,000 U.S. religious congregations for its 2020 report and found that 76% have wheelchair access. Thirty percent offer large-print worship materials and about the same portion have hearing assistive devices.

"That's not terrible. But then when you start to ask the questions of how are they accommodating all the other challenges and disabilities? ...Then it just almost drops off," Thumma said. "They don't make the full accommodations to allow all of their people to actually worship to their fullest in the service."

The pandemic and the sweeping rise of online worship that followed was a catalyst for a more expansive

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understanding of what it really means to be an accessible church, said the Rev. Kelly Colwell, who leads digital and hybrid ministry at First Congregational Church of Berkeley, United Church of Christ, in California.

She had an eye-opening virtual coffee chat early in the pandemic. A congregant with multiple sclerosis explained how her online event-packed calendar finally allowed her to participate in ways her physical condition wouldn't otherwise permit. It made Colwell realize the church had been excluding people with accessibility challenges all along.

Today, Colwell continues to assess whether the church is physically accessible to all congregants on an equal basis. Now she also considers how to make the online and hybrid experience meaningful.

"We're not providing a sort of separate and unequal service for people who can't come in person," Colwell said.

Maria Town, the American Association of People with Disabilities' president and CEO, has seen progress. She pointed to congregations adding inclusion events and playgrounds for all as well as an activist-created, easy-to-read Quran translation for those with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

"It's slow, but I do think more and more entities are beginning to realize that this is a need, and I also hope that more and more people with disabilities are actually saying, 'We deserve to be here,'" Town said.

Omer Zaman, a Muslim wheelchair user near Chicago, is one of the disabled faithful pushing for acceptance and accessibility. He focuses on inclusion at mosques as a volunteer and board member with MUHSEN, a nonprofit advocating for accommodations and understanding of disabilities in the Muslim community.

"Individuals with special needs can be on a board. They can contribute. They can give you a perspective," said Zaman, 37, who has muscular dystrophy. "We are not defined by our special needs. It's just a part of who we are ... but there's more to us than that."

MUHSEN recognizes mosques making progress through its tiered masjid certification. To earn it, they must meet requirements like having disability awareness events, support groups, specialized childcare, braille Qurans and ramps.

"It's not just the ramp," said Jerry Lamb, who has confronted accessibility problems in many types of venues.

Lamb wants to invite policymakers to what he thinks would be an eye-opening outing in wheelchairs. They would experience firsthand just how hard it is to do basic activities, like using public bathrooms and finding restaurants with enough space between tables for a wheelchair, he said.

His family also sacrificed what they thought was their forever home to move into a fully accessible house. They skipped church for awhile, juggling the pandemic, Lamb's health problems, and taking on new duties as foster parents.

"It wasn't even the fact that church didn't have a place for him in the chair. It was difficult for us. We were just learning this new kind of lifestyle," said his wife, Laura Lamb, who was grateful their fellow congregants checked in on them.

Dignity is needed in accessibility as well, said Amy Asin, the Union for Reform Judaism's vice president of congregational engagement and leadership experiences.

Anybody who's "had to go through the kitchen to get to the sanctuary has experienced what congregations need to do," Asin said. "Some of it is about getting around... some of it is about making sure that path has dignity."

Accessibility shouldn't be treated as only a disability community issue either, she said.

"If we've had the blessing of living long enough, we will all be disabled. This is not about them. This is about all of us," Asin said.

Accessibility updates can be pricey, but so can a congregation's other needs, Asin said. These projects also can go through the annual budget process, knowing that some years, replacing a leaky roof or other critical need will take precedence.

Sometimes financial help is available. Asin said donors may be interested in funding a particular accessibility project.

ENCORE Ministry provides grants for congregations making accommodations for older members in the Tennessee-Western Kentucky Conference of the United Methodist Church, said executive director Kent

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McNish. Of the conference's roughly 1,000 congregations, more than 60% of congregants are 60 and older, he said: "Most churches see that as a given and they don't do anything for their senior adults."

ENCORE is trying to change that with training and resources. As examples, they have funded sound systems that make worship easier to hear and screens that are more readable than hymnals.

At Camden First, the sanctuary layout now sends an important message. "This is a place where we have thoughtfully made decisions to invite folks in" that need mobility assistance, Kelchner said.

The Lambs rejoined the congregation in the sanctuary this fall. It just so happened that a newly-halved pew was near what once was their usual Sunday seat before everything changed. Jerry Lamb said, "It felt like coming home."

## Applications for US unemployment aid rose slightly last week

By CHRISTOPHER RUGABER AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — The number of people seeking unemployment benefits rose only slightly last week with the labor market remaining strong despite the Federal Reserve's efforts to cool the economy and hiring.

