

# Groton Daily Independent

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"Never underestimate the power you have to take your life in a new direction."

GERMANY KENT

## Groton Community Calendar

### 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.

### Wednesday, Jan. 4

Senior Menu: Chicken breast, rice pilaf, broccoli, pineapple strawberry, ambrosia, whole wheat bread.

School Breakfast: Eggs and breakfast potatoes.

School Lunch: Cheese nachos.

Chamber Board Meeting, noon, at City Hall

Emmanuel: Sarah Circle, 5 p.m.; No Confirmation.

United Methodist: Community Coffee Hour, 9:30 a.m.; Confirmation, 4 p.m.

Groton CM&A: Kids' Club, Youth Group and Adult Bible Study begins at 7 pm

### Thursday, Jan. 5

Senior Menu: Tater tot hot dish, green beans, grape juice, apple crisp, whole wheat bread.

School Breakfast: Stuffed bagels.

School Lunch: Chicken sandwich, fries.

Girls Basketball hosts Clark/Willow Lake: C game at 5 p.m. followed by JV and Varsity.

Emmanuel: Nigeria Circle, 2 p.m.

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

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

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**Happy New Year!**  
Thanks for your support in 2022.

It makes it possible for us to support many activities.

## **Groton American Legion Post #39**

Lounge: 605-397-2603 ~ Downtown Groton

Three adorable puppies are shown from the chest up, wearing colorful party hats (green, red, and orange). They are positioned behind a white banner. The background is white with a shower of colorful confetti.

Happy New Year  
**2023**



1503 N Broadway  
Groton ~ 605-397-8145

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## Weekly Vikings Recap - Week 17

By Jack & Duane Kolsrud

With a chance to play for the 1 seed in week 18, the Minnesota Vikings lay an absolute egg against the Green Bay Packers, losing 41-17, and falling to 12-4 on the season. With the 49ers' win today, the Vikings currently sit as the 3 seed in the NFC playoffs. For how crazy this Vikings' season has been, the Vikings have been surprisingly very consistent this year. The team either wins a highly-intense close game or gets blown out embarrassingly.

There was probably only one highlight for the Vikings on Sunday and it came on a blocked punt by Josh Metellus early in the first quarter. Even though the Vikings' offense would get the ball at the Packers' one-yard line because of that blocked punt, they were unable to score a touchdown and had to settle for a field goal to give the Vikings a 3-0 lead. On the following kickoff, the Packers would return the kick for a touchdown and the Vikings would never have a lead again in this game.

The Vikings' offense looked horrible on Sunday at nearly every facet of the game. Kirk Cousins had three interceptions, one of which was returned for a touchdown, and a fumble lost. Justin Jefferson struggled to get open as he kept slipping on the grass at Lambeau Field. Jefferson, who ended the game with only one catch, was visibly frustrated the entire game as the Packers' defense doubled him at any chance they could get. And lastly, the running game never got going as Alexander Mattison finished the game as the Vikings' leading rusher with only 38 yards rushing. Before the final drive, Cousins was surprisingly the Vikings' leading rusher for the Vikings in the game.

To make matters worse, the Vikings played almost the entire game down two of its offensive linemen. Austin Schlottmann, who has been filling in for Garrett Bradbury over the past few weeks, got hurt on the opening drive of the game for the Vikings. Because of it, the Vikings had to use backup guard, Chris Reed, as the center for the rest of the game. Reed's lack of experience showed as the Vikings' committed multiple false starts because of him. Also, Brian O'Neill got hurt early in the game as well, which caused the Vikings to play three quarters with only six healthy offensive linemen. If O'Neill is unable to go the rest of the season, that will be a huge blow for the Vikings as O'Neill and Darrisaw have been the best offensive tackle pairing in the NFL this year.

With the Vikings' loss and the 1 seed out of contention, the question now for the Vikings becomes whether they will rest their starters next week against the Chicago Bears. They are currently down multiple offensive linemen to injuries and have an old defense that looks like they could use a "bye week." Also, the Bears currently hold the #2 overall pick in the draft based on their record and a win would likely ruin their draft position. Because of that, it might be a game where both teams go into with no desire to go all out for a victory in any way.



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## Wolves Women Fall to Huskies in NSIC North Road Contest

St. Cloud, Minn. – After a closely contested first half Northern State was unable to keep pace with St. Cloud State in the second half, losing the New Year's Day game by a score of 74-53. The Wolves were able to take a 5-point lead mid-way through the second quarter thanks to a 14-2 scoring run, however the Huskies perimeter offense proved too strong as they knocked down 13 3-pointers in the game on 56.5 percent shooting from beyond the arc.

### THE QUICK DETAILS

Final Score: NSU 53, SCSU 74

Records: NSU 7-6 (2-5 NSIC), SCSU 9-3 (6-2 NSIC)

Attendance: 375

### HOW IT HAPPENED

St. Cloud State opened the game on a 12-5 run before Laurie Rogers converted a 3-point play after getting fouled on a layup to spark a 10-2 Northern State scoring run, Rogers scored seven of Northern's final ten points of the period

After three minutes of scoreless play to start the second quarter Kailee Oliverson knocked down a pair of free throws and Madelyn Bragg made a layup to extend the Wolves scoring run to 14-2, giving NSU their largest lead of the game at 19-14

The Wolves held the Huskies to 0-4 shooting from the field with a pair of turnovers before scoring their first points of the second period at the 5:33 mark with a 3-pointer by Dru Henning

SCSU out-scored NSU 18-8 in the final five and a half minutes of the first half, knocking down four three pointers

St. Cloud State held a 42-26 advantage in the second half, however Northern State was able to end the game on an 8-0 scoring run

Northern State held a 26-24 edge in points in the paint and a 12-8 second chance points advantage

The Wolves shot 14-20 (70.0%) from the free throw line with Oliverson (4-4) and Rogers (3-3) each perfect from the charity stripe, this afternoon marked the 11th game this season with ten or more made free throws

### NORTHERN STATE STATISTICAL STANDOUTS

Kailee Oliverson: 11 points, 5 rebounds, 1 assist, 1 block

Laurie Rogers: 11 points, 4 rebounds, 3 blocks, 1 steal

Madelyn Bragg: 8 points, 3 rebounds, 1 block

Jordyn Hilgemann: 8 points, 1 assist

### UP NEXT

Northern State will return to the friendly confines of Wachs Arena for the first time in four weeks next weekend when they host Augustana and Wayne State. The Wolves and Vikings are scheduled for a 5:30 p.m. tip-off on Friday afternoon. Northern then closes the weekend on Saturday with a 4 p.m. tip-off scheduled with the Wildcats.

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## Masten and the Wolves Out-Run St. Cloud State

St. Cloud, Minn. – The Northern State University men's basketball team extended their win streak to four games on Sunday afternoon, defeating St. Cloud State on the road. The Wolves defeated the Huskies by 18 points as six scored in double figures.

### THE QUICK DETAILS

Final Score: NSU 83, SCSU 65

Records: NSU 10-3 (6-1 NSIC), SCSU 5-8 (2-6 NSIC)

Attendance: 350

### HOW IT HAPPENED

- Northern tallied 45 points in the first, leading 45-37 at the half, and added 38 in the second
- The Wolves shot 46.5% from the floor, 36.3% from the 3-point line, and 100.0% from the foul line
- They tallied a game high 39 rebounds, 23 assists, 38 points in the paint, 16 fast break points, and 12 points off turnovers
- For the second straight contest, Northern gave up single digit turnovers, suffering just seven in the win
- Sam Masten recorded the team's first triple-double of the 2022-23 season, notching 14 assists, 13 points, and 11 rebounds
- Michael Nhial led the team off the bench with 12 points and pulled down a team second best eight rebounds

### NORTHERN STATE STATISTICAL STANDOUTS

- Jordan Belka: 15 points, 5 rebounds, 1 assist
- Jacksen Moni: 14 points, 5 rebounds, 1 assist, 1 block, 1 steal
- Augustin Reede: 14 points, 2 rebounds, 2 assists, 50.0 3-point field goal%
- Sam Masten: 13 points, 14 assists, 11 rebounds
- Trey Longstreet: 11 points, 80.0 field goal%, 3 rebounds
- Michael Nhial: 12 points, 8 rebounds, 1 steal

### UP NEXT

Northern State returns to Wachs Arena next Friday and Saturday versus Augustana and Wayne State. Tip-off times are scheduled for 7:30 p.m. on Friday against the Vikings and 6 p.m. on Saturday versus the Wildcats. Visit [nsuwolves.com/gameday](http://nsuwolves.com/gameday) for full game day promotions and information.

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## COVID-19 Heat Map

by Marie Miller

Thought I'd do a year-end wrap-up for the heat maps. Working from last night's reporting, what I'm seeing at the moment is a lot of movement, probably reflective of the same disruptions in reporting and in actual cases caused by the holidays that we've discussed in the Updates. The net is downward, which is good, but it's not by much. Here's what I have.

Moving from orange to red are Kentucky, Rhode Island, Virginia, and South Carolina; moving from red down to orange are California, Arizona, Nebraska, and Illinois. No net change in the red category.

Moving from yellow to orange is the District of Columbia; from orange down to yellow are Oregon, Nevada, Idaho, Wyoming, South Dakota, and Vermont.

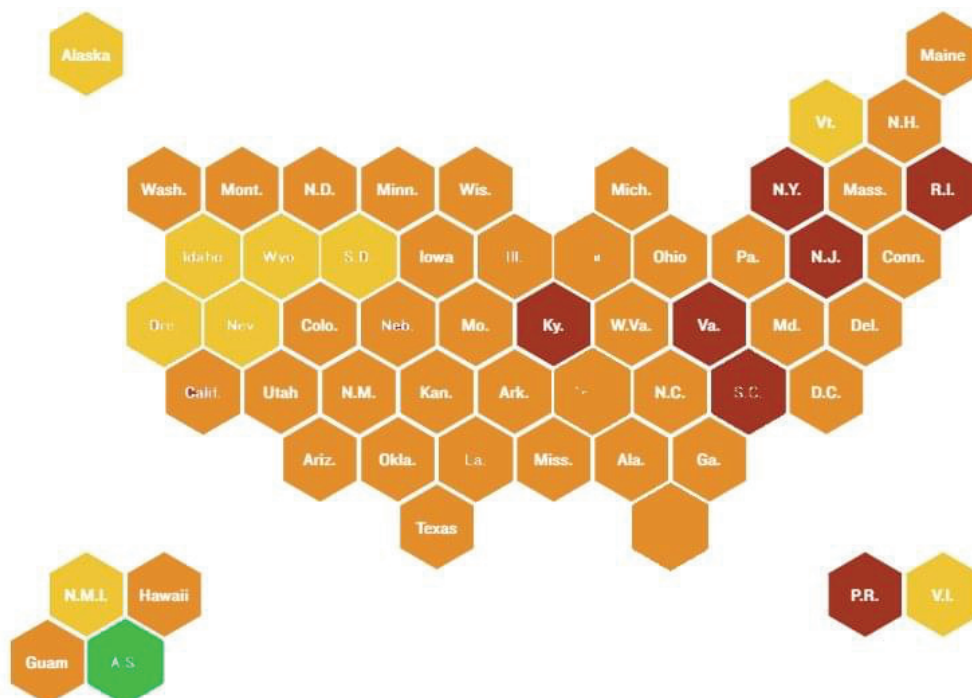
Net change is 5 states and territories moving from orange to yellow. We're at 7 red, 39 orange, 9 yellow, and 1 green.

Trends are looking better overall with 18 states and territories increasing, only 10 of these by double digit percentages. There are 29 decreasing by double digits. I see West Virginia and North Carolina at the top of the orange category and gaining fast; I wouldn't be surprised to see them break into red in the next week or two. On the other hand, I see Washington, Utah, Arizona, North Dakota, and Iowa at the bottom of orange and the Northern Marianas and the US Virgin Islands at the bottom of yellow with all of them decreasing substantially, so I would expect some upcoming category changes there too.

This is very much a snapshot in time and, as mentioned above, influenced by holiday complications; so I don't want anyone getting too caught up in these numbers yet. If not for an urge to tie the old year up in a bow, I'd have waited a couple of weeks to update these maps. We can all hold our breaths for a bit here, and barring something unexpected, things should sort themselves out soon.

New year's wishes to all.

The original template for this heat map is from NPR; I have modified it to show changes since NPR's last update. Red designates "unchecked spread," orange is "escalating spread," yellow is "potential spread," and green is "close to containment." (For the record, N.M.I. is the Northern Mariana Islands, AS is American Samoa, and VI is the US Virgin Islands, all US territories.)



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## "Grief and Love"

Writing about grief is like writing about life—huge! Where does one start? It is like describing love: basically impossible. The comedian and late-night host Stephen Colbert lost his father and two older brothers in a tragic accident when he was young, and said, about grief, "It is a gift to exist, and with that gift comes suffering. If I am grateful for life, I must be grateful for all of it. I hope that grief stays with me because it is all the unexpressed love I didn't get to tell you."

So even though grief may be difficult to describe, I'm working to do what Rick taught me: to share my grief publicly, as he did his death. As I've sought to live with my grief, I have found tips and ideas that have helped. Not every tip will be pertinent to every person, so use judgement as you address someone in grief.

- Talk about the one who has died. They are generally the grieving person's favorite subject
- Contact the person in grief frequently. Loneliness can be consuming. Remember birthdays and anniversaries, which can be emotional triggers for the one grieving.

- Include the grieving person in activities. Sometimes getting away from the grief can be a relief.

- Offer to help a person in grief with household chores, as these tasks can become overwhelming. Better yet, just show up and help!

- Be aware that grief can be like a roller coaster, high one day and low on another. Grief can be exhausting. Realize that a person in grief may need extra rest.

- Consider the vulnerability it takes for a grieving person to ask for help. The grieving person may suffer in silence rather than admit defeat.

- And last for this incomplete list: grief has no right or wrong and no timeline. Every individual is different.

The songwriter Nick Cave said "It seems to me, that if we love, we grieve. That's the deal. That's the pact. Grief and love are forever intertwined. Grief is the terrible reminder of the depths of our love and, like love, grief is non-negotiable."

Rick showed us, courageously, how to face death while honoring life, with love and joy instead of dread. Now maybe those of us who grieve can see the shape of our love in our grief. The poet John Roedel wrote: "Your grief is a temple in your heart that honors that love."

I hope that I continue to find wisdom in this grief as I continue my journey.

Joanie S. Holm, R.N., C.N.P. is co-founder and president of Healing Words Foundation that supports Prairie Doc® programming. Follow The Prairie Doc® at [www.prairiedoc.org](http://www.prairiedoc.org) and on Facebook featuring On Call with the Prairie Doc® a medical Q&A show providing health information based on science, built on trust for 21 Seasons, on SDPB and streaming live on Facebook most Thursdays at 7 p.m. central.



Based on Science, Built on Trust



**Joanie Holm, RN, CNP**

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## Groton City Council Meeting Agenda

January 3, 2023 – 7:00pm  
City Hall – 120 N Main Street

(IF YOU WOULD LIKE TO CALL IN TO THIS MEETING, PLEASE MAKE PRIOR ARRANGEMENTS TO DO SO BY CALLING CITY HALL 605-397-8422)

- Public Comments - pursuant to SDCL 1-25-1

(Public Comments will offer the opportunity for anyone not listed on the agenda to speak to the council. Speaking time will be limited to 3 minutes. No action will be taken on questions or items not on the agenda.)

