

COPENHAGEN, Denmark — NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg will become Norway's next central bank governor, officials said Friday. Stoltenberg's tenure at NATO ends later this year. Norway's government announced his appointment at the central bank in a statement and said it hopes he can start in his new role around Dec. 1. "I am grateful for the trust and am looking forward to taking on the job," Stoltenberg told a news conference, which he attended by videoconference from Brussels where the 30-member military alliance is headquartered. He was informed Friday that he got the job.

ROME — U.S. President Joe Biden joined Pope Francis and a leading Sunni imam on Friday in calling for greater global cooperation to fight the coronavirus pandemic, climate change and other world crises on the second anniversary of a landmark Christian-Muslim peace initiative. The Vatican released a statement from Biden marking the International Day of Human Fraternity, a U.N.-designated celebration of interfaith and multicultural understanding inspired by a landmark document signed on Feb. 4, 2019, in Abu Dhabi by Francis and Sheikh Ahmad al-Tayyeb, the imam of the Al-Azhar center for Sunni learning in Cairo. The document called for greater mutual understanding and solidarity to confront the problems facing the world. With the backing of the United Arab Emirates, the initiative has gone on to create a high-level commission to spread the message, and Friday's anniversary celebration included a video message from Francis that was also translated into Hebrew.

TOKYO — More than a year ago Sebastian Bressa finished his paperwork to become a language teacher in Tokyo and made plans to quit his job in Sydney. His life has been in limbo ever since. Japan has kept its door closed to most foreigners during the pandemic, and the 26-year-old Australian is one of hundreds of thousands denied entry to study, work or see their families. Japan has become one of the world's most difficult countries to enter and some are comparing it to the locked country, or "sakoku," policy of xenophobic warlords who ruled Japan in the 17th to 19th centuries. The current border rules allow in only Japanese nationals and permanent foreign residents, and have raised the ire of foreign students and scholars who say the measures are unfair, unscientific and force talented visitors to go to other countries. Critics say the rules are also hurting Japan's international profile and national interest.

GONDOKORO, South Sudan — As South Sudan struggles for peace, it's still cleaning up the deadly threat posed by thousands of land mines from previous conflict decades ago. Cattle herders. Charcoal collectors. Children. All have been victims of long-forgotten mines that continue to make South Sudan one of the world's most dangerous countries for unexploded ordnance. The mines are a stealth problem among the country's more pressing ones, which include the slow recovery from a five-year civil war, the worst flooding in decades and hunger that's expected to affect more people this year than ever during the young nation's decade of existence. The explosives are a danger to fragile efforts at rebuilding and development.

CARACAS, Venezuela (AP) — Turmoil in Peru's government boiled this week as President Pedro Castillo overhauled his Cabinet for a third time in six months and then it quickly emerged his new prime minister has faced domestic violence claims, highlighting doubts about the political neophyte's ability to lead a nation.

SAVANNAH, Ga. — The federal judge presiding over the hate crimes trial of three white men who chased and killed Ahmaud Arbery said she will seat a jury Monday after a week spent asking potential jurors what they already know about the Black man's death as well as their views on racism in America. U.S. District Court Judge Lisa Godbey Wood said Friday she's ready to start the trial with 64 people deemed qualified to serve as impartial jurors. That pool will be narrowed to a main jury of 12 plus four alternates Monday, when the judge also expects attorneys to make opening statements. It will be the second time the port city of Brunswick, on the Georgia coast south of Savannah, has held a trial in Arbery's killing since November, when the same three defendants were convicted of murder in a Georgia state court.

NEW YORK — Several conservative media figures in the U.S. have taken up the cause of Canadian truckers who have occupied parts of Ottawa and blocked border crossings to protest COVID-19 restrictions and vaccine mandates. Fox News Channel's Sean Hannity cheered the truckers on while showing four live reports from Ottawa this week. Tucker Carlson's online store is selling "I (heart) Tucker" T-shirts edited to say "I (heart) Truckers." "Send our solidarity, love and support to all of the brave people who are there," Hannity told Fox reporter Sara Carter, who was with the protesters in Ottawa, on his show Thursday. "Don't give up." The Canadian protesters are protesting vaccine mandates for truckers and other COVID-19 restrictions and are railing against Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, though many of the country's infection measures are already rapidly being lifted as the omicron surge levels off. The five-day blockade has disrupted the flow of goods between the U.S. and Canada and forced the auto industry on both sides to roll back production.

