

12/3/21 Friday

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Millions Remain Long-Term Unemployed Despite Big Decline in November US Jobless Rate
By - Morgan Artyukhina

The new US jobs report showed an unexpectedly large decrease in unemployment alongside a smaller-than-expected increase in non-farm payroll jobs. Economists say it could mean the US is approaching full employment, meaning interest rate hikes could be on the way. However, longer-term unemployed numbers remained almost unchanged.

New data for [November released Friday](#) by the US Department of Labor's Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) showed that just 210,000 jobs were added to the US economy last month, which was the smallest gain since last December, when the United States entered the worst phase of the pandemic thus far.

However, at the same time, some 546,000 people entered the workforce, sending the unemployment rate down from 4.6% to 4.2% - its lowest point since February 2020, the last month before the COVID-19 pandemic began, although still 3.9 million fewer than that time. Of course, there are also [783,000 fewer people](#) missing from the economy, too, 184,000 of whom were of working age.

Those numbers came as a bit of a shock, since many economists had predicted a much stronger job growth going into the end-of-year holiday season. [Dow Jones, for example](#), estimated that 573,000 jobs would be created and unemployment would only decline by one tenth of a percent, to 4.5%.

However, performance was still better than in October and [September, during which](#) the peak of the delta outbreak occurred.

"This report is a tale of two surveys," Nick Bunker, economic research director at job placement site Indeed, [told CNBC](#). "The household survey shows accelerating employment gains, workers returning to the labor force, and low levels of involuntary part-time work. The payroll survey shows a significant deceleration in job growth, particularly in COVID-affected sectors."

"The underlying momentum of the labor market is still strong, but this month shows more uncertainty than expected," he added.

Christopher Rupkey, chief economist at FWDBONDS in New York, [told Reuters](#) that observers shouldn't "be fooled by the measly payroll jobs gain this month because the economy's engines are actually in overdrive as shown by the plunge in joblessness."

A low unemployment rate traditionally means that wages should soon begin to rise as employers compete for the few remaining unemployed workers. With inflation at its highest rate in 30 years, wages will have to increase just to keep workers at their present levels of consumption.

Indeed, the BLS report showed a modest 0.3% increase in average hourly earnings in November, while the average workweek also slightly increased from 34.7 hours to 34.8 hours. As a result, workers' paychecks rose by 0.7% - just barely enough to match inflation. The

consumer price index report for November hasn't been released yet, but [October's numbers showed](#) a 0.6% increase in the cost of goods and a larger 6.2% increase over the previous 12 months.

Both trends also mean that it's almost inevitable that the Federal Reserve will soon [increase interest rates](#), which have been kept low during the pandemic in an attempt to encourage maximum possible job growth at the expense of devaluing the dollar somewhat.

However, a major wildcard is the large number of people without jobs, most of whom aren't counted as unemployed in BLS statistics.

The BLS report notes that the number of people not in the labor force who currently want a job, the number of people marginally attached to the labor force, and the number of long-term unemployed - the lattermost of whom are counted in the unemployment statistics - have not changed over the last month. Long-term unemployed people, who have been unemployed for 27 weeks or more, still account for 32.1% of all unemployed and total some 2.2 million people. Those not in the labor force but who want a job are much larger, at 5.9 million in November, and 1.6 million of those have a marginal attachment to the labor force, having looked for a job in the last 12 months but not in the four preceding the BLS survey. Another subset of this category, those discouraged workers who believed there were no jobs available for them, had also barely changed, still totalling 450,000.

People in that category also face more precarity than they did previously, as the Biden administration has allowed federal pandemic-era aid programs to expire, such as the [federal eviction](#) and [foreclosure moratoria](#) and the [added federal unemployment](#) payout, both of which ended in early September.

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US Ends Vienna Talks, Says Iran Not 'Serious' About Meeting JCPOA Compliance Standards
By - Morgan Artyukhina

In 2018, then-US President Donald Trump unilaterally pulled out of the 2015 nuclear deal, claiming without evidence that Iran had been secretly violating its precepts. He reimposed US sanctions, and although the deal's other partners weren't convinced by Trump's claims, they nonetheless abided by US sanctions, leading to Iran backing out as well.

The US has suddenly pulled out of talks aimed at returning to the 2015 Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) nuclear deal with Iran and six other nations, claiming Tehran isn't "serious" about the negotiations.

"We've had this first round of talks since the new [Iranian] government, and what we've seen in the last couple of days is that Iran right now does not seem to be serious about doing what's necessary to return to compliance, which is why we ended this round of talks in Vienna," US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said on Friday, adding the US would be "consulting very closely and carefully" with partners to the 2015 nuclear deal, including Russia, China, and the European Union, as well as "concerned countries" like Israel, Saudi Arabia, and the Gulf states.

The top US diplomat did not elaborate on why he believed Iran wasn't serious about the talks, since Washington had [signaled for months](#) that it was eager to get back to the negotiating table and believed a deal could be reached, although US State Department spokesperson Ned Price did say in October that Washington was not "optimistic, not pessimistic," but simply "clear-eyed" about a new round of talks.

"The first six rounds of negotiations made progress, finding creative compromise solutions to many of the hardest issues that were difficult for all sides. Iran's approach this week was not, unfortunately, to try to resolve the remaining issues," a State Department [spokesperson said](#) in a separate statement. The final meeting of the JCPOA commission took place in Vienna earlier on Friday.

"The new Iranian administration did not come to Vienna with constructive proposals," the official added.

Mohammad Marandi, an adviser to Iran's Vienna delegation, [told CNN on Thursday](#) that "the only side that from the very beginning was sitting at the table and stayed at the table was Iran." "If there is a lack of optimism, it is because of the actions of the United States. The current administration in Washington, the president of the United States, was critical of Trump's 'maximum pressure' campaign, yet when he came to power, he continued with that policy and continues with that policy today," Marandi said of Biden.

"The United States is in clear violation of the agreement and in violation of a UN Security Council resolution, whereas the Iranians were fully implementing the nuclear deal; even after the United States left the deal the Iranians continued to abide by the deal - in full - for a full year, even though the Europeans effectively left the deal," Marandi added. "Then, after a year, the Iranians gradually decreased their commitments and then stopped their commitments - and even that was in accordance with the deal, because Articles 26 and 36 allow Iran to stop implementing the deal when the other side is not abiding by their side of the bargain."

[Next Monday's meeting](#) would have been the seventh round of the negotiations, but the first since Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi took office in August. A conservative and critic of the prior Rouhani administration's approach to the talks, Raisi's new administration conducted a [thorough review](#) of the negotiations thus far to figure out why they hadn't yet yielded results.

The 2015 deal, signed between the US, UK, France, Germany, European Union, Russia, China, and Iran, lowered economic sanctions against Iran in exchange for them accepting strict limitations on the purity of uranium-235 they could produce and the quantity they could retain - just enough to run a handful of small electrical plants and conduct medical research. The deal was intended to assuage fears that Iran might develop a nuclear weapon, which Israelis worried might be used against them due to Tehran's longstanding hostility to the Zionist State.

After the US unilaterally withdrew from the deal in May 2018 and the other JCPOA partners proved unwilling to stand up to US threats against them if they continued trading with Iran, they began reducing their own commitments to the deal, increasing the quality and quantity of uranium being refined.

Earlier this week, it was reported that Israel had presented the US with intelligence proving Tehran was preparing to refine uranium to [90% purity of U-235](#) - a sufficient purity to produce a nuclear weapon. The Iranians haven't commented on the report, but have [previously admitted to](#) producing U-235 at 60% purity. They have indicated they are prepared to return to the confines of the deal as soon as a path toward revival is reached.

Israel, which never had faith in the JCPOA, has repeatedly threatened to carry out its own strike against Iran's nuclear facilities if the US fails to revive the deal. In October, Jerusalem approved a special \$1.5 billion budget for [drawing up attack plans](#) against Iran, and its Mossad intelligence agency has undertaken a number of espionage operations against Iran's nuclear program as well. Those have included the [brazen daytime assassination](#) of Mohsen Fakhrizadeh, one of Iran's seniormost nuclear scientists, on a highway outside Tehran in November 2020 and a series of [sabotage operations](#) against the fuel enrichment facility at Natanz and the research facility at Karaj.

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Astronomers Spot Ultra-Dense Exoplanet Seemingly Made of Solid Iron Orbiting Nearby Star
By - Morgan Artyukhina

According to the Interactive Extra-Solar Planets Catalogue, humans have spotted some 4,878 planets in 3,604 solar systems other than our own. Termed exoplanets, only few have been found in the habitable zone around their parent star, and none have been confirmed to have life. There are few things that are standard or typical across the universe, but the exoplanet GJ 367b still manages to stick out as an oddball in Earthling discoveries. Astronomers at the German Aerospace Center's Institute of Planetary Research, using data gathered by NASA's Transiting Exoplanet Survey Satellite (TESS), reported the find in a [paper published in Science](#) on Thursday.

For starters, GJ 367b is one of the smallest exoplanets ever spotted, just slightly larger than Mars and just 70% the size of Earth. It's also only about 55% the mass of Earth, making it one of the lightest spotted, too. However, its density is impressively high: according to the scientists, the exoplanet clocks in at an average of 8.106 grams per cubic centimeter. That's not just denser than the Earth, which has an average density of just 5.51 grams per cubic centimeter, but it's also denser than solid iron, which has a density of 7.874 grams per cubic centimeter at room temperature.

However, GJ 367b continues to impress. The tiny planet also orbits a tiny star, a red dwarf that never achieved the size and luminosity of stars like our Sun, so closely that it completes an orbit every eight hours. At that distance, GJ 367b is tidally locked, meaning the same side always faces its star, and is constantly blasted with radiation, according to [Space.com](#).

GJ 367b's star is relatively close, too, sitting just 31 light-years away.

"From the precise determination of its radius and mass, GJ 367b is classified as a rocky planet," Dr. Kristine Lam, the study's lead author, [said in a statement](#).

"It seems to have similarities to Mercury. This places it among the sub-Earth sized terrestrial planets and brings research one step forward in the search for a 'second Earth,'" she added. Lam separately told Space.com that little is known about how such an odd planet could have formed, but noted that "if the planet is a remnant core of a former gaseous planet, then the gaseous planet should be no bigger than a Neptune-sized planet."

However, it isn't the first such planet to be spotted, either: an exoplanet designated Kepler 107c, orbiting a star 1,700 light-years away, was [found in 2019](#) to have an even higher density of 12.65 grams per cubic centimeter and is about 1.5 times as wide as the Earth. In its case, however, scientists believe it to be the remnant core of an even larger planet that survived some kind of cataclysmic collision.

The scientists spotted GJ 367b using TESS, a satellite launched in 2018 that took up the mission of the old Kepler space telescope, the first specialized for spotting exoplanets. They then further scrutinized the planet using the [High Accuracy Radial Velocity Planet Searcher \(HARPS\)](#) at the European Southern Observatory's 3.6-meter telescope in Chile.

TESS uses the same method as Kepler in that it looks for stars that "wobble" or regularly dim and brighten - possible signs they have exoplanets orbiting them, which by calculating the star's properties, can then have their own properties largely derived. However, TESS can process 400 times the amount of sky as Kepler, making it a far [more effective tool](#) in the search for planets outside our solar system.

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Macron Postures as Peacemaker Between Lebanon, Gulf Nations After Selling UAE Fighter Jets

By - Morgan Artyukhina

A monthslong row between Lebanon and several Persian Gulf nations was sparked by former Information Minister George Kordahi's criticisms of the Saudi-led war in Yemen, leading to several nations cutting ties with Beirut. A previous row in 2017 saw Lebanon's then-prime minister, Saad Hariri, suddenly resign during a trip to Riyadh.

French President Emmanuel Macron said on Friday that he hopes his trip to several Gulf nations will help further heal the rift between them and Lebanon, a former French colony, following Kordahi's resignation earlier in the day.

"We will see at the end of this trip - and I remain cautious - but my wish is both economically and politically, to be able to re-engage all the Gulf countries in the relationship with Lebanon, to help them get out of this," [Macron said](#) while in Dubai, United Arab Emirates.

"I hope the coming hours will allow us to make progress," he added, noting that he hoped Lebanese Prime Minister Najib Mikati would also convene his government and continue with economic reforms that Paris [has long backed](#).

The French leader is due to tour Saudi Arabia in the coming days and meet with Saudi Crown Prince Muhammad Bin Salman, the de facto head of the Saudi government, to discuss topics ranging from Iran to Yemen, according to the [Saudi Gazette](#), as well as [archeological digs](#) at the ancient Nabataean city of Al-'Ula.

That meeting has already come under fire in [the French press](#), with critics saying he shouldn't meet with the man who authorized the October 2018 assassination of dissident journalist Jamal Khashoggi at the Saudi consulate in Istanbul, Turkey.

"Who can think for one second that we can help Lebanon and preserve peace and stability in the Middle East if we say: 'We're not going to speak to Saudi Arabia, the most populated and most powerful country in the Gulf?'" [Macron fired back](#) at reporters while in Dubai.

"It doesn't mean that I endorse anything, that I've forgotten, that we're not demanding partners," he said, adding that he was acting "for our country and in the interests of the region."

France and the Yemen War

Macron's visit to the UAE has also included penning a massive new \$19 billion [weapons sale](#) that includes 80 advanced Dassault Rafale fighter jets and 12 Airbus Caracal utility helicopters. While Abu Dhabi has pulled its forces out of the war against the Yemeni Houthi movement, when it was still engaged in the conflict, Abu Dhabi became a major customer for French military hardware, resulting in [Macron regularly](#) defending the [weapons sales](#) against critics.

An especially damning report was [leaked in April 2019](#) that had been prepared for the French restricted council by the Directorate of Military Intelligence the previous September. The report revealed that Minister of the Armed Forces Florence Parly had lied when she claimed French military hardware wasn't and couldn't be used in the Yemen war.

The report revealed French Mirage 2000 strike aircraft, targeting pods for laser-guided bombs, and a slew of artillery pieces had been used in the massive coalition bombardment of Houthi-controlled cities and towns that has wrecked the country's infrastructure and greatly contributed to the incredible death toll that the [United Nations estimates](#) will hit 377,000 before by the end of the year.

Despite the formal Emirati withdrawal in February 2020, they still had a smaller number of troops in Shabwa, the capital of the eastern Hadhramaut Governorate, and in the Red Sea port of Mocha, as of late May 2021, according to the [Brookings Institution](#) think tank in Washington, DC. [Other academics](#) have also pointed to the persistent power of Emirati influence over its many allied militia groups on the ground in Yemen

Row Over Lebanese Criticism of Air War

It was this air war, which failed to halt the Houthis in their seven-year struggle against the Saudi-aligned Yemeni government, that Kordahi criticized in October, tearing a barely-healed wound between Beirut and the Saudi-led alliance wide open.

In a television interview that aired in late October, [Kordahi said](#) the Houthis were "defending themselves ... against an external aggression" and that their "homes, villages, funerals and weddings were being bombed" by the coalition. He also called the Saudis' seven-year war effort "futile" and said it was "time for it to end."

His comments came amid [an air campaign](#) by the Saudis hoping to blunt the Houthi offensive in Ma'rib Governorate, which by early December had been mostly claimed by the Zaidi Shiite rebel group despite a [continuing bombardment](#) by Riyadh. Ma'rib is the last stronghold of Yemeni President Abdrabbuh Mansour Hadi in the north of the country and an economic powerhouse rich in oil.

Kordahi's comments sparked fury in Riyadh: the monarchy described them as "slanderous" and "deplorable and unacceptable" and ordered its diplomats out of the Levantine country. It also levied a series of accusations against Beirut, including that they had failed to take action against alleged drug smuggling by Hezbollah, a Shiite militia and political party in Lebanon that is part of the government and which the Saudis have long claimed is supporting the Houthi struggle.

Riyadh also banned all Lebanese imports. Its friends in the region, including the UAE, Bahrain and Kuwait, [soon followed suit](#).

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US Intel Accuses Russia of Planning 'Multi-Front Offensive' Against Ukraine as Early as 2022
By - Gaby Arancibia

Over the last several weeks, tensions have remained high between the US and Russia as American authorities have accused Moscow of laying the groundwork for a potential invasion of neighbouring Ukraine. The Kremlin has repeatedly rejected the unsubstantiated claims. Newly surfaced US intel reports have accused Russia of planning a "multi-front offensive" against Ukraine sometime within the next year, a charge that marks the latest claim pinned to the Kremlin amid weeks of heightened tensions.

Citing sources and a US intelligence document, The Washington Post [reported](#) late Friday that planning is allegedly underway by Moscow for a military offensive as early as 2022 that will include up to 175,000 troops.

An unidentified source with knowledge of the sensitive information alleged to the outlet that Russian forces would be "twice what we saw this past spring during Russia's snap exercise near Ukraine's borders".

"The plans involve extensive movement of 100 battalion tactical groups with an estimated 175,000 personnel, along with armour, artillery, and equipment", the source claimed.

The source later indicated that the intelligence report, based on satellite images, alleges that Russian forces are grouping in four locations along the Ukrainian border and are fitted out with "newly arrived" tanks and artillery.

It was also reported in the intel document that Russian troops are strategically leaving military equipment behind at training facilities "to enable a rapid, final buildup" of troops against Ukraine. The intel findings come days after [reports also detailed](#) that US officials had shared maps with European allies that marked the areas in which an alleged Russian troop "buildup" was taking place along the Ukrainian border. That same report purported that a "rapid, large-scale push into Ukraine" was potentially in the works.