- Minutes
- Bills
- Department Reports
- Employee Salaries and Volunteer List
- Economic Development Meeting from December 7, 2022 – Follow Up

- Election Date – April 11, 2023

2-Year Terms Ending:

- Jon Cutler – Ward 1
- Shirley Wells – Ward 2
- Karyn Babcock – Ward 3

1-Year Appointment Ending:

- Jason Wambach – Ward 3
- REMINDER: Applications Due by January 16th at 5:00pm:
- Baseball Coordinator
- Softball Coordinator
- Legion Coach
- Jr. Legion Coach
- Jr. Teener Coach

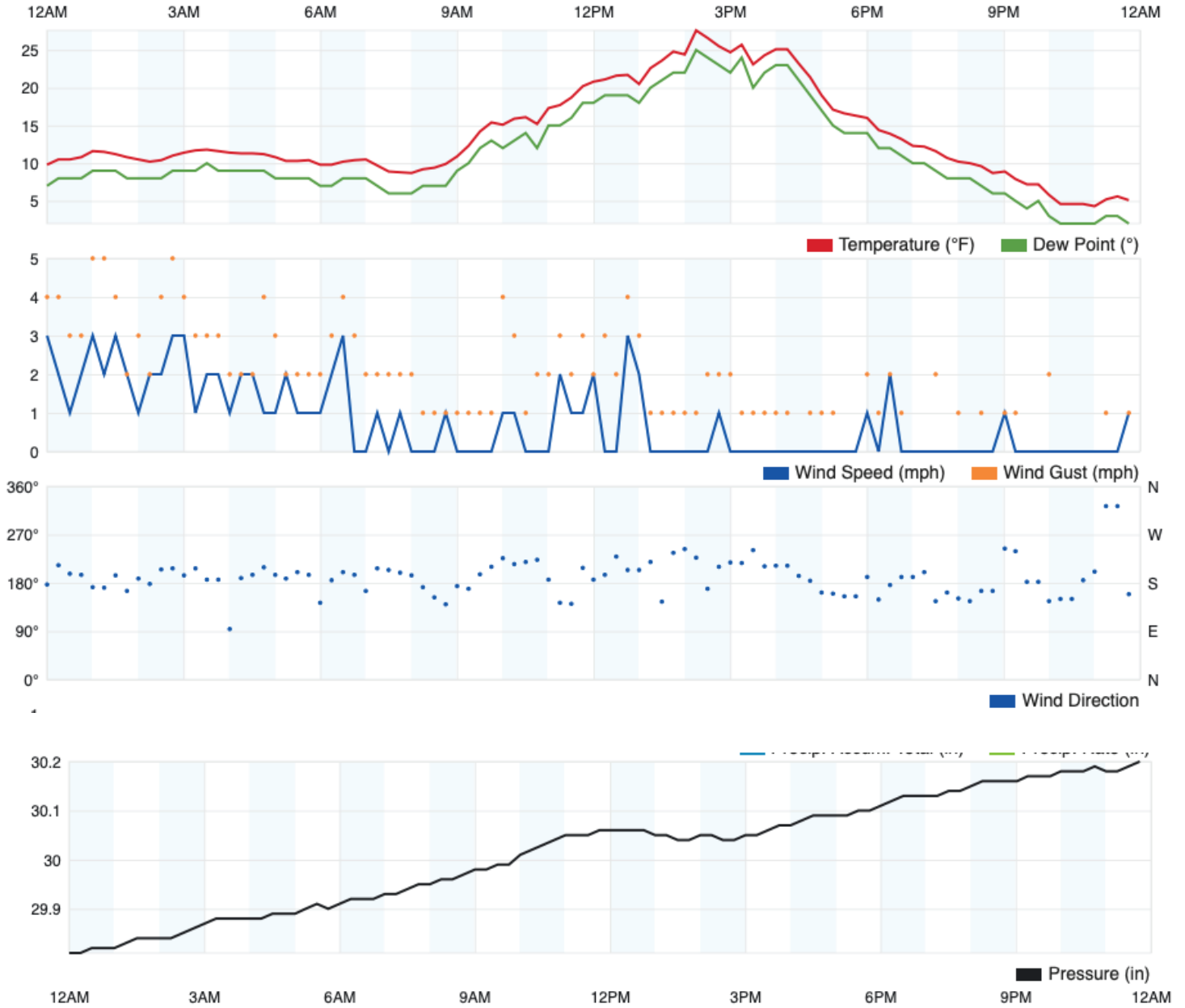
- Executive session personnel & legal 1-25-2 (1) & (3)
- Adjournment



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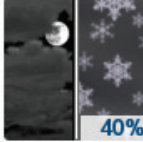





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## Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Today	Tonight	Tuesday	Tuesday Night	Wednesday	Wednesday Night	Thursday
						
Cloudy	Mostly Cloudy then Chance Snow	Chance Snow	Mostly Cloudy	Partly Sunny	Partly Cloudy	Mostly Sunny
High: 22 °F	Low: 10 °F	High: 18 °F	Low: 7 °F	High: 16 °F	Low: 2 °F	High: 16 °F

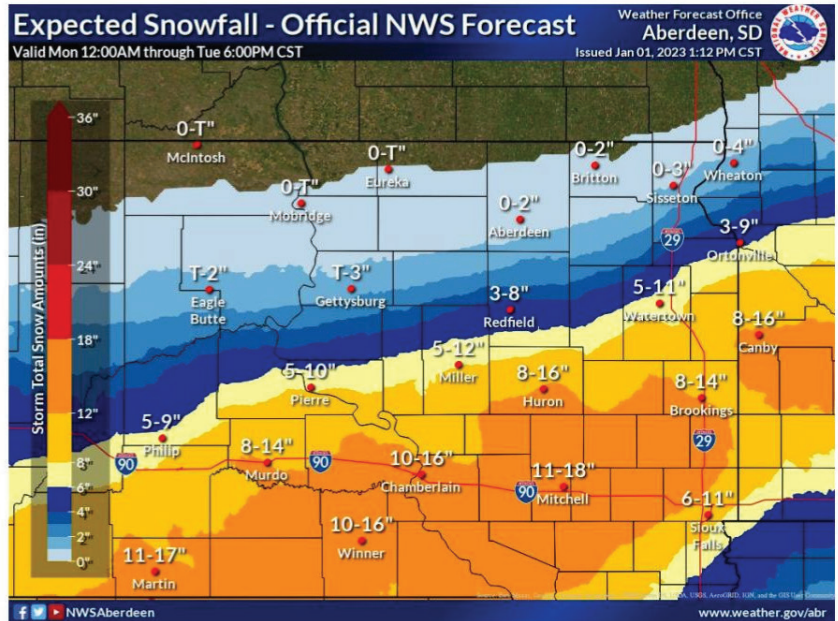


## Snowfall Forecast Mon-Tuesday

January 1, 2023  
1:46 PM

- Large spreads in predicted snowfall amounts (i.e. 5-12 inches) suggest lower confidence in the forecast.

**\*\*\* If you have travel plans Monday and/or Tuesday, keep up-to-date with the latest forecasts.\*\*\***



National Weather Service  
Aberdeen, SD

Latest Snowfall Prediction. Still some uncertainty in amounts, thus the sometimes high snowfall ranges.

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## Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 28 °F at 2:12 PM

Low Temp: 4 °F at 10:53 PM

Wind: 5 mph at 12:02 AM

Precip: : 0.00

Day length: 8 hours, 51 minutes

## Today's Info

Record High: 50 in 1963

Record Low: -30 in 2010

Average High: 24°F

Average Low: 3°F

Average Precip in Jan.: 0.04

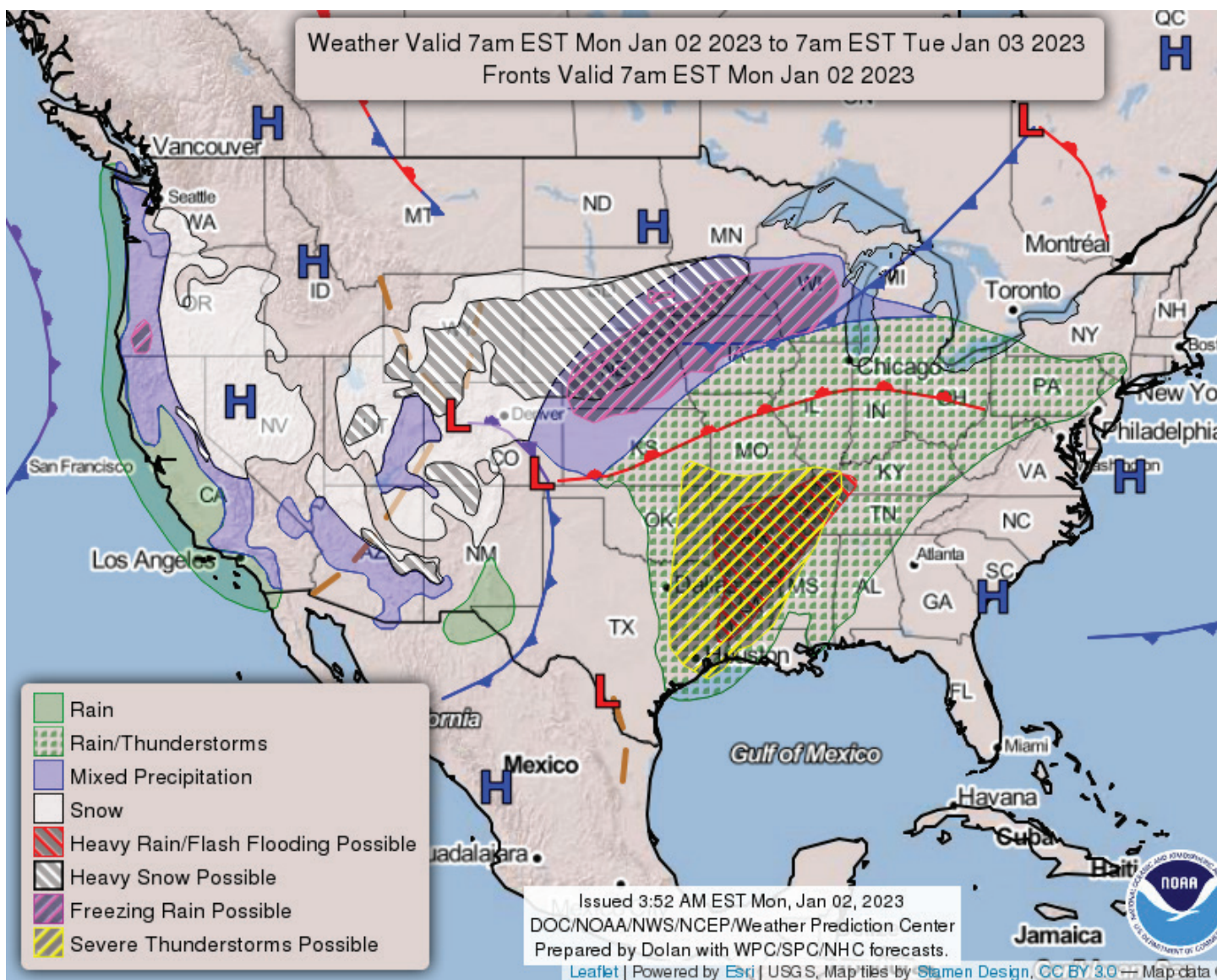
Precip to date in Jan.: 0.00

Average Precip to date: 0.04

Precip Year to Date: 0.00

Sunset Tonight: 5:02:23 PM

Sunrise Tomorrow: 8:10:27 AM





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## Today in Weather History

January 2, 1999: Heavy snow of 6 to 8 inches fell across part of northeast South Dakota from the late afternoon hours of the 1st to the early morning hours of the 2nd. Strong north winds of 15 to 30 mph combined with temperatures in the single digits generated wind chills from 25 to 40 below and visibilities below 1/4 of a mile at times. Holiday travel along Interstate-29 and Highway 12 was most affected by this winter storm. There were some travel delays and some stranded motorists as a result. Some snowfall amounts included 6 inches at Kidder, Victor, Sisseton, Webster, Waubay, Wilmot, and 8 inches at Britton and near Peever.

1839: It is believed Louis Daguerre took the first daguerreotype of the moon. Unfortunately, in March of that same year, his entire laboratory burnt to the ground, destroying all his written records and much of his early experimental work—and that historical image of the moon. A year later, John William Draper, an American doctor, and chemist took his own daguerreotype of the moon.

1897: Tornadoes in January? Two tornadoes touched down on this day. The first tornado touched down in Mooringsport, Louisiana, killing five people and injuring 21 others. The second tornado occurred at Benton, Arkansas. Although this tornado was more destructive in regards to property damage, it caused one death.

1949: A blizzard raged and brought heavy snow, strong winds, and cold temperatures to South Dakota, Wyoming, Colorado, and Nebraska.

1999: A powerful winter storm developed over the Texas panhandle and moved northeast through the Missouri bootheel and then north northeast through eastern Illinois and into Michigan. Snow began accumulating in east-central Illinois and areas south of Chicago during the early evening hours of New Year's Day and overspread the city and north suburbs by midnight. Snow continued through the night and much of the day Saturday, January 2. The heaviest snow fell during the daytime hours Saturday and tapered off by late afternoon or early evening and ended by late evening. Northeast winds were 20 to 30 mph with a few higher gusts during the day Saturday. Winds gusted to over 50 mph along the Lake Michigan shoreline. The strong wind coming off the lake enhanced snowfall totals within about 10 miles of the lake. Snowfall was generally 9 to 15 inches over north central and east central Illinois and in the Chicago suburbs. Snowfall in Chicago and the north suburbs in Lake County was 18 to 22 inches. Winds subsided Saturday evening as the storm center passed over southern Lake Michigan. Then strong northwest winds developed Sunday, causing considerable blowing and drifting and hampering clean-up efforts.

The 21.6 inches at O'hare, the official observing site for Chicago, was the second greatest storm total snowfall. The record was 23.0 inches January 26-27, 1967. Of the 21.6 inches, 18.6 fell on January 2, setting a record for the most snowfall on a calendar day. Other snowfall amounts included; Algonquin 14.0, Aurora 14.4, Barrington 18.0, Brookfield 15.1, Bourbonnais 14.0, Channahon 13.0, Chatsworth 17.0, Coal City 13.0, Compton 9.7, Crestwood 14.2, DeKalb 12.4, Dixon 16.4, Earlville 11.3, Fairbury 13.0, Geneva 13.0, Glenwood 16.0, Harvard 9.0, Lake Villa 17.9, LaGrange Park 15.0, Midway Airport 20.6, Mundelein 10.0, Naperville 11.0, Olympia Fields 15.8, Orland Park 13.8, Rochelle 9.6, Rockford 9.0, Streamwood 14.0, Willow Springs 12.0. The heavy snow and blowing snow caused hazardous travel. Lake Shore Drive was closed down for the first time ever. State, county, and local road crews worked around the clock. The City of Chicago Department of Streets and Sanitation spent 12 million dollars on snow removal efforts. Three hundred flights were canceled at O'Hare and Midway airports.

2006: Six tornadoes impacted central and northern Georgia. The tornadoes were rated from F0 to F3.

2017: 36 confirmed tornadoes impacted the Deep South from Louisiana to Georgia. Many of the tornadoes came from line segments of storms known as quasi-linear convective systems. A larger convective system also created numerous wind damage reports, and in Alabama, four people died from straight-line winds.



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Daily Devotionals

## Seeds of Hope

### LET GOD MAKE THINGS RIGHT

Resentments fill hearts and control minds. They are easy to collect and store in dark crevices deep inside while we wait for the right moment to "settle a score." It is amazing how much more room we seem to have for resentments than we do for love. Perhaps it is because we want to be like God and set standards and pass judgment on what others do to us. It seems like we want to be the prosecutor, then the jury, become the judge, and finally the executioner.

If we could ever look at this "getting even" objectively, it might amaze us. Unless there is an accepted way to measure a wrong, it is impossible to know the appropriate method to apply to "get even." It might be too little, or too much, and rarely "just right."

For example: What are we to do if someone treats us or a loved one unfairly? Or speaks a lie or half-truth about us? Maybe exaggerate our faults? Refuse to pay back the money we loaned them? Try to ruin our reputation? Have you been ridiculed for an honest mistake? Someone perhaps, may have sold us an inferior product, then refused to honor their service contract.

Most of our "getting even" are subjective and devised to achieve what we think and feel is appropriate. However, in God's Word we are warned not to do that!

"Do not say, 'I'll pay you back for this wrong!' Wait for the Lord, and He will avenge you." One translator inserts the word "expectantly" after the word "wait." In other words, "You know that this is up to God, and He, in His impeccable timing, will come to your aid." God is our Savior and Redeemer and He will do what is right in His eyes - not our eyes.

There is a warning in Genesis that demands our attention: "Far be it from you (to do the work of God)! Will not the Judge of all the earth do what is right?"

We must never assume God's responsibilities! Never!

Prayer: Father, "getting even" is a natural, normal thing to want to do. But it is never the right thing to do. Help us to turn vengeance over to You for You are the Judge! In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: Do not say, 'I'll pay you back for this wrong!' Wait for the Lord, and He will avenge you. Proverbs 20:22



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

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

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

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## MEGA MILLIONS

WINNING NUMBERS:  
12.30.22

1 3 6 44 51 7

MegaPlier: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:  
**\$785,000,000**

NEXT 1 Days 16 Hrs 8  
DRAW: Mins 52 Secs

GAME DETAILS

## LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS:  
12.31.22

9 29 30 35 42 8

All Star Bonus: 5x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:  
**\$33,450,000**

NEXT 16 Hrs 8 Mins 51  
DRAW: Secs

GAME DETAILS

## LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS:  
01.01.23

1 4 7 14 36 11

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

NEXT 15 Hrs 38 Mins 51  
DRAW: Secs

GAME DETAILS

## DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS:  
12.31.22

3 13 19 22 24

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:  
**\$20,000**

NEXT 2 Days 16 Hrs 8  
DRAW: Mins 52 Secs

GAME DETAILS

## POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS:  
12.31.22

1 25 29 54 56 9

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

NEXT 16 Hrs 7 Mins 52  
DRAW: Secs

GAME DETAILS

## POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS:  
12.31.22

18 37 44 50 64 11

Power Play: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:  
**\$265,000,000**

NEXT 16 Hrs 7 Mins 52  
DRAW: Secs

GAME DETAILS

### Dakota Cash jackpot winning ticket sold in Springfield

PIERRE, S.D. —The final Dakota Cash drawing of 2022 certainly brought some fireworks for one South Dakota Lottery player.

Saturday's Dakota Cash drawing resulted in a \$275,656 jackpot winner. The winning ticket was purchased at Casey's General Store, located at 1313 Walnut St. in Springfield.

The winning numbers were 3, 13, 19, 22 and 24. The odds of hitting the jackpot were 1:324,632.

If you are Saturday's winner, please sign the back of your ticket immediately and visit a South Dakota Lottery validation center to claim your prize. The Sioux Falls Lottery office is located at 3605 Western Ave., Suite B.

The Dakota Cash game is exclusive to South Dakota with drawings each Wednesday and Saturday. For more information on the game, visit <https://lottery.sd.gov/game/dakota-cash/>.



## News from the Associated Press

### **Israeli army kills 2 Palestinians in West Bank confrontation**

RAMALLAH, West Bank (AP) — Israeli forces killed two Palestinians, including a man claimed by an armed group as a member, during a confrontation that erupted early Monday when troops entered a Palestinian village in the occupied West Bank, Palestinian health officials said.

The two men were killed in the village of Kafr Dan near the northern city of Jenin. The Israeli military said it entered Kafr Dan late Sunday to demolish the houses of two Palestinian gunmen who killed an Israeli soldier during a firefight in September. The military said troops came under heavy fire and fired back at the shooters.