Applications for unemployment aid for the week ending Dec. 24 climbed 9,000 to 225,000, the Labor Department reported Thursday. The four-week average of applications, which smooths out some of the week-to-week swings, slipped just 250 to 221,000.

Unemployment benefit applications are a proxy for layoffs, and are being closely monitored by economists as the Fed has rapidly raised interest rates in an effort to slow job growth and inflation. Should the Fed's rate hikes cause a recession, as many economists fear, a jump in layoffs and unemployment claims would be an early sign.

So far, the level of jobless claims remains quite low, evidence that Americans are enjoying a high degree of job security. In the coming weeks, thousands of workers with temporary jobs during the winter holidays will lose work and apply for jobless aid. The government seeks to seasonally adjust the data to account for those job losses, but the adjustments are not always perfect and the layoff of temporary workers could distort the data.

The Fed is seeking to slow job growth and the pace of wage increases as part of its efforts to battle inflation. The central bank has hiked rates seven times this year, which has made it more expensive for consumers to take out mortgage and auto loans, and raised borrowing rates for credit cards.

So far, the interest rate increases have pushed mortgage rates above 6%, essentially double what they were before the Fed began tightening credit. Higher mortgage rates have hammered the housing market, with sales of existing homes falling for 10 straight months.

Yet so far there has been only a limited impact on hiring. Employers added 263,000 jobs in November, a healthy gain, and the unemployment rate stayed at a low 3.7%.

## Christmas tree recycling is a good alternative to landfills

By JOHN RABY Associated Press

Taking down the Christmas tree is only one task after the holiday season. For those with a real tree, figuring out what to do with it can be as easy as placing it by the curb.

In most states, it can be the gift that keeps on giving.

Discarded Christmas trees can be picked up curbside for recycling through regular trash-collection services in various cities. The trees are often shredded for use as compost or mulch that is offered back to residents and non-profit groups free of charge for gardening and landscaping.

In many states, natural resources workers collect whole trees at predetermined drop-off points to be placed in lakes and waterways as fish habitat.

In parts of Louisiana, for example, Christmas trees are used to shore up coastal areas hit by erosion and to rebuild wetlands. In Jefferson Parish alone, about 5,000 trees are collected each year for such efforts.

Some zoos, including petting zoos, accept chemical- and ornament-free Christmas trees to feed to some animals, such as goats, pigs and elephants, and for sensory and entertainment purposes for others, like



kangaroos, lions, camels and rhinos.

Or, there's no place like home. Discarded trees can get their final resting place in a corner of the backyard as a shelter and feeding area for birds.

Be sure to remove the ornaments, lights and tinsel. Placing a tarp around the tree before taking it back outside will spare frustration in having to vacuum up the pine needles afterward.

Some websites offer a way to search for local tree recycling programs. Home Depot stores in select areas also hold tree collection events.

But don't wait too long after Christmas because dried-out trees can be fire hazards. It's also dangerous to try to use a fireplace or wood stove to burn parts of the tree because the oils in them could cause chimney fires.

Perhaps the worst place to send discarded live Christmas trees is a landfill because materials buried there break down into the greenhouse gas methane, considered more harmful than carbon dioxide.

## **Maria Bakalova wants to make you feel something**

By KRYSTA FAURIA Associated Press

LOS ANGELES (AP) — When it comes to acting, Maria Bakalova considers herself to be a person of extremes.

"Cinema is supposed to be provoking. It's not supposed to be, I think, something that is somewhere in the middle," the Oscar-nominated actor said in a recent interview with The Associated Press.

If a movie doesn't make you feel something, she said, "what was really the point?"

Bakalova both stars in her latest project, "The Honeymoon," and worked as a producer, something she said she hopes to do more of in the future.

"The more I grow up, the more I want to spend time behind the camera," she said, citing a need for more women to direct and write.

"The Honeymoon," now available to rent on streaming, is a comedy replete with extremes.

The drug-and-toilet-humor-filled comedy may seem like a long way off from her initial dream of acting in the kinds of films made in the avant-garde Dogme 95 movement, led by Lars von Trier and Thomas Vinterberg. The Bulgarian actress was so captivated by Danish cinema that she convinced her parents to take her to Copenhagen in an effort to get whatever job she could at von Trier's production company.

But she realized different genres can achieve similar ends after her breakout role in "Borat Subsequent Moviefilm," a project she praised for its ability to effect change.

"It's a social experiment that can show people's true colors. And at the end of the day, that should be the most important part because art can influence people," she said.

Although her role in "Borat" opened her up to the potential and importance of a variety of genres, Bakalova said she still believes actors should be discerning about what parts they accept.

"Don't be too picky," she cautioned, but said actors have a responsibility to select roles that are "worthy of your attention and people's attention because you're not doing this art just for yourself." She believes the secret to longevity in Hollywood is to never settle into one genre or character.