Earlier on Friday, US President Joe Biden touched on the Russian invasion claims and relayed to reporters that he would be preparing a "set of initiatives" along with his national security team to effectively make it more difficult for Russian President Vladimir Putin to move troops toward Ukraine. The commentary itself came as Biden is due to speak with Putin in the coming week. Speaking with White House reporters as he prepared to depart for his weekend trip to Camp David, the US commander-in-chief further stated that he would be having a "long discussion" with his Russian counterpart, and added that he would not accept "anybody's red lines". Russia has repeatedly rejected any assertion that it is planning to invade Ukraine, with Putin previously calling the "buildup" reports "alarmist". More recently, Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov underscored that the current allegations are "hysteria being whipped up artificially".

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Iran Walked Back All Compromises Made During Past Nuclear Talks in Vienna, US Official Reveals

By - Gaby Arancibia

The latest round of talks in Vienna saw Iran walk back all previous compromises made for reviving the 2015 Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, a senior US State Department official has revealed.

The unidentified official told reporters on Saturday that Iranian negotiators effectively abandoned all past agreements and instead sought to make more demands from participants.

"What getting ready [for the Vienna talks] meant was to come with [a] proposal that walked back any of the compromises that Iran had floated ... pocket all of the compromises that others, the US in particular, had made and then asked for more", the official said during a phone briefing. The official went on to relay to reporters that it's believed Iran's bid to accelerate its nuclear programme is part of a larger effort to be in a better position to negotiate a nuclear deal during a later round of talks.

"I think, at a minimum, they believe they could accumulate more enriched uranium ... use more grand centrifuges as leverage for a deal that they think they could extract more from us", the official said.

The unidentified official further underscored that the negotiating tactic would ultimately not succeed.

The US unilaterally withdrew from the 2015 nuclear deal under the Trump administration in 2018, at a time when former US President Donald Trump baselessly accused Iran of violating the terms of the agreement and then moved to reimplement previously lifted sanctions against the nation.

Although tensions remained uneasy between the US and Iran for the remainder of the Trump term, the ties did not entirely improve as US President Joe Biden came into office. In fact, negotiations between the two parties have not yet proven entirely effective as the latest round of talks was recently called off.

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken [commented](#) on Friday that Washington pulled out of the talks after determining that Tehran was not "serious" about the negotiations. Blinken did not offer any explanation as to how Iran was not meeting expectations.

Not all hope has been lost.

Saturday's revelations from the unidentified State Department official indicated that the Biden administration still sees an opportunity for the nuclear deal to be taken up again. When asked if it was time admit the deal was no longer possible, the official told reporters that "we have not reached that point".

It presently remains unclear when a next round of talks involving the US may be held.

The latest comments emerged just as Iranian air defences fired a missile as part of exercises over the town of Natanz, the location of most of Iran's nuclear installations. The operation was reportedly part of a test to examine a "rapid reaction force".

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Mercedes' Hamilton Takes Win in First Saudi Arabian GP After Chaotic Battle With Verstappen
By - Gaby Arancibia

The inaugural Saudi Arabian Grand Prix automobile race has been riddled with controversy and mayhem as top racers Lewis Hamilton and Max Verstappen fought for the win. The two now head to Abu Dhabi tied in the points with 369.5 each.

Mercedes' Lewis Hamilton clinched the win at the Saudi Arabian Grand Prix on Sunday, a move that will now see the final race of the season determine whether the 7-time champion will obtain his eighth title. Top rival Max Verstappen ended the race in second place.

Hamilton's win, however, was not the easiest by far, as Red Bull's Max Verstappen went toe-to-toe with the champion driver throughout the entire 50 laps on the circuit. The drivers went wheel-to-wheel on three occasions at the first corner, with Verstappen eventually being told to give back position to Hamilton.

The first order to return the first place position to Hamilton ended with the Mercedes driver clipping his front wing on the Red Bull car, a development that instantly sent shockwaves throughout the Mercedes garage and saw team principal Toto Wolff smash his headphones in a fit of rage.

In the end, Verstappen was issued a five-second time penalty that saw him officially end the race 11.825 seconds behind Hamilton. While the Red Bull driver's chances at clinching the world title appear to have evaporated over the last three races, he retains one last chance in Abu Dhabi to steal the championship.

Speaking after the award ceremony, Verstappen described the race as having been "quite eventful" before adding that "a lot of things happened which I don't fully agree with but it is what it is."

Hamilton offered similar remarks on the tense race, referring to the match-up as "incredibly rough." He further noted that he "didn't quite understand" why Verstappen had slammed the breaks during the decreed position swap.

Some officials have suggested that a lack of communication resulted in the race blip.

Following the post-race interview and ceremony, both drivers were summoned to the steward's office.

Overall, the 30-kilometer inaugural street race in the coastal Saudi city of Jeddah was marred by three standing starts, two restarts and multiple safety cars after the quick track prompted the early retirement of five drivers - Haas' Mick Schumacher and Nikita Mazepin, Williams' George Russell, Aston Martin's Sebastian Vettel and Red Bull's Sergio Perez. Troubles began just 14 laps into the race.

The final F1 race will take place on Saturday. Both Hamilton and Verstappen will be going into the Abu Dhabi race with 369.5 points each. Verstappen, however, will be going in the top spot, as he's won more races than Hamilton during the 2021 calendar. Should both drivers not finish, Verstappen would take the win, clinching his first F1 championship.

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Oklahoma Suing Biden Admin to Exempt National Guard From Pentagon's COVID-19 Vaccine Mandate

By - Evan Craighead

Earlier this week, US Secretary of Defence Lloyd Austin issued a directive clarifying that all active duty or Ready Reserve members of the US armed forces (including the National Guard) be fully vaccinated against COVID-19 by their service's respective deadlines, or face payment withholding and exclusion from required training.

As the Pentagon seeks to enhance [COVID-19 vaccine mandate compliance](#), the state of Oklahoma, in a new complaint filed in the US District Court for the Western District of Oklahoma on Thursday, is pushing back against orders from US Department of Defence and the Biden administration.

The complaint - filed by the state of Oklahoma, Governor Kevin Stitt, and Attorney General John O'Connor - argues that the COVID-19 vaccine mandate that has been unilaterally imposed by the administration of US President Joe Biden is, in their words, "dangerously Un-American", because it oversteps local and state lawmakers and interferes with religious liberties guaranteed in the First Amendment. The lawsuit also attempts to paint the health mandate as seeking to place the unvaccinated in "financial ruin".

"That is the diametrical opposite of how a 'compound republic'— constitutionally enshrining a separation of powers among the three branches of the federal government and a further federalist allocation of federal and state power—is designed to function", reads the complaint. Thursday's filing requests that the court declare the vaccine mandate unconstitutional and issue a temporary restraining order to block its enforcement amid litigation.

"It is sinister that Biden is threatening Oklahomans with the loss of their jobs if they do not surrender their personal rights and freedoms to the federal government", [said AG O'Connor in a quoted statement](#). "The president is using private employers to do his dirty work".

US Air National Guard and Air Force Reserve personnel are required to be vaccinated by 2 December, while 30 June is the deadline for those affiliated with the US Army - which applies to most members of the National Guard in Oklahoma.

The US secretary of defence issued a memo this week highlighting that members of the National Guard will face hefty penalties if they do not comply with the vaccine mandate.

"As I've said before, vaccination of the Force will save lives and is essential to our readiness", Austin wrote.

An estimated 2.1 million US military personnel are expected to follow the mandate.

Prior to that, the secretary of defence issued a direct response to Oklahoma Governor Stitt, who requested on 2 November that the Pentagon make Oklahoma National Guard troops exempt from the COVID-19 vaccine mandate because it "violates the personal freedoms of many Oklahomans".

"The concerns raised in your letter do not negate the need for this important military readiness requirement", Austin said in his response, dated 29 November.

As Oklahoma carries out a legal battle over the COVID-19 vaccine mandate for members of its National Guard, Gen. Dan Hokanson, the National Guard Bureau Chief, has tested positive for the contagious disease, according to a Friday statement issued by spokesperson Wayne Hall. The spokesperson noted that the bureau chief will be isolating, working remotely, and avoiding contact with others.

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Jan. 6 Panel Postpones Jeffrey Clark Deposition Over Medical Condition
By - Evan Craighead

Jeffrey Clark, a Trump-era US Department of Justice official who served from 2018 to 2021, was originally scheduled to appear before the House Select Committee on Saturday, December 4th, as the 9-person panel unanimously voted to hold the 54-year-old accountable for his failure to cooperate with the panel's probe on the January 6th riot.

The US House Select Committee to Investigate the January 6th Attack on the US Capitol announced on Friday that it has rescheduled Clark's deposition due to an unnamed "medical condition".

"Through his attorney, Mr Clark has informed the Select Committee of a medical condition that precludes his participation in tomorrow's meeting", the statement read, noting that the 54-year-old provided the panel with "ample evidence of his claim".

Rep. Bennie Thompson (D-MS), chair of the House Select Committee, has agreed to postpone Clark's deposition until Thursday, December 16th.

[On Wednesday, Thompson declared](#) that Clark left the panel with "no other choice" after he refused to comply with [a subpoena demanding](#) the submission of deposition testimony and the production of documents that are relevant to the scope of the House Select Committee's ongoing investigation.

Clark served as both a US Senate-confirmed assistant attorney general for the US Department of Justice's Environment and Natural Resources Division and an assistant attorney general for the DOJ's Civil Division.

According to the [October subpoena](#), the panel's probe revealed credible evidence that Clark attempted to involve his department in efforts to block a peaceful transfer of power between administrations.

The House Select Committee's issuance detailed that Clark proposed the delivery of a letter to Georgia state lawmakers and other government officials to push for a delay in the certification of 2020 election votes. The former DOJ official has also been accused of recommending a news

conference in which the DOJ would announce a probe into allegations of widespread voter fraud, despite lacking evidence to support the assertion.

As the panel proceeds with its investigation, Dr John Eastman, a conservative attorney who rose to prominence for backing then-US President Trump's opposition to the 2020 election results, invoked his Fifth Amendment right against self-incrimination.

Eastman's lawyer, Charles Burnham, noted in a December 1st letter that members of the committee have openly discussed making criminal referrals to the DOJ.

"Dr Eastman has a more than reasonable fear that any statements he makes pursuant to this subpoena will be used in an attempt to mount a criminal investigation against him", Burnham said of his client, who spoke at Trump's rally prior to the January 6th riot.

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Meet Mehmet: Dr. Oz Vying for US Senate in Pennsylvania After Trump-Endorsed Candidate Drops Out

By - Evan Craighead

Celebrity cardiothoracic surgeon Dr. Mehmet Cengiz Öz, popularly known as 'Dr. Oz,' confirmed in a November 30 op-ed that he would run for the US Senate in his home state of Pennsylvania to, as he put it, help the US "heal" following the politicization of the COVID-19 pandemic that has polarized an already-divided nation.

Dr. Oz, physician to Hollywood superstars and host of 'The Dr. Oz Show,' bagged his first congressional endorsement this week, signaling that the television doctor may have a shot at securing the GOP nomination ahead of the 2022 midterm election in the state of Pennsylvania.

"I'm endorsing Dr. Oz for Senate because Dr. Oz is our clearest path to victory in this election," Rep. Guy Reschenthaler (R-PA) told the New York Post on Wednesday.

Reschenthaler declared that Oz - similar to former US President Donald Trump - is in a special position as he is entering the race "with almost nearly universal name identification," which may be a game-changer for the Republican primary.

"Additionally, Dr. Oz is coming in with his incredible American success story having invented a heart valve that saved countless lives," he said of Oz, whose parents migrated to the US from Turkey's Konya Province.

Oz tweeted his thanks to Reschenthaler for his endorsement.

Oz is seeking to fill the spot soon to be vacated by Sen. Pat Toomey (R-PA), the 60-year-old US lawmaker who announced in October 2020 that he would not seek reelection.

The cardiothoracic surgeon's campaign comes not long after Sean Parnell, the only Republican Senate candidate in Pennsylvania endorsed by Trump, announced that he would suspend his campaign.

Parnell's announcement came after a judge found his estranged wife's domestic abuse allegations credible.

As Oz hopes to make his move from TV to Washington, his unexpected campaign and seemingly newfound political aspirations have raised eyebrows among those in both local and national media.

Earlier this week, CBS' Stephen Colbert took aim at Oz during a Tuesday broadcast of "The Late Show With Stephen Colbert," calling out the physician's long list of problematic promotions, including his recent backing of the debunked hydroxychloroquine cure amid the COVID-19 pandemic.

Colbert also called out Oz's residence, stating that the celebrity medico "may not just have fake medical claims, he may have fake Pennsylvania claims."

Days later, [the Philadelphia Inquirer](#) ran a piece highlighting that, despite his current campaign in Pennsylvania, Oz has primarily lived in New Jersey for the past three decades.

Although it is standard practice for candidates to campaign in a state that has been their home for several years, Oz's family made their move to Montgomery County, Pennsylvania, home in late 2020.

Despite Oz's wealth, he and his wife, Lisa Oz, pay "market price" rent at the Bryn Athyn home that is owned by his spouse's parents, according to the Inquirer, citing a campaign spokesperson for the cardiothoracic surgeon.

Per the state's constitution, Oz will only be required to "inhabit" Pennsylvania if he wins the US Senate seat.

Celebrity TV host Oprah Winfrey was also brought into the conversation, as the media maven notably accelerated Oz's television career after she appeared on his Discovery Channel series "Second Opinion with Dr. Oz," which ran for a single season and featured notable guests such as Winfrey, basketball legend and businessman Magic Johnson, and actor Charlie Sheen. Additionally, Oz increased his media visibility and amassed a large following due to regular appearances on 'The Oprah Winfrey Show.' The heart surgeon made more than 60 appearances on the daytime talk show, which ran until 2011.

By 2009, Oz was able to launch 'The Dr. Oz Show' with Sony Pictures Television and Winfrey's Harpo Productions. The syndicated daily TV program remains in production to this day and routinely addresses health and wellness issues, as well as celebrity-focused medical testimonies and true crime stories.

While Oz is a household name in the US, he is not the only individual vying for the Republican nomination ahead of the 2022 midterm election in Pennsylvania. Hedge-fund manager David McCormick, real estate developer Jeff Bartos, investment firm CEO Carla Sands, and political commentator Kathy Barnette are among the GOP candidates who have announced campaigns.

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Twitter Admits to Erroneously Suspending Accounts Amid a Slew of 'Coordinated and Malicious' Reports

By - Evan Craighead

Earlier this week, The Washington Post reported that neo-Nazis and other right-wing activists were teaching and encouraging their followers on ways to use Twitter's new "private information policy" to remove incriminating photos originally published to the platform by anti-extremism researchers and journalists.

Twitter announced on Friday that it had corrected a number of errors after it mistakenly suspended a handful of Twitter accounts under its new policy, which allows users to request the removal of an image or video that includes them and was tweeted without their consent.

Twitter spokesman Trenton Kennedy [told The Washington Post](#) that the platform received a flood of "coordinated and malicious reports" that targeted anti-extremism researchers and journalists.

An internal review has also been launched to ensure the new policy was used "as intended". "We'll have more to share on the review later", Kennedy said.

According to Twitter, 12 suspensions occurred as the system was overwhelmed with a "significant amount" of reports.

It is unclear how many reports were filed.

The policy, [announced on Tuesday](#), seeks to address concerns about the misuse of media and the dissemination of images that reveal the identities of non-consenting individuals.

Kennedy highlighted that the policy does not apply to public figures or those who are part of "public conversations and discourse online or offline".

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WWII Veteran And Longtime US Senator Bob Dole Dies at 98

By - Evan Craighead

Bob Dole, a World War II veteran-turned-career politician who served as GOP Senate leader, died in his sleep on Sunday, according to a statement issued by the late 98-year-old's family. Back in February, Dole publicly revealed that he had been diagnosed with stage IV lung carcinoma - the most advanced form of lung cancer.

Dole — born Robert Joseph Dole on July 22, 1923, in Russell, Kansas — was remembered by his family and second wife, Elizabeth Dole, as a pragmatic conservative who "never forgot where he came from."

"Thank you for the outpouring of love over the last year, it continues to sustain us as we grieve the loss of the precious man we knew as husband and father," read a family statement issued by the Elizabeth Dole Foundation.

Dole is survived by Elizabeth Dole and Robin Dole, daughter of Bob and Phyllis Holden, the late GOP senator's first wife.

The Dust Bowl native began his nearly lifelong career of public service by enlisting in the US Army during World War II. During his 1945 deployment to Italy, Dole was struck by German ammunition, resulting in serious wounds that would require years of rehabilitation at a military hospital.

Despite being afflicted with paralysis in his right arm, Dole launched a successful campaign for Kansas state legislature in 1951, and graduated with a law degree from Washburn Municipal College in Topeka, Kansas, by 1952.

Soon after, Dole was elected as Russell County attorney, a position he held for eight years before being elected to represent his home state in the US House of Representatives.

Over the next several years, the GOP congressman would vote in favor of a number of critical pieces of legislation, such as the Civil Rights Act, the Voting Rights Act, and the Age Discrimination Act, which sought to combat discriminatory, age-based hiring practices.

After eight years in the House, Dole was elected to the US Senate in November 1968. The freshman senator wasted little time drafting his first piece of legislation — a bill to provide housing to disabled individuals.