It was the latest bloodshed in the region that has seen Israeli-Palestinian tensions surge for months. On Monday, the Israeli rights group B'Tselem said 2022 was the deadliest year for Palestinians since 2004, a period of intense violence that came during a Palestinian uprising.

The Palestinian Health Ministry identified those killed as Samer Houshiyeh, 21, and Fouad Abed, 25. Houshiyeh was shot several times in the chest, according to Samer Attiyeh, the director of the Ibn Sina Hospital in Jenin. Attiyeh initially said Abed was 17, but the ministry later gave his age as 25.

An armed group, the Al Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades, later claimed Houshiyeh as a member. The group, an offshoot of Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas' Fatah party, published an older photo in which Houshiyeh had posed with rifles. Video on social media showed his body wrapped with the armed group's flag as his mother and other mourners bid farewell.

It was not immediately clear whether the second Palestinian killed was also affiliated with a militant group. Israel says it demolishes the homes of militants as a way to deter potential attackers. Critics say the tactic amounts to collective punishment.

The Israeli military has been conducting near-daily raids into Palestinian cities and towns since a spate of Palestinian attacks against Israelis killed 19 last spring.

Nearly 150 Palestinians were killed by Israeli fire in the West Bank and east Jerusalem last year, according to B'Tselem's figures, making 2022 the deadliest since 2004, when 197 Palestinians were killed. A fresh wave of attacks killed at least another nine Israelis in the fall. The Israeli army says most of the Palestinians killed have been militants. But stone-throwing youths protesting the incursions and others not involved in confrontations have also been killed.

Israel says the raids are meant to dismantle militant networks and thwart future attacks. The Palestinians see them as further entrenchment of Israel's 55-year, open-ended occupation of the West Bank.

Israel captured the West Bank, along with east Jerusalem and the Gaza Strip, in the 1967 Mideast war and the Palestinians seek those territories for a future state.

### **Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI body lying in state at Vatican**

By GIADA ZAMPANO and FRANCES D'EMILIO Associated Press

VATICAN CITY (AP) — Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI's body, his head resting on a pair of crimson pillows, lay in state in St. Peter's Basilica on Monday as thousands of people filed by to pay tribute to the pontiff who shocked the world by retiring a decade ago.

As daylight broke, 10 white-gloved Papal Gentlemen — lay assistants to pontiffs and papal households — carried the body on a cloth-covered wooden stretcher after its arrival at the basilica to its resting place in front of the main altar under Bernini's towering bronze canopy.

A Swiss Guard had saluted as the body was brought in via a side door after Benedict's remains, placed in a van, were transferred from the chapel of the monastery grounds where the increasingly frail, 95-year-old former pontiff had passed away on Saturday morning.

His longtime secretary, Archbishop Georg Gaenswein, and a handful of consecrated laywomen who served in Benedict's household, followed the van by foot in a silent procession toward the basilica. Some

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of the women stretched out a hand to touch the body with respect.

Before the rank-and-file faithful were allowed into the basilica, prayers were intoned and a small cloud of incense was released near the body, its hands clasped on its chest.

Just after 9 a.m. (0800 GMT), the doors of the basilica were swung open so the public, some who had waited for hours in the dampness before dawn, could pay their respects to the late pontiff, who retired from the papacy in 2013 to become the first pope to do so in 600 years.

Faithful and curious, the public strode briskly up the center aisle to pass by the bier with its cloth draping after waiting in a line that by midmorning snaked around St. Peter's Square.

Benedict's body was dressed with a miter, the peaked headgear of a bishop and a red cloak.

Filippo Tuccio, 35, came from Venice on an overnight train to view Benedict's body.

"I wanted to pay homage to Benedict because he had a key role in my life and my education. I arrived here at around 7:30, after leaving Venice last night," Tuccio said.

"When I was young I participated in World Youth Days," said the pilgrim, referring to the jamborees of young faithful held periodically and attended by pontiffs. Tuccio added that he had studied theology, and "his pontificate accompanied me during my university years."

"He was very important for me: for what I am, my way of thinking, my values. This is why I wanted to say goodbye today."

Public viewing lasts for 10 hours on Monday in St. Peter's Basilica. Twelve hours of viewing are scheduled for Tuesday and Wednesday before Thursday morning's funeral, which will be led by Pope Francis, at St. Peter's Square.

Security officials expected at least 25,000 people to pass by the body on the first day of viewing.

At two sides of the piazza's colonnade, viewers went through the usual security measures required for tourists entering the basilica — passing through metal detectors and screening bags through an X-ray machine.

Marina Ferrante, 62, was among them. The Roman arrived an hour before the doors were opened, and she grew emotional when she explained why she came.

"I think his main legacy was teaching us how to be free," she said. "He had a special intelligence in saying what was essential in his faith and that was contagious" for other faithful. "The thing I thought when he died was that I would like to be as free as he was."

While venturing that the shy, bookworm German churchman and theologian and the current Argentine-born pontiff had different temperaments, "I believe there's a continuity between him and Pope Francis and whoever understands the real relationship between them and Christ can see that," Ferrante said.

An American man who lives in Rome called the opportunity to view the body "an amazing experience." Mountain Butorac, 47, who is originally from Atlanta, said he arrived 90 minutes before the dawn open and left the basilica a half-hour after it opened.

"I loved Benedict, I loved him as a cardinal (Joseph Ratzinger), when he was elected pope and also after he retired," Butorac said. "I think he was a sort of people's grandfather living in the Vatican."

He came to the Vatican to pray for Benedict when he was ailing, "so I wanted to be here today to say goodbye. I think he and Francis were close, they cared for each other," he said.

With an organ and choir's soft rendition of "Kyrie Eleison" ("Lord, have mercy" in Latin) in the background, ushers moved well-wishers along at a steady clip down the basilica's center aisle and then nudged them gently forward, saying, in Italian, "avanti" (keep going) to keep the pace brisk. Someone left a red rose.

A few VIPs had a moment before the general public to pay their respects, including Italian Premier Giorgia Meloni, the far-right leader who in the past has professed admiration for the conservative leanings of Benedict.

Also viewing the body was Italian President Sergio Mattarella. The Vatican has said only two nations' official delegations — from Italy and from Benedict's native Germany — were invited formally to the funeral, since the pope emeritus was no longer head of state.

## Russia presses its Ukraine strategy, fires 40 drones at Kyiv

By FELIPE DANA Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Russia deployed multiple exploding drones in another nighttime attack on Ukraine, officials said Monday, as the Kremlin signaled no letup in its strategy of using bombardments to target civilian infrastructure and wear down Ukrainian resistance to its invasion.

The barrage was the latest in a series of relentless year-end attacks, including one that killed three civilians on New Year's Eve.

Kyiv Mayor Vitali Klitschko said Monday that 40 drones "headed for Kyiv" overnight. All of them were destroyed, according to air defense forces.

Klitschko said 22 drones were destroyed over Kyiv, three in the outlying Kyiv region and 15 over neighboring provinces.

Energy infrastructure facilities were damaged as the result of the attack and an explosion occurred in one city district, the mayor said. It wasn't immediately clear whether that was caused by drones or other munitions. A wounded 19-year-old man was hospitalized, Klitschko added, and emergency power outages were underway in the capital.

In the outlying Kyiv region a "critical infrastructure object" and residential buildings were hit, Gov. Oleksiy Kuleba said.

Russia has carried out airstrikes on Ukrainian power and water supplies almost weekly since October.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy has accused Russia of "energy terrorism" as the aerial bombardments have left many people without heat amid freezing temperatures. Ukrainian officials say Moscow is "weaponizing winter" in its effort to demoralize the Ukrainian resistance.

Ukraine is using sophisticated Western-supplied weapons to help shoot down Russia's missiles and drones, as well as send artillery fire into Russian-held areas of the country.

Moscow's full-scale invasion on Feb. 24 has gone awry, putting pressure on Russian President Vladimir Putin as his ground forces struggle to hold ground and advance. He said in his New Year's address to the nation that 2022 was "a year of difficult, necessary decisions."

Putin insists he had no choice, but to send troops into Ukraine because it threatened Russia's security — an assertion condemned by the West, which says Moscow bears full responsibility for the invasion.

Russia is currently observing public holidays through Jan. 8.

Drones, missiles and artillery shells launched by Russian forces also struck areas across Ukraine.

Five people were wounded in the Monday morning shelling of a Ukraine-controlled area of the southern Kherson region, its Ukrainian Gov. Yaroslav Yanushevich said on Telegram.

The Russian forces attacked the city of Beryslav, the official said, firing at a local market, likely from a tank. Three of the wounded are in serious condition and are being evacuated to Kherson, Yanushevich said.

Seven drones were shot down over the southern Mykolaiv region, according to Gov. Vitali Kim, and three more were shot down in the southeastern Dnipropetrovsk region, Gov. Valentyn Reznichenko said.

In the Dnipropetrovsk region, a missile was also destroyed, according to Reznichenko. He said that energy infrastructure in the region was being targeted.

Ukraine's Air Force Command reported Monday that 39 Iranian-made exploding Shahed drones were shot down overnight, as well as two Russian-made Orlan drones and a X-59 missile.

"We are staying strong," the Ukrainian defense ministry tweeted.

A blistering New Year's Eve assault killed at least four civilians across the country, Ukrainian authorities reported, and wounded dozens. The fourth victim, a 46-year-old resident of Kyiv, died in a hospital on Monday morning, Klitschko said.

Multiple blasts rocked the capital and other areas of Ukraine on Saturday and through the night. The strikes came 36 hours after widespread missile attacks Russia launched Thursday to damage energy infrastructure facilities, and the unusually quick follow-up alarmed Ukrainian officials.

In Russia, a Ukrainian drone hit an energy facility in the Bryansk region that borders with Ukraine, Bryansk regional governor Alexander Bogomaz reported on Monday morning. A village was left without

power as a result, he said.

## Helicopters collide over Australian beach, 4 passengers dead

By COURTNEY WALSH Associated Press

MELBOURNE, Australia (AP) — Two helicopters collided in an Australian tourist hotspot Monday afternoon, killing four passengers and critically injuring three others in a crash that drew emergency aid from beachgoers enjoying the water during the southern summer.

One helicopter appeared to have been taking off and the other landing when they collided near the Sea World theme park in Main Beach, a northern beach on the Gold Coast, Gary Worrell, Queensland state police acting inspector, said at a news conference.

One helicopter landed safely on a sandbank, but debris from the other was spread across an area police described as difficult to access.

The dead and three most seriously injured people were all passengers in the crashed helicopter.

"Members of the public and police tried to remove the people and they commenced first aid and tried to get those people to safety from an airframe that was upside down," Worrell said.

"(People on) Jet Skis, family boaters, ordinary members of the public rushed to assist these people."

Passengers in the other helicopter, which lost its windscreen in the crash, are also receiving medical assistance.

Footage of the crash showed a helicopter shortly after takeoff being clipped by another helicopter flying over the water.

Sea World Helicopters, a separate company from the theme park, expressed its condolences and said it was cooperating with the authorities handling the crash investigation.

"We and the entire flying community are devastated by what has happened and our sincere condolences go to all those involved and especially the loved ones and family of the deceased," the statement said.

The company did not confirm if it operated one or both helicopters involved in the crash, saying in the statement it would not comment further because of the investigation.

A witness named John told Melbourne radio station 3AW that patrons at Sea World heard the crash.

He said staff at the theme park moved swiftly to close off areas closest to the crash.

"There was a massive, massive bang," he said. "It was just huge. I'm not sure if it was the propellers or whatever hitting against each other. But there was this poor lady and her son near the helipad in tears."

Queensland Premier Annastacia Palaszczuk said the accident was an "unthinkable tragedy."

"My deepest sympathies are with each of the families and everyone affected by this terrible accident," she said.

Australian Transport Safety Bureau chief commissioner Angus Mitchell said an investigation into the cause of the crash was underway.

Queensland Ambulance Service said earlier that 13 people were being assessed for injuries.

The Gold Coast region is at its busiest in January, the peak time for holidays in Australia's summer.

## Democrat Katie Hobbs to take office as Arizona governor

By JONATHAN J. COOPER Associated Press

PHOENIX (AP) — Katie Hobbs takes the oath of office Monday to become Arizona's 24th governor and the first Democrat to hold the office since 2009.

Power will transfer in a private ceremony at the state Capitol as Hobbs formally takes over from Republican Doug Ducey. A public inauguration for Hobbs and others taking statewide offices is scheduled for Thursday.

Hobbs is the outgoing secretary of state and was previously a state legislator who rose to be the top Democrat in the Senate. As governor, she'll have to work with a House and Senate narrowly controlled by Republicans. The new Legislature convenes for the first time next week.

Hobbs assumes control of a state with a strong economy and a solid financial position, with a large budget surplus forecast for the next fiscal year.



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But there are headwinds on the horizon. Phoenix has some of the nation's highest inflation levels and housing costs have soared as rapid population growth has outpaced home construction, belying the state's reputation for affordability. And the water supply is constrained by drought.

Hobbs narrowly defeated Republican Kari Lake, a former television anchor who was backed by former President Donald Trump. She excited conservatives with her staunch backing of Trump, including his lies about the 2020 election, and her strong criticism of mask mandates and business closures due to the COVID-19 pandemic. But she struggled to connect with Arizona's general electorate, which has repeatedly eschewed Republicans closely aligned with Trump going back to the 2018 midterms.

Hobbs will be the fifth woman to be Arizona governor. The last Democratic governor was Janet Napolitano, who resigned in January 2009 to be U.S. Homeland Security secretary under President Barack Obama. She was replaced by Republican Gov. Jan Brewer.

The Arizona Constitution says state officers take their position on the first Monday in January. While Hobbs will take office on schedule, the public ceremony was delayed because Monday is the observed New Year holiday.

Also formally taking office Monday are Democrats Adrian Fontes as secretary of state and Kris Mayes as attorney general, both of whom defeated Trump-backed Republicans who refused to concede and unsuccessfully challenged their losses in court. Mayes's 280-vote victory was among the closest statewide races in Arizona history.

Kimberly Yee will be sworn in for her second term as state treasurer and Tom Horne as superintendent of public instruction, a role he filled for two terms beginning in 2003. Yee and Horne are both Republicans.

## **Brazil's Lula sworn in, vows accountability and rebuilding**

By MAURICIO SAVARESE and CARLA BRIDI Associated Press

BRASILIA, Brazil (AP) — Brazil's Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva was sworn in as president on Sunday, and in his first address expressed optimism about plans to rebuild while pledging that members of outgoing Jair Bolsonaro's administration will be held to account.

Lula is assuming office for the third time after thwarting far-right incumbent Bolsonaro's reelection bid. His return to power marks the culmination of a political comeback that is thrilling supporters and enraging opponents in a fiercely polarized nation.

"Our message to Brazil is one of hope and reconstruction," Lula said in a speech in Congress' Lower House after signing the document that formally instates him as president. "The great edifice of rights, sovereignty and development that this nation built has been systematically demolished in recent years. To re-erect this edifice, we are going to direct all our efforts."

Sunday afternoon in Brasilia's main esplanade, the party was on. Tens of thousands of supporters decked out in the red of Lula's Workers' Party cheered after his swearing in.

They celebrated when the president said he would send a report about the prior administration to all lawmakers and judicial authorities, revoke Bolsonaro's "criminal decrees" that loosened gun control, and hold the prior administration responsible for its denialism in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic.

"We do not carry any spirit of revenge against those who sought to subjugate the nation to their personal and ideological designs, but we are going to ensure the rule of law," Lula said, without mentioning Bolsonaro by name. "Those who erred will answer for their errors, with broad rights to their defense within the due legal process."

Lula's presidency is unlikely to be like his previous two mandates, coming after the tightest presidential race in more than three decades in Brazil and resistance to his taking office by some of his opponents, political analysts say.

The leftist defeated Bolsonaro in the Oct. 30 vote by less than 2 percentage points. For months, Bolsonaro had sown doubts about the reliability of Brazil's electronic vote and his loyal supporters were loath to accept the loss.

Many have gathered outside military barracks since, questioning results and pleading with the armed

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forces to prevent Lula from taking office.

His most die-hard backers resorted to what some authorities and incoming members of Lula's administration labeled acts of "terrorism" – which had prompted security concerns about inauguration day events.

Lula will have to navigate more challenging economic conditions than he enjoyed in his first two terms, when the global commodities boom proved a windfall for Brazil.

At the time, his administration's flagship welfare program helped lift tens of millions of impoverished people into the middle class. He left office with a personal approval rating of 83%.

In the intervening years, Brazil's economy plunged into two deep recessions — first, during the tenure of his handpicked successor, and then during the pandemic — and ordinary Brazilians suffered greatly.

Lula has said his priorities are fighting poverty, and investing in education and health. He has also said he will bring illegal deforestation of the Amazon to a halt. He sought support from political moderates to form a broad front and defeat Bolsonaro, then tapped some of them to serve in his Cabinet.

In his first act as president Sunday, Lula signed a decree to tighten gun control and set a 30-day deadline for the comptroller-general's office to evaluate various Bolsonaro decrees that placed official information under seal for 100 years. He also signed a decree that guaranteed a monthly stipend for poor families, and reestablished the mostly Norway-financed Amazon fund for sustainable development in the rainforest.

Claúdio Arantes, a 68-year-old pensioner, carried an old Lula campaign flag on his way to the esplanade. The lifelong Lula supporter attended his 2003 inauguration, and agreed that this time feels different.

"Back then, he could talk about Brazil being united. Now it is divided and won't heal soon," Arantes said. "I trust his intelligence to make this national unity administration work so we never have a Bolsonaro again."