SACRAMENTO, Calif. — California would mandate that all businesses require their employees and independent contractors to receive the COVID-19 vaccine under legislation announced Friday by Democratic state lawmakers that was immediately criticized by Republicans as government overreach. Employees or contractors who qualify for medical or religious exemptions would have to be regularly tested under a planned amendment to the bill. New employees would have to get at least one dose by the time they start work and the second dose within 45 days of being on the job. Assemblywoman Buffy Wicks introduced her bill months after delaying an original proposal last fall. The previous version would have allowed workers to submit to weekly testing as an alternative to getting vaccinated, but that is not an option in her new proposal.

NEW YORK — An early look at the performance of COVID-19 booster shots during the recent omicron wave in the U.S. hinted at a decline in effectiveness, though the shots still offered strong protection against severe illness. The report, published by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention on Friday, is considered an early and limited look at the durability of booster protection during the omicron surge that exploded in December and January but has been fading in recent weeks. "COVID-19 vaccine boosters remain safe and continue to be highly effective against severe disease over time," said Kristen Nordlund, a CDC spokesperson

ATLANTA — Atlanta’s leaders are rethinking plans to install a statue representing a Native American man lauded as a “co-founder of Georgia” following a report on the project by The Associated Press. The Chief Tomochichi statue was conceived as the centerpiece of a park celebrating civil rights-era heroes. Its placement is being reconsidered, however, now that city council members have a fuller understanding of historical facts about the Muscogee man who signed a 1733 treaty launching the Georgia colony, Councilman Michael Julian Bond told the AP. The Muscogee (Creek) Nation, whose 93,000 citizens are descended from Georgia’s original inhabitants, wasn’t consulted before the \$300,000 statue was unveiled pending a move to Atlanta’s new Peace Park. Tribal historians were dismayed, calling it inappropriate and disrespectful.

SANTA FE, N.M. — New Mexico legislators are considering new criminal penalties aimed at protecting state and local judges and their immediate families from threats and the malicious sharing of personal information such as home addresses. The bill responds to concerns about the physical safety of judges and about efforts to sway or disrupt judicial proceedings. “It’s vital that we keep our judicial process neutral, objective and free from any outside influence,” Republican Rep. T. Ryan Lane of Aztec, an attorney and co-sponsor of the bill, told a legislative panel in January. His bill would make it a felony to threaten a judge or their immediate family with the intent to instill fear of physical harm, retaliate against a judicial decision or interrupt a judge’s official duties. Retaliation includes threats of bodily harm and property destruction. The malicious sharing of personal information — or doxxing — would trigger misdemeanor sanctions.

SAN FRANCISCO, Calif. — The California Supreme Court has denied a potential bid for freedom by Charles Manson follower Leslie Van Houten following Gov. Gavin Newsom’s rejection of her parole. The court on Wednesday refused to hear Van Houten’s appeal of a lower court ruling last December that denied her petition for a review. That petition challenged what it termed a denial of due process by Newsom in reversing a 2020 parole board recommendation. It also said Newsom had refused to provide documents indicating when the board referred the case to him and argued that there was a “strong possibility” that he exceeded a 30-day time limit for review. An email to Van Houten’s attorney, Rich Pfeiffer, seeking comment wasn’t immediately returned Thursday night. Van Houten, 72, is serving a life sentence for helping Manson and other cult members kill Los Angeles grocer Leno LaBianca and his wife, Rosemary, in August 1969. She was 19 when she and other followers fatally stabbed the LaBiancas and smeared their blood on the walls.

MINNEAPOLIS — Authorities searching the Minneapolis apartment where Amir Locke was killed by a SWAT team member said a no-knock search warrant was necessary to protect the public and officers as they looked for guns, drugs and clothing worn by people suspected in a violent murder, according to documents made public Thursday. The applications for the search warrants executed at the apartment complex on Feb. 2 were released the same day that Locke’s family renewed a call for a ban on no-knock warrants. Although some names are redacted, Minneapolis police have said the 22-year-old Locke, who was Black, was not named in the warrants. Locke’s 17-year-old cousin, Mekhi Camden Speed, was named and was arrested this week and charged with two counts of second-degree murder

PACIFIC JUNCTION, Iowa — Census data shows that in the three years since devastating 2019 floods submerged Pacific Junction in southwest Iowa, the town's population has shrunk from 475 to less than 100. Now the question is whether it will remain a town. Pacific Junction Mayor Andy Young recently told Omaha, Nebraska, television station KETV he's hopeful the town will see families coming back. "I hope to see that we thrive and move on," he said. "I don't think we'll ever be as big as what we were before. But even if we get, you know, over half of where we were, that's pretty good accomplishment." Dozens of empty lots around the town are the result of federal buyouts, which stipulate a new home cannot be built on the property once the old one comes down. Heavy rains and snowmelt in March 2019 saw 200 miles of levees either breached or overtopped in Iowa, Nebraska, Missouri and Kansas and saw hundreds of homes and businesses flooded. Pacific Junction was among the communities hardest hit and had to be evacuated.

IOWA CITY, Iowa — An Iowa woman is grateful the state Board of Parole reversed its decision to give early release to the man who fatally shot her son in 2017 after a judge clarified that he sentenced the man to serve 24 years in prison. Shafona Jones told The Gazette in Cedar Rapids that she's glad that Johnson County Attorney Janet Lyness followed up with the judge after the parole board granted Lamar Wilson, 28, work release in September. The board rescinded its order in late November before Wilson was released. Wilson was convicted of voluntary manslaughter and several other charges in the August 2017 shooting on Iowa City's pedestrian mall that left Jones' son dead and two others injured. Wilson didn't deny firing the gun, but he argued he fired the shots in self-defense. State appeals courts upheld Wilson's conviction and said the state's "stand-your-ground law" didn't give him immunity from prosecution because of his self-defense claim.

DES MOINES, Iowa — Republicans have released three plans to cut taxes in Iowa and all share the common themes of phasing in a flat personal income tax and eliminating taxes on retirement income at a cost of billions of dollars to state revenue. Democrats and some progressive groups argue the changes would primarily help high-income residents and risk future budget problems, but Republicans respond that the state is simply taking in too much money and should return it to taxpayers. Gov. Kim Reynolds was first to release her plan, which also cuts taxes on corporations. The Senate's plan also cuts corporate taxes but the House's proposal does not. "It's fair, it's flat and it's easy. It makes us more competitive. It helps Iowans keep more of their hard-earned money," Reynolds said of her plan, which achieves a 4% flat rate tax in four years.

SIoux CITY -- Top staff recommend increasing the city of Sioux City's operating budget next year by \$5.8 million, or 2.62%, which would result in a slight increase in the city's property tax rate. The City Council will begin its review of the proposed \$226.7 million fiscal 2023 budget at a special meeting that begins at 8:30 a.m. Saturday in the Council chambers. The proposed property tax levy is around \$15.43 per \$1,000 of assessed valuation, up about 6.7 percent, from the previous year's levy of around \$14.45. The owner of a home assessed at \$100,000 would pay \$761 in property taxes to the city, up \$16 from the previous year, while the owner of a commercial or industrial property with an assessed value of \$100,000 would face a city tax bill of \$1,389. up from \$89 the prior year, according to the budget. The proposed increase of 4.25% in general fund expenditures is due primarily to increases in employee wages and benefits.

MASON CITY - Mason City is closing in on approving its budget and five-year capital improvements plan. The Mason City Council met on Thursday evening with Mason City Director of Finance Brent Hinson to review the final changes to the budget. At the meeting, the council decided to add additional funding to the Riverwalk project. Hinson said that \$2.5 million was added to the five-year capital improvements plan to account for the possibility of expanding the Riverwalk over the years, according to Hinson. \$500,000 of the project will be budgeted for fiscal year 2023, all of which will be funded with American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds. Another \$400,000 will be funded using ARPA in fiscal year 2024, and \$100,000 via local option sales tax. In total, \$1.6 million of the Riverwalk enhancements are projected to be funded via local option sales tax over the five-year capital improvements plan. One other change made to the five-year plan is a slight bump in sanitation rates.

NEW ORLEANS - Marshall, Old Dominion and Southern Miss all will terminate their membership with Conference USA on June 30, the schools announced Friday. The three schools, which are bound for the Sun Belt, said in similar statements that they first communicated their intent in December to cease participation in Conference USA at the end of the 2021-22 academic year. All three schools say Conference USA has been unwilling to discuss a resolution for the June departures. On Jan. 20, Conference USA said in a statement that the three departing members were expected to follow league bylaws and honor their contracts by remaining through the 2022-23 academic year.

AUSTIN, Texas — Timmy Allen hit the go-ahead jumper, then Marcus Carr delivered the game-sealing steal and free throws. A few seconds later, Texas fans stormed the court. The No. 20 Longhorns tightened up the Big 12 standings Monday night with an intense 79-76 win over No. 8 Kansas as they made the late plays and shots to overcome a blistering second-half shooting effort from the Jayhawks. The Longhorns earned the biggest win so far for first-year coach Chris Beard, but the coach and players shrugged off the moment as one of many to come. “It’s good for us but it’s not the biggest thing in the world,” said Allen, who scored 24 points in an impressive all-around performance. “We have higher goals than just beating somebody on our home floor.”

LOS ANGELES — Quarterback Caleb Williams is transferring to Southern California, following head coach Lincoln Riley from Oklahoma to the Trojans. Williams posted his long-awaited announcement on social media Tuesday with a video that included the former five-star recruit in a USC uniform and famous Trojans fan Snoop Dogg rapping. The 20-year-old Williams started seven games as a freshman last season for Oklahoma, passing for 1,912 yards and 21 touchdowns. After taking the Sooners’ starting job from Spencer Rattler, Williams confirmed his status as one of the most promising quarterbacks in college football under the tutelage of Riley, who has also mentored Heisman Trophy winners Baker Mayfield and Kyler Murray. Williams entered the transfer portal on Jan. 3, five weeks after Riley’s stunning move from Norman to Los Angeles. Williams was immediately linked to USC, but he kept fans waiting until February — although Riley and the Trojans tipped their hand when they weren’t linked to any other quarterbacks in the transfer portal despite the departures of last season’s top two USC passers.

**This Afternoon:** A 30 percent chance of showers after 4pm. Partly cloudy, with a high around 58. West wind between 8 and 15 mph, with gusts as high as 22 mph.

**Tonight:** A chance of rain showers before 1am, then a chance of snow. Mostly cloudy, with a low around 32. North wind between 13 and 15 mph, with gusts as high as 23 mph. Chance of precipitation is 30%.

**Saturday:** Scattered flurries before 10am. Partly cloudy, with a high near 43.

**Saturday Night:** Partly cloudy, with a low near 29.

**Sunday:** Partly cloudy, with a high around 60.

**Sunday Night:** A 30 percent chance of showers after midnight. Mostly cloudy, with a low around 39.

TOWN	WEATHER	TEMP	WIND	PCPN.
SIOUX CITY	CLDY	54	W 10	.20
SPENCER	PTLY CLDY	49	W 15	.50
WATERLOO	RAIN	44		.75
DES MOINES	OVERCAST	52	NW 3	TRACE
CEDAR RAPIDS	RAIN	49	NW 11	.14
OTTUMWA	CLDY	53	W 13	
BURLINGTON	PTLY CLDY	55	W 18	

## COMMERCIAL

So it's 2:00 in the morning...and you're starving. Nothin' in the fridge, and nothin' in the cupboards. You don't even have dog biscuits hangin' around. You think about cooking, but then you remember the 3-alarm fire you started last time you tried using the stove. Well, check out FAST STOP. There's gotta be one right near ya'. They have everything from burgers to tacos...24 hours a day...7 days a week. FAST STOP. Think of it as your own personal walk-in kitchen.