Despite the bipartisan successes during his US Senate tenure, Dole was also familiar with failure, after being selected as then-President Gerald Ford's vice-presidential running mate in the 1976 presidential election. Following Ford's loss to Democrat Jimmy Carter, Dole launched his own presidential campaign for the GOP nomination in the 1980 election.

California's Ronald Reagan ultimately received the Republican Party's nomination.

Dole would attempt a presidential bid in 1988, but did not formally declare a new campaign until 1996, when he resigned from the Senate and his position as GOP leader. Despite securing the GOP nomination at the record-breaking age of 73 (and one month), Dole would lose the presidential election to then-Democratic nominee Bill Clinton.

Despite a decadeslong career in public service, Dole's charisma and comedic timing allowed the GOP heavyweight to casually connect with the American public.

Shortly after retiring from the US Senate, then-US President Bill Clinton awarded Dole with the Presidential Medal of Freedom — the highest US civilian honor. While the medal ceremony is traditionally a solemn and serious occasion, Dole took time to lighten the mood during the 1997 ceremony.

"I had a dream that I would be, this historical week, receiving something from the president," Dole told attendees. "But I thought it would be the front door key."

Clinton lauded the retired US senator from Kansas for his "adversity to advantage and pain to public service" during his transition from the military to Capitol Hill.

However, Dole's comedic stylings were elevated in the 1990s, when 'Saturday Night Live' star Norm Macdonald portrayed the Republican heavyweight amid his 1996 run for president.

Oddly enough, Macdonald — also recently diagnosed with cancer — died less than three months prior to Dole.

"Norm ... was a great talent, and I loved laughing with him on SNL," [tweeted Dole on September 14](#). **"*Bob Dole* will miss Norm Macdonald."**

Dole and Macdonald first met in late 1996, after Dole had already lost the election to Clinton.

From everyday Americans to US President Joe Biden, individuals have been flooding social media with condolences and promises of prayers and well wishes since Dole's Sunday passing.

"Bob Dole was a man to be admired by Americans. He had an unerring sense of integrity and honor," [tweeted the US president](#).

"May God bless him, and may our nation draw upon his legacy of decency, dignity, good humor, and patriotism for all time," Biden noted.

[Per presidential order](#), flags will be flown at half-staff to honor Dole's legacy.

Former US President Donald Trump also remembered the 98-year-old as a US "war hero and true patriot" whose career of public service strengthened the Republican Party.

"Senate Republicans and the entire Senate were better off for Bob's stewardship," asserted Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-KY). "His Dust Bowl roots fueled a special commitment to vulnerable Americans, and sure enough, Bob's work on food security, veterans' issues, and the rights of disabled Americans have continued to have an especially lasting impact."

Former US President George W. Bush praised the late US senator "for his life of principled service."

"Our entire family benefitted from that friendship, including my father," Bush wrote, speaking of the bond between Dole and the late, former US President George H.W. Bush.

Dole, a self-proclaimed 'Trumper,' acknowledged to USA Today in July that former US President Donald Trump did in fact lose the 2020 presidential election.

"He lost the election, and I regret that he did, but they did," the GOP heavyweight said. "He had Rudy Giuliani running all over the country, claiming fraud. He never had one bit of fraud in all those lawsuits he filed and statements he made."

Dole stated that while he supported Trump's agenda and wanted a second term for 45, he was also "sort of Trumped out" and believed that democracy in the US "lost something."

"And I don't know how you correct it, but I keep hoping that there will be a change in my lifetime," he told the outlet, just days before his 98th birthday.

"Senator Bob Dole was a truly great man who lived an extraordinary life of service to America and he will be deeply missed by all of us who had the privilege to know him," [tweeted former US Vice President Mike Pence](#).

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Fauci Speechless After US Senator Asserts Epidemiologist 'Overhyped' COVID-19 Pandemic
By - Evan Craighead

Sen. Ron Johnson (R-WI) asserted this week that Dr Anthony Fauci, director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases since 1984, "overhyped" the threat of HIV/AIDS in the 1980s, and is using the same playbook in the present-day COVID-19 pandemic. Johnson's remarks were made on World AIDS Day, which mourns victims of the disease.

Dr Anthony Fauci appeared to be at a loss for words on Sunday after CNN's Jake Tapper asked the epidemiologist to respond to Sen. Johnson's targeted comment.

"How do you respond to something as preposterous as that? Overhyping AIDS? It's killed over 750,000 Americans and 36 million people worldwide. How do you overhype that?", Fauci questioned during his appearance on "State of the Union".

The epidemiologist was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 2008 to honour his extensive research for the US on HIV/AIDS in the 1980s. Some argued that Fauci's guidance regarding HIV and its transmission led to further public confusion and shame, which could discourage individuals from getting regularly tested.

Fauci, who also serves as the chief medical adviser to the president, similarly questioned the Wisconsin GOP senator's assertion that the COVID-19 pandemic and the global impact of the contagious disease are blown out of proportion.

"Overhyping COVID? It's already killed 780,000 Americans and over 5 million people worldwide", the epidemiologist pointed out.

"I don't have any clue of what he's talking about", Fauci said, referring to Johnson.

Johnson's remarks about the epidemiologist were made during a Wednesday interview with Fox News' Brian Kilmeade. While weighing in on the developing Omicron variant of COVID-19, the US senator from Wisconsin suggested that the Biden administration was attempting to "create a state of fear" in order to "maintain controls".

"He overhyped it", Johnson said of Fauci's work to demystify HIV/AIDS in the 1980s. "He created all kinds of fear, saying it could infect the entire population when it couldn't, and he's doing, he's using the exact same playbook with COVID: ignoring therapy, pushing a vaccine". During the Sunday interview, Fauci also signalled that the US will "hopefully" be able to lift its COVID-19 travel ban on African countries as experts learn more about the [contagious disease's Omicron variant](#).

"As we're getting more and more information about cases in our own country and worldwide we're looking at that very carefully on a daily basis", Fauci said.

The order [implemented last week](#) impacts those seeking to travel from Botswana, Eswatini, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, and South Africa.

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Omicron Mitigation: What Travellers to the US Need to Know Beginning Monday
By - Evan Craighead

Earlier this week, the White House announced that foreign nationals would be barred from travelling to the US if, within the previous 14 days, they have also been to Malawi, Botswana, Zimbabwe, Namibia, Lesotho, Eswatini, Mozambique, or South Africa. The order comes as an effort to slow the spread of the new "Omicron" variant of COVID-19.

Beginning Monday, December 6th, all US-bound air passengers aged two years or older will be required to produce a negative reading from a COVID-19 viral test taken no more than one calendar day prior to travel, according to the US Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

"The Order uses a 1-day time frame instead of 24 hours to provide more flexibility to the air passenger and aircraft operator", the CDC clarified.

Those lacking an authentic negative test result may provide documentation proving they have recovered from the contagious disease in the past 90 days.

Travellers will be asked to attest to the validity of the travel information presented.

Acceptable negative COVID-19 test results must include the following:

Personal identifiers, such as the patient's name, date of birth, etc. These details will be cross-checked with the traveller's passport or travel documents.

A specimen collection date, to prove the test was administered no more than one day prior. Information on the type of test, as only antigen tests and Nucleic Acid Amplification Tests (NAAT) will be accepted.

A result specifically indicating that "COVID-19" or the "SARS-CoV-2" antigen/RNA was not detected in the patient's specimen. "Invalid" results will not be accepted.

Details on the COVID-19 testing facility or service, such as the name and contact information of the entity.

The full [30-page order is available](#) on the CDC website.

Prior to the updated order, the US accepted negative COVID-19 test results within three days of administration.

Travellers to the US will be expected to don a face mask when travelling via plane, trains, subway, and other modes of public transportation. The Transportation Security Administration also requires face masks in airports and bus terminals.

Fines for violators currently range anywhere between \$500 and \$3,000.

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Biden White House to Reportedly Announce Diplomatic Boycott of Beijing Olympics
By - Evan Craighead

Last month, US President Joe Biden announced that his administration was mulling a diplomatic boycott of the Beijing 2022 Winter Games. The announcement came months after US lawmakers, including House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-CA), expressed bipartisan support for the protest.

As the 2022 Winter Olympics approach, the Biden administration is expected to unveil the US government's diplomatic boycott of the games later this week, according to a Sunday report from CNN, citing "several sources".

The partial boycott comes in opposition to allegations of human rights violations by the Chinese government, and only applies to US government officials who traditionally attend the international games.

Olympians competing under the US flag will not be impacted by the demonstration.

Washington has not imposed a full boycott since then-President Jimmy Carter's administration totally withdrew the US from the 1980 Moscow Summer Olympics.

The report comes days after the [United Nations General Assembly moved to adopt](#) an "Olympic Truce" drafted by Beijing and the International Olympic Committee. The goodwill resolution was co-sponsored by 173 countries, many of which expressed their support for the games amid the COVID-19 pandemic.

Participating nations have been urged to observe the resolution from seven days before the opening ceremony to seven days after the closing of the 2022 Olympic Games, as well as the 2022 Paralympic Winter Games.

Though US officials may not attend the Winter Games, it may be business as usual for many major American corporations.

On November 30th, Chinese Vice Foreign Minister Xie Feng told US business executives that Beijing hopes American corporations "make a positive contribution" to the 2022 Olympic Games, scheduled to begin on Friday, February 4th, and running until the Sunday, February 20th, closing ceremony.

"Boycotting the Olympics for political reasons harms the interests of athletes, violates the shared ideals and aspirations of the international society, and is unpopular", Xie told attendees of the virtual conference, attended by the American Chamber of Commerce in China, the American Chamber of Commerce in Shanghai, and the US-China Business Council.

The 2022 Paralympic Winter Games are scheduled to run from Friday, March 4th, through Sunday, March 13th.

The National Security Council has been holding private talks about a possible diplomatic boycott as Democratic and Republican members of Congress have expressed support for the protest.

[Biden notably announced consideration](#) for the move last month.

At the same time, some US lawmakers - like Sen. Ted Cruz (R-TX) - have been urging the US to handle the upcoming games like any other.

"We've got young men and young women, Americans who spent their whole lives practicing for this moment. I don't want to punish those young athletes", Cruz said last month.

He also chastised the US National Basketball Association (NBA) and US-based companies like Nike for turning a blind eye to allegations of human rights atrocities allegedly carried out by the Chinese government.

Diplomatic boycott discussions accelerated last month after several nations, as well as the IOC, expressed concern for Chinese tennis player Peng Shuai, who disappeared from public view shortly after alleging that she had been sexually assaulted by former Chinese Vice Premier Zhang Gaoli. Those fears have been partially tamed after the tennis star reemerged at a Beijing tennis tournament and held brief talks with IOC President Thomas Bach and other key members.

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Omar Confident Speaker Pelosi Will Take Action Against Boebert's Anti-Muslim Remarks
By - Evan Craighead

Last month, Rep. Lauren Boebert (R-CO) expressed that she was deeply sorry for "anyone in the Muslim community I offended", after she was overheard suggesting that Rep. Ilhan Omar (D-MN), who practices Islam, was mistaken for a jihadist while they were in an elevator. Omar slammed her colleague as a "buffoon" peddling "anti-Muslim bigotry".

As Democratic lawmakers continue to call for Boebert to be stripped of committee assignments, Rep. Omar appeared on CNN's "State of the Union" to provide her outlook on the personal matter.

"I have had a conversation with [House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-CA)], and I'm very confident that she will take decisive action next week", she told host Jake Tapper on Sunday.

Omar, a Somalia-born Muslim, highlighted that Pelosi has historically followed through on her promises regarding religious matters.

"When I first got to Congress, I was worried that I wasn't going to be allowed to be sworn in because there was a ban on the hijab. She promised me that she would take care of it. She fulfilled that promise", Omar said.

Back in 2019, the US lawmaker from Minnesota became the first lawmaker in 181 years to don a head covering on the House floor.

"She's made another promise to me that she will take care of this. And I believe her", the Minnesota lawmaker concluded.

Omar also took aim at House Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy (R-CA), panning her colleague as both a "liar and a coward" over his refusal to hold Boebert accountable for her comments.

McCarthy has suggested that Omar should have a sit-down with Boebert and hear her side.

The original video in question has since been [removed from public view on Facebook](#), but has since been reuploaded to various platforms. Boebert, a first-term lawmaker, appeared thoroughly tickled with herself as she dramatically recounted a so-called encounter with Omar, who denies the series of events occurred as such.

"I was getting into an elevator with one of my staffers and he and I were leaving the Capitol, we're going back to my office and we get in the elevator and I see a Capitol Police officer running hurriedly to the elevator", Boebert recounted to a crowd. "I see fret all over his face. And he's reaching. The door is shutting. I can't open it".

Boebert issued a partial apology via Twitter, but stopped short of directly apologising to Omar.

"There are plenty of policy differences to focus on without this unnecessary distraction", she said in her apology post, appearing to downplay the incident.

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CNN Fires Chris Cuomo Over His Efforts to Help Brother With Sexual Harassment Claims
By - Nevin Brown

CNN has fired Chris Cuomo effective immediately over his involvement in the defence of his brother, Andrew Cuomo, the former governor of New York, in the wake of sexual harassment allegations.

Chris Cuomo, the host of "Cuomo Prime Time", was suspended by CNNearlier in the week as the network evaluated new information that came to light in his defence of his elder brother.

CNN employed a law firm to conduct a review of Cuomo's actions.

During the review, additional information came to light that CNN has said they will continue to investigate. The younger Cuomo released a short statement following his firing about the decision and his time at the network.

[Cuomo's statement read](#): "This is not how I want my time at CNN to end but I have already told you why and how I helped my brother. So let me now say as disappointing as this is, I could not be more proud of the team at Cuomo Prime Time and the work we did as CNN's #1 show in the most competitive time slot. I owe them all and will miss that group of special people who did really important work".

Cuomo used his [understanding of the media and journalist contacts](#) to help his brother's defence stay one step ahead amidst a continuous stream of sexual harassment and misconduct allegations that eventually led to an investigation and his brother's resignation as governor of New York.

Andrew Cuomo came under fire after allegations of sexual harassment surfaced in December 2020. A former aide claimed Cuomo sexually harassed her for years. Over the months that followed more women came forward with allegations of sexual misconduct. In March, an investigation began and after five months concluded that Cuomo sexually harassed 11 women. Andrew Cuomo denied the attorney general's findings, but a week later, he resigned. The investigation has since led to multiple criminal investigations into Cuomo's behaviour.

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US Democracy in Trouble? Half of Young Americans Polled Agree

By - Nevin Brown

The findings from the Institute of Politics at the Harvard Kennedy school's national poll of Americans aged 18 to 29 suggest that half of young Americans are concerned about democracy in their country.

The poll asked young Americans ten questions about the current and future state of America. The results show how concerned the respondents are about the state of the country, but also how Republicans and Democrats differ in their concerns.

"After turning out in record numbers in 2020, young Americans are sounding the alarm," IOP Polling Director John Della Volpe said in a statement. "When they look at the America they will soon inherit, they see a democracy and climate in peril - and Washington as more interested in confrontation than compromise."

[Of the 2,109 Americans surveyed](#), 52% called the United States either a failed democracy or a democracy in trouble, 34% called it either healthy or somewhat functioning, and 13% simply did not know.

There was a significant discrepancy between young Republicans and Democrats over their view of the health of American democracy. Forty-five percent of young Democrats, compared to 70% of young Republicans, believe the United States is either a failed democracy or a democracy in trouble.

Another significant finding was that 35% of the young Americans polled believe that there is at least a 50% chance that a second civil war could occur during their lifetime, with 46% of the young Republicans believing that there is at least a 50% chance of a second civil war during their lifetime as opposed to 32% of young Democrats.

When it comes to American exceptionalism, the poll found that 31% of the participants believe America is the greatest country in the world, but 50% think there are greater or equal countries to the United States.

However, Democrats and Republicans had an inverse belief in their country's standing in the world - 62% of Republicans believe that America is the greatest country on Earth, while 64% of Democrats believe there are greater countries or ones as great as the US.

One area in which young Democrats and Republicans participating in the survey showed significant overlap was in their willingness for politicians to compromise even if it means their preferred policy is not passed. Overall, 43% of those polled would prefer that elected officials meet in the middle. Forty-nine percent of young Democrats and 45% of young Republicans preferred compromise at the expense of their preferred political priorities.

The poll also touched on how the pandemic has affected young Americans, US President Joe Biden's approval rating, what they define as a successful presidency, mental health and climate change, and the federal government's response.

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Photos: Homeowner's Solution to Reptilian Infestation Ends With Snake & House Burned Down
By - Nevin Brown

A homeowner in Maryland took extreme measures to deal with a snake infestation - they tried to smoke out their serpentine squatters and ended up seeing their home go up in flames.

According to fire officials in Montgomery County, Maryland, the home caught on fire on November 23 in Poolesville, Maryland, after the owner burned coal in the basement to evict snakes that had taken up residence.

Fire officials believe the heat source was too close to combustibles, which caused the fire to go out of control, eventually collapsing the roof. Some 75 firefighters reported to the "dark and cold" scene. The event has been ruled an accident.

No injuries or deaths were reported, although it was estimated that the fire caused over \$1 million in damages to the multistory single-family home.

Fires caused by homeowners using smoke to manage pest infestations have been reported in the past. As recently as 2017, a man in Georgia burnt his home to the ground attempting to deal with a hornet nest.

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Everything You Need to Know About Biden's 9-Step Winter COVID Plan
By - Nevin Brown

On Thursday, the Biden administration released a nine-step plan to combat the seasonal winter COVID surge. With Americans spending more time inside and the emergence of the Omicron variant, there is a high likelihood that the winter months will see case numbers skyrocket.