Given the nation's political fault lines, it is highly unlikely Lula ever reattains the popularity he once enjoyed, or even sees his approval rating rise above 50%, said Maurício Santoro, a political science professor at Rio de Janeiro's State University.

Furthermore, Santoro said, the credibility of Lula and his Workers' Party were assailed by a sprawling corruption investigation. Party officials were jailed, including Lula — whose convictions were later annulled on procedural grounds. The Supreme Court then ruled that the judge presiding over the case had colluded with prosecutors to secure a conviction.

Lula and his supporters have maintained he was railroaded. Others were willing to look past possible malfeasance as a means to unseat Bolsonaro and bring the nation back together.

"I always wanted to go the inauguration, I didn't think I would have a chance to see Lula there after he was jailed," said Tamires Valente, 43, a marketing professional from Brasilia. "I am very emotional, Lula deserves this."

But Bolsonaro's backers refuse to accept someone they view as a criminal returning to the highest office. And with tensions running hot, a series of events has prompted fear that violence could erupt on inauguration day.

On Dec. 12, dozens of people tried to invade a federal police building in Brasilia, and burned cars and buses in other areas of the city. Then on Christmas Eve, police arrested a 54-year-old man who admitted to making a bomb that was found on a fuel truck headed to Brasilia's airport.

He had been camped outside Brasilia's army headquarters with hundreds of other Bolsonaro supporters since Nov. 12. He told police he was ready for war against communism, and planned the attack with people he had met at the protests, according to excerpts of his deposition released by local media.

Bolsonaro finally condemned the bomb plot in a Dec. 30 farewell address on social media, hours before flying to the U.S.. His absence on inauguration day marks a break with tradition.

Instead of Bolsonaro, a group representing diverse segments of society performed the role of presenting Lula with the presidential sash to Lula atop the ramp of the presidential palace. Across the sea of people standing before the palace, supporters stretched a massive Brazilian flag over their heads.

Speaking to the crowd, Lula listed shortfalls in government funds that will affect the Brazilian people. He said that, according to the transition team's report on Bolsonaro's government, textbooks haven't been printed for public schools, there are insufficient free medications and COVID-19 vaccines, the threat looms of federal universities shutting down, and civil defense authorities cannot work to prevent disasters.

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"Who pays the price for this blackout is, once again, the Brazilian people," he said, and was promptly met by a chant from the crowd: "No amnesty! No amnesty! No amnesty!"

## Jeremy Renner hospitalized after snow-related accident

LOS ANGELES (AP) — "Avengers" star Jeremy Renner is being treated for serious injuries that happened while he was plowing snow, the actor's representative said Sunday.

Renner, 51, is in critical condition although he is stable, the actor's representative said. No further details on the extent of Renner's injuries were available.

The actor has a home in Nevada, but it is unclear where he was hurt. Renner plays Hawkeye, a sharp-shooting member of the superhero Avengers squad in Marvel's sprawling movie and television universe.

He is a two-time acting Oscar nominee, scoring back-to-back nods for "The Hurt Locker" and "The Town." Renner's portrayal of a bomb disposal specialist in Iraq in 2008's "The Hurt Locker" helped turn him into a household name.

"The Avengers" in 2012 cemented him as part of Marvel's grand storytelling ambitions, with his character appearing in several sequels and getting its own Disney+ series, "Hawkeye."

## 2024 contest comes into view with hurdles for both parties

By STEVE PEOPLES AP National Political Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Both political parties are opening the new year confronting critical questions about the people and policies they want to embrace as the next election speeds into view.

The challenges are particularly urgent for Republicans, who hoped to enter 2023 with a secure grip on one, if not both, chambers of Congress. Instead, an underwhelming midterm election yielded only a thin House majority that will expose fierce intraparty divisions this week as California Rep. Kevin McCarthy fights for the speakership. And before the end of the month, the Republican National Committee must resolve a divisive leadership battle of its own.

A central figure in virtually everything is Donald Trump, the former president who transformed the GOP more than seven years ago and is still fighting to exert his will over Republicans in Congress, the RNC and Republican voters just as the next presidential primary season begins.

RNC Chair Ronna McDaniel acknowledged, in an interview, that her party's greatest political challenge ahead may come from within as party leaders navigate Trump's outsized role.

"There's so much at stake we can't afford to be divided heading into 2024," McDaniel said, promising that the RNC would be neutral in the looming presidential nomination process. "If we are divided, we will lose."

For now, at least, Democrats appear to be far more united than their Republican counterparts.

But much depends on Joe Biden and whether the 80-year-old president will follow through on his plan to seek reelection. If he eschews another term — and a formal announcement may be months away — Democrats would be thrust into a murky future with no obvious popular alternatives.

Vermont Sen. Bernie Sanders, who did not rule out another presidential bid of his own, said Democrats are also at a "pivotal moment," facing cracks in their delicate political coalition among young people, African Americans, Latinos and working-class voters.

"It pains me very, very much that we're seeing more and more working-class people voting Republican," he said in an interview. "Politically, that is a disaster, and Democrats have to recognize that serious problem and address it."

Though many voters may be tired of the never-ending campaign that is U.S. politics, especially after a high-stakes midterm election in 2022, the tense dynamics guarantee the political spotlight will only burn brighter in the new year. If history is a guide, the opening presidential primary debates are just seven months away. And the debate stage is expected to be crowded — at least on the GOP side. No fewer than 10 high-profile Republicans are actively weighing 2024 presidential bids in open defiance of Trump, emboldened by the growing belief that the former president is as politically vulnerable as he's ever been.

At the moment, Trump is the only announced candidate in the Republican primary. But a handful of

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candidates are expected to join by the end of March, while some higher-profile contenders — Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis, among them — believe they can wait until late spring or even early summer to make their intentions known.

Few believe Trump will be easy to topple in a GOP primary. Already, he has begun to lash out at would-be rivals by name, and he maintains a rock-solid grip among the party's most active voters, who will dominate GOP primary contests.

Still, voters will have several options in a likely field that features DeSantis, former Vice President Mike Pence, former Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and outgoing Maryland Gov. Larry Hogan, among several others. Most have already begun actively courting donors and making connections on the ground in early states on the presidential primary calendar.

Before the presidential nomination process begins in earnest, the GOP must first resolve a contentious leadership fight in the House. And by month's end, the Republican National Committee will decide whether to elect McDaniel to a fourth two-year term.

Much of the energy from Trump's Make America Great Again movement has rallied behind California attorney Harmeet Dhillon in an increasingly nasty leadership fight that will be decided at the committee's winter meeting later in the month after three consecutive disappointing election cycles.

Trump and his loyalists will figure prominently in each of the clashes. But prominent establishment Republicans are pushing back much more aggressively.

Steven Law, a key Mitch McConnell ally who leads the Senate GOP's leading super PAC, vowed to "play a much more assertive role" in shaping future Senate contests. That's just as the incoming head of the Senate GOP campaign arm, Sen. Steve Daines, R-Mont., suggests that his committee will actively play in Republican primaries to ensure that candidates who can be more competitive with the broader general election audience advance. That's a notable reversal from the committee's current hands-off practice, which was blamed for elevating candidates who failed to expand their support beyond the base.

On paper, Senate Republicans have major opportunities ahead in red states like West Virginia, Montana and Ohio, where Democrats are up for reelection in 2024. To take full advantage, however, the GOP must avoid the same "candidate quality" issues that plagued the party in the November midterms as a slate of deeply flawed Trump-backed candidates lost key Senate contests in Arizona, Georgia, Nevada, New Hampshire and Pennsylvania.

"Recruitment is going to be job one, starting now," Law said. "The first step is to do everything we can to get the best possible candidate in the field."

Law was optimistic that Trump would stay out of Senate primary contests in 2024 given the needs of his presidential campaign. McConnell, R-Ky., the Senate's Republican leader, offered a similar sentiment in a recent interview with NBC News.

"We can do a better job with less potential interference," McConnell said of Trump. "The former president may have other things to do."

Meanwhile, Democrats have issues of their own to sort out — the most pressing, of course, is whether Biden will seek a second term. Already, he is the oldest president in U.S. history. Polling suggests that a significant number of voters in both parties don't want him to run again.

The Democratic president, who spent new year's weekend with family in the U.S. Virgin Islands, has said he aims to make a final decision over the holidays.

Biden told reporters the day after the midterms that he intends to run, but that he is a "respector of fate." Aides and allies are already making preparations for a campaign launch, though they are avoiding overt steps that could be seen as getting in front of Biden's decision-making process.

A formal campaign launch isn't expected until the second quarter of 2023, both to maximize the incumbency advantage offered to Biden — allowing him to try to stay above the political fray for as long as possible — and to avoid having to report fundraising during the historically weak first quarter.

And while a 2024 Biden run is likely, some Democrats are working to change his mind.

A progressive group has been running ads under the banner "Don't Run Joe" across Georgia, Michigan and South Carolina in recent days. The ad campaign features Democratic voters condemning the president



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as "status-quo Joe," while highlighting his weak polling numbers.

"If he runs, the election is at serious risk," one voter says of Biden in the new ad, which will also begin running on CNN in Washington, D.C., on Monday, according to one of the group's leaders, Norman Solomon.

There is no clear Democratic alternative should Biden not run, however. That may help explain why most Democratic officials are openly encouraging the president to run again.

In an interview, progressive leader Rep. Ro Khanna, D-Calif., said he wouldn't challenge the president in a primary and he discouraged anyone from the party's progressive wing from doing so.

"At this point, I don't think a candidacy from someone would do anything other than weaken the president. And why would you want to do that headed into an election that's going to be close?" he said.

Quentin Wathum-Ocama, president of the Young Democrats of America, has been critical of Biden in the past but said he's "good" if Biden wants to run again.

Even if young people are not overly excited about the Biden administration, he said, they feel a "sense of duty and obligation" to support the party because of the threats to democracy that Trump and his allies represent.

"We're not always going to be super enthused, but we're going to show the hell up," Wathum-Ocama said. "We're obligated to show up because we know what happens next — and that could be something even scarier than what we saw on Jan. 6."

Sanders insisted that the Democratic Party "has got to be more than the anti-Trump party."

The Vermont independent said Democrats in Congress must move with real urgency to address the erosion of working-class voters who are increasingly willing to support Trump and his Republican allies. He called on Senate Democrats to adopt a higher minimum wage, among other worker-friendly legislation that would test the new Republican-controlled House's commitment to working-class voters.

As for his own 2024 intentions, the 81-year-old Sanders, who sought the Democratic nomination for president in 2016 and 2020, said it was not the right time to discuss whether he might launch another White House bid.

"I'll make a decision at the appropriate time," Sanders said. "People need to breathe."

## Evacuation warnings amid flooding after California storm

SACRAMENTO, Calif. (AP) — Residents of a Northern California community were ordered to evacuate ahead of imminent flooding, and evacuation warnings were in place elsewhere in rural parts of the region on New Year's Day after a powerful storm brought drenching rain or heavy snowfall to much of the state, breaching levees, snarling traffic and closing major highways.

Even after the storm moved through, major flooding occurred in agricultural areas about 20 miles (32 kilometers) south of Sacramento, where rivers swelled beyond their banks and inundated dozens of cars along State Route 99.

Emergency crews rescued motorists on New Year's Eve into Sunday morning and the highway remained closed. Crews on Sunday found one person dead inside a submerged vehicle near Route 99, Dan Quiggle, deputy fire chief for operations for Cosumnes Community Service District Fire Department, told The Sacramento Bee.

Sacramento County authorities issued an evacuation order late Sunday for residents of the low-lying community of Point Pleasant near Interstate 5, citing imminent and dangerous flooding. Residents of the nearby communities of Glanville Tract and Franklin Pond were told to prepare to leave before more roadways are cut off by rising water and evacuation becomes impossible.

"It is expected that the flooding from the Cosumnes River and the Mokelumne River is moving southwest toward I-5 and could reach these areas in the middle of the night," the Sacramento County Office of Emergency Services said earlier on Twitter Sunday afternoon. "Livestock in the affected areas should be moved to higher ground."

To the north in the state's capital, crews cleared downed trees from roads and sidewalks as at least

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17,000 customers were still without power Sunday, down from more than 150,000 a day earlier, according to a Sacramento Municipal Utility District online map.

Near Lake Tahoe, dozens of drivers were rescued on New Year's Eve along Interstate 80 after cars spun out in the snow during the blizzard, the California Department of Transportation said. The key route to the mountains from the San Francisco Bay Area reopened early Sunday to passenger vehicles with chains.

"The roads are extremely slick so let's all work together and slow down so we can keep I-80 open," the California Highway Patrol said on Twitter. Several other highways, including State Route 50, also reopened.

More than 4 feet (1.2 meters) of snow had accumulated in the high Sierra Nevada, and the Mammoth Mountain Ski Area said heavy, wet snow would cause major delays in chairlift openings. On Saturday, the resort reported numerous lift closings, citing high winds, low visibility and ice.

A so-called atmospheric river storm pulled in a long and wide plume of moisture from the Pacific Ocean. Flooding and rock slides closed portions of roads across the state.

Rainfall in downtown San Francisco hit 5.46 inches (13.87 cm) on New Year's Eve, making it the second-wettest day on record, behind a November 1994 deluge, the National Weather Service said. Videos on Twitter showed mud-colored water streaming along San Francisco streets, and a staircase in Oakland turned into a veritable waterfall by heavy rains.

In Southern California, several people were rescued after floodwaters inundated cars in San Bernardino and Orange counties. No major injuries were reported.

With the region drying out on New Year's Day and no rainfall expected during Monday's Rose Parade in Pasadena, spectators began staking out their spots for the annual floral spectacle.

The rain was welcomed in drought-parched California. The past three years have been the state's driest on record — but much more precipitation is needed to make a significant difference.

It was the first of several storms expected to roll across the state in the span of a week. Saturday's system was warmer and wetter, while storms this week will be colder, said Hannah Chandler-Cooley, a meteorologist at the National Weather Service in Sacramento.

The Sacramento region could receive a total of 4 to 5 inches (10 to 13 centimeters) of rain over the week, Chandler-Cooley said.

Another round of heavy showers was also forecast for Southern California on Tuesday or Wednesday, the National Weather Service's Los Angeles-area office said.

## **Macao eases COVID rules, but tourism, casinos yet to rebound**

By KANIS LEUNG Associated Press

MACAO (AP) — Only a few tourists crisscrossed the wavy black and white paving of Macao's historic Senado Square on a recent weekday and many of the shops were shuttered.

The gaming hub on China's south coast near Hong Kong has endured some of the world's strictest anti-virus controls for nearly three years, and a loosening of border restrictions after China rolled back its "zero-COVID" strategy in early December is widely expected to boost its tourism-driven economy.

But for now, China's worst wave of infections so far is keeping away the hordes of high rollers who usually fill its casinos. From Dec. 23-27, the city saw a daily average of only 8,300 arrivals, according to police data. That's just 68% of November's level. The scene improved on New Year's Eve with 28,100 visitors entering the city that day, but that's only 66% of the level a year ago. The daily average was 108,000 in 2019, before the pandemic.

Last week, China announced it would resume issuing passports for tourism, potentially setting up a flood of Chinese going abroad, but also spicing up competition for Macao.

Businesses are hoping the Lunar New Year holidays in late January will bring better luck for the territory of 672,000 people, a former Portuguese colony and the only place in China where casinos are legal.

"Tourists just come here to have a walk instead of shopping," said Antony Chau, who sells roasted chestnuts on the square known for the European-style buildings that recall its history as a former Portuguese colony. "They're just wandering."

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When the coronavirus hit in 2020, the city's gambling revenue collapsed 80% to just \$7.5 billion from a year earlier. In 2021, the figure recovered to \$10.8 billion, but that's still down 75% from a peak of \$45 billion in 2013. Gambling revenues last year was halved to \$5.3 billion.

A rebound could not come a moment too soon for souvenir shop owner Lee Hong-soi.

He said his business has been even quieter recently than before entry rules were relaxed. Since entry into Macao requires a negative PCR test result before departure, many in mainland China could not visit because they were infected, he said. And now Macao and other parts of China are battling outbreaks.

"I am running out of strength after enduring for three years," he said.

Several hundred meters away, visitors were enjoying an unusual degree of tranquility at the Ruins of St. Paul's, originally the 17th century Church of Mater Dei.

Rain Lee, 29, visiting from Hong Kong with her husband, said she was happy not to deal with crowds, but disappointed so many businesses were shuttered.

"Many shops are gone," said Lee, a property manager. "I wish it could be like the pre-pandemic days when all stores were open, with many people walking in the streets. It was more vibrant back then."

Beijing visitor Xylia Zhang, 36, taking her first trip outside the mainland since the pandemic began, was looking forward to trying her luck in the casinos.

"It's quite exciting because I may lose the several hundred dollars (in Chinese yuan) that I budgeted," she said. "I have been to casinos in Seoul and Las Vegas. But I haven't experienced that in Chinese-speaking places."

The surge of cases in China has prompted some people to go to Macao to get shots of the mRNA-based Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine, which is not available in the mainland, the Chinese business news website Caixin reported last month. Macao's University Hospital, which provides the service, did not reply to an emailed request for comment and its phone rang unanswered Friday.

But there has been no sign of a rush of customers, especially not in the casinos.

Gambling floors at two major casinos were half-empty Wednesday, with just a few small groups of Chinese visitors sitting around slot machines and craps tables, dealers visibly bored with the lack of activity.

It will take a while for Macao to regain its pre-pandemic pizzazz, said Glenn McCartney, associate professor in integrated resort and tourism management at the University of Macao.