When she thinks back on her time making "Borat," Bakalova said the infamous hotel room scene with Rudy Giuliani felt like the most precarious of Sacha Baron Cohen's antics, calling it a "scary situation."

"I absolutely had no way to communicate with Sacha," she recalled. "I didn't know what was going to happen."

Bakalova, who had never acted in an English-language film prior to "Borat," had a busy year in 2022. In addition to "The Honeymoon," she starred in "Bodies Bodies Bodies" and Judd Apatow's "The Bubble." She will make her Marvel debut in 2023 with "Guardians of the Galaxy Vol. 3."

Aside from acting, one of Bakalova's goals at some point is to meet fellow flutist Lizzo.

"If I just ever have a chance to be next to her, at least look at her, that's going to be the best day of my life," she said.

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## The AP names its nine Breakthrough Entertainers of 2022

By The Associated Press undefined

They worked hard, with the rewards coming slowly but surely. Then something came along — often a key role or sometimes a cluster, maybe an album — and it all became next-level, a shift triggering where-did-you-come-from vibes.

That describes most of this year's nine Associated Press' Breakthrough Entertainers of the Year, a class of talent that flowered in 2022. They are Sadie Sink, Stephanie Hsu, Tenoch Huerta, Joaquina Kalukango, Iman Vellani, Daryl McCormack, Tobe Nwigwe, Simone Ashley and Danielle Deadwyler.

Sink had been on Broadway and worked alongside stars such as Naomi Watts and Helen Mirren. But playing Max Mayfield in the fourth season of "Stranger Things," she broke through as a brave skater girl who never lets go of her Walkman, who hates pink, plays video games and is a "Dragon's Lair" champion.

Hsu also was a Broadway veteran with a few TV credits when she was asked to play both a sullen teen and an intergalactic supervillain in the movie "Everything Everywhere All at Once." That led to an unforgettable performance that included dressing as Elvis and walking a pig on a leash.

Like many of the others on the list, Kalukango had racked up plenty of Broadway credits when she took a risk and played the lead in a Broadway musical, "Paradise Square." It led to a best actress in a leading role Tony Award and a stunning moment in the telecast when she sang "Let It Burn."

"Black Panther: Wakanda Forever" isn't one of Huerta's biggest roles but the Mexican actor suddenly launched a hundred memes as the mutant leader of a kingdom based on Mayan and Aztec influences beneath the ocean for centuries. Huerta, known for roles in the Netflix series "Narcos: Mexico" and the movie "The Forever Purge," has taken a big step for movie diversity.

Nwigwe, just nominated for a Grammy as best new artist, has been bubbling up with noted appearances on NPR's Tiny Desk Concert series and earning a spot on Michelle Obama's 2020 workout playlist with "I'm Dope." This year, the Houston-based artist was featured on the "Black Panther: Wakanda Forever" soundtrack and dropped the EP "moMINTs" to acclaim.

McCormack has worked consistently since 2018 but 2022 seems to have turned into something special with a constellation of roles — "Peaky Blinders," the buzzy, dark comedy thriller "Bad Sisters," plus a star-making performance as the title character in the film "Good Luck to You, Leo Grande" opposite Emma Thompson.

Ashley, a British actress of Indian heritage with a Tamil background, found herself leading season two of the Regency-era period drama "Bridgerton." She had a role in the series "Sex Education," but playing the fiercely independent Kate Sharma for Shonda Rhimes was her first lead character in a major production.

Deadwyler burst into the awards race this year with her performance in "Till" as Mamie Till-Mobley, the mother of teenager Emmett Till, who was lynched in 1955. She has also appeared in "The Harder They Come," "Watchmen" and the Netflix series "From Scratch" and "Station Eleven."

Vellani, another member of the Marvel Cinematic Universe on this list, is the exception, having had no such slow burn. The 19-year-old actor in "Ms. Marvel" plays a high school student enamored with all things superheroes only to find herself suddenly wielding powers of her own. And Vellani, in real life, is just starting to find her powers, like all the entertainers nominated here.

## Today in History: December 30, fire killed 600 in Chicago

By The Associated Press undefined

Today is Friday, Dec. 30, the 364th day of 2022. There is one day left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On Dec. 30, 1903, about 600 people died when fire broke out at the recently opened Iroquois Theater in Chicago.

In 1813, British troops burned Buffalo, New York, during the War of 1812.

In 1853, the United States and Mexico signed a treaty under which the U.S. agreed to buy some 45,000 square miles of land from Mexico for \$10 million in a deal known as the Gadsden Purchase.

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In 1860, 10 days after South Carolina seceded from the Union, the state militia seized the United States Arsenal in Charleston.