[The primary objective of US President Joe Biden's plan](#) is to increase Americans' access to vaccines, therapeutics, and testing. What follows are the biggest takeaways from each step in the Biden plan.

1. Boosters for All Adults

"President Biden will announce new steps to ensure that the nearly 100 million eligible Americans who have not yet gotten their booster shot, get one as soon as possible".

The US Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has issued updated guidance that suggests every adult receive a booster shot.

All adults are eligible for free booster shots, which are available at over 800,000 locations nationwide.

Pharmacies will be launching outreach campaigns to help individuals get boosters.

The Biden administration is calling on employers to provide paid time off for employees to get a booster shot. All federal employees already receive paid time off to get vaccinated.

2. Vaccinations to Protect Kids and Keep Schools Open

The US is the world leader in vaccinating children and the Biden administration points out that vaccination is the best way to keep schools open amidst the emergence of new variants.

The president will announce a new effort to launch hundreds of family vaccination clinics across the country.

Medicaid will pay healthcare providers to talk to families about getting their kids vaccinated.

The administration is focused on making sure schools remain open. The CDC will release findings on quarantine and testing policies in schools to help students and schools.

The FDA will be given the necessary resources to quickly and safely review COVID vaccines in children under the age of five.

3. Expanding Free At-Home Testing

Americans with private insurance will be able to get at-home COVID tests fully reimbursed by their insurance.

The administration wants to increase the ease and quantity of COVID testing throughout the United States.

4. Stronger Public Health Protocols

Early next week, the US will increase pre-departure protocols to require all inbound international travellers to test within one day of their trip. This applies to all individuals regardless of their vaccination status or nationality.

Masks will continue to be required on airplanes, trains, and all forms of public transit.

5. Protections in the Workplace to Keep Economy Open

The Biden administration is calling on businesses to require employees be vaccinated or tested weekly.

6. Rapid Response Teams to Battle Rising Cases

There will be over 60 Winter COVID emergency response teams that can be deployed to states based upon need. At least 20 of these will be Department of Defence Medical Response Teams and another 10 National Disaster Medical System teams to support clinical staffing at strained hospitals.

There will be 20 monoclonal antibody strike teams to provide therapeutic support and at least 15 CDC expert deployments to assist in epidemiological and technical support.

An additional \$20 million in funding will be added to the American Rescue Plan to strengthen the Medical Reserve Corps, which the administration believes will support approximately 300,000 medical and public health professionals.

7. Supplying Treatment Pills to Prevent Hospitalisations and Death

Facing the reality of a seasonal surge of COVID and the emergence of the Omicron variant, the Biden administration says that any new therapeutic treatments will be available to any American regardless of their economic status or zip code.

The administration is taking measures to obtain 13 million doses of antiviral courses, six times the number of COVID hospitalisations over the past year.

8. Continued Commitment to Global Vaccination Efforts

The Biden administration has said that for every shot administered in the US, one will be donated globally. They are also pledging to donate 200 million doses over the next 100 days. There are reportedly steps underway to ramp up the production of vaccines in the United States and abroad.

9. Steps to Ensure We Are Prepared for All Scenarios

The Biden administration acknowledges that the Omicron strain could be more resistant to the current vaccines. The federal government and vaccine manufacturers have already begun to develop contingency plans if more boosters are needed.

The FDA and CDC will be given additional resources to quickly review and approve any new vaccines or treatment needed to limit the spread of Omicron or any other new variant.

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6.0-Magnitude Earthquake Rocks Indonesia - EMSC

By - Nevin Brown

A 6.0-magnitude earthquake struck Indonesia Saturday at 11:47 p.m. UTC.

The earthquake struck from a depth of 151 kilometres and hit northern Halmahera, the largest island in the Maluku archipelago and the largest Indonesian island outside of the five major islands.

[According to reports](#), a slight shake was felt for 30 seconds all the way to the Philippines, some 431 km from the epicentre.

No injuries, deaths, or property damage have been reported.

Another earthquake struck Indonesia approximately 21 minutes later, south of Sumbia. The 3.9-magnitude quake came from a depth of 10 kilometres and is on the other side of the Banda Sea.

A volcanic eruption hit Indonesia earlier in the day in East Java. The eruption of the Semeru volcano displaced thousands of people, injuring 41, and killing one.

A spokesperson for the Disaster Mitigation Agency said that ten people who were trapped following the volcanic eruption have been rescued.

It has not been confirmed that the eruption and earthquake are directly related.

The Maluku islands were long known as the Spice Islands, due to their monopoly on nutmeg, mace, and cloves.

The islands sit on what geophysicists refer to as the Halmahera tectonic microplate.

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Turkish Authorities Uncover Explosive Device on Police Car Assigned to Erdogan Rally
By - Nevin Brown

A bomb was found attached to the undercarriage of a private car belonging to a police officer assigned to Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's program in Siirt.

The bomb was identified when a friend of the officer reportedly noticed something under his car. Further investigation revealed the bomb and prompted an investigation and the assistance of a bomb squad.

Turkey's Ministry of Interior, Suleyman Soylu, said in a statement, "Our President has a program in our province of Siirt, and a police officer working at the Riot Forces Bureau of Mardin province Nusaybin district, who will go to the program as a reinforcement force, has left his residence to go to the foreign mission in question, with his personal vehicle, and the police officer who will go abroad, like himself, has been removed from his residence."

The bomb was dealt with without any injuries. Crime scene technicians checked the vehicle and explosives for fingerprints. No suspect has been brought in and it is unclear if there is a person of interest.

The police officer was a member of Turkey's Riot Police Department in Mardin province.

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A Failed Biennial World Cup Could Lead to New Global Tournament
By - Nevin Brown

FIFA's vice-president, Victor Montagliani, believes he has a possible solution to bridge the divide over the proposed biennial World Cup ahead of FIFA's December 20th planning summit with all national associations.

[In an interview with Reuters](#), Montagliani proposed that a tournament in the mold of the Confederations Cup, or a global version of the Nations League, could be preferred to a biennial World Cup. He also indicated that using different tournament formats to the World Cup could increase fan engagement and excitement for a new event.

Montagliani is also the president of CONCACAF, the governing body for the sport in North America, Central America, and the Caribbean. The FIFA president, Gianni Infantino, has been pushing a biennial World Cup to help grow the game and reshape the sport's calendar.

The FIFA president, however, has been at odds with UEFA, Europe's governing body, over the former's desire to increase the frequency of the World Cup from once every four years to once every two years. Many leagues and clubs have also voiced their opposition to FIFA's desired biennial World Cup.

At one point, UEFA threatened to boycott an additional World Cup. The current calendar for international tournaments ends in 2024, which puts the impetus on FIFA and other governing bodies to come to a resolution.

Infantino said, "We need to look at sporting and economic merits, then we can have a reasoned discussion about World Cups and perhaps other competitions."

Montagliani, in a possible effort to appease Infantino, UEFA, leagues, and clubs, suggested that smaller alternative tournaments would be discussed this month.

While he has indicated that he's willing to walk away from a biennial World Cup, he noted, "The principle of having an event, in between World Cups, is something I am totally for."

"The question is what is that going to be, how do we look at it, how does that affect other things like qualification processes and tournaments that are already there? That is the process that we need to go through," he added.

One suggestion that Montagliani has pushed is to replicate a tournament that resembles that old Confederations Cup. The event hasn't been played since 2017 and saw the champions of each confederation compete in an eight-team tournament.

Montagliani expressed that a global Nations League could be pursued. He said, "Four or five years ago we had discussions over a 'Global Nations League' so these discussions are not foreign to the table. They might look different, whether it is a Global Nations League, a Confederations Cup."

The effect that another global tournament could have on the sport has been a main sticking point for UEFA, clubs, and leagues. Montagliani is aware of those concerns, which is why he believes a renewed Confederations Cup, where there is no additional qualification process, could be a popular compromise.

"What I would like to see is [an analysis of] the fall-out, not so much on the revenue side but what is the impact on the ecosystem we currently have," Montagliani stated, adding, "I think our approach is to look at this from a holistic standpoint."

Montagliani has been willing to embrace change when it comes to tournaments. He made CONCACAF's club competition a straight knockout tournament, eschewing the traditional group stage to the knock-out stage format of most large tournaments.

He believes that a straight knockout-style tournament, in lieu of a biennial World Cup, could be what the sport needs.

"It could be completely different from what a World Cup would be," he offered, suggesting that it could be "a different format that we haven't thought about that could be exciting for fans."

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Explosive & Nearing Dominance: What the Data Out of South Africa is Telling Us About Omicron
By - Nevin Brown

The omicron variant of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, first identified in South Africa, has quickly spread throughout the world. Cases have emerged in Europe, the United States, Australia, and China. The World Health Organization has labeled it a variant of concern. The World Health Organization's (WHO) chief scientist, Soumya Swaminathan, [believes](#) the omicron variant has the potential to become the dominant covid variant. Data from South Africa shows the number of cases doubling daily, and in November, 73% of sequenced covid cases were omicron.

Tulio de Oliveira, a public health professor in South Africa, [said](#), "Omicron is probably the fastest-spreading variant that South Africa has ever seen."

The explosive growth in cases indicates that it is highly transmissible. [Delta makes up 99% of the world's covid cases](#), but omicron's rapid rise in South Africa is significant evidence that it could become the dominant variant in 2022. Within a few months, scientists from the European Union and Australia are projecting omicron to cause more infections than the delta strain. While preliminary data suggests that omicron is highly transmissible, many infections have presented less severe symptoms, or, reportedly, no symptoms at all. The WHO said that no deaths have been reported from omicron, but there is not enough data to conclude that the variant is mild.

Omicron also appears to be more resilient against natural immunity. Scientists from South Africa conducted a statistical study that suggests that omicron is three times more likely to reinfect individuals than previous covid variants. The study analyzed 2.8 million positive coronavirus samples from South Africa, of which 35,670 were believed to be reinfections. The scientists did not have access to vaccination data.

Further research is necessary to determine if omicron is more transmissible, lethal, or resistant to vaccines, treatments, and natural immunity than other variants. However, the early indications are that it is highly transmissible and avoids natural immunity.

The WHO has yet to determine if omicron will require a new vaccine or boosters to counter. Only 30% of South Africa's population is fully vaccinated, which makes it difficult for researchers to determine to what degree vaccines protect individuals from the new variant.

The WHO told vaccine makers they should be prepared to tweak their current covid vaccines. However, a new vaccine may not be needed for omicron, but could be necessary for another variant.

The CEO of BioNTech, Ugur Sahin, said, "I believe in principle at a certain timepoint we will need a new vaccine against this new variant." Sahin added that BioNTech has the capacity to quickly adapt its vaccine in response to omicron.

Omicron in the US

Cases of omicron have been reported all over the US. The United States has joined the United Kingdom and other nations in implementing travel restrictions on countries in southern Africa.

According to the New York Times' COVID-19 tracker, cases and hospitalizations in the US are rising and the average number of daily covid deaths has crept back up to over 1,000.

The Biden administration has continued to push to get all Americans vaccinated. Only 60% of the adult population is fully vaccinated, a figure much lower than most developed nations. With

the emergence of omicron, it's possible that booster shots will become a central tenet of the US response.

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Manchester United's Michael Carrick Steps Down as First Team Coach
By - Nevin Brown

Michael Carrick, Manchester United's caretaker manager, has decided to leave the club as his spell as the first team manager concludes. The club will install Ralf Rangnick as the first team manager, on a six-month interim basis to see out the season.

[Michael Carrick said of his decision to step down](#), "After a lot of thought and deliberation, I have decided that now is the right time for me to leave the club." He added, "I am, and will always be, a Manchester United fan and will come to as many matches as possible. I would like to wish Ralf, the staff, the players and the fans all the best for the future and I look forward to being in the stands and supporting the boys as a fan."

No specifics have been given over Carrick's decision to leave the club. Some speculate that his lineup decisions following United's pursuit of Ralf Rangnick were in fact dictated by the incoming manager.

Carrick leaves Manchester United a legend. He played for the club from 2006 to 2018, made 464 appearances and secured five Premier League titles, an FA Cup, and a UEFA Champions League trophy.

Following his retirement, he joined Jose Mourinho's staff at United for the 2018-19 season. Mourinho was fired in December of 2018, but Carrick was retained by Ole Gunnar Solksjaer. Carrick was subsequently appointed manager and served as an assistant coach through the Norwegian's tenure.

Following Solksjaer's dismissal, Carrick was handed the first-team job on a caretaker basis as United searched for an interim manager to finish the season.

On Monday, Rangnick was officially named United's interim manager. Due to a work visa problem, he has yet to hold a training with the club. However, he was spotted at Old Trafford watching United's 3-2 win over Arsenal.

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Zlatan Ibrahimovic: Manchester United Has 'Small Mentality'
By - Nevin Brown

Zlatan Ibrahimovic has opened up about his time at Manchester United in his autobiography, "Adrenaline". Over the course of his two-year stint with United, he found that the club on the inside did not resemble its outward image.

Ibrahimovic joined Manchester United after enjoying a successful four-season stint at Paris Saint-Germain. The headline-grabbing Swede won trophies everywhere he played, and was looking for a new challenge. [He notoriously told PSG](#) that he would only stay in Paris if they tore down the Eiffel Tower and replaced it with a statue of himself.

When Ibrahimovic chose Manchester United, the self-professed biggest club in the world, he expected the outward reputation to mirror the inner workings of the club.

[He wrote in his autobiography](#), however, that "one thing surprised me: everyone thinks of United as a top club, one of the richest and most powerful in the world and seen from the outside it looked that way to me, but once I was there I found a small, closed mentality".

The club's treatment of Wayne Rooney's locker bewildered Ibrahimovic. On the day after Rooney moved from United back to Everton, United removed his name from his locker. Rooney is United's all-time goalscorer and a club legend. United rushing to remove his presence from the locker room did not sit well with Ibrahimovic.

The seemingly mundane experience of drinking juice came to epitomise Ibrahimovic's time in Manchester. He writes: "One day I was in the hotel with the team before a game. I got thirsty so I opened the mini-bar and had a fruit juice".

"We played and then went home. Some time went by. My pay slip arrives. Normally I don't look at it. I only do so at the end of the year to see what's come in and what's gone out. But that time, I don't know why, I was curious and realised they'd taken a pound off my monthly wage".

"I called the team manager", he continued, saying "'Excuse me, why have they taken a pound off my salary?' The team manager had a look and told me: 'It was the fruit juice from the mini-bar'. 'Are you kidding, seriously?' 'No, I'm not. Here, if you order something you have to pay for it'. 'Sure, but I didn't go to the hotel on my own accord. I wasn't on holiday. It was my workplace. I was there for Manchester. If I have to play and I'm thirsty, I have to drink. I can't go on the pitch dehydrated'".

The experience of drinking sweet fruit juice left a bitter taste in Ibrahimovic's mouth. He wrote: "Can you believe it? A quid? Something like that would never happen in Italy. These are the details that make a difference and earn the respect of the players".

He details how he would have to show identification every day to get into United's training ground. He writes how he joked with the person at the gate when he told them, "Listen my friend I've been coming here every day for a month. I'm the best player in the world. If you still don't recognise me, you're in the wrong job".

Ibrahimovic's time at Manchester United changed the way he thought of the club, for the worse. He saw a massive club nickel and dime its players. He saw a club not properly respecting a legend. He saw a club that felt more like a commercial enterprise than a united group working toward a shared goal.

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From Photo-Ops to Afghan Withdrawal: Trump & Milley's Most High-Profile Spats
By - Nevin Brown

Former US President Donald Trump and Gen. Mark Milley had a well-documented tense relationship. Even as the two have since parted ways, Trump has proven that their separation only strengthened his dislike for the general.

Trump [most recently](#) took the opportunity during a speaking engagement at his Mar-a-Lago estate to take another jab at Milley, referring to him as a "f**king idiot" for essentially believing that abandoning military equipment in Afghanistan was the best option ahead of the US withdrawal.

Milley has yet to comment on Trump's critique.

While Milley may have been hand picked by Trump to serve as the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, their relationship inevitably soured as the former commander-in-chief's term came to an end.

Here are five of their most high-profile spats:

St. John's Church Photo-Op

On 1 June 2020, at the height of Black Lives Matter protests in Washington, DC, [Trump cleared a mass of protesters](#) to take an infamous photo of himself holding a bible in front of St. John's Church, located a few short steps from the White House.

As Trump approached the building, photos caught Milley, in full military garb, walking with the president. Subsequent reports on the incident revealed that the photos embarrassed Milley and almost led him to resign over what he viewed as a politicalisation of the military.

Milley decided against resigning and instead publicly apologised for the president's actions, a move that Trump did not like. [Reports](#) at the time detailed that Trump demanded to know why Milley apologised, and told him that apologies were a sign of weakness.

Milley reportedly responded by telling the president: "Not where I come from". He later allegedly told the then commander-in-chief that he did not expect Trump to understand. "It's an ethic for us, a duty".

The Chinese Conversation

Trump's term in office saw a severe escalation of tensions between the United States and China, with US intelligence revealing that, at one point, China was fearful the US would launch an attack.

It has been [reported that Milley](#), upon learning of China's concerns, called his Chinese counterpart and explained that an attack was not imminent, and that he would have warned China if Trump ordered an attack.

The call was done without Trump's knowledge, which later prompted Trump to blast Milley's actions as "[treasonous](#)".