"(For) tourism, you can't sort of snap your fingers, and things start to move," McCartney said.

But he said Macao's tourism officials have staged road shows in China during the pandemic, leveraging the scenic city's location just across the border.

The Lunar New Year will bring a sense of the potential for a longer term rebound in tourism, he said.

"That could be the cue."

## Rodgers, Packers rout Vikings 41-17, control playoff fate

By STEVE MEGARGEE AP Sports Writer

GREEN BAY, Wis. (AP) — Aaron Rodgers and the Packers suddenly are just a win away from an improbable playoff berth.

He has his defense to thank for continuing Green Bay's reversal of fortune.

Rodgers threw a touchdown pass and ran for a score, and the Packers shut down Kirk Cousins and star receiver Justin Jefferson in a 41-17 blowout of the Minnesota Vikings on Sunday.

Keisean Nixon scored on a 105-yard kickoff return and Darnell Savage had a 75-yard pick-6 of Cousins — one of four turnovers by the Minnesota QB. The Packers (8-8) will reach the playoffs if they beat the Detroit Lions at home in their regular-season finale.

A fourth straight postseason berth seemed out of the question after a 1-7 stretch dropped the Packers to 4-8, but they haven't lost since and have benefited from favorable results around the league. Green Bay's latest bit of good fortune came earlier Sunday when Washington fell 24-10 at home to the Cleveland, putting the Packers in control of their postseason fate.

"I still believe in myself and felt like it just takes one sometimes," said Rodgers, who went 15 of 24 for

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159 yards. "It's strange, but when we were sitting at 3-6 and looked at the next three, at the time Tennessee was playing really well, obviously the Cowboys were playing well and Philly was No. 1 in the league.

"I just felt like if we get one of those, we can win the last five, and 9-8 was going to get in. I didn't really go around saying that because you don't really want to say, 'Hey, if we get just one of these three, you know, we can maybe make the playoffs.' But in my head, that's what I was thinking."

The Packers beat the Cowboys in overtime before losing to Tennessee and Philadelphia. They've now won four straight, with their ball-hawking defense a big reason why.

Green Bay held Jefferson, the NFL's leading receiver, to one catch for 15 yards. Jefferson had nine receptions for 184 yards and two touchdowns in a season-opening 23-7 victory over the Packers.

Savage, Adrian Amos and Rudy Ford each intercepted passes by Cousins, while Kenny Clark recovered a fumble on a strip sack. The Packers converted each of Cousins' turnovers into touchdowns.

"They say (turnovers) come in bunches, so you've just got to capitalize on it," Savage said. "I think we're just going out there, playing hard, trusting each other. A lot of stuff's falling our way."

Cousins went 18 of 31 for 205 yards for the NFC North champion Vikings (12-4). His only touchdown pass came in garbage time, a 47-yarder to Jalen Nailor that cut Green Bay's lead to 41-10.

"I just didn't play well enough tonight," Cousins said. "Just need to play better, that's the bottom line."

The Vikings' Dalvin Cook was held to 27 yards on nine carries.

Rodgers threw a 21-yard touchdown pass to Robert Tonyan and also scored Green Bay's final touchdown on a 2-yard scramble.

After a blocked punt by Josh Metellus gave Minnesota first-and-goal at the 1 to help the Vikings take an early 3-0 lead, the Packers scored 41 straight points.

That outburst started with the big plays from Nixon and Savage. This marked the first time the Packers scored on an interception return and a kickoff return in the same game since a 31-23 victory over the St. Louis Cardinals on Oct. 30, 1967.

Nixon's touchdown was the Packers' first off a kickoff return since Randall Cobb's franchise-record 108-yarder against New Orleans in 2011. Nixon had a 94-yard kickoff return in a 26-20 Christmas Day victory at Miami, but he left that game with a groin injury that kept him from practicing most of this week.

"Guys had great blocks for me," Nixon said. "They opened it up. I feel like it was open sea. I just ran through it. I just knew I had one person to beat, and once I passed the kicker, it was party time."

Green Bay also got a solid game from veteran kicker Mason Crosby, who went 2 of 2 on field-goal attempts, including a 56-yarder that the crossbar before bouncing through to close the first half.

That kick gave Green Bay a 27-3 halftime lead. The Packers didn't let up in the second half, and if they can maintain that level next week, they'll conclude a remarkable turnaround with a playoff appearance.

"We're going to have a good story to tell, you know what I'm saying, but we've got to finish it," Amos said. "We finished this week and now we're 0-0. We've been in playoff mode for a while. We've got to continue going into this week."

## INJURIES

The Vikings lost two of their starting offensive linemen to injuries in the first quarter. Center Austin Schlottmann suffered a broken fibula and right tackle Brian O'Neill departed with a calf injury. Schlottmann was starting in place of Garrett Bradbury, who missed a fourth straight game with a back injury.

Chris Reed, who hadn't played an offensive snap all season, took over for Schlottmann at center. Olu-saemeka Udoh filled in at right tackle.

## UP NEXT

The Vikings visit Chicago and the Packers host the Lions next weekend.

## Democrat Kathy Hochul sworn in as elected New York governor

By MAYSOON KHAN Associated Press/Report for America

ALBANY, N.Y. (AP) — New York Governor Kathy Hochul was sworn in for her first elected term on Sunday, making history as the first woman elected to the position in the state.



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The Democrat, launching her term as the 57th governor of New York, said her goals were to increase public safety and to make the state more affordable.

"Right now there are some fights we have to take on," Hochul said after taking the oath of office at the Empire State Plaza Convention Center in Albany. "First we must and will make our streets safer."

Hochul also called for making the state more affordable, citing the high cost of living. Also sworn in Sunday was Lt. Gov. Antonio Delgado.

A native of Buffalo, Hochul, 64, defeated Republican congressman Lee Zeldin, an ally of Donald Trump, in November's election to win the office that she took over in 2021 when former Gov. Andrew Cuomo resigned.

A former congresswoman, she served as Cuomo's lieutenant governor before taking over in August 2021 and has tried to cast herself as a fresh start from Cuomo. He resigned amid sexual harassment allegations, which he denies.

New York Democratic U.S. Sen. Chuck Schumer described her November victory as "breaking the glass ceiling."

During her time as governor, New York passed some of the strictest gun laws in the nation, some of which are experiencing court challenges.

Delgado, a former Democratic U.S. representative who identifies as Afro-Latino, took over the position as lieutenant governor in May after Brian Benjamin resigned, and said he couldn't "wait to get down to business" of "transparent" and "accountable" government.

New York Attorney General Letitia A. James, 64, also took oath Sunday for her second elected term in the position. She made history in 2018 as the first woman elected as the state's attorney general and the first Black person to serve in the role.

"Four years ago I made a commitment to make this office a force of justice. I promise to fight for all New Yorkers, regardless of your political affiliation," James, of Brooklyn, said.

Comptroller Thomas DiNapoli was sworn in for his fourth term. "We continue to live in a time of unprecedented challenge of evil and economic uncertainty. But we New Yorkers are resilient," he said.

## NY lawmakers get pay raise making them nation's best-paid

By MAYSOON KHAN Associated Press/Report for America

ALBANY, N.Y. (AP) — Just in time for the New Year, New York lawmakers have become the highest paid state legislators in the nation under a bill signed Saturday.

Members of both houses are getting a pay raise of \$32,000, for a base salary of \$142,000, under a bill Gov. Kathy Hochul signed a day before her inauguration Sunday. That's a 29% raise over their previous salary of \$110,000.

The law went into effect Sunday.

Before the pay boost, state lawmakers in California were the highest paid with a yearly base salary of \$119,000, according to the National Conference of State Legislatures.

New York lawmakers passed the pay-raise bill during a special session in late December.

The new pay raise comes with restrictions, though.

Starting in 2025, outside income will be capped at \$35,000. Pay in excess of that from military service, retirement plans, or investments will still be allowed.

Some Democrats in the legislature supported the pay raise, and said it was necessary in order to keep up with the cost of living.

But some Republican lawmakers spoke out against the bill during the special session, criticizing the ban on the outside income.

"Their attempt to buy political cover by instituting a ban on outside income won't make Albany better, it will make it worse," said state Sen. George Borrello in explaining his "no" vote on the bill.

Borrello said the ban would discourage citizen legislators, or "enterprising, accomplished individuals with real-world experience from entering public service."

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The last pay raise state legislators received was in 2018, and that was their first raise in two decades.

## 14 killed in attack on Mexican border prison

MEXICO CITY (AP) — Ten guards and four inmates were killed early Sunday when gunmen in armored vehicles attacked a state prison in Ciudad Juarez across the border from El Paso, Texas, according to state officials.

The Chihuahua state prosecutor's office said in a statement that around 7 a.m. various armored vehicles arrived at the prison and gunmen opened fire on guards. In addition to those killed, 13 people were wounded and at least 24 inmates escaped.

Mexican soldiers and state police regained control of the prison later Sunday. The state prosecutor's office said its personnel were investigating.

In August, a riot inside the same state prison spread to the streets of Juarez in violence that left 11 people dead.

In that case, two inmates were killed inside the prison and then alleged gang members started shooting up the town, including killing four employees of a radio station who were doing a promotion at a restaurant.

Violence is frequent in Mexican prisons, including in some where authorities only maintain nominal control. Clashes regularly erupt among inmate of rival gangs, which in places like Juarez serve as proxies for drug cartels.

Shortly before Sunday's attack on the prison, municipal police were attacked and managed to capture four men after a pursuit, according to the state prosecutor's office statement. Later, police killed two alleged gunmen traveling in a SUV.

## UK climate group calls temporary halt to disruptive protests

LONDON (AP) — The U.K. division of climate change protest group Extinction Rebellion says its activists would temporarily stop blocking busy roads, gluing themselves to buildings and engaging in other acts of civil disobedience because such methods have not achieved their desired effects.

"As we ring in the new year, we make a controversial resolution to temporarily shift away from public disruption as a primary tactic," the group said in a New Year's Eve website post. "We recognize and celebrate the power of disruption to raise the alarm and believe that constantly evolving tactics is a necessary approach."

To further its goals of getting politicians, corporations and the public "to end the fossil fuel era," the group said it would instead focus on broadening its support with actions such as getting 100,000 people to surround the Houses of Parliament in London on April 21.

"In a time when speaking out and taking action are criminalized, building collective power, strengthening in number and thriving through bridge-building is a radical act," the website post said. "This year, we prioritize attendance over arrest and relationships over roadblocks, as we stand together and become impossible to ignore."

In response to protests by Extinction Rebellion and other direct-action groups, Britain's Conservative government last year toughened police powers to shut down disruptive protests and increased penalties for obstructing roads, which can now bring a prison sentence.

Even tougher moves were rejected by Parliament, but the government planned to try again to pass a law that would make it a criminal offense to interfere with infrastructure. Civil liberties groups have decried the moves as restrictions on free speech and the right to protest.

In the four years since Extinction Rebellion formed, the group has attracted both praise and criticism with climate demonstrations that were designed to be disruptive and often led to mass arrests while succeeding in snarling road and port traffic.

In April, British police said six people were arrested after activists climbed onto an oil tanker and blocked four London bridges to protest investments in fossil fuel. Extinction Rebellion said at the time that two former British Olympic athletes, gold medal-winning canoeist Etienne Stott and sailor Laura Baldwin, were

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among the protesters.

In its Sunday post titled "We Quit," the U.K. branch of Extinction Rebellion said that while the group has helped bring about "a seismic shift" in the climate conversation, "very little has changed. Emissions continue to rise and our planet is dying at an accelerated rate."

The group said it thinks a confluence of multiple crises made it the right time to try a new approach. In its announcement about the April protest, it said, "Surrounding the Houses of Parliament day after day in large numbers means we can leave the locks, glue and paint behind."

## Ukraine faces grim start to 2023 after fresh Russian attacks

By RENATA BRITO Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Ukrainians faced a grim start to 2023 as Sunday brought more Russian missile and drone attacks following a blistering New Year's Eve assault that killed at least three civilians across the country, authorities reported.

Air raid sirens sounded in the capital shortly after midnight, followed by a barrage of missiles that interrupted the small celebrations residents held at home due to wartime curfews. Ukrainian officials alleged Moscow was deliberately targeting civilians along with critical infrastructure to create a climate of fear and destroy morale during the long winter months.

In a video address Sunday night, President Volodymyr Zelenskyy praised his citizens' "sense of unity, of authenticity, of life itself." The Russians, he said, "will not take away a single year from Ukraine. They will not take away our independence. We will not give them anything."

Ukrainian forces in the air and on the ground shot down 45 Iranian-made explosive drones fired by Russia on Saturday night and before dawn Sunday, Zelenskyy said.

Another strike at noon Sunday in the southern Zaporizhzhia region killed one person, according to the head of the regional military administration, Alexander Starukh. But Kyiv was largely quiet, and people there on New Year's Day savored the snippets of peace.

"Of course it was hard to celebrate fully because we understand that our soldiers can't be with their family," Evheniya Shulzhenko said while sitting with her husband on a park bench overlooking the city.

But a "really powerful" New Year's Eve speech by Zelenskyy lifted her spirits and made her proud to be Ukrainian, Shulzhenko said. She recently moved to Kyiv after living in Bakhmut and Kharkiv, two cities that have experienced some of the heaviest fighting of the war.

Multiple blasts rocked the capital and other areas of Ukraine on Saturday and through the night, wounding dozens. An AP photographer at the scene of an explosion in Kyiv saw a woman's body as her husband and son stood nearby.

Ukraine's largest university, the Taras Shevchenko National University in Kyiv, reported significant damage to its buildings and campus. Mayor Vitali Klitschko said two schools were damaged, including a kindergarten.

The strikes came 36 hours after widespread missile attacks Russia launched Thursday to damage energy infrastructure facilities. Saturday's unusually quick follow-up alarmed Ukrainian officials. Russia has carried out airstrikes on Ukrainian power and water supplies almost weekly since October, increasing the suffering of Ukrainians, while its ground forces struggle to hold ground and advance.

Nighttime shelling in parts of the southern city of Kherson killed one person and blew out hundreds of windows in a children's hospital, according to deputy presidential chief of staff Kyrylo Tymoshenko. Ukrainian forces reclaimed the city in November after Russia's forces withdrew across the Dnieper River, which bisects the Kherson region.

When shells hit the children's hospital on Saturday night, surgeons were operating on a 13-year-old boy who was seriously wounded in a nearby village that evening, Kherson Gov. Yaroslav Yanushevych said. The boy was transferred in serious condition to a hospital about 99 kilometers (62 miles) away in Mykolaiv.

Elsewhere, a 22-year-old woman died of wounds from a Saturday rocket attack Saturday in the eastern town of Khmelnytskyi, the city's mayor said.

Instead of New Year's fireworks, Oleksander Dugyn said he and his friends and family in Kyiv watched

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the sparks caused by Ukrainian air defense forces countering Russian attacks.

"We already know the sound of rockets, we know the moment they fly, we know the sound of drones. The sound is like the roar of a moped," said Dugin, who was strolling with his family in the park. "We hold on the best we can."

While Russia's bombardments have left many Ukrainians without heating and electricity due to damage or controlled blackouts meant to preserve the remaining power supply, Ukraine's state-owned grid operator said Sunday there would be no restrictions on electricity use for one day.

"The power industry is doing everything possible to ensure that the New Year's holiday is with light, without restrictions," utility company Ukrenergo said.

It said businesses and industry had cut back to allow the additional electricity for households.

Zelenskyy, in his nightly address, thanked utility workers for helping to keep the lights on during the latest assault. "It is very important how all Ukrainians recharged their inner energy this New Year's Eve," he said.

In separate tweets Sunday, the Ukrainian leader also reminded the European Union of his country's wish to join the EU. He thanked the Czech Republic and congratulated Sweden, which just exchanged the EU's rotating presidency, for their help in securing progress for Ukraine's bid.

Meanwhile, NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg said the Western military alliance's 30 members need to "ramp up" arms production in the coming months both to maintain their own stockpiles and to keep supplying Ukraine with the weapons it needs to fend off Russia.

The war in Ukraine, now in its 11th month, is consuming an "enormous amount" of munitions, Stoltenberg told BBC Radio 4's "The World This Weekend" in an interview that aired Sunday.

"It is a core responsibility for NATO to ensure that we have the stocks, the supplies, the weapons in place to ensure our own deterrence and defense, but also to be able to continue to provide support to Ukraine for the long haul," he said.

Achieving the twin goals "is a huge undertaking. We need to ramp up production, and that is exactly what the NATO allies are doing," Stoltenberg said.

The NATO chief said that while Russia has experienced battlefield setbacks and the fighting on the ground appears at a stalemate, "Russia has shown no sign of giving up its overall goal of taking control over Ukraine," he said.

"The Ukrainian forces have had the momentum for several months but we also know that Russia has mobilized many more forces. Many of them are now training.

"All that indicates that they are prepared to continue the war and also potentially try to launch a new offensive," Stoltenberg said.

He added that what Ukraine can achieve during negotiations to end the war will depend on the strength it shows on the battlefield.

"If we want a negotiated solution that ensures that Ukraine prevails as a sovereign, independent, democratic state in Europe, then we need to provide support for Ukraine now," Stoltenberg said,

## Historic term begins in Michigan as Whitmer, others sworn in

By JOEY CAPPELLETTI Associated Press

LANSING, Mich. (AP) — Michigan Gov. Gretchen Whitmer was sworn in for second term as the state's 49th governor on Sunday, pushing a message of unity and working together during remarks on the state Capitol steps as Democrats took full control of the state government for the first time in 40 years.

Whitmer, who was first elected in 2018 after serving as a state lawmaker for 14 years, won reelection in November by defeating Republican Tudor Dixon by nearly 11 percentage points. Alongside her on Sunday were other top Democratic leaders, including newly reelected Secretary of State Jocelyn Benson, Attorney General Dana Nessel and Lt. Gov. Garlin Gilchrist II.

During her inauguration address, Whitmer pledged to pursue "common sense" gun reform, continue investing in K-12 education, improve worker rights, lower taxes for the state's retirees and tackle climate change, adding that she would provide more specifics in her upcoming State of the State speech.



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"For the next four years, our task is to ensure that every Michigander, present and future, can succeed," Whitmer said to the nearly 1,000 people in attendance. "And our message is simple: We're putting the world on notice that your future is here in Michigan."

With a newly powerful Democratic caucus, Whitmer faces a test of delivering on years of promises in a swing state where Democrats must appeal to more than just their base or risk losing their majorities when the Legislature is up for grabs again in two years.

Whitmer acknowledged several Republican legislative leaders and promised throughout her speech to work across the aisle and with "anyone that wants to solve problems and get things done."

Sen. Aric Nesbitt, the new Republican leader in the state Senate, congratulated Whitmer following the inauguration and said in a statement that he hopes she "actually follows through on her repeated promises of bipartisanship."

The inauguration ceremony comes days after two men were sentenced to lengthy federal prison terms after they led a plot to kidnap Whitmer in 2020 ahead of the presidential election. Whitmer has previously blamed Republican leaders for stoking violent rhetoric and making light of the plot to kidnap and assassinate her.

Michigan Democrats officially took control of the state House and Senate at noon Sunday after winning slim majorities and flipping both chambers in November's election.

Newly selected Democratic leaders in the Legislature, Senate Majority Leader Winnie Brinks and House Speaker Joe Tate, joined the governor in stressing the importance of bipartisanship during their speeches.

"A stunning opportunity stands before us to work together like never before across legislative chambers and alongside the executive branch," said Brinks, who was selected as the Senate's first female majority leader in December.

The new legislative session is required to begin the second Wednesday of January. The state's budget will be among the priorities lawmakers tackle as they carry a nearly \$6 billion surplus into the new year.

History was also made Sunday on the state's Supreme Court as Kyra Harris Bolden was sworn in as the first Black woman to serve on the high court after Whitmer appointed the former state representative in November to replace retiring Justice Bridget McCormack. Bolden also administered Whitmer's oath of office.

## Trump rings in 2023 facing headwinds in his White House run

By JILL COLVIN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Donald Trump began 2022 on a high. Primary candidates were flocking to Florida to court the former president for a coveted endorsement. His rallies were drawing thousands. A bevy of investigations remained largely under the radar.

One year later, Trump is facing a very different reality.

He is mired in criminal investigations that could end with indictments. He has been blamed for Republicans' disappointing performance in the November elections. And while he is now a declared presidential candidate, the six weeks since he announced have been marked by self-inflicted crises. Trump has not held a single campaign event and he barely leaves the confines of his Mar-a-Lago club in Florida.

Instead of staving off challengers, his potential 2024 rivals appear ever more emboldened. Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis, fresh off a resounding reelection victory, increasingly is seen as Trump's most formidable competition.

Trump's subdued campaign announcement has left even former stalwarts wondering whether he is serious about another run for the White House.

"There was a movie called 'Failure to Launch.' I think that's what Donald Trump's process of running has been so far. He had the announcement, and he hasn't done anything to back it up since then," said Michael Biundo, a GOP operative who advised Trump's 2016 campaign but is steering clear this time.

"What campaign?" asked longtime GOP donor Dan Eberhart, who gave \$100,000 to Trump's 2020 reelection effort but is now gravitating to DeSantis. "Trump's early launch seems more a reaction to DeSantis' overperformance and a legal strategy against prosecution than a political campaign."

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Trump campaign officials insist they have been spending the weeks since his Nov. 15 announcement methodically building out a political operation. Trump, they note, announced just before the holiday season, when politicians typically lie low, and he did so unusually early, giving him plenty of time to ramp up.

"This is a marathon and our game plan is being implemented by design," said Trump spokesperson Steven Cheung.

"We're also assembling top-level teams in early voting states and expanding our massive data operation to ensure we dominate on all fronts," he said. "We are not going to play the media's game that tries to dictate how we campaign."

Trump also defended criticism of his campaign's slow start. "The Rallies will be bigger and better than ever (because our Country is going to Hell), but it's a little bit early, don't you think?" he wrote on his social media site.

While he has eschewed campaign events, the former president has nonetheless courted controversy.

There was his dinner with a white nationalist and the rapper formerly known as Kanye West, who has been spouting antisemitic tropes and conspiracies; his suggestions that parts of the Constitution be terminated to return him to power; and the "major announcement" that turned out to be the launch of \$99 digital trading cards that do not benefit his campaign.

Since his announcement, he has also faced a series of legal losses, including the appointment of a special counsel to oversee the Justice Department's investigation into the presence of classified documents at Trump's Florida estate as well as key aspects of a separate inquiry involving Trump's efforts to overturn the results of the 2020 election. Trump's namesake company was convicted of tax fraud last month for helping executives dodge taxes on extravagant perks. In Georgia, a special grand jury appears to be wrapping up its work investigating his efforts to remain in power.

Trump's potential rivals have spent months laying the groundwork for their own campaigns, visiting early-voting states, speaking before conservative groups and building the kinds of relationships that could benefit them down the line.

Bob Vander Plaats, the president and CEO of The Family Leader, an Iowa-based conservative group, pointed to Republicans such as former Vice President Mike Pence, former Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and former U.N. Ambassador Nikki Haley, who have made repeat visits to the state.

"They've done the early work that is needed to be out in front of Iowans and they're very well received," he said, noting the period since Trump announced his candidacy has been "unusually quiet. In a lot of ways, it kind of feels like it's the announcement that didn't even happen or doesn't feel like it happened because there was no immediate buzz. ... I don't hear from people on the ground, 'I can't wait for Trump to run.' 'Did you hear Trump's announcement?'"

He called the poor performance of some Trump-backed candidates in the 2022 midterms a "caution flag" and said that even Trump supporters are open to backing someone else in the 2024 contest.

"For the president, I think he's definitely going to have to earn the nomination," he said.

Despite his vulnerabilities, Trump remains the early GOP front-runner. While he is seen as potentially beatable in a one-on-one matchup, he is likely to benefit from a crowded field that splits the anti-Trump votes, just as he did when he ran and won in 2016.

But Biundo, the former Trump campaign adviser, said that after watching likely candidates such as Pence pay visits to early voting states, he too, believes the field is wide open.

"I don't think Donald Trump has it locked up. I don't think Ron DeSantis has it locked up. I don't think anyone has it locked up," he said. "At this point, it's an open primary."

## **Biden's new year pitch focuses on benefits of bipartisanship**

By DARLENE SUPERVILLE Associated Press

CHRISTIANSTED, U.S. Virgin Islands (AP) — President Joe Biden and top administration officials will open a new year of divided government by fanning out across the country to talk about how the economy is benefiting from his work with Democrats and Republicans.

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As part of the pitch, Biden and Senate Republican leader Mitch McConnell will make a rare joint appearance in McConnell's home state of Kentucky on Wednesday to highlight nearly \$1 trillion in infrastructure spending that lawmakers approved on a bipartisan basis in 2021.

The Democratic president will also be joined by a bipartisan group of elected officials when he visits the Kentucky side of the Cincinnati area, including Sen. Sherrod Brown, D-Ohio, Democratic Gov. Andy Beshear of Kentucky and Republican Gov. Mike DeWine of Ohio, the White House said.

Biden's bipartisanship blitz was announced two days before Republicans retake control of the House from Democrats on Tuesday following GOP gains in the November elections. The shift ends unified political control of Congress by Democrats and complicates Biden's future legislative agenda. Democrats will remain in charge in the Senate.

Before he departed Washington for vacation at the end of last year, Biden appealed for less partisanship, saying he hoped everyone will see each other "not as Democrats or Republicans, not as members of 'Team Red' or 'Team Blue,' but as who we really are, fellow Americans."

The president's trip appeared tied to a recent announcement by Kentucky and Ohio that they will receive more than \$1.63 billion in federal grants to help build a new Ohio River bridge near Cincinnati and improve the existing overloaded span there, a heavily used freight route linking the Midwest and the South.

Congestion at the Brent Spence Bridge on Interstates 75 and 71 has for years been a frustrating bottleneck on a key shipping corridor and a symbol of the nation's growing infrastructure needs. Officials say the bridge was built in the 1960s to carry around 80,000 vehicles a day but has seen double that traffic load on its narrow lanes, leading the Federal Highway Administration to declare it functionally obsolete.

The planned project covers about 8 miles (12 kilometers) and includes improvements to the bridge and some connecting roads and construction of a companion span nearby. Both states coordinated to request funding under the nearly \$1 trillion bipartisan infrastructure deal signed in 2021 by Biden, who had highlighted the project as the legislation moved through Congress.

McConnell said the companion bridge "will be one of the bill's crowning accomplishments."

DeWine said both states have been discussing the project for almost two decades "and now, we can finally move beyond the talk and get to work."

Officials hope to break ground later this year and complete much of the work by 2029.

Biden's visit could also provide a political boost to Beshear, who is seeking reelection this year in his overwhelmingly Republican state.

In a December 2022 interview with The Associated Press, Beshear gave a mixed review of Biden's job performance. Biden had joined Beshear to tour tornado- and flood-stricken regions of Kentucky last year.

"There are things that I think have been done well, and there are things that I wish would have been done better," Beshear said of Biden.

Other top administration officials will also help promote Biden's economic policies this week.

In Chicago on Wednesday, Vice President Kamala Harris will discuss "how the President's economic plan is rebuilding our infrastructure, creating good-paying jobs – jobs that don't require a four-year degree, and revitalizing communities left behind," the White House said in its announcement.

Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg was delivering the same message in New London, Connecticut, also on Wednesday.

Mitch Landrieu, the White House official tasked with promoting infrastructure spending, will join soon-to-be former House Speaker Nancy Pelosi on Thursday in San Francisco, which she represents in Congress.

Biden was scheduled to return to the White House on Monday after spending nearly a week with family on St. Croix in the U.S. Virgin Islands.

The president opened New Year's Day on Sunday by watching the first sunrise of 2023 and attending Mass at Holy Cross Catholic Church in Christiansted, where he has attended religious services during his past visits to the island.

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## Santos should consider resigning, veteran GOP lawmaker says

By HOPE YEN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Even as the House GOP leadership keeps silent, a veteran Republican lawmaker said Sunday that George Santos should consider resigning after the congressman-elect from New York admitted to lying about his heritage, education and professional career.

Texas Rep. Kevin Brady, a former House Ways and Means chairman who has served in Congress for 25 years, told "Fox News Sunday" that Santos would have "to take some huge steps" to regain trust and respect in his district. Santos is set to be sworn in Tuesday when the new Congress begins.

"This is troubling in so many ways. Certainly, he's lied repeatedly," said Brady, who is retiring from the House. "He certainly is going to have to consider resigning." Brady said a decision about whether Santos steps down is one "to be made between he and the voters who elected him."

In November, Santos, 34, was elected in the 3rd Congressional District, which includes some Long Island suburbs and a small part of the New York City borough of Queens. He became the first non-incumbent, openly gay Republican to win a seat to Congress. But weeks after helping Republicans secure their razor-thin House majority, Santos is now under investigation for fabricating large swaths of his biography. His campaign spending is also being scrutinized.

He has shown no signs of stepping aside. Last week, Santos was asked on Fox News about the "blatant lies" and responded that he had "made a mistake."

The top House Republican, Rep. Kevin McCarthy of California, who is running to become House speaker now that the GOP will hold the majority, has not said what action, if any, he might take against Santos.

Brady said if he headed a committee that Santos was set to serve on, "right now, he would not be on the committee."

The congressman also said that "we're a country of second chances. And when people are willing to turn their life around and own up to this and do what it takes and earn respect and trust again, you know, we're willing to do that." Brady said he was hopeful that Santos "chooses the right path here."

Questions were raised about Santos last 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.

Democrats are expected to pursue several avenues against 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.

## Full speed ahead: 'Avatar' sequel again dominates box office

NEW YORK (AP) — "Avatar: The Way of Water" is the box office king for a third straight week, and shows no sign of slowing down.

James Cameron's long-awaited sequel to the first "Avatar" film brought in an estimated \$63 million over the holiday weekend, roughly the same as the previous week, and now has made more than \$400 million domestically and more than \$1.3 billion globally. "The Way of Water" is already the 15th highest global release ever, just behind the first "Black Panther."

Numbers released Sunday by Comscore showed "Avatar" far ahead of the runner-up, Universal's "Shrek" spinoff "Puss in Boots: The Last Wish," which made an estimated \$16 million, and Disney's "Black Panther: Wakanda Forever," which brought in around \$4.8 million.

The Sony biopic "Whitney Houston: I Wanna Dance With Somebody" made \$4.2 million in its second week of release. "Babylon," the epic of early Hollywood starring Brad Pitt and Margot Robbie, continued to fare badly despite its five Golden Globe nominations. The Paramount release earned just \$2.7 million in its second week, a 24% drop, and averaged just \$815 per location. By comparison, the new "Avatar," a 20th Century Studios film, averaged more than \$15,000.

Estimated ticket sales for Friday through Sunday at U.S. and Canadian theaters, according to Comscore.



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Final domestic figures will be released Monday.

1. "Avatar: The Way of Water," \$63 million.
2. "Puss in Boots: The Last Wish," \$16 million.
3. "Black Panther: Wakanda Forever," \$4.8 million.
4. "I Wanna Dance With Somebody," \$4.2 million.
5. "Babylon," \$2.7 million.
6. "Violent Night," \$2.1 million.
7. "The Whale," \$1.3 million.
8. "The Fabelmans," \$1.1 million.
9. "The Menu," \$1.1 million.
10. "Strange World," \$538,000.

## 'Lord, I love you': Aide recounts Benedict's last words

By FRANCES D'EMILIO Associated Press

VATICAN CITY (AP) — Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI's last words were "Lord, I love you," his longtime secretary said Sunday, quoting a nurse who helped care for the 95-year-old former pontiff in his final hours.

Archbishop Georg Gaenswein, a German prelate who lived in the Vatican monastery where Benedict took up residence after his 2013 retirement, said the nurse recounted hearing Benedict utter those words at about 3 a.m. Saturday. The retired pope died later that morning.

"Benedict XVI, with a faint voice but in a very distinct way, said in Italian, 'Lord, I love you,'" Gaenswein told the Vatican's official media, adding that it happened when the aides tending to Benedict were changing shifts.

"I wasn't there in that moment, but the nurse a little later recounted it," the archbishop said. "They were his last comprehensible words, because afterwards, he wasn't able to express himself any more."

Gaenswein did not identify the male nurse who shared the information.

Earlier, the Vatican said that Pope Francis went to pay his respects immediately after Gaenswein called to inform him of Benedict's death shortly after 9:30 a.m. Saturday Vatican spokesman Matteo Bruni said Francis stayed in Benedict's monastery for quite some time before returning to his residence in a hotel located across the Vatican Gardens.

During New Year's Day remarks on Sunday, Francis prayed for his predecessor's passage to heaven and expressed thanks for Benedict's lifetime of service to the church.

Francis departed briefly from reading his homily during a morning Mass at St. Peter's Basilica to pray aloud for Benedict.

"Today we entrust to our Blessed Mother our beloved Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI, so that she may accompany him in his passage from this world to God," he said.

The basilica is set to host Benedict's coffin for three days of viewing that start Monday.

Rome Prefect Bruno Frattasi, an Interior Ministry official, told Italian state TV that "no fewer than 25,000, 30,000" mourners were expected to file past the coffin on Monday.

On Sunday, Benedict's body lay on a burgundy-colored bier in the chapel of the monastery where he had lived during his nearly decade-long retirement. He was dressed in a miter, the headgear of a bishop, and a red cloak-like vestment.

A rosary was placed in his hand. Behind him, visible in photos released by the Vatican, were the chapel's altar and a decorated Christmas tree.

Francis remembered Benedict again later Sunday while addressing thousands of people in St. Peter's Square. He told the crowd that "in these hours, we invoke her intercession, in particular for Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI, who, yesterday morning, left this world."

"Let us unite all together, with one heart and one soul, in giving thanks to God for the gift of this faithful servant of the Gospel and of the church," Francis said, speaking from a window of the Apostolic Palace to pilgrims and tourists below.

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The square will be the setting for Benedict's funeral led by Francis on Thursday morning. The service will be a simple one, the Vatican has said, in keeping with the wishes of Benedict. Before he was elected pope in 2005, Benedict was a German cardinal who served as the Church's guardian of doctrinal orthodoxy.

In recent years, Francis hailed Benedict's stunning decision to become the first pope to resign in 600 years and has made clear he'd consider such a step as an option for himself.

Hobbled by knee pain, Francis, 86, on Sunday arrived in the basilica in a wheelchair and took his place in a chair for the Mass, which was being celebrated by the Vatican's secretary of state.

Francis, who has repeatedly decried the war in Ukraine and its devastation, recalled those who are victims of war, passing the year-end holidays in darkness, cold and fear.

"At the beginning of this year, we need hope, just as the Earth needs rain," Francis said in his homily.

While addressing the faithful in St. Peter's Square, the pope cited the "intolerable" war in Ukraine, which began more than 10 months ago, and conflicts elsewhere other places in the world.

Yet, Francis said, "let us not lose hope" that peace will prevail.

## **EXPLAINER: What's ahead for Ohio's unsettled political maps?**

By JULIE CARR SMYTH Associated Press

COLUMBUS, Ohio (AP) — The election contests of 2022 may have been held and decided, but Ohio's political maps remain far from settled.

It was supposed to be a once-per-decade process for redrawing the state's U.S. House and Statehouse districts, in order to reflect updated population figures from the 2020 Census. Now it promises to extend into 2023, and probably longer.

While most U.S. states managed to eventually settle their map disputes, Ohio's protracted ordeal has trapped it in a uniquely confounding legal stalemate.

Here's a look at how Ohio got here, and what may (or may not) come next:

### HOW DID THE NEW MAPMAKING PROCESS WORK?

This was the first time Ohio tried out new ways of drawing congressional and legislative maps.

In 2015, Ohio voters were looking to avoid partisan gerrymandering, and voted overwhelmingly to empower a new, bipartisan Ohio Redistricting Commission to draw Statehouse maps. Those are the districts of the state senators and representatives whom voters send to Columbus.

Under the new rules, if both political parties said yes to the new boundaries, the maps would be in place for a full decade. Single-party support would result in a four-year map.

In 2018, another successful constitutional amendment was also wildly popular with voters. It set up a new system for drawing the state's U.S. House districts — that is, the districts of the representatives that voters send to Washington.

The state Legislature would get the first crack at drawing the lines. If they failed, the commission would be next. If it failed, then the Legislature could try a final time. A three-fifths majority of the minority party — in this case, Democrats — would need to agree to the new map for it to be in place for 10 years. Barring that, again, it would last only four years.

As it turned out, the seeming incentives for bipartisan compromise failed and Democrats didn't cast a single vote for any of the final maps, which were all Republican-drawn.

### WHAT POWER DID THE NEW SYSTEM GIVE THE STATE'S HIGH COURT?

Voters gave the Ohio Supreme Court "exclusive, original jurisdiction" to decide legal challenges, which included three lawsuits against the legislative maps and two lawsuits against the congressional map.

In a series of 4-3 votes, the court struck down every map they were sent. The court said the maps unduly benefited one party: Republicans. Those maps included two separate congressional maps — one approved by lawmakers in November 2021 and a second that cleared the redistricting commission in March 2022 — and five sets of Statehouse maps.

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## YET OHIO'S ELECTIONS HAPPENED ANYWAY?

That's right. Amid the legal clashes of the past year, courts allowed Ohio to go forward with May and August primaries under unconstitutional maps.

This fall, Republicans won 10 of Ohio's 15 congressional seats under the disputed U.S. House map (although Democrats netted several notable wins). The disputed Statehouse maps yielded even larger Republican supermajorities.

But the maps aren't valid beyond this election cycle. They will need to be redrawn.

## OK, SO THE MAPS DIDN'T FLY. WERE THERE CONSEQUENCES?

That's the conundrum. Even as they missed deadlines and flouted court instructions, Republicans argued that they were doing all they could to understand and interpret a fledgling process. The court's orders were unreasonable and conflicting, they said.

The voting-rights and Democratic groups that won seven consecutive rounds in court argued for lawmakers or commissioners to be held in contempt of court.

Ultimately, the justices balked. Chief Justice Maureen O'Connor told The Associated Press in a year-end interview that she feared taking such action would create a constitutional crisis.

Importantly, the Ohio Supreme Court had no other enforcement options available to it. The new system neither allowed the court to impose a particular map — say, one favored by the suing parties or developed by experts — nor to draw their own.

## WHERE DO THOSE CASES STAND NOW?

Ohio's congressional map dispute is now awaiting action in the U.S. Supreme Court, where Republican legislative leaders have appealed for a review of their loss in state court.

The case could be considered in conjunction with the closely watched Moore v. Harper case, whose oral arguments were held in December. That case seeks to resolve whether the U.S. Constitution's provision giving state legislatures the power to make the rules about the "times, places and manner" of congressional elections means state courts can be cut out of the process.

If Ohio's appeal is denied, Republican Ohio House Speaker Bob Cupp has said lawmakers will then have 30 days to pass a new congressional map. But the high court's decision isn't expected for months.

Meanwhile, Ohio's legislative maps expired with the November 2022 election — on orders of a federal court. The Ohio Redistricting Commission will have to come back together and make new, constitutionally compliant maps in time for 2024 elections. The state constitution says that process can't begin before July 1 of this year. Lawsuits challenging Statehouse maps, which ended in a draw this summer, remain open.

## HAVE OHIO'S POLITICAL DYNAMICS CHANGED?

Yes and no. The Ohio Redistricting Commission — made up of the governor, secretary of state, auditor and four lawmakers — remained 5-2 in Republicans' favor after the November elections.

Cupp, a key player in the redistricting saga, is retiring, but his successor will also be Republican.

But the Ohio Supreme Court's political leaning may have changed.

O'Connor, a Republican who was a key swing vote on the court, retired Saturday because of age limits. The ascension of her successor, GOP Justice Sharon Kennedy, left a court vacancy to which Republican Gov. Mike DeWine has appointed Republican Joe Deters, the longtime Hamilton County prosecutor.

Time will tell whether Deters sides with the 7-member court's other three Republican justices — unlike O'Connor — altering earlier case outcomes.

For her part, O'Connor has announced plans to pursue redistricting reforms in the Ohio Constitution, likely the type of independent commission she wrote about in one of her decisions. Many others are collaborating on similar efforts. The timing of any ballot campaign hasn't been determined.

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## Defending champion Georgia vs. Cinderella TCU for CFP title

By RALPH D. RUSSO AP College Football Writer

After the best semifinal day in the nine-year history of the College Football Playoff, the title game will match the defending national champion against the closest thing the sport has had in years to a Cinderella team.

It will be No. 1 Georgia (14-0) looking for its second straight championship against upstart and No. 3 TCU on Jan. 9 at SoFi Stadium in Inglewood, California.

The four-team playoff has been littered with lopsided semifinal games, but Saturday — and into early Sunday and the new year — delivered two thrillers and a combined 179 points.

The Bulldogs came from 14 points down in the second half to beat No. 4 Ohio State 42-41 in the Peach Bowl and advance to the CFP championship game for the third time under coach Kirby Smart.

"If we want any chance of winning a national championship, we have to play a lot better football than we played tonight, but we have to keep the resiliency and composure along with us," Smart said.

The Bulldogs and Buckeyes played a classic that came down to a missed field goal by Ohio State with three seconds left. Amazingly, it was even better than the wild opener of the semifinal doubleheader between No. 3 TCU and No. 2 Michigan.

The Horned Frogs (13-1) upset the Wolverines 51-45 in the Fiesta Bowl, the second-highest scoring CFP game ever.

"We're going to celebrate it," TCU quarterback Max Duggan said. "Obviously, we're excited, but we know we got a big one coming up."

TCU, the first Big 12 to win a playoff game, will be looking for its first national title since 1938. Under coach Dutch Meyer, the Horned Frogs beat Carnegie Tech 15-7 in the Sugar Bowl to complete a 10-0 season.

The Southeastern Conference champion Bulldogs opened as a 13 1/2-point favorites, according to FanDuel Sportsbook, in what will be the fifth meeting between the schools.

Georgia has won them all, including the last in the 2016 Liberty Bowl.

Coming off a 5-7 season in 2021 and picked to finish seventh in their conference before the season, the Horned Frogs have embraced the underdog role and thrived on being doubted.

"We know we're going to hear it again. It's not going to stop now," first-year coach Sonny Dykes said. "We got to do what we did this game (against Michigan). We've got to answer that criticism and show up and do what we're supposed to do."

"If we think that's going away, I think you guys all know that's not. That's just the way it is."

TCU would be the first team to win a national championship the year after having a losing season since Michigan State in 1965.

Georgia, No. 1 for most of the season, is looking for its third national title, trying to become the first back-to-back champion in the CFP era and the first since Alabama won the BCS in 2011 and '12.

It will be a matchup of Heisman Trophy finalist quarterbacks, with Duggan and Georgia's Stetson Bennett.

Neither is a future NFL draft first-rounder, and both had ups and down in the semifinal but came through in the biggest spots.

Duggan ran for two scores and threw two TD passes as the Frogs held back a surging Michigan in the second half.

Bennett threw for 398 yards and two touchdowns in the fourth quarter, including the game winner with 54 seconds left.

These Bulldogs rely more on Bennett and their offense than last year's championship team, which fielded one of the best defenses college football has had in recent history. Georgia ranked fifth in the nation in yards per play (6.97) coming into the playoff.

The Frogs have a powerful offense, too, with Duggan and star receiver Quentin Johnston, who had 163 yards on six catches against the Wolverines.

This is the penultimate season of the four-team version of the playoff before it expands to 12 teams in the 2024 season.

Before Saturday, only three of 16 semifinals had been decided by single digits, and all those blowouts helped fuel a desire to grow the field in the hope of creating some more interesting postseason games.



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This New Year's Eve, the four-team playoff turned out to be an eight-hour college football party. After losing to TCU, Michigan coach Jim Harbaugh summed up his team's game, and as it turns out, the day.

"The winner," he said, "was football."

## Benedict death paves way for protocols to guide future popes

By NICOLE WINFIELD Associated Press

VATICAN CITY (AP) — There was no tolling of the bells of St. Peter's Basilica, no solemn announcement by a Vatican monsignor to the faithful in the square. A fisherman's ring did not get smashed and the diplomatic corps were not mobilized to send official delegations to Rome.

The death of Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI passed in an entirely un-papal-like manner Saturday, with a two-sentence announcement from the Vatican press office, making clear once and for all that Benedict stopped being pope a decade ago. The rituals of his passing were less like the ones of a pontiff, monarch or Vicar of Christ on Earth and more akin to those of a retired bishop, even if he will be buried in the red vestments of a pope.

In a way it was fitting, and drove home that the new chapter in the history of the Catholic Church that Benedict began writing in 2013 when he became the first pope in 600 years to resign had ended, and that it's now up to Pope Francis to follow up with how future popes might retire.

Will Francis issue new protocols to regulate the office of a retired pope, after Benedict largely winged it on the fly? Will he feel more free to consider his own retirement, now that the main impediment to resignation -- having two emeritus popes at the same time -- has been removed? How does a reigning pope celebrate the funeral of a retired one?

"I think that his death will open problems, not close problems," said Massimo Franco, the author of "The Monastery," a book about Benedict's revolutionary retirement.

According to preliminary information released by the Vatican, Benedict's funeral Thursday in St. Peter's Square seems designed to be low-key, in keeping with his wishes for "simplicity" but also making clear that his status as an emeritus does not merit a pomp-filled papal sendoff.

When John Paul II died in 2005, presidents, prime ministers and kings from more than 100 countries attended the funeral presided over by none other than Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, who would become Benedict XVI after his election as pope 10 days later.

For Benedict's funeral, the Vatican only invited Italy and Germany to send official delegations, and advised foreign embassies that any other leaders who wished to attend could do so but only in their "private capacity."

Benedict's body will lie in state in St. Peter's Basilica starting Monday, but the three-day window for the faithful to pay their respects suggests a limited outpouring is expected. After John Paul's death, an estimated 2 million people lined up for four days and nights to say a final farewell, with some camping out on the cobblestones.

Italian security officials estimate some 60,000 people could attend the funeral, a fraction of the 300,000 who packed the piazza and surrounding streets in 2005.

Francis, for his part, offered a first word of tribute Saturday during his New Year's Eve homily, after having paid his respects Saturday morning immediately after Benedict died with a visit to the converted monastery where his predecessor lived. Francis praised Benedict's nobility and faithful prayers in his final years, but otherwise stuck to a previously prepared homily about the need for kindness and dialogue in today's world.

Francis will have the final word on Thursday, when he eulogizes Benedict, whom he has praised for his courage in "opening the door" to letting other popes retire.

But Francis himself has said protocols are needed to guide future papal retirements, saying the situation had worked out well enough in Benedict's case because he was "saintly and discreet." The death of Benedict now removes the key obstacle to any new law or procedures that could never be promulgated while he was still alive.

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While a future pope could change any decree Francis issues, canonists, cardinals and even rank-and-file Catholics have argued new norms are needed because Benedict's decisions in retirement impacted his successor from the very start.

From the title he chose (pope emeritus) to the cassock he wore (white) to the occasional public comments he made ( on sex abuse and priestly celibacy), even Benedict's supporters felt his choices left too much doubt about who was really in charge, especially for those Catholics nostalgic for his doctrinaire papacy.

Throughout Benedict's 10-year retirement, many traditionalists continued to consider Benedict a point of reference, and some even refused to respect the legitimacy of Francis as pope.

"I am convinced that the most appropriate ways will be found so as not to engender confusion in the people of God, even though this doesn't seem to me to be the right time for proclamations and clarifications," Geraldina Boni, a professor of canon law at the University of Bologna, said.

Thanks to Benedict's "meekness and discretion," and Francis' "strong and affable temperament," any possible rivalry was avoided, she said. But that may not be case in the future.

The work to clarify how things would work the next time there is both a sitting and a retired pope has already started. A team of canon lawyers launched a crowd-sourcing initiative in 2021 to craft a new church law to govern how a retired pope lives out his final years.

The project, explained at [progettocanonicosederomana.com](http://progettocanonicosederomana.com), includes proposals on everything from his title to his dress, pension and activities to make sure they "don't interfere directly or indirectly" with his successor's governance.

According to the draft proposals, which were the subject of an academic conference in October, a future retired pope should be referred to as the "bishop emeritus of Rome" not a "pope emeritus." While he could still wear the white cassock of the papacy, his fisherman's ring must be destroyed, as Benedict's was in 2013, and his insignia must remove "all symbols of his Petrine jurisdiction."

He should promote the unity of the church but cannot participate in any meetings of bishops or cardinals, and should consult the reigning pope before publishing anything on the doctrine and life of the church, social questions "or anything that can be considered as competing opinions with the pontifical magisterium."

"There was a time when we were accused of having imprudently chosen a theme that was too controversial," given Benedict was still alive, said Boni, who spearheaded the initiative. "On the contrary, the need for norms covering a pope who resigned has been affirmed repeatedly by high-level church figures."

While it's unclear if the proposals will be taken up by the Vatican, Francis regardless will find it easier to resign himself and to regulate the process for future popes since Benedict took the first step.

"We have to get used to the idea that popes will live long lives and that, in the end just like my grandfather or your grandfather and everyone's grandfathers, they can't continue," Luis Badilla, who runs the popular Vatican blog *Il Sismografo*, said. "But they are still part of the family, and this is something beautiful. It gives us a normal church, not a martian or other-worldly one."

## **Pelé brought renown to Santos, Brazilian port city and team**

By MAURICIO SAVARESE AP Sports Writer

SANTOS, Brazil (AP) — Pelé. Santos, Brazil.

Over decades, adoring fans around the world mailed thousands of letters, postcards and packages to the sports legend without his address or full name.

Almost without fail, they reached the office of Edson Arantes do Nascimento in the port city he made famous.

Santos was founded by the Portuguese in January 1546. It hosts Latin America's biggest port, which feeds the Sao Paulo area and exports the country's agricultural commodities to the planet.

Only after a 15-year-old sensation started scoring goals for the city's team did Santos, a city of about 430,000 residents today, become a household name. The Brazilian great, who died Thursday at 82 after fighting cancer, played there from 1956 to 1974.

"There's a Santos before Pelé and another after him," said Serginho Chulapa, Brazil's striker in the 1982

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World Cup and a local hero with more than 100 goals for the club. "He put both the city and club on the map. Before him, people came to work at the port and go to the beach."

Chulapa had four spells at Santos FC as a player, all during the 1980s. Since retirement he has worked at the club in different capacities, some of them alongside Pelé.

"Santos is not in a metropolis like Sao Paulo, we have to work with less money. And Pelé made this club gigantic since he started playing," Chulapa said. "Santos had its peak with him."

Pelé gave Santos two Copa Libertadores titles and two Intercontinental Cup titles against Benfica and AC Milan, as it beat some of the best rivals around the world. The Brazilian great won 26 titles at the club.

Some of Brazil's top politicians, including President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, have lived in the coastal city. But one of Santos's main touristic attractions is the Pelé Museum. It lies in the renovated area of the Casaroes do Valongo, close to the city port. It opened in 2014 and hosts tens of thousands of tourists. Many are like Gisela Claudia, 65, who arrived on a cruise ship to spend New Year's Eve in the city.

"It is my first time in Santos. And I only came in this cruise because my husband wanted to see the city of Pelé," Claudia said.

"He is lost somewhere in the museum," she said. "There are other beaches on this trip that are more beautiful than this. But none of them have this history of the greatest player."

The museum features some of Pelé's remaining memorabilia: boots, trophies, medals, shirts.

Santos has become a popular destination for New Year's Eve, specially among residents of Sao Paulo, who grew fond of its clubs, beaches and a few private islands where parties take place. But the local club's Vila Belmiro stadium, where Pelé's funeral will take place on Monday, remains one of the city's main tourist attractions.

The last time Santos consistently filled its arena's 16,000 seats was between 2009 and 2013, when striker Neymar played there.

Santos FC is also home to other renowned players, most of them coming from its academy long after Pelé had retired. The list includes Rodrygo, Elano, Zé Roberto, Giovanni, Robinho, Diego and Gabriel Barbosa.

Pelé's death is expected to change many names around Santos. The first is expected to be the port, which will be renamed King Pelé Port, the incoming federal administration has decided.

Architect Maria Tereza Myre Dores, one of Pelé's closest friends and his neighbor in the final years of his life in the neighboring city of Guarujá, says Santos the club and Santos the city will never be the same.

"He was Santos. He loved the city, loved the club. And he made both better and bigger," Myre Dores said.

"I still remember the afternoons he spent in his office signing letters and shirts for people everywhere. One by one and sending them back, even those that only came with those three words; Pelé, Santos, Brazil," the architect said. "Without him, Santos is less Santos."

## UN official meets Taliban deputy premier over women NGO ban

KABUL, Afghanistan (AP) — A senior U.N. official in Afghanistan met on Sunday the deputy prime minister of the Taliban-led government to discuss a ban on women working for non-governmental groups that Afghan authorities have announced in a series of measures rolling back women's rights.

The decision by the Taliban government to bar women from NGO work has prompted major international aid agencies to suspend operations in the country. The ban has raised fears that people will be deprived of food, education, healthcare and other critical services, as over half of Afghanistan's population needs urgent humanitarian assistance.

Aid agencies have warned the ban will have catastrophic consequences and "hundreds and thousands" of Afghans will die because of the Taliban decision.

The deputy head of the U.N. Mission in Afghanistan, Potzel Markus, met Maulvi Abdul Salam Hanafi in the capital Kabul to discuss the ban, as well as other measures including barring women from universities.

"Banning women from working in non-governmental organizations, denying girls and women from education and training, harms millions of people in Afghanistan and prevents the delivery of vital aid to Afghan men, women, and children," the U.N. mission said.

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Potzel is the latest U.N. official to meet the Taliban's leadership amid mounting international concern over the curtailing of women's freedoms in Afghanistan.

Last Monday, the acting head of the U.N. mission Ramiz Alakbarov met Economy Minister Qari Din Mohammed Hanif.

Hanif issued the NGO ban on Dec. 24, allegedly because women weren't wearing the Islamic headscarf, or hijab, correctly. He said any organization found not complying with the order will have its license revoked.

Aid agencies have been providing essential services and support in the face of a worsening humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan.

The Taliban takeover in 2021, as U.S. and NATO forces were in the final weeks of their pullout after 20 years of war, sent Afghanistan's economy into a tailspin and transformed the country, driving millions into poverty and hunger. Foreign aid stopped almost overnight.

Sanctions on the Taliban rulers, including a halt on bank transfers and the freezing of billions in Afghanistan's foreign assets have already restricted access to global institutions. Funds from aid agencies helped prop up the country's aid-dependent economy before the Taliban takeover.

U.N. aid chief Martin Griffiths is due to visit Afghanistan to discuss the ban.

Potzel's meeting with Hanafi came as a U.N. survey showed that a third of NGOs headed by women in Afghanistan have been forced to stop 70% of their activities due to the ban and around a third have stopped all their activities.

The U.N. Women's Department said 86% of the 151 organizations surveyed have either stopped or are functioning partially.

It also said the lack of women in the distribution of aid has had a significant impact on the Afghan population.

## While blamed, Benedict fought sex abuse more than past popes

By NICOLE WINFIELD Associated Press

VATICAN CITY (AP) — Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI is rightly credited with having been one of the 20th century's most prolific Catholic theologians, a teacher-pope who preached the faith via volumes of books, sermons and speeches. But he rarely got credit for another important aspect of his legacy: having done more than anyone before him to turn the Vatican around on clergy sexual abuse.

As cardinal and pope, Benedict pushed through revolutionary changes to church law to make it easier to defrock predator priests, and he sacked hundreds of them. He was the first pontiff to meet with abuse survivors. And he reversed his revered predecessor on the most egregious case of the 20th century Catholic Church, finally taking action against a serial pedophile who was adored by St. John Paul II's inner circle.

But much more needed to be done, and following his death Saturday, abuse survivors and their advocates made clear they did not feel his record was anything to praise, noting that he, like the rest of the Catholic hierarchy, protected the image of the institution over the needs of victims and in many ways embodied the clerical system that fueled the problem.

"In our view, Pope Benedict XVI is taking decades of the church's darkest secrets to his grave with him," said SNAP, the main U.S.-based group of clergy abuse survivors.

Matthias Katsch of Eckiger Tisch, a group representing German survivors, said Benedict will go down in history for abuse victims as "a person who was long responsible in the system they fell victim to," according to the dpa news agency.

In the years after Benedict's 2013 resignation, the scourge he believed encompassed only a few mostly English-speaking countries had spread to all parts of the globe. Benedict refused to accept personal or institutional responsibility for the problem, even after he himself was faulted by an independent report for his handling of four cases while he was Munich bishop. He never sanctioned any bishop who covered up for abusers, and he never mandated abuse cases be reported to police.

But Benedict did more than any of his predecessors combined, and especially more than John Paul, under whose watch the wrongdoing exploded publicly. And after initially dismissing the problem, Pope



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Francis followed in Benedict's footsteps and approved even tougher protocols designed to hold the hierarchy accountable.

"He (Benedict) acted as no other pope has done when pressed or forced, but his papacy (was) reactive on this central issue," said Terrence McKiernan, founder of the online resource BishopAccountability, which tracks global cases of clergy abuse and cover-up.

As prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith for a quarter-century, the former Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger saw first-hand the scope of sex abuse as early as the 1980s. Cases were arriving piecemeal to the Vatican from Ireland, Australia and the U.S., and Ratzinger tried as early as 1988 to persuade the Vatican legal department to let him remove abuser priests quickly.

Vatican law at the time required long and complicated canonical trials to punish priests, and then only as a last resort if more "pastoral" initiatives to cure them failed. That approach proved disastrous, enabling bishops to move their abusers around from parish to parish where they could rape and molest again.

The legal office turned Ratzinger down in 1988, citing the need to protect the priest's right to defense.

In 2001, Ratzinger persuaded John Paul to let him take hold of the problem head on, ordering all abuse cases be sent to his office for review. He hired a relatively unknown canon lawyer, Charles Scicluna, to be his chief sex crimes prosecutor and together they began taking action.

"We used to discuss the cases on Fridays; he used to call it the Friday penance," recalled Scicluna, Ratzinger's prosecutor from 2002 to 2012 and now the archbishop of Malta.

Under Ratzinger's watch as cardinal and pope, the Vatican authorized fast-track administrative procedures to defrock egregious abusers. Changes to church law allowed the statute of limitations on sex abuse to be waived on a case-by-case basis; raised the age of consent to 18; and expanded the norms protecting minors to also cover "vulnerable adults."

The changes had immediate impact: Between 2004 and 2014 — Benedict's eight-year papacy plus a year on either end — the Vatican received about 3,400 cases, defrocked 848 priests and sanctioned another 2,572 to lesser penalties, according to the only Vatican statistics ever publicly released.

Nearly half of the defrockings occurred during the final two years of Benedict's papacy.

"There was always a temptation to think of these accusations of this scourge as something that was contrived by the church's enemies," said Cardinal George Pell of Australia, where the allegations hit early and hard and where Pell himself was accused of abuse and of dismissing victims.

"Pope Benedict realized very, very clearly that there is an element of that, but the problem was much, much deeper, and he moved effectively toward doing something about it," said Pell, who was eventually acquitted of an abuse conviction after serving 404 days in solitary confinement in a Melbourne lockup.

Among the first cases on Ratzinger's agenda after 2001 was gathering testimony from victims of the Rev. Marcial Maciel, the founder of the Mexico-based Legionaries of Christ religious order. Despite volumes of documentation in the Vatican dating from the 1950s showing Maciel had raped his young seminarians, the priest was courted by John Paul's Curia because of his ability to bring in vocations and donations.

"More than the hurt that I received from Maciel's abuse, later on, stronger was the hurt and the abuse of power from the Catholic Church: the secrecy, ignoring my complaints," said Juan Vaca, one of Maciel's original victims who along with other former seminarians filed a formal canonical case against Maciel in 1998.

Their case languished for years as powerful cardinals who sat on Ratzinger's board, including Cardinal Angelo Sodano, John Paul's powerful secretary of state, blocked any investigation. They claimed the allegations against Maciel were mere slander.

But Ratzinger finally prevailed and Vaca testified to Scicluna on April 2, 2005, the very day that John Paul died.

Ratzinger was elected pope two weeks later, and only then did the Vatican finally sanction Maciel to a lifetime of penance and prayer.

Benedict then took another step and ordered an in-depth investigation into the order that determined in 2010 that Maciel was a religious fraud who sexually abused his seminarians and created a cult-like order

to hide his crimes.

Even Francis has credited Benedict's "courage" in going after Maciel, recalling that "he had all the documentation in hand" in the early 2000s to take action against Maciel but was blocked by others more powerful than he until he became pope.

"He was the courageous man who helped so many," Francis said.

That said, Benedict's protocol-bending courage only went so far.

When the archbishop of Vienna, Cardinal Christoph Schoenborn, publicly criticized Sodano for having blocked the Vatican from investigating yet another high-profile serial abuser — his predecessor as Vienna archbishop — Benedict summoned Schoenborn to Rome for a dressing down in front of Sodano. The Vatican issued a remarkable reprimand taking Schoenborn to task for having dared speak the truth.

And then an independent report commissioned by his former diocese of Munich faulted Benedict's actions in four cases while he was bishop in the 1970s; Benedict, by then long retired as pope, apologized for any "grievous faults" but denied any personal or specific wrongdoing.

In Germany on Saturday, the We are Church pro-reform group said in a statement that, with his "implausible statements" about the Munich report, "he himself seriously damaged his reputation as a theologian and church leader and as an 'employee of the truth.'"

"He was not prepared to make a personal admission of guilt," it added. "With that, he caused major damage to the office of bishop and pope."

The U.S. survivors of the Road to Recovery group said Benedict as cardinal and pope was part of the problem. "He, his predecessors, and current pope have refused to use the vast resources of the church to help victims heal, gain a degree of closure, and have their lives restored," the group said in a statement calling for transparency.

But Benedict's longtime spokesman, the Rev. Federico Lombardi, says Benedict's action on sex abuse was one of the many underappreciated aspects of his legacy that deserves credit, given that it paved the way for even more far-reaching reforms.

Lombardi recalled the prayers Ratzinger composed in 2005 for the Good Friday Via Crucis procession at Rome's Colosseum as evidence that the future pope knew well — earlier and better than anyone else in the Vatican — just how bad the problem was.

"How much filth there is in the church, especially among those who, in the priesthood, are supposed to belong totally to him (Christ)," Ratzinger wrote in the meditations for the high-profile Holy Week procession.

Lombardi said he didn't understand at the time the experience that informed Ratzinger's words.

"He had seen the gravity of the situation with far more lucidity than others," Lombardi said.

## **Taliban: Kabul checkpoint bomb blast kills, wounds several**

KABUL, Afghanistan (AP) — A bomb exploded near a checkpoint at Kabul's military airport Sunday morning killing and wounding "several" people, a Taliban official said, the first deadly blast of 2023 in Afghanistan.

No one immediately claimed responsibility for the attack, but the regional affiliate of the Islamic State group — known as the Islamic State in Khorasan Province — has increased its attacks since the Taliban takeover in 2021. Targets have included Taliban patrols and members of Afghanistan's Shiite minority.

The military airport is around 200 meters (219 yards) from the civilian airport and close to the Interior Ministry, itself the site of a suicide bombing last October that killed at least four people.

Interior Ministry spokesman Abdul Nafi Takor said the blast left several people dead and wounded. He gave no exact figures or further information about the bombing, saying details of an investigation will be shared later.

Although Taliban security forces prevented photography and filming directly at the blast site, the checkpoint appeared damaged but intact. It is on Airport Road, which leads to high-security neighborhoods housing government ministries, foreign embassies and the presidential palace.

A spokesman for the Kabul police chief, Khalid Zadran, was not immediately available for comment.

## Dems, GOP have distinct priorities for 2023: AP-NORC poll

By HANNAH FINGERHUT Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Eva Guzman's expenses have swelled, but she feels comfortable financially thanks to the savings she and her late husband stockpiled for a rainy day. Nevertheless, the 80-year-old retired library clerk in San Antonio limits trips to the grocery store, adjusts the thermostat to save on utilities and tries to help her grandchildren and great-grandchildren get what they need.

It was difficult to raise her own four children, Guzman said, but she and her husband were able to manage. She doesn't know how young families today stay financially afloat with such high prices for groceries and clothes.

"It's really gotten worse in this age for a lot of people," said Guzman, who identifies as a conservative and blames President Joe Biden for inflation and economic instability. "It's really getting out of hand."

Like Guzman, 30% of people in the United States consider inflation a high priority for the country, named in an open-ended question as one of up to five issues for the government to work on in 2023, according to a December poll from The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research. That's roughly twice the percentage as a year ago, though down from 40% in June, with inflation easing somewhat despite remaining high.

Overall, the economy in general remains a bipartisan issue, mentioned by most U.S. adults across party lines. But the poll finds Republicans and Democrats have sharply distinct views of priorities for the country in the new year. More Republicans than Democrats name inflation, gas and food prices, energy and immigration, while Democrats focus on health care, climate change, poverty, racism, abortion and women's rights.

Elizabeth Stephens, a 41-year-old Democratic-leaning independent in Houston, recognizes that inflation is an issue right now. But she thinks there are other problems that the government should focus on addressing.

"Inflation comes and goes," said Stephens, a manager working in learning and development. But issues such as poverty and health care disparities, she said, "are always there."

"Even if the economy is great, there are still people who are suffering," Stephens added.

There is broad skepticism from members of both parties that progress will be made on the issues about which the public most cares. In the poll results and in interviews with the AP, many people cite hostile political divisions as part of the problem.

Stephens said the country is so divided that "it seems close to impossible" to imagine there would be progress this year.

Glenn Murray, a 59-year-old in Little Mountain, South Carolina, also called out the distance between the left and the right, wishing that politicians would recognize the "truth in the middle." But his priorities are different from Stephens'.

Murray, a moderate Republican, thinks inflation and the economy are critical issues and he worries that the U.S. will soon face a recession. But he is also concerned about energy policy, suggesting the nation's reliance on foreign oil is driving up gas prices, and he describes the surge of migrants at the U.S.-Mexico border as "unsustainable."

"I definitely understand that immigration is what helped build this country ... but you have to have guardrails," said Murray, who works for a university's audit services. "You just can't open the gates and let everyone in that wants to come in."

Named by 45% of Republicans, immigration is one of the GOP's leading priorities. The Supreme Court recently extended Trump-era pandemic restrictions on people seeking asylum, as thousands of migrants gathered on the Mexico side of the border seeking to enter the United States.

Roughly 2 in 10 Republicans also name crime, foreign policy issues, energy and health care. Republicans are more likely than Democrats to specifically name inflation, 37% vs. 26%, and gas prices, 22% vs. 7%.

Among Democrats, about 4 in 10 rank climate change and health care, 3 in 10 prioritize gun issues and roughly one-quarter name education and abortion or women's rights. Roughly 2 in 10 Democrats name

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racism and poverty.

For 24-year-old Osbaldo Cruz, the country's minimum wage is insufficient, especially to keep up with high inflation. But the Democrat, who works as an assistant manager at a fast-food restaurant, equally prioritizes climate change and gun policy, issues that have been close to his home in Las Vegas.

Seeing record temperatures and increasing waste, Cruz worries that conditions on Earth won't be livable in the future. "People pretty much think short term, so we never take the time to invest in proper long-term solutions," he said.

And while he said he understands the importance of the right to bear arms, he's concerned with how easy it is for people to get a gun.

Joseph Wiseman, a 52-year-old Presbyterian pastor in Wichita, Kansas, wants the country to prioritize protections for women's health care, including access to abortion after the Supreme Court overturned *Roe v. Wade*, and LGBTQ individuals.

"I'm very concerned that basic human rights are under threat," he said. "The blatant politicization of the Supreme Court and the handing down of that ruling really brought home in stark circumstance how deadly important this is for the livelihood of 51% of God's children."

Wiseman was a lifelong Republican up until the past few years, registering instead as a Democrat. He said he worries about the "dangerous" shift toward authoritarianism and Christian nationalism happening in the country, especially within the GOP.

Still, he said he has to be hopeful.

"I have to be optimistic that the threat will be met and that basic human rights can be secured for all," Wiseman said.

Most of those surveyed say the opposite. About three-quarters of U.S. adults say they are not confident in the ability of the federal government to make progress on the important problems facing the country in 2023, according to the poll.

About one-third of Republicans and Democrats name the state of politics as a critical issue facing the country.

Michael Holcomb, a 35-year-old audio technician in Los Angeles, wants less polarization in the election process, which he thinks leads politicians to be more extreme. But he sees the issue as extending beyond politics.

"I think that it's more of a cultural problem," the independent said. "We all have to figure out a way to get past it."

## Today in History MON JAN 02

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Monday, Jan. 2, the second day of 2023. There are 363 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On Jan. 2, 1960, Sen. John F. Kennedy of Massachusetts launched his successful bid for the presidency. On this date:

In 1900, U.S. Secretary of State John Hay announced the "Open Door Policy" to facilitate trade with China.

In 1788, Georgia became the fourth state to ratify the U.S. Constitution.

In 1811, Sen. Timothy Pickering, a Federalist from Massachusetts, became the first member of the U.S. Senate to be censured after he'd improperly revealed the contents of an executive document.

In 1929, the United States and Canada reached agreement on joint action to preserve Niagara Falls.

In 1942, the Philippine capital of Manila was captured by Japanese forces during World War II.

In 1967, Republican Ronald Reagan took the oath of office as the new governor of California in a ceremony that took place in Sacramento shortly just after midnight.

In 1971, 66 people were killed in a pileup of spectators leaving a soccer match at Ibrox (EYE'-brox) Stadium in Glasgow, Scotland.