In 1922, Vladimir Lenin proclaimed the establishment of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, which lasted nearly seven decades before dissolving in December 1991.

In 1954, Olympic gold medal runner Malvin G. Whitfield became the first Black recipient of the James E. Sullivan Award for amateur athletes.

In 1972, the United States halted its heavy bombing of North Vietnam.

In 1994, a gunman walked into a pair of suburban Boston abortion clinics and opened fire, killing two employees. (John C. Salvi III was later convicted of murder; he died in prison, an apparent suicide.)

In 2004, a fire broke out during a rock concert at a nightclub in Buenos Aires, Argentina, killing 194 people.

In 2006, a state funeral service was held in the U.S. Capitol Rotunda for former President Gerald R. Ford.

In 2009, seven CIA employees and a Jordanian intelligence officer were killed by a suicide bomber at a U.S. base in Khost (hohst), Afghanistan.

In 2015, Bill Cosby was charged with drugging and sexually assaulting a woman at his suburban Philadelphia home in 2004. (Cosby's first trial ended in a mistrial after jurors deadlocked; he was convicted on three charges at his retrial in April 2018 and was sentenced to three to 10 years in prison, but the Pennsylvania Supreme Court overturned the conviction in June 2021 and Cosby went free.)

In 2020, Republican Sen. Josh Hawley of Missouri said he would raise objections when Congress met to affirm President-elect Joe Biden's victory, forcing House and Senate votes. President Donald Trump asked the Supreme Court to overturn his election loss in Wisconsin; it was his second unsuccessful appeal in as many days to the high court over the result in the battleground state. Dawn Wells, who played the wholesome Mary Ann on the 1960s sitcom "Gilligan's Island," died in Los Angeles at age 82 from what her publicist said were causes related to COVID-19.

Ten years ago: Recalling the shooting rampage that killed 20 first graders in Connecticut as the worst day of his presidency, President Barack Obama pledged on NBC's "Meet the Press" to put his "full weight" behind legislation aimed at preventing gun violence. A tour bus crashed on an icy Oregon highway, killing nine passengers and injuring nearly 40 on Interstate 84 east of Pendleton.

Five years ago: A wave of spontaneous protests over Iran's weak economy swept into Tehran, with college students and others chanting against the government. Forecasters issued winter weather advisories across much of the Deep South ahead of plunging temperatures expected as the new year arrived.

One year ago: In a phone conversation lasting nearly an hour, President Joe Biden warned Russia's Vladimir Putin that the U.S. could impose new sanctions against Russia if it took further military action against Ukraine; Putin responded that such a U.S. move could lead to a complete rupture of ties between the nations. A wildfire driven by wind gusts up to 105 mph swept through towns northwest of Denver, destroying hundreds of homes and forcing tens of thousands of people to flee. (The wildfire would cause more than \$2 billion in losses, making it the costliest in state history; it was blamed for at least one death.)

Today's Birthdays: Actor Russ Tamblyn is 88. Baseball Hall of Famer Sandy Koufax is 87. Folk singer Noel Paul Stookey is 85. TV director James Burrows is 82. Actor Concetta Tomei (toh-MAY') is 77. Singer Patti Smith is 76. Rock singer-musician Jeff Lynne is 75. TV personality Meredith Vieira is 69. Actor Sheryl Lee Ralph is 67. Actor Patricia Kalember is 66. Country singer Suzy Bogguss is 66. Actor-comedian Tracey Ullman is 63. Radio-TV commentator Sean Hannity is 61. Sprinter Ben Johnson is 61. Former Secretary of State Mike Pompeo is 59. Actor George Newbern is 59. Movie director Bennett Miller is 56. Singer Jay Kay (Jamiroquai) is 53. Rock musician Byron McMackin (Pennywise) is 53. Actor Meredith Monroe is 53. Actor Daniel Sunjata is 51. Actor Maureen Flannigan is 50. Actor Jason Behr is 49. Golfer Tiger Woods is 47. TV personality-boxer Laila Ali is 45. Actor Lucy Punch is 45. Singer-actor Tyrese Gibson is 44. Actor Eliza Dushku is 42. Rock musician Tim Lopez (Plain White T's) is 42. Actor Kristin Kreuk is 40. Folk-rock singer-musician Wesley Schultz (The Lumineers) is 40. NBA star LeBron James is 38. R&B singer Andra Day is 38. Actor Anna Wood is 37. Pop-rock singer Ellie Goulding (GOL'-ding) is 36. Actor Caity Lotz is 36. Actor Jeff Ward is 36. Country musician Eric Steedly is 32. Pop-rock musician Jamie Follesé (FAHL'-es-ay) (Hot Chelle (shel) Rae) is 31.