Stop the Coup

In the wake of Trump's loss in the 2020 presidential election, Milley reportedly feared that Trump would stage a coup, and prepared the US high command to be ready to step in if there was not a peaceful transfer of power.

Milley is said to have gone to great lengths to ensure that, come January 20th, Joe Biden would be sworn in as US president, according to claims made by Washington Post reporters Carol Leonning and Philip Rucker in their tell-all book "I Alone Can Fix It: Donald J. Trump's Catastrophic Final Year".

As reports began to emerge over the allegations, Trump blasted the claims. Oddly enough, while Trump did claim that he would never stage a coup, he did further state that he would never stage a coup with Milley.

"If I was going to do a coup, one of the last people I would want to do it with is General Mark Milley", Trump said in the statement at the time.

Trump later stated that their fallout over the St. John's photo-op fiasco proved to him that Milley "had no courage or skill, certainly not the type of person I would be talking 'coup' with".

The Almost War With Iran

While Milley was watchful should Trump attempt to overturn the results of the 2020 election, he also worried that Trump would look to start an external conflict.

Many advisers in Trump's inner circle were Iran hawks, and the idea of conducting military actions against the Middle Eastern nation were a constant theme in Milley's meetings with the administration.

[Milley was reportedly](#) in a meeting in which a Trump adviser suggested going to war with Iran should he lose the presidential election. When the subject was not immediately dropped, Milley repeatedly argued against taking any unprovoked military action against Iran.

On the subject of a missile strike against Iran, Milley reportedly told Trump: "If you do this, you're gonna have a f**king war".

On January 3rd, Milley finally convinced Trump to drop the idea of attacking Iran after weighing the pros and cons of a military operation.

Withdrawal of All US Troops From Afghanistan

The US withdrawal from Afghanistan is what prompted Trump's most recent lashing out at the military general, by referring to him as "a f**king idiot", but it was Milley who stopped Trump from withdrawing all US forces while 45 was still in office.

The Trump administration had [signed](#) an agreement with the Taliban* in February 2020 that would see US troops leave Afghanistan after nearly 20 years of military occupation.

The original agreement called for US forces to withdraw from Afghanistan within 14 months of the announcement. [It was reported](#) that Milley and other military officials had to convince Trump not to withdraw all troops from Afghanistan on January 15th.

Milley and other US military officials warned Trump that a full withdrawal would lead to the same issues that the Biden administration eventually struggled with in the August pullout.

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Trump Slams Top US General Milley as 'F**king Idiot' Over Afghanistan Withdrawal

By - Nevin Brown

Former US President Donald Trump has a well-deserved reputation for speaking candidly. At an event at his Mar-a-Lago resort in Palm Beach, Florida, Trump recounted a conversation that caused him to become convinced that General Mark Milley, the nation's highest-ranking military official, "was a f**king idiot".

Trump, speaking at an event hosted by the right-wing Turning Point Action group, told a story over the weekend about a conversation he had with US General Mark Milley over the hectic US withdrawal from Afghanistan.

Trump told the crowd that he had said to Milley: "The moment we get out [of Afghanistan], I want every nut, every bolt, every screw... we're taking everything, we're taking down the tents".

Trump continued his Saturday speech: "They left all the tents. They left everything", adding, in a rhetorical query for those listening, "Couldn't they have flown in a couple of hundred pilots and flown the planes out?"

The story then turned to Trump's interactions with Milley when the former was president. Trump recounted, "I'll never forget Milley saying to me, 'Sir, sir. It's cheaper to leave the equipment than to bring it'". According to Trump, he then asked Milley, "You think it's cheaper to leave it there so they can have it than it is to fill it up with a half tank of gas and fly it into Pakistan or fly it back to our country?"

Trump then claimed that Milley answered him, "'Yes, sir, we think it's cheaper, sir'". To which Trump went to the punch line of his story: "That's when I realised he was a f**king idiot".

The cost of flying a single military aircraft for an hour is extremely expensive. According to [Business Insider](#), the C-130, used for the transportation of cargo and troops, costs \$6,604 per hour of flight. Factor in air support, logistics, and storage of excess equipment, and the cost of withdrawing all of the American military gear from Afghanistan starts to add up.

Trump's story, however, failed to include the context surrounding his conversation with Milley, as the Trump administration had [signed](#) an agreement with the Taliban* in February 2020 that would see US troops leave Afghanistan after nearly 20 years of military occupation.

The original agreement called for US forces to withdraw from Afghanistan within 14 months of the announcement. Trump's troop withdrawal, however, was not completed until August 2021, nearly 16 months after his administration signed the agreement.

At the time, Milley and US military officials warned Trump that a full withdrawal could lead to the issues that the Biden administration eventually struggled with. In January 2021, weeks before Trump was set to leave office, it was reported Milley had to talk the departing president out of withdrawing all troops from Afghanistan.

Trump and Milley had well-documented conflicts while the former was in the White House. It has been [reported](#) that Milley told Chinese officials he would warn China if Trump ordered an attack, that Milley had the US high command ready to step in if there wasn't a peaceful transfer of power following Trump's loss in the 2020 presidential election, and he pushed back on Trump's decision to quickly withdraw all US troops from Afghanistan.

Over the past year, Milley has come under fire from Democrats and Republicans for his handling of the evacuation from Afghanistan. [Reports](#) have consistently shown that Milley, unlike the Trump and Biden administrations, pushed back on a full US withdrawal from Afghanistan.

While Trump may be accusing Milley of being an "idiot" for allowing the US to leave so much equipment behind in Afghanistan, it's worth noting that he never pushed the leave in the first place.

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Graphic Design: The Chilling Art of a School Shooter
By - Nevin Brown

Hours before Ethan Crumbley opened fire on his classmates and teachers at Oxford High School in Oakland County, Michigan, he was sent to the school's guidance counselor over a graphic image that depicted a shooting.

According to prosecutors, one of Crumbley's teachers noticed a graphic picture that depicted a gun, a bullet, a shooting victim, and a laughing emoji, with the words "thoughts won't stop, help me", "the world is dead" and "my life is useless" written on it.

Crumbley was sent to the school guidance office where he was probed over his picture. He allegedly told the counselor that the picture was for a video game he was designing, which he viewed as a future career. The counselor's office was satisfied with his response and deemed that he wasn't a threat to harm himself or others.

However, they wanted his parents to take him home for the day. According to records, Ethan Crumbley's parents, James and Jennifer Crumbley, were difficult to contact and then uncooperative with the school's wishes.

When his parents arrived they were told they had 48 hours to find their son counseling or the school would call child protective services. The Crumbleys were made aware of their son's graphic image but did not reveal that they had recently bought him a gun.

Ethan Crumbley's parents refused to take him home and left the school without him, with the school counselors then deciding that it was better to keep him at school than to send him to an empty home.

Hours later, as in the image he drew, Ethan allegedly emerged from a bathroom and opened fire. Four students; Tate Myre, Hana St. Juliana, Madisyn Baldwin, and Justin Shilling, were killed. Six other students and one teacher were wounded.

Ethan Crumbley was apprehended at the scene and charged with 24 criminal counts, including four counts of first-degree murder and terrorism. His parents were charged with four counts of involuntary manslaughter in the days that followed the shooting.

James and Jennifer Crumbley failed to show for their arraignment, turned off their phones, and withdrew \$4,000 in cash, briefly going on the run. [The pair were ultimately arrested](#) hiding in a commercial space linked to an artist named Andrzej Sikora.

Sikora, 65, a Polish immigrant, has not been charged with any crime and is cooperating with authorities. However, investigators believe the Crumbleys were assisted in getting into the commercial space. Sikora's name and number were also listed outside the basement room where the Crumbleys were finally apprehended.

The parents of the school shooter could face additional charges and police are investigating who helped them get into the building. Sikora will be interviewed on Monday by police to determine if he had any connection to their attempt to evade authorities.

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Democrats' Anti-Trump Playbook Could Be a Losing Strategy for 2022 Midterm Elections By - Nevin Brown

House Democrats who opposed President Donald Trump in Congress now believe in keeping quiet about the 45th president. With US President Joe Biden's approval ratings in the 40s, congressional Democrats are scrambling to hold off a red wave during the 2022 midterm elections and maintain their slight edge in the House and Senate.

Topics that have dominated national politics, such as critical race theory, the January 6th insurrection and Donald Trump, are thought by some House Democrats to potentially become their undoing. There are concerns that those topics will prevent them from advocating the benefits of US President Joe Biden's "Build Back Better" agenda.

Democrats are still reeling from the results of the Virginia governor's race that saw Republican Glenn Youngkin win a state that Biden carried by 10 points. [Youngkin ran a campaign](#) that targeted school mask mandates, critical race theory, and basic economic issues.

Youngkin's Democratic opponent, Terry McAuliffe, spent much of his campaign trying to prove to voters that Youngkin was Trump in khakis.

"People don't want to hear about Donald Trump", US Rep. Susan Wild (D-PA) [told Axios](#), adding that "they're going to vote because they want to see people get s**t done".

The Virginia gubernatorial race reminded Democrats that congressional political races are local. Carolyn Bourdeaux (D-GA) [tweeted](#), "All politics is local, whether it's advocating for the equitable redevelopment of Gwinnett Place Mall, or securing funding for our local trailway system, every day I am working in Congress for our community".

US Rep. Josh Gottheimer (D-NJ) repeated the same sentiment, saying, "I don't believe you run national campaigns for Congress".

Democrats know they need to balance their rhetoric. Anti-Trump rhetoric still raises money and spurs activists but, according to some, isn't what will drive suburban voters to their cause. US Rep. Sean Patrick Maloney (D-NY) spoke about how candidates need to focus on what they're doing for voters, and what the other guy won't do.

"[Democrats are] delivering results at scale, for the size of the problems", Maloney said. "That's key, but the Republicans being reckless and irresponsible and motivated only by power is also going to be important".

While Democrats understand the need to run local campaigns, their image nationally could come to define their success. Sean McElwee, executive director of Data for Progress, believes, "it's going to be really, really hard to distinguish yourself from your national brand", noting that "it's functionally impossible for House members to do".

McElwee acknowledges that a Democratic brand built around anti-Trumpism won't work when the former president is no longer in power. The strategies that won Democrats the House and the Senate, and ultimately landed them the White House may not be enough to make for a winning strategy in 2022.

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US, UK, Canada Concerned by Tigrayans Arrested Without Charge in Ethiopia - Statement

WASHINGTON, December 3 (Sputnik) - Australia, Canada, Denmark, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, and the United States issued a joint statement on Monday expressing concerns over the Ethiopian government arresting Tigrayans based on their ethnicity and without charge.

"We, Australia, Canada, Denmark, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, and the United States, are profoundly concerned by recent reports of the Ethiopian government's detention of large numbers of Ethiopian citizens on the basis of their ethnicity and without charge," the statement said. "The Ethiopian government's announcement of a state of emergency on November 2 is no justification for the mass detention of individuals from certain ethnic groups."

The statement referred to reports by the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission (EHRC) and Amnesty International about mass arrests of ethnic Tigrayans.

"Individuals are being arrested and detained without charges or a court hearing and are reportedly being held in inhumane conditions," the statement read. "Many of these acts likely constitute violations of international law and must cease immediately."

The countries called on the government to provide unhindered and timely access by international monitors, and stressed that all sides must comply with their obligations under international humanitarian law.

"It is clear that there is no military solution to this conflict, and we denounce any and all violence against civilians, past, present and future. All armed actors should cease fighting and the Eritrean Defense Forces should withdraw from Ethiopia," the statement said. "We reiterate our call for all parties to seize the opportunity to negotiate a sustainable ceasefire without preconditions. Fundamentally, Ethiopians must build an inclusive political process and national consensus through political and legal means, and all those responsible for violations and abuses of human rights must be held accountable."

The Ethiopian government and the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) have been locked in conflict over control of the north of the country since November 2020, when the central authorities accused the Tigray rebels of attacking a military base. The Ethiopian government launched an operation in Tigray with the support of neighboring Eritrea.

In the spring of 2021, Ethiopian authorities announced the withdrawal of Eritrean troops from Tigray. In November, Ethiopia declared a six-month state of emergency as the TPLF forces together with eight other factions, some of which are considered terrorist by Addis Ababa, advanced toward the Ethiopian capital.

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Canada's Ambassador to China to Step Down Effective December 31 - Statement

WASHINGTON, December 3 (Sputnik) - Canadian Ambassador to China Dominic Barton said on Monday that he is stepping down from his position effective December 31.

"After much deliberation, I have spoken with Prime Minister [Justin] Trudeau and [Foreign] Minister [Melanie] Joly to inform them that I will step down from the position of Ambassador, effective December 31, 2021," he said in a statement.

The diplomat noted that when he first accepted the appointment in 2019, Trudeau set his core priority to secure the release of Michael Kovrig and Michael Spavor. Today they are back home, so this mission has been accomplished, and "the government is better positioned to achieve its other diplomatic priorities with China," according to Barton.

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RPT - World Must Not Blame Africa for Undervaccination While Denying Continent Shots - Expert

WASHINGTON, December 3 (Sputnik) - The international community should not be blaming African nations for being undervaccinated while at the same time limiting their access to vaccines, South African expert Solly Moeng told Sputnik.

Last week, the World Health Organization raised concerns over the novel coronavirus Omicron variant that was first detected in South Africa. The development comes as Africa struggles with a low vaccination rate which the WHO estimates is 7.5 percent.

"Many of the African countries are struggling to get access to vaccines," Moeng, an Africa Brand Summit Convener, said. "The world can deny vaccines to Africa, and still blame Africans for not being sufficiently vaccinated, which is nonsense."

These developed countries, Moeng noted, have huge quantities of vaccines that developing states want to purchase but are being hampered from accessing. There is something wrong with this situation, and that needs to be said, he added.

Moeng believes the way the omicron announcement was made had a negative impact worldwide and damaged African economies. The scientists, he said, were unprepared - they likely thought it was important to announce the new virus strain as quickly as possible.

"The economic price paid by a lot of businesses in the tourism and hospitality travel sector is huge... it is serious," he said. "One has to weigh the potential ramifications of one's actions, irrespective of whether that action is good, is noble."

Moeng also said there was no clarity or coordination with the government and other structures working on this COVID pandemic in South Africa.

"If there was, there would be a team of trained professional communicators in there to advise them... because when you communicate very sensitive, potentially explosive stuff, you don't just go to the microphone or to the podium, speak and then go away," he said.

In addition, the reputation management adviser said they should know there is a level of prejudice against Africa - or anything coming from Africa.

"You can see how travel bans were imposed on South Africa and the neighbors, but not on the Netherlands or Germany or the UK or these other places where the same variant of COVID 19 was found," he added.

Moeng also said Africa on the whole has far fewer casualties from COVID-19 than the rest of the world, and stressed that South Africa still has restrictions in place, for example, on stadiums, where numbers are hugely controlled. Meanwhile, Moeng said he was told up to 2,000 people are allowed to go into stadiums in other countries.

"They're more careless than we are," he added. "So, I think there's a general prejudice against or a lack of trust of South African or African capabilities around the world, which is a pity. And I think these travel bans just show that the prejudice, the preconceived ideas are still there... that's a problem, this inequality."

Hence, a careful approach is necessary to avoid prompting the types of "knee jerk reactions" seen from several parts of the world, he said.

"We have to be careful and know that we live in a world where whatever we say might end up being interpreted in ways that we never, never expect because of who we are," Moeng said.

"We don't have control over how the world responds to us, but we have control over how we say things or how we do things."

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World Must Not Blame Africa for Undervaccination While Denying Continent Shots - Expert

WASHINGTON, December 3 (Sputnik) - The international community should not be blaming African nations for being undervaccinated while at the same time limiting their access to vaccines, South African expert Solly Moeng told Sputnik.

Last week, the World Health Organization raised concerns over the novel coronavirus Omicron variant that was first detected in South Africa. The development comes as Africa struggles with a low vaccination rate which the WHO estimates is 7.5 percent.

"Many of the African countries are struggling to get access to vaccines," Moeng, an Africa Brand Summit Convener, said. "The world can deny vaccines to Africa, and still blame Africans for not being sufficiently vaccinated, which is nonsense."

These developed countries, Moeng noted, have huge quantities of vaccines that developing states want to purchase but are being hampered from accessing. There is something wrong with this situation, and that needs to be said, he added.

Moeng believes the way the omicron announcement was made had a negative impact worldwide and damaged African economies. The scientists, he said, were unprepared - they likely thought it was important to announce the new virus strain as quickly as possible.

"The economic price paid by a lot of businesses in the tourism and hospitality travel sector is huge... it is serious," he said. "One has to weigh the potential ramifications of one's actions, irrespective of whether that action is good, is noble."

Moeng also said there was no clarity or coordination with the government and other structures working on this COVID pandemic in South Africa.

"If there was, there would be a team of trained professional communicators in there to advise them... because when you communicate very sensitive, potentially explosive stuff, you don't just go to the microphone or to the podium, speak and then go away," he said.

In addition, the reputation management adviser said they should know there is a level of prejudice against Africa - or anything coming from Africa.

"You can see how travel bans were imposed on South Africa and the neighbors, but not on the Netherlands or Germany or the UK or these other places where the same variant of COVID 19 was found," he added.

Moeng also said Africa on the whole has far fewer casualties from COVID-19 than the rest of the world, and stressed that South Africa still has restrictions in place, for example, on stadiums, where numbers are hugely controlled. Meanwhile, Moeng said he was told up to 2,000 people are allowed to go into stadiums in other countries.

"They're more careless than we are," he added. "So, I think there's a general prejudice against or a lack of trust of South African or African capabilities around the world, which is a pity. And I think these travel bans just show that the prejudice, the preconceived ideas are still there... that's a problem, this inequality."

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Colorado Store Shooting Suspect Found Incompetent to Stand Trial - Reports

WASHINGTON, December 3 (Sputnik) - A US judge ruled that the Colorado man charged with a mass shooting that killed 10 individuals at a King Soopers store was not competent to stand trial, the Denver Post reported.

The man charged with the shooting, 22-year old Ahmad Al Aliwi Alissa, will be transported to the state hospital in Pueblo, where he will undergo mental health treatment before proceeding with a criminal trial against him, the report said, citing Boulder District Court Chief Judge Ingrid Bakke's ruling on Friday.

He faces 115 criminal charges, including 10 counts of first-degree murder for his alleged role in the mass shooting that left 10 people dead, including a responding police officer. No motive for the shooting has been provided to the public.

The incompetence ruling will delay the case for at least three months, the report said. Alissa's competency could be restored through treatment and medication despite backsliding in recent months, Boulder County District Attorney Michael Dougherty reportedly said.

Alissa, born in Syria in 1999, later became a naturalized US citizen.

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UPDATE - Omicron Variant Now Confirmed in Ten US States

WASHINGTON, December 3 (Sputnik) - Cases of the coronavirus Omicron variant have been reported by health officials in five additional US states today, bringing the total number of states with confirmed infections to ten.

New Omicron variant cases were reported in the states of Maryland, Nebraska, Pennsylvania, New Jersey and Utah on Friday, according to health officials. Cases were also reported earlier this week in California, Colorado, Hawaii, Minnesota and New York.

Omicron, which was first detected in southern Africa, has emerged as a variant of concern, prompting new travel restrictions and public health measures in the United States and primarily Western countries.

The Biden administration has said that the Omicron variant is a cause for concern but not for alarm. White House COVID-19 experts said the United States is in a better position to deal with the Omicron than with previous variants.

South Africa health officials said the infections were discovered in fully vaccinated individuals, the cases were mild and the initial reactions in the United States and other primarily Western countries - overblown.

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Ex-Trump Official Delays Congressional Deposition Over Medical Issues - Statement

WASHINGTON, December 3 (Sputnik) - The deposition of former Trump Justice Department official Jeffrey Clark to the House Select Committee to Investigate the January 6 Attack on the US Capitol was postponed until December 16 due to medical issues, Select Committee Spokesperson Tim Mulvey said in a statement.

"Through his attorney, Mr. Clark has informed the Selected Committee of a medical condition that precludes his participation in tomorrow's meeting and he has provided ample evidence of his claim. Chairman Thompson has agreed to postpone the deposition until December 16th. Chairman Thompson wishes Mr. Clark well," the statement said on Friday.

Clark was previously uncooperative with the Select Committee's probe into the Trump administration and its possible involvement with the January 6 incident at the US Capitol. On Wednesday, the Select Committee voted in favor of criminal contempt of Congress charges. According to an October subpoena, Clark recommended holding a press conference to announce a Justice Department investigation into allegations of voter fraud - a recommendation that was rejected by the Department leadership due to its lack of a "factual basis" and its inconsistency with its institutional role.

Clark's defense said he has refused to provide information requested by the panel because it was unrelated to the events that occurred at the US Capitol on January 6.

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New Twitter CEO Announces Major Reorganization - Reports

WASHINGTON, December 3 (Sputnik) - New Twitter CEO Parag Agrawal announced a significant company reorganization aimed to accelerate its growth and bring together different professionals who were previously divided by their job functions, The Washington Post reported on Friday, citing a companywide notice.

Twitter's new leader promised to focus on "clear decision-making, increased accountability, and faster execution," as he announced a number of organizational and leadership changes, which will allow the company to achieve its goals, the report said on Friday.

The company already notified the US Securities and Exchange Commission about the upcoming moves, the report added.

A number of Twitter's top officials confirmed their resignations on Friday.

The reorganization supposes the creation of three new divisions, including consumer, revenue, and core tech, which will be led by general managers, the report said. It is the first signal the new company's leadership intends to change the practices that did not give the opportunity to innovate, it added.

Former CEO of Twitter Jack Dorsey said on Monday he will be serving on the company board through the spring after announcing his resignation from the lead corporate position.

Dorsey founded Twitter in 2006, becoming a billionaire technology entrepreneur.

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Omicron Variant Detected in 4 More US States, Bringing Total to 9

WASHINGTON, December 3 (Sputnik) - Cases of the coronavirus Omicron variant have been reported by health officials in four additional US states on Friday, bringing the total up to nine states with confirmed infections.

New Omicron variant cases were reported in the states of Maryland, Nebraska, Pennsylvania and Utah on Friday, according to health officials. Cases were also reported earlier this week in California, Colorado, Hawaii, Minnesota and New York.

Omicron, which was first detected in southern Africa, has emerged as a variant of concern, prompting new travel restrictions and public health measures in the United States and primarily Western countries.

The Biden administration has said that the Omicron variant is a cause for concern but not for alarm. White House COVID-19 experts said the United States is in a better position to deal with the Omicron than with previous variants.

South Africa health officials said the infections were discovered in fully vaccinated individuals, the cases were mild and the initial reactions in the United States and other primarily Western countries - overblown.

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US to Crack Down on Alleged Corrupt Foreign Government Officials Next Week - Reports

WASHINGTON, December 3 (Sputnik) - The Biden administration is planning to impose sanctions on corrupted foreign government officials in the run-up to Summit for Democracy scheduled to take place virtually on Thursday and Friday, the Wall Street Journal reported. During the summit next week, the Biden administration will try to persuade participating government officials from over 100 countries to exert similar pressure on the countries which are identified by the US as non-democratic, the report said on Friday, citing an unnamed official familiar with the matter.

The US sanctions will become a part of the existing Global Magnitsky Act and are part of the Biden administration's effort to run democratic renewal around the world, the report said. "Over the course of the week, Treasury will take a series of actions to designate individuals who are engaged in malign activities that undermine democracy and democratic institutions around the world including corruption, repression, organized crime, and serious human-rights abuse," the report quoted the official as saying.

At present, it is not known who exactly will be targeted by the new US sanctions though a number of lawmakers and Biden administration officials have repeatedly spoken out in favor of imposing sanctions against key officials in Russia and China.

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US Stocks Down 2nd Week in Row on Federal Reserve Rate Hike, Omicron Fears

NEW YORK, December 3 (Sputnik) - US stocks tumbled for a second week in a row, roiled by fears of an imminent rate hike by the Federal Reserve and the possibility of another round of global economic turmoil from potential measures to address the coronavirus Omicron variant. The Labor Department announced earlier on Friday the unemployment rate in November stood at just 0.2% above the Federal Reserve's 4% target for maximum employment and a key criteria for an interest rate hike. Federal Reserve Chairman Jerome Powell said earlier this week that the central bank was already thinking of speeding up the taper of its pandemic-era stimulus and putting in a rate hike as expeditiously as possible to rein in inflation.

Reports of cases of Omicron in the United States have begun flowing in, with more states reporting infections after the first one reported in California earlier this week.

The November jobs numbers and Omicron cases proved to be a double-whammy for Wall Street.

At the close, the biggest losers were technology stocks on the Nasdaq Composite. The index - which groups Big Tech names such as Facebook, Apple, Amazon, Netflix and Google - fell 296 points, or 1.9%, on the day to close at 15,086. For the week, the Nasdaq fell 2.6%, adding to last week's 3.5% rout.

The Dow Jones Industrial Average, which comprises mostly industrial stocks, lost 60 points, or 0.2%, to settle at 34,580. The Dow fell almost 1% on the week, after last week's drop of nearly 2%.

The S&P 500 index, which groups the top 500 US stocks, finished down 39 points, or 0.8%, at 4,538. The S&P fell 1.2% for the week, adding to last week's 2.2% drop.

Despite their recent setback on Omicron fears, US stocks are still having one of their best years, with the Dow up 13%, the S&P 500 showing a gain of 20% and Nasdaq a rise of 18%.

"It's clear from comments this week by Chairman Jerome Powell and his colleagues that the plan has changed recently and they now intend to taper faster, raise rates sooner," Craig Erlam, analyst at online trading platform OANDA, said. "But Omicron could complicate efforts further just as the economic data was starting to catch up. A strong (jobs) report today leaves the Fed[eral] Reserve well and truly backed into a corner."

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US Concerned by Continued Escalation of Islamic State Terror Attacks in Iraq - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, December 3 (Sputnik) - The United States is very concerned about the escalating attacks conducted by the Islamic State terror group (banned in Russia) across Iraq, US State Department spokesperson Ned Price said.

"The United States is deeply concerned by the continued escalation of ISIS [Islamic State] attacks throughout Iraq, including the attack yesterday in Makhmour district that took the lives of ten Peshmerga and three civilians," Price said on Friday.

The United States reaffirms its commitment to supporting the Iraqi Security Forces, including the Kurdish Peshmerga, in their fight against extremists, Price added.

On Thursday, terrorists attacked a village in the Makhmour region and killed at least ten people, including three civilians, according to media reports.

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Police Searching for Michigan School Shooting Suspect's Parents - Sheriff

WASHINGTON, December 3 (Sputnik) - The parents of suspected Michigan school shooter Ethan Crumley are missing and law enforcement is looking for them after the Oakland County

prosecutor announced they are charged with involuntary manslaughter, Sheriff Michael Bouchard said.

"When we were informed the prosecutor had issued charges, we sent detectives out and got a call from the lawyer for the couple saying they're not returning her calls or texts. If they think they're going to get away, they're not," Bouchard told CNN on Friday, adding that the Crumbleys are currently missing.

James and Jennifer Crumbley were charged with four counts of involuntary manslaughter each in connection with the school shooting for which their 15-year-old son stands accused. The couple purchased the firearm used in the attack just days before the shooting and did not take seriously concerning reports from school staff about his behavior, Oakland County prosecutor Karen McDonald said during a news conference earlier on Friday.

Four students were killed and seven others were injured in the shooting that took place on Tuesday.

"A Be On the Lookout (BOLO) alert has been issued for James and Jennifer Crumbley, the parents of Ethan Crumbley, the accused Oxford High School shooter. They are wanted on charges of Involuntary Manslaughter," the Oakland County Sheriff's office said in a statement via Facebook.

A statement from the couple's lawyers circulated by reporters on Twitter said that they left town on the night of the shooting for their own safety and are returning to the area to be arraigned. They are not fleeing from law enforcement, the statement added.

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US States of Maryland, Pennsylvania Confirm First Omicron Variant Cases - Statements

WASHINGTON, December 3 (Sputnik) - The US states of Maryland and Pennsylvania have confirmed the first cases of the new coronavirus Omicron variant, local authorities said in statements.

In Maryland, three cases have been detected at the Baltimore Metropolitan area in close proximity to the US capital of Washington, DC.

"Two cases are from the same household, including a vaccinated individual who recently traveled to South Africa and an unvaccinated person who was a close contact of that individual. One unrelated case involves a vaccinated individual with no known recent travel history," the Office of Governor said in a statement on Friday.

None of the three individuals are hospitalized and the authorities are taking comprehensive contact tracing efforts to identify, quarantine and test all potential close contacts, the statement added.

Maryland Governor Larry Hogan urged resident to continue taking safety measures.

"This is a rapidly evolving situation, and we will continue to keep Marylanders updated as new information becomes available," he said.

In Pennsylvania, a Philadelphia man also tested positive for the Omicron variant, the local authorities said in a separate statement.

"At this time, the Health Department is issuing a warning to all Philadelphians to take precautions, given the possibility that this new strain may be more transmissible. This includes seriously reconsidering plans for indoor holiday gatherings and activities," the statement said. In addition to California, where the first case of an Omicron infection was detected earlier this week, the US states of Minnesota, Colorado, Hawaii and New York have also reported cases of the new variant, the statement said. In addition, Nebraska reported six cases on Friday. Last week, the World Health Organization identified the new strain of the coronavirus, first reported in South Africa, as one of concern. However, local doctors and health officials have reported that the cases – all in fully vaccinated persons - are mild.

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Armed Man Arrested Outside UN Charged With Making Terroristic Threat - NYPD

UNITED NATIONS, December 3 (Sputnik) - The armed man arrested outside the United Nations headquarters has been charged with criminal possession of weapon and making a terroristic threat, among other charges, New York Police Department (NYPD) Detective Christopher Roskosky told Sputnik on Friday.

The 64-year-old's motive for bringing the shotgun to the world body's complex remains unknown, according to Roskosky.

"He has been charged with criminal possession of a weapon, making a terroristic threat, menacing, reckless endangerment, obstructing governmental administration, disorderly conduct," Roskosky said.

The individual was arrested on Thursday after several hours of NYPD's attempts to establish a dialogue with him. He came to New York from the US state of Florida and has no criminal history.

The gunman agreed to put down the weapon pointed against his neck after police handed documents, including medical papers, he had with him, over to the United Nations.

The individual was then taken to a hospital, where he remains as of Friday, Roskosky said.

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SPUTNIK TOP STORIES OF THE DAY

WASHINGTON, December 3 (Sputnik) -

US-RUSSIA RELATIONS

* US Secretary of State Antony Blinken on Friday said President Joe Biden and Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin will speak very soon.

* Blinken expressed hope that the United States along with Germany and France could re-engage with Ukraine and Russia to implement the Minsk accords.

* Russian Ambassador to the United States Anatoly Antonov said on Friday that he is unaware of any breakthroughs the two countries had reportedly achieved on issuing visas to American embassy staff in Moscow.

* Moscow refutes Western media reports that Russia and the United States in consultations had allegedly prepared a draft document on the restoration of the issuance of visas and the work of embassies, there has been no progress on this issue yet, as Washington is not responding to Moscow's proposals, a diplomatic source told Sputnik.

* The issues of the work of the diplomatic missions of Russia and the United States and the issuance of visas, including for diplomats, are unlikely to be the focus of the upcoming conversation between the presidents of the two countries, Vladimir Putin and Joe Biden, a diplomatic source told Sputnik.

US-EU SECURITY PARTNERSHIP

* The United States and the European Union are launching a dialogue on security and defense, with its first meeting slated for early 2022, US State Secretary Antony Blinken and EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell said in a joint statement on Friday.

* High-level diplomats from the United States and European Union in a joint statement said they held a bilateral meeting in Washington, DC to discuss a range of issues, including the importance of US-EU support for Ukraine given the alleged Russian aggression on its borders.

JCPOA TALKS

* The United Nations calls on all parties participating in the talks to revive the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) to reinforce their efforts to achieve reimplementation of the Iran nuclear agreement, UN spokesperson Stephane Dujarric said on Friday.

* The United States ended the seventh round of the nuclear talks in Vienna to revive the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) because Iran does not seem to be serious about taking the necessary steps to return to the agreement's compliance, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said.

* Text of Tehran's proposal on the revival of the JCPOA mirrors details of the 2015 deal, the Press TV reported on Friday, citing a source close to Vienna negotiations.

PUTIN-ERDOGAN TALKS

* Russian President Vladimir Putin and Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan discussed Donbas, the Russian leader said that Kiev continued its destructive line aimed at disrupting the Minsk agreements, the Kremlin said on Friday.

* Putin and Erdogan expressed satisfaction with the level of interaction in order to stabilize the situation and establish peace process in Syria, the Kremlin said.

* Putin discussed energy in a phone conversation with Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, the Kremlin said.

* Putin briefed Erdogan, about the results of the trilateral meeting of the leaders of Russia, Azerbaijan and Armenia on November 26 in Sochi, the Kremlin said.

COVID-19

* Six new cases of the Omicron coronavirus variant have been detected in the US state of Nebraska, the Nebraska Public Health Solutions District said on Friday in a press release.

* The World Health Organization does not yet have data on the difference between the clinical symptoms of Omicron and other strains of COVID-19, Maria Van Kerkhove, the technical lead of COVID-19 response at WHO's Emergency Diseases Unit, said.

* The Omicron strain has been identified in 38 countries, but Delta remains the dominant variant of COVID-19, Maria Van Kerkhove, the technical lead of COVID-19 response at WHO's Emergency Diseases Unit, said.

AIR PLANE INCIDENT IN LATVIA

* The AirBaltic plane which arrived in Riga from Stockholm on Friday skid off the taxiway due to poor visibility, the Riga airport told Sputnik, adding that the runway is closed.

* Passengers and crew of an AirBaltic plane have been safely evacuated after an accident at the Riga airport on Friday, a spokesman for the rescue service told Sputnik.

MIGRANT CRISIS ON BELARUS-POLAND BORDER

* The situation at the Polish-Belarusian border remains tense but is much calmer than several weeks ago, German Interior Ministry spokesman Steve Alter said on Friday.

* Berlin expects Minsk to ensure long-term access of international organizations to migrants, German government spokesman Steffen Seibert said.

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Omicron Likely to Reinforce IMF Downgrade of Global Growth Forecasts - Managing Director

WASHINGTON, December 3 (Sputnik) - The coronavirus Omicron variant is likely to reinforce a downgrade of the International Monetary Fund's (IMF) outlook on the global economy, IMF Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva said on Friday.

"Let's be very frank: A new variant that may spread very rapidly can dent confidence and in that sense we are likely to see some downgrades of our October projections for global growth," Georgieva said at a live-streamed discussion on the global economy.

Georgieva said that even before the emergence of the Omicron variant, the IMF had already been concerned about a loss in the momentum of global growth due to the negative impacts of the Delta variant.

"The Delta variant proved to be a disruption that caused some additional delays in production" of goods in the United States and China, the leading engines for world growth, she said.

The IMF projected in October that advanced economies would regain in 2022 their pre-pandemic aggregate output, and exceed those by 0.9% by 2024.

It said output for emerging market and developing economies, excluding China, was expected to remain 5.5% below the pre-pandemic forecast in 2024.

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US, EU Interested in Cooperating With Taiwan Based on 'One China' Policy - Joint Statement

WASHINGTON, December 3 (Sputnik) - The United States and the European Union are interested in deepening cooperation with Taiwan based on the "one-China" policy and maintaining the status quo in the Taiwan Strait, US and EU senior diplomats said in a joint statement on Friday.

"Deputy Secretary of State Wendy R. Sherman and European External Action Service Secretary General Stefano Sannino led the first US-EU high-level consultations on the Indo-Pacific on December 3 in Washington," the statement said. "They reconfirmed their interest in stability and the status quo in the Taiwan Strait, and both sides noted a shared interest in deepening cooperation with Taiwan consistent with their respective 'one-China' policies."

Both, the United States and the European Union reaffirm the centrality of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) in the Indo-Pacific region that should remain open and free, the statement said.

Taiwan has been ruled independently from China since 1949. China views the island as its province, while the island authorities maintain that it is an autonomous country.

The United States has boosted cooperation with Taiwan in recent years, while China has strengthened deployment of fighter jets into Taiwan's air defense identification zone. Taiwan topped the agenda of the video meeting between the US and Chinese presidents last month. President Xi Jinping issued a stern warning to his US counterpart over the self-ruled island, which Beijing saw as a renegade province.

On Tuesday, the United States unveiled a list of 110 countries invited to attend a democracy summit in December. The list did not include China but included Taiwan.

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Police Searching for Michigan School Shooting Suspect's Parents - Sheriff

WASHINGTON, December 3 (Sputnik) - The parents of suspected Michigan school shooter Ethan Crumbley are currently missing and being looked for by law enforcement after the county prosecutor announced involuntary manslaughter charges against them, Oakland County Sheriff Michael Bouchard told CNN on Friday.

"When we were informed the prosecutor had issued charges, we sent detectives out and got a call from the lawyer for the couple saying they're not returning her calls or texts. If they think they're going to get away, they're not," Bouchard said. "Correct," he then confirmed when asked if the Crumbleys are currently missing.

James and Jennifer Crumbley were charged with four counts of involuntary manslaughter each in connection with the school shooting for which their 15-year-old son stands accused. The

couple purchased the firearm used in the attack just days before the shooting, and did not take seriously concerning reports from school staff about his behavior, county prosecutor Karen McDonald said during a news conference earlier on Friday.

Four students were killed and seven others were injured in the shooting, which took place on Tuesday.

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Engineers Building Launch Pad at Cape Canaveral for Proposed Moon Mission Starship - Musk

WASHINGTON, December 3 (Sputnik) - Engineers have started work on constructing a new launch pad at Cape Canaveral in Florida to launch a SpaceX starship for an orbital test flight early next year, SpaceX founder and CEO Elon Musk said on Friday.

"Construction of Starship orbital launch pad at the Cape has begun," Musk said in a message via Twitter.

Last month, Musk told the National Academies Space Studies Board that the SpaceX starship, chosen by NASA for the Artemis Program to return US astronauts to the surface of the Moon for the first time since 1972, would have its first orbital test flight early in 2022.

SpaceX has already carried out several suborbital space flights with its proposed starship, including one successful landing.

The company has also said he hopes to receive Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) approval for the starship before the end of 2021.

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Republican Lawmakers Express Concern Over Possible Ban on US Crude Oil Export - Letter

WASHINGTON, December 3 (Sputnik) - A group of more than 60 Republican members of Congress expressed concerns over a possible Biden administration ban on the export of US crude oil in a letter sent to Energy Secretary Jennifer Granholm and Commerce Secretary Gina Raimondo on Friday.

"We are extremely concerned about the comments Secretary Granholm made regarding the possibility of reinstating a ban on exporting American crude oil. Domestic oil and gas producers are already feeling the burden of the Biden Administration's reckless energy policies, such as cancelling the Keystone Pipeline and pausing leasing on federal lands, which further harms the industry and American consumers... We must allow American companies to compete with every other major oil producing country," the letter said.

Exports increased over 500% from 2015 to 2019 after Congress repealed an export ban in order to allow US companies to compete in the international marketplace, the letter said. The United States became energy independent and a net exporter of petroleum product, it added.

The lawmakers in the letter requested answers from Granholm and Raimondo on a number of questions, including what impact a reinstatement of the moratorium would have on the US economy, what aggregate effect decreased US oil exports have on net global carbon emissions and whether the administration has discussed the national security implications of being more dependent on OPEC+ countries.

Signatories to the letter include Congressmen Roger Williams, August Pfluger, Kevin Brady and Jodey Arrington alongside dozens of others.

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Biden Has 'Frog in Throat' Cold, Tested Negative For COVID-19 - White House Doctor

WASHINGTON, December 3 (Sputnik) - President Joe Biden is suffering from nasal congestion creating a "frog in the throat " effect but has tested negative for 19 respiratory pathogens including COVID-19, official White House physician Dr. Kevin O'Connor said on Friday. "As is readily apparent, President Biden is experiencing some increased nasal congestion this week," O'Connor said in a statement. "This can be heard in his voice and he is feeling the colloquially well-known 'frog in one's throat.'"

O'Connor said Biden tested negative for the novel coronavirus and other coronaviruses, influenza and streptococcus three times this week. The president's treatment will include common over the counter medications for symptoms, he said.

Earlier on Friday Biden said the reason for his hoarse voice was because he had gotten a cold and assured Americans that he was well and getting tested for the coronavirus every day. Biden explained that his one-and-a-half year old grandson liked to kiss everybody and was doing that despite his grandfather having a cold.

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UPDATE - Biden Signs Stopgap Funding Bill to Keep US Government Open - White House

WASHINGTON, December 3 (Sputnik) - President Joe Biden has signed a stopgap funding bill to keep the US government open, the White House announced Friday, after Democratic lawmakers managed to win enough support from rival Republicans to vote on the highly-contested matter.

"On Friday, December 3, 2021, the President signed into law ... the 'Further Extending Government Funding Act'," the White House said in a statement.

It said the bill would provide federal agencies "appropriations," or funding, through February 18 to continue with projects and activities that include support, among others, for Afghanistan evacuees.

Biden told reporters at the White House earlier on Friday that the bill would also help his administration make needed investments in public health, education and national security. "I want to thank a substantial bipartisan vote in the Senate for sending this bill to my desk," the Democrat president said, acknowledging the cooperation of Republican lawmakers in the matter.

The Senate passed the short-term funding bill on Thursday night, preventing furloughs of federal workers and suspension of certain government services.

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Israeli 'Pegasus' Spyware Used to Hack Phones of 11 US Diplomats - Reports

WASHINGTON, December 3 (Sputnik) - The Pegasus spyware developed by Israeli company NSO Group was used to hack the iPhones of 11 US diplomats in recent months, the Washington Post reported on Friday, citing alerts from Apple to the impacted individuals. The recent attacks were focused on US officials working in East Africa, the report said. The Pegasus spyware gives government clients the ability to steal files, listen to conversations and track the movements of the infected device, the report added.

The White House National Security Council in a statement Friday said the US is acutely concerned that NSO Group's software poses a serious counterintelligence and security risk to American personnel, which is why the administration placed several companies involved in the development and proliferation of these tools on the Commerce Department's entity list.

In November, the US Department of Commerce included the NSO Group in its list of entities engaging in activities contrary to US national security. The group's Pegasus spyware has purportedly been used to spy on the phones of about 50,000 targets, including politicians, businessmen, activists, journalists and opposition figures around the world.

Apple later in November launched a lawsuit against NSO Group for the surveillance and targeting of the company's customers. They are also seeking a permanent injunction to ban NSO Group from using any Apple software, services, or devices.

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White House Says Engaged in Possibility of Biden-Putin Call, Not Yet Finalized

WASHINGTON, December 3 (Sputnik) - The White House is engaged in the possibility of a phone call between presidents Joe Biden and Vladimir Putin, Press Secretary Jen Psaki said on Friday.

"As it relates to the potential for a call [between Biden and Putin], we have been engaged in the possibility of that. When we have – if and when we have that finalized – we'll make you all

aware of that," Psaki said during a news briefing, in response to a question about a possible call between the leaders.

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US Has Range of Tools for Possible Russia-Ukraine Clash, Including Sanctions - White House

WASHINGTON, December 3 (Sputnik) - The US has a number of ways to respond in the event of a confrontation between Russia and Ukraine, including coordinated economic sanctions, White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki said on Friday.

"There's a range of tools at our disposal, of course economic sanctions are an option, but we are going to do that in coordination with our European partners, with Congress, those consultations have been ongoing and we just want to be prepared," Psaki said during a press conference.

The news comes following a statement from President Joe Biden earlier on Friday about working with European and Ukrainian partners to develop a set of initiatives to "make it very very difficult" for Russia to "invade" Ukraine.

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Nikitin's Deportation From US Delayed for 2 Weeks After Flight to Russia Canceled - Lawyer

WASHINGTON, December 3 (Sputnik) – The deportation of Russian national Oleg Nikitin, who was sentenced in the United States for violating export regulations, has been delayed for approximately two weeks after his flight home was canceled, his lawyer Alexey Tarasov told Sputnik on Friday.

"We were in contact with Immigration and Customs Enforcement yesterday, and it appears that there is going to be a delay of approximately two weeks in Mr. Nikitin's removal. The officer said that ICE will work expeditiously, but the process takes time," Tarasov said.

US authorities brought Nikitin from a detention facility in the US state of Georgia to the airport in Atlanta on Thursday, the lawyer noted. However, the ticket was purchased for an Aeroflot flight from New York to Moscow that was later canceled.

"The Aeroflot flight schedule apparently changed for the winter months, and as a result, there was a connecting flight from Atlanta to New York that was missed as well," Tarasov explained. The exact date of deportation will depend on processing, Tarasov noted.

"It just takes time for Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) to facilitate travel arrangements," he added. "Whenever somebody is deported, ICE is asked to facilitate the travel, and that includes purchasing tickets and in some instances actually arranging for escorts to be on the plane with him."

Nikitin apparently will wait for deportation at the same detention facility in Georgia, according to the lawyer.

In September, Nikitin was sentenced to 28 months in prison, which is nearly equivalent to the time he served in custody.

Nikitin served as general director of the St. Petersburg-based energy company KS Engineering (KSE). American authorities accused him of conspiring with his business partner Anton Cheremukhin, as well as three foreign nationals, to purchase a US-made power turbine worth \$17.3 million in violation of US trade regulations. The turbine was to be employed on a Russian Arctic deep water drilling platform, according to the US Justice Department.

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US Committed to Making Sure Taiwan Has Means to Defend Itself - Blinken

WASHINGTON, December 3 (Sputnik) - The United States is committed to ensuring that Taiwan has the means to defend itself in the event of an attack from China, Secretary of State Antony Blinken said on Friday.

"We've been very clear and consistent over many years that we are committed to making sure that Taiwan has the means to defend itself," Blinken said at a Reuters forum. "Whether that's in defense articles and services, we will continue to make good on that commitment."

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US Ended Vienna Talks Because Iran Does Not Seem Serious About JCPOA Compliance - Blinken

WASHINGTON, December 3 (Sputnik) - The United States ended the seventh round of the nuclear talks in Vienna to revive the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) because Iran does not seem to be serious about taking the necessary steps to return to the agreement's compliance, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said on Friday.

"We've had this first round of talks since the new [Iranian] government, and what we've seen in the last couple of days is that Iran right now does not seem to be serious about doing what's necessary to return to compliance, which is why we ended this round of talks in Vienna," Blinken said during the Reuters NEXT Virtual Global Conference.

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US, EU Launch Security Dialogue, First Meeting Set for Early 2022 - Joint Statement

WASHINGTON, December 3 (Sputnik) - The United States and the European Union are launching a dialogue on security and defense, with its first meeting slated for early 2022, US State Secretary Antony Blinken and EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell said in a joint statement on Friday.

The leaders acknowledged "the importance of a stronger and more capable European defense that contributes to global and Transatlantic security" and expressed support for "the fullest possible involvement of the United States in EU defense initiatives."

"As envisioned in the June 2021 U.S.-EU Summit joint statement, they announce the launch of a U.S.-EU dialogue on security and defense ... The first meeting of the dialogue, which will aim to pursue closer cooperation in the fields of security and defense, will be held in early 2022," the statement further said.

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Blinken Says Expects Biden, Putin to Speak in Very Near Future

WASHINGTON, December 3 (Sputnik) - US Secretary of State Antony Blinken on Friday said President Joe Biden and Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin will speak very soon.

"I expect they will be speaking in the very near future," Blinken said at a Reuters forum.

During this upcoming conversation, he added, Biden will state the US desire to have a stable relationship with Moscow. Blinken also said the US and Russia have "overlapping interests" and stressed the necessity of direct contacts between the two presidents.

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Blinken Hopes US, France, Germany to Re-Engage With Ukraine, Russia on Minsk Accords

WASHINGTON, December 3 (Sputnik) – Secretary of State Antony Blinken expressed hope on Friday that the United States along with Germany and France could re-engage with Ukraine and Russia to implement the Minsk accords.

"My hope and expectation would be that we along with the French and Germans who have this so-called Normandy process could really reengage with Ukraine and with Russia to see if they will implement the steps they agreed to in the Minsk process," Blinken said.

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US, EU Diplomats Agreed to Support Ukraine, Continue Consultations - Joint Statement

WASHINGTON, December 3 (Sputnik) - High-level diplomats from the United States and European Union in a joint statement said they held a bilateral meeting in Washington, DC to discuss a range of issues, including the importance of US-EU support for Ukraine given the alleged Russian aggression on its borders.

"[US] Deputy Secretary of State Wendy R. Sherman and European External Action Service Secretary General Stefano Sannino led the first U.S.-EU high-level consultations on the Indo-Pacific on December 3 in Washington," the statement said on Friday. "They... discussed the importance of continued consultation and US-EU support for Ukraine against Russian aggression."

Both diplomats reiterated their concerns over the recent Russian military buildup at the Ukrainian border, according to the statement.

Over the past several weeks, Ukraine and some Western countries have expressed concern about the alleged increase in what they characterize as "aggressive actions" by Russia on their border. However, Russia has refuted the accusations by saying it is moving troops within its own territory and at its own discretion.

Russia has repeatedly said it stands by its right to move armed forces freely within its territory. The Kremlin has also expressed concerns about Ukraine having aggregated almost half of all its armed forces on the contact line with the Donbas region in the east of the country.

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Michigan School Shooter Suspect's Parents Charged With Involuntary Manslaughter

WASHINGTON, December 3 (Sputnik) - The parents of accused Michigan school shooter Ethan Crumbley were charged with involuntary manslaughter in connection with the incident, Oakland County Prosecutor Karen McDonald said on Friday during a news conference.

"Based on the information and evidence I have received, today I'm announcing charges against the shooter's parents, Jennifer and James Crumbley," McDonald said.

Jennifer and James are charged with four counts of involuntary manslaughter each due to their role in obtaining the firearm used in the shooting, as well as their responsibility for its safe storage, McDonald noted.

The 15-year old is being charged as an adult on 24 counts, including terrorism and murder, after killing four and injuring seven others with a semi-automatic handgun he purportedly obtained after his father purchased it alongside him just several days prior to the shooting. Ethan posted photos of the firearm on social media, in which he referred to the Sig Sauer 9mm handgun as his "new beauty," McDonald said. Jennifer also made a post to social media calling the pistol his "new Christmas present," McDonald added.

There were also a number of incidents in the days before the shooting that indicated Ethan was dangerous and disturbed, McDonald said. A teacher reported to school officials that the teen was searching for ammunition on his cell phone during class, which was then reported to his parents. Jennifer then sent a message to Ethan stating "I'm not mad at you, you have to learn not to get caught," McDonald said.

The morning of the shooting, Ethan's teacher came upon a note on his desk that contained a drawing of a handgun and phrases such as "the thoughts won't stop, help me," and "blood everywhere," McDonald said. It also contained depictions of people who had been shot, as well as a laughing emoji, she added.

Jennifer and James were then called into the school for a meeting, where they were shown the note, and failed to ask Ethan whether he had his gun with him or inspect his backpack. Ethan was then returned to school as normal, where he allegedly committed the shooting later that day. When news of the shooting was made public, Jennifer texted Ethan "don't do it," McDonald said. James Crumbley also drove straight home after hearing news of the shooting, after which he called 911 to report that a gun was missing from his house and he believed his son may be the shooter, McDonald added. The gun was stored unlocked in a drawer in James and Jennifer's bedroom," McDonald noted.

McDonald called Michigan's state gun laws "woefully inadequate" and expressed her anger over the event. Involuntary manslaughter is the strongest charge that the prosecution believes can be proven in court, she said.

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Austin, Kishi Meet After Japan Calls US Decision to Resume F-16 Flights 'Regrettable'

WASHINGTON, December 3 (Sputnik) - US Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin and Japan Defense Minister Nobuo Kishi talked on Friday after Kishi described Washington's decision to resume F-16 flights before finishing the probe into one jet dropping its fuel tanks in a residential area as "highly regrettable," the Defense Department press service told Sputnik.

"I can confirm that the Secretary talked to his counterpart this morning and we expect to post a readout of that phone call today," the official said.

On Tuesday, a US F-16 was forced to drop two fuel tanks near a residential area in the Aomori Prefecture during an emergency landing. The Japanese government made a representation to the United States and demanded the suspension of flights before a probe into the incident was completed. However, the city of Misawa authorities reported F-16 flights two days after the incident. Kishi described the US decision to resume the F-16 flights as "highly regrettable."

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UNGA to Vote on Credentials Cmte. Decision on Afghanistan, Myanmar Monday -
Spokesperson

UNITED NATIONS, December 3 (Sputnik) - The UN General Assembly (UNGA) will meet on Monday to vote on a report issued by the Credentials Committee that deferred a decision on the representation of Afghanistan and Myanmar at the world body, UNGA president spokesperson Pulina Kubiak said.

"On the Credentials Committee,... the General Assembly is scheduled to take up this issue on Monday, 6th December, at 10 o'clock (EDT) in the morning," Kubiak said during a press briefing on Friday.

Following its meeting on Wednesday, the Credentials Committee issued a report in which it decided without a vote to "defer its decision on the credentials pertaining to the representatives of Myanmar and... Afghanistan to the seventy-sixth session of the General Assembly."

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UN Urges All Parties in JCPOA Talks to Redouble Efforts to Reimplement Accord - Spokesman

UNITED NATIONS, December 3 (Sputnik) - The United Nations calls on all parties participating in the talks to revive the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) to reinforce their efforts to achieve reimplementation of the Iran nuclear agreement, UN spokesperson Stephane Dujarric said on Friday.

The seventh round of indirect talks between the United States and Iran ended earlier on Friday. Iranian Foreign Minister Amir Abdollahian said in a phone call with EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell that the negotiations on the nuclear agreement are slow.

"We're not we're not going to make the jump from talks ended the way they are and to a situation not being dealt with through diplomatic terms," Dujarric said during a press briefing.

"Our position on JCPOA remains unchanged, and we would encourage all of the parties involved to redouble their efforts to move together towards reimplementation of that agreement." The main topic of the negotiations that started on Monday was the issue of lifting US sanctions against Iran.

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US Equipped, Prepared to Fight Omicron Variant – CDC Director

WASHINGTON, December 3 (Sputnik) - The United States stands equipped and prepared to fight the newly-identified Omicron coronavirus variant, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Director Rochelle Walensky said on Friday.

"We are equipped and prepared to fight the Omicron variant head on. We're actively taking steps to stay ahead of Omicron," Walensky said during a press briefing.

In addition to California, where the first case of an Omicron infection was detected earlier this week, the US states of Minnesota, Colorado, Hawaii and New York have also reported cases of the new coronavirus variant, she added. In addition, Nebraska reported six cases of Omicron on Friday.

The main tool at the CDC's disposal to identify Omicron is genomic sequencing, which makes it possible to confirm the variant within hours after detection by states, Walensky said.

The CDC director noted that at the present time, the CDC is taking steps to enhance and streamline genomic sequencing across the US, and is expanding surveillance of international travelers.

At the same time, 99.9% of all new COVID-19 cases are of the Delta variant that became the dominant strain of the novel coronavirus in summer, according to Walensky.

Last week, the World Health Organization identified the new strain of the coronavirus, first reported in South Africa, as one of concern, since it may be more transmissible and dangerous. However, local doctors and officials have reported that the cases are mild. Cases have been confirmed in multiple countries, and some governments have rushed to suspend travel with southern African nations to slow the spread of the new variant.

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Michigan School Shooter Suspect's Parents Charged With Involuntary Manslaughter

WASHINGTON, December 3 (Sputnik) - The parents of accused Michigan school shooter Ethan Crumbley were charged with involuntary manslaughter in connection with the incident, Oakland County Prosecutor Karen McDonald said on Friday during a news conference.

James and Jennifer Crumbley are being charged with four counts of involuntary manslaughter each due to their role in obtaining and being responsible for safely storing the firearm used in the shooting, McDonald announced.

The 15-year old is being charged as an adult on 24 counts, including terrorism and murder, after killing four and injuring seven others with a semi-automatic handgun he purportedly obtained after his father purchased it for him just several days prior to the shooting.

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Biden Says to Sign Later on Friday Stopgap Funding Bill to Keep US Government Open

WASHINGTON, December 3 (Sputnik) - President Joe Biden will sign later on Friday a stopgap funding bill to keep the US government running after negotiations with rival Republican lawmakers secured enough votes needed for the measure to pass.

"I'd like to report that later today, I'll be signing a bill funding the government operations for the next few months," Biden told reporters at the White House. "Funding the government is a great achievement, as a bare minimum, what we need to get done."

Biden said the measure would help the administration make needed investments in the economy, particularly on public health, education and national security.

"I want to thank a substantial bipartisan vote in the senate for sending this bill to my desk," Biden said, acknowledging the cooperation of Republican lawmakers in the matter.

The Senate passed the short-term funding bill on Thursday night, preventing furloughs of federal workers and suspension of certain government services.

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US State of Nebraska Detects Six Cases of Omicron Coronavirus Variant - Health Officials

WASHINGTON, December 3 (Sputnik) - Six new cases of the Omicron coronavirus variant have been detected in the US state of Nebraska, the Nebraska Public Health Solutions District said on Friday in a press release.

"The Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), the Nebraska Public Health Solutions (PHS) District, and the Nebraska Public Health Laboratory (NPHL) have detected six cases of the omicron variant of SARS-CoV-2 among district residents. The first case was likely exposed during international travel to Nigeria, returned on November 23rd, and became symptomatic on November 24th," the press release said.

The other five cases were likely contracted through contact with the first case. Only one of the six infected individuals was vaccinated, the press release said. None have required hospitalization, and case investigations and contact tracing are ongoing, the press release added.

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IMF Calls on US to Speed Up Stimulus Taper, Rate Hike Amid Soaring Inflation

WASHINGTON, December 3 (Sputnik) - The International Monetary Fund (IMF) on Friday called on the Federal Reserve to accelerate monetary policy tightening in the United States toward the path of a rate hike to rein in inflation running at more than 30-year highs in the world's largest economy.

"We see grounds for monetary policy in the United States - with gross domestic product close to pre-pandemic trends, tight labor markets, and now broad-based inflationary pressures - to place greater weight on inflation risks as compared to some other advanced economies, including the euro area," the IMF said in a blog post.

While the discovery of the coronavirus Omicron variant meant policymakers should remain agile, data-dependent and ready to adjust course as needed, they should also tackle inflation in a timely manner to avoid triggering market panic, the IMF said.

"It would be appropriate for the Federal Reserve to accelerate the taper of asset purchases and bring forward the path for policy rate increases," it added.

The IMF call came as the Labor Department reported the US jobless rate fell to 4.2%, nearing the Federal Reserve's 4% target for maximum employment, which would be one of the criteria

for raising interest rates that have been held at between zero and 0.25% since the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic in 2020.

The Federal Reserve had also pumped stimulus of more than \$2 trillion into the economy over the past 20 months, via monthly buying of \$120 billion of bonds and assets.

Economists say the combined actions of the Fed have led to runaway inflation in the United States, with the Consumer Price Index, which represents a basket of products ranging from gasoline and health care to groceries and rents, rising 6.2% during the year to October - its fastest growth since 1990.

Acknowledging the situation, Federal Reserve Chairman Jerome Powell recently announced that the US central bank was considering a quicker end to its stimulus program than the originally intended deadline of mid-2022.

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Biden Says Getting Cold Reason For His Hoarse Voice, Tests for COVID-19 Every Day

WASHINGTON, December 3 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden said on Friday that the reason for his hoarse voice is because he has gotten a cold and assured Americans that he is well and getting tested for COVID-19 every day.

"I am OK, I have a test everyday. It is just a cold," Biden told reporters at the White House when asked about his hoarse voice.

Biden explained that his one-and-a-half year old grandson likes to kiss everybody and is doing that despite his grandfather having a cold.

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RPT - Biden Says Putting Together Set of Initiatives to Deter Putin From Invading Ukraine

WASHINGTON, December 3 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden said on Friday that he is preparing a set of initiatives to deter Russian President Vladimir Putin from "invading" Ukraine.

"I have been in constant contact with our allies in Europe, with the Ukrainians," Biden said.

"What I am doing is putting together what I believe will be the most comprehensive and meaningful set of initiatives to make it very very difficult for Mr. Putin to go ahead and do what people are worried he may do, but that's in play right now."

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Biden Says Putting Together Set of Initiatives to Deter Putin Form Invading Ukraine

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US Plans Javelin Missile Delivery to Ukraine, Reneges on Surface-to-Air Missiles - Reports

WASHINGTON, December 3 (Sputnik) - The Biden administration is considering providing Ukraine with additional anti-tank weapons such as Javelin missiles, but has reneged on providing surface-to-air missiles like Stinger missiles in order not to provoke Russia, CNN reported on Friday.

Over the past several weeks, Ukraine and some Western countries have expressed concern about the alleged increase in what they characterize as "aggressive actions" by Russia on their border. However, Russia has refuted the accusations by saying it is moving troops within its own territory and at its own discretion.

Ukraine is planning to use its new military patrol boats, supplied by the United States, to boost defense missions in the Black Sea, the report said citing anonymous sources in the Biden administration.

Earlier on Friday, Secretary of the Russian Security Council Nikolai Patrushev told Russian news agencies that US Secretary of State Antony Blinken confirmed during a meeting with Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba that there is no alternative to participating in the Minsk process.

Russia has repeatedly said it stands by its right to move armed forces freely within its territory. The Kremlin has also expressed concerns about Ukraine having aggregated almost half of all its armed forces on the contact line with the Donbas region in the east of the country.

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Russian Ambassador Unaware of Any 'Breakthroughs' on Diplomatic Visas With US

WASHINGTON, December 3 (Sputnik) - Russian Ambassador to the United States Anatoly Antonov said on Friday that he is unaware of any breakthroughs the two countries had reportedly achieved on issuing visas to American embassy staff in Moscow.

The Washington Post reported earlier on Friday, citing US officials, that Russia and the United States have neared a deal on granting visas to American embassy staff in Moscow.

"I am unaware of such reports, I don't know about any breakthroughs - the word is very strong, powerful - I don't know about any breakthroughs," Antonov said.

The diplomat confirmed that the two countries continue consultations on the matter.

"We are trying to find some solutions, to make life easier for Russian diplomats in Washington, Houston and New York. So far we are not doing very well," he added.

Antonov reiterated that Russia offered the United States mutual removal of all the restrictions on the diplomatic missions.

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Contacts Between Biden, Putin Can Calm 'Overheated' Relations - Russian Envoy

WASHINGTON, December 3 - The upcoming contacts between presidents Vladimir Putin and Joe Biden will help stabilize bilateral relations between the United States and Russia and calm the situation that has "overheated" in Europe and around the world, Russian Ambassador to Washington Anatoly Antonov said on Friday.

"I believe that the upcoming contacts between the two presidents, which were announced in Kremlin, will help stabilize relations and calm the situation, which has overheated in Europe and around the world," Antonov told reporters.

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US Adds Less Than Half of Forecast Jobs in November, But Still Nears Max Employment

WASHINGTON, December 3 (Sputnik) - US employers added 210,000 jobs in November, underperforming forecasts by more than 300,000, Labor Department data showed on Friday, but the jobless rate still moved down to 4.2% and near the Federal Reserve's target for maximum employment.

"Total nonfarm payroll employment rose by 210,000 in November, and the unemployment rate fell by 0.4 percentage point to 4.2 percent," the Labor Department said in a news release.

An unemployment rate of 4% is defined by the Federal Reserve as maximum employment.

Economists polled by US media had anticipated an addition of 550,000 jobs for November.

"Some good and bad in the report," economist Greg Michalowski said in a post on the ForexLive forum. "The nonfarm payroll number was obviously much lower than expectations."

The Federal Reserve's maximum employment target is being closely watched as it would be one of the triggers for the central bank to raise interest rates that have been held at between zero and 0.25% since the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic.

Almost two years into the coronavirus pandemic, restoring jobs growth remains one of the biggest challenges of US policy makers.

The United States lost more than 21 million jobs between March and April 2020, at the height of business lockdowns forced by the pandemic. Some 3 to 5 million of those jobs have not returned, according to labor market estimates. The mismatch in supply-demand of labor has boosted wage pressures and, accordingly inflation, in an economy rebounding from the pandemic.

The economy shrank by 3.5% for all of 2020 due to the COVID-19 measures. Growth this year has been spotty, with an annualized 3.5% expansion in the first quarter, 3.6% in the second and 2% in the third.

The Federal Reserve announced in March that it expected a 6.5% economic expansion for all of 2021 and has not changed its target despite the uneven growth in the past three quarters. The problem for the central bank though is inflation running at more than 30-year highs as prices of almost everything have soared from the lows of the pandemic due to higher wage demands and supply chain disruptions.

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US to Ship 9Mln COVID-19 Vaccine Doses to Africa, 2Mln Worldwide - White House

WASHINGTON, December 3 (Sputnik) - The United States will ship 9 million COVID-19 vaccine doses to African countries and 2 million doses worldwide later on Friday amid concerns about the novel coronavirus Omicron variant that was first detected in South Africa, White House Assistant Press Secretary Kevin Munoz said.

"Today, we are shipping 9 million vaccine doses to Africa and another 2 million worldwide. We need every country to step up with the same urgency and ambition as the United States," Munoz said via Twitter.

On Thursday, President Joe Biden pledged to accelerate the United States' efforts to vaccinate people throughout the world.

In September, Biden announced that the United States was donating another 500 million vaccine doses to help other countries to protect from the novel coronavirus.

According to the World Health Organization, vaccination rates in Africa remain very low with only 7.5% of the population fully vaccinated.

South African health officials have said Omicron was detected in fully vaccinated individuals, the cases were mild and characterized the reaction in the United States and other primarily Western countries to the variant as a "storm in a tea cup."

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US FDA Eyes Speedy Review of Omicron Vaccines, Drugs - Reports

WASHINGTON, December 3 (Sputnik) - The US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) is taking steps to expedite a potential review of Omicron-specific vaccines and drugs to ensure prompt delivery of these when needed, The Wall Street Journal reported on Friday, citing sources. The agency has reportedly been meeting with drug manufacturers to set guidelines for the studies and data needed to rapidly evaluate products targeting the new coronavirus variant. According to the rules the FDA is working on, manufacturers will be required to meet standards similar to those set for the authorization of COVID-19 booster shots, the report said. They would be relieved of the obligation to conduct large and lengthy trials with thousands of subjects, and could study the immune responses in a few hundred participants. Development and testing of the new vaccines is expected to take about three months. In an expedited review process, it would take the FDA one to two weeks to decide on their authorization requests.

Pfizer CEO Albert Bourla said this week that the company and its partner BioNTech could have Omicron-specific shots ready in 100 days, while Moderna said it can advance candidates for the new vaccine to clinical testing in 60 to 90 days.

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'Alternative' Mueller Report Could Be Released Soon - Documents

WASHINGTON, December 3 (Sputnik) - An unpublished compilation of all findings of the investigation into Donald Trump's alleged collusion with Russia, dubbed the "Alternative Mueller Report," has been found in Justice Department files and could be released soon, a letter submitted to a US federal court said.

The investigation into allegations of collusion between the Trump campaign and Russia was opened by the FBI in July 2016, ahead of the presidential election in November 2016. In May 2017, Trump dismissed FBI Director James Comey, under whose leadership the probe was initiated, and Special Counsel Robert Mueller was appointed to lead the investigation. Mueller released a report on his findings in April 2019. The investigation did not find evidence of the alleged collusion, which was repeatedly denied by both Trump and Russia.

In his book "Where the Law Ends: Inside the Mueller Investigation," published last year, Mueller deputy Andrew Weissman mentioned that there is also "an internal report memorializing everything" their team found. The New York Times filed a lawsuit in July to request these records under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA).

"This is a FOIA action in which Plaintiff seeks release of an internal record created by the Office of Special Counsel Robert Mueller ('SCO') referenced in former SCO prosecutor Andrew Weissman's book Where the Law Ends: Inside the Muller Investigation. Since Plaintiff filed its complaint, Defendant has located and begun processing this record and intends to release all non-exempt portions to Plaintiff once processing is complete," Assistant US Attorney Jennifer Jude wrote in the letter, dated December 2.

The "primary processing of the record" will be complete by the end of January 2022, according to the document.

"In light of this progress, the parties jointly request that the December 10th initial conference be adjourned sine die and propose that they submit a joint status letter to the Court by February 14, 2022, proposing next steps in this case. Additionally, because no discovery is anticipated in this FOIA case, the parties respectfully request that they be relieved of the obligation to file a proposed case management plan for this case," it added.

While Trump has characterized the Mueller probe as a political witch hunt to reverse the result of the 2016 election, Russian officials have said the allegations were made up to excuse the defeat of presidential candidate Hillary Clinton, as well as deflect public opinion away from actual instances of election fraud and corruption.

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US Puts 12 Economies Including China Under Scrutiny for Currency Practices - Treasury

WASHINGTON, December 3 (Sputnik) – The United States has placed its 12 major trading partners on a "monitoring list" for currency practices, including China, India, Germany, and Japan, the Treasury said on Friday.

"Treasury found that twelve economies warrant placement on Treasury's "Monitoring List" of major trading partners that merit close attention to their currency practices: China, Japan, Korea, Germany, Ireland, Italy, India, Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand, Mexico, and Switzerland," the Treasury said in a press release.