

Groton Daily Independent

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Upcoming Events

Monday, March 2, 2020

Girls' Basketball Regions: Groton area hosts Webster Area, 7 p.m.

Tuesday, March 3, 2020

Boys' Basketball Regions: Groton Area hosts Aberdeen Roncalli, 7 p.m.

City Council Meeting at Groton Community Center, 7 p.m.

Thursday, March 5, 2020

Girls' Basketball Region at highest seed

Friday, March 6, 2020

Boys' Basketball Region at highest seed

State Debate at Huron

Saturday, March 7

State Debate at Huron

Regional DI Competition at Groton Area

Sunday, March 8, 2020

2:00pm- 6:00pm: Open Gym at GHS Arena

2:00-4:00 PM Grades JK-8 (Students must be accompanied by an adult) 4:00-6:00 PM Grades 6-12

Monday, March 9, 2020

School Board Meeting, 7 p.m.

Girls SoDak 16

OPEN: Recycling Trailer in Groton

The recycling trailer is located at 10 East Railroad Ave. It takes cardboard, papers and aluminum cans.

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It's Girls' Basketball Action on GDILIVