

The Atlanta Journal-Constitution

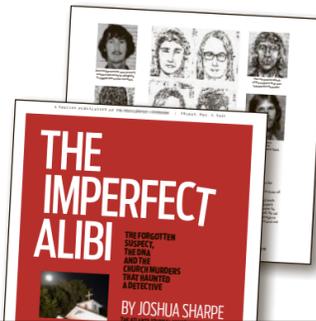
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TOP STORY CORONAVIRUS

U.S. STRATEGIES

Biden outlines steps to fight next surge

President plans to expand COVID-19 testing, access to vaccines.



A sign at New York's Staten Island Ferry terminal urges people to be vaccinated. On Thursday, President Joe Biden outlined plans to contend with a winter spike. SPENCER PLATT/GETTY IMAGES/TNS

By Zeke Miller and Alexandra Jaffe
Associated Press

BETHESDA, MD. — With rising numbers of COVID-19 cases predicted this winter, President Joe Biden on Thursday appealed for Americans to get their boosters and get behind his plan to tackle the new omicron variant through wider availability of vaccines and shots, but without new major restrictions on daily life.

Biden wants to require private insurers to cover the cost of at-home COVID-19 tests and is tightening testing requirements for people entering the United States, regardless of their

vaccination status. While some other countries are closing their borders or reinstating lockdowns, the president said he would not at this time impose additional clampdowns beyond his recommendation that Americans wear masks indoors in public settings.

"Experts say the COVID-19 cases will continue to rise in the weeks ahead this winter, so we need to be ready," Biden said during a visit to the National Institutes of Health in suburban Maryland after a briefing with scientific advisers.

Biden continued on A8

HIGHLIGHTS

Vaccines

A renewed push is planned to get people vaccinated, including the latest group to become eligible, children ages 5 to 11. The administration plans to launch "hundreds of family vaccination clinics" that will offer vaccinations and boosters for people of all eligible ages. The plan also includes a national campaign to reach the 100 million Americans who are eligible for boosters and have not had them.

Testing

To encourage testing, Americans covered by private health insurance will be reimbursed for purchasing



President Joe Biden speaks during a visit to the National Institutes of Health on Thursday in Bethesda, Md.

EVAN VUCCI/ASSOCIATED PRESS

rapid, at-home coronavirus test kits. For those who lack insurance, or who are covered by Medicaid, an additional 50 million tests will be provided

to community health centers and rural clinics.

Travel

International travelers coming to the U.S. must be tested for the coronavirus within one day of global departure, regardless of nationality or vaccination status, beginning early next week. That toughens protocols for vaccinated travelers, who had been able to get tested as long as three days before departure.

No lockdowns

President Joe Biden said his strategy does not include shutdowns as a way to fight the virus.

IN GEORGIA

Health officials: State can handle variants

They say shots, masks will work against threats such as omicron.

By Helena Oliviero | helena.oliviero@ajc.com
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As more cases of the omicron variant of COVID-19 are identified in the U.S., there's little doubt this new coronavirus strain will be detected in Georgia any day now.

Georgia's public health experts say they're

still searching for the heavily mutated variant and learning about the threat it might pose, but they're calling for caution, not panic. They say we have far more tools — especially testing, vaccines and mask-wearing — to battle and weather this new threat, as well as future variants, which almost certainly lie ahead.

"Obviously this is not good news," said Felipe Lobelo, an associate professor at Emory University School of Public Health, about the emerging

Variants continued on A8

LOCAL IN-DEPTH STONECREST

Stage is set for Stonecrest mayor's plea

Leader will have chance to admit guilt in fraud case during Jan. hearing.

By Zachary Hansen
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The mayor of Stonecrest will have an opportunity to plead guilty in a federal fraud case at the beginning of 2022.

Jason Lary, the city's founding mayor, faces three felony charges after the FBI accused him of concocting a kickback scheme to steal more than \$650,000 in federal pandemic relief funds. Prosecutors said Lary defrauded businesses and churches that received financial assistance from the city, adding that Lary used the allegedly stolen funds to cover his own tax liabilities and pay off a lake house mortgage.

On Nov. 10, Lary appeared in federal court and pleaded not guilty to the three charges: wire fraud; conspiracy to commit federal program theft; and federal program theft.

However, federal court records show a change of plea hearing is scheduled for Jan. 5 at 11 a.m. Given Lary's prior plea, it's likely he will plead guilty as part of a plea deal. This outcome was

OUR REPORTING



Jason Lary, Stonecrest founding mayor, faces three felony charges.

The Atlanta Journal-Constitution has covered the allegations against Lary and his alleged abuse of the Stonecrest's CARES Act program throughout 2021. The AJC was the first news outlet to obtain the internal investigative report in April and report its details. Since then, the AJC has published more than two dozen stories diving into the allegations, the structure of the alleged scheme and the investigation's fallout.

already teased by Lary's attorney, Dwight Thomas.

"He accepts full responsibility," Thomas said in court Nov. 10, "and there won't be a jury

Stonecrest continued on A8

DIGGING DEEPER 2021 ELECTIONS

Council presidency offers no pathway to Atlanta's top job

Moore becomes fifth leader to try — and fail — to be elected mayor.

By Ernie Suggs
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Felicia Moore says she doesn't think there's a "curse" on the City Council presidency.

In quiet times of reflection, Marvin Arrington sometimes wonders, "What if?"

What if the legendary Atlanta City Councilman, who was born and raised in the city and who climbed the political ladder to become City Council president, had waited to run for mayor when the seat opened instead of challenging popular incumbent Bill Campbell in 1997?

"No question," Arrington said recently. "If I had run in 2001, I would have been mayor."

Arrington's loss set a strange precedent within city politics.

Never in the history of Atlanta has the person who occupied the seat of council president ever ascended to the mayor's office.

On Tuesday night, Felicia Moore became the latest council president to fall short of winning the city's top office. After getting 41% of the vote in the general election, Moore went into the runoff as the frontrunner only to be overwhelmed by Councilman Andre Dickens, who nearly doubled her vote total.

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ALSO INSIDE

New base names suggested

» Fort Benning and Fort Gordon in Georgia among those recommended to change from being named after Confederate war figures, A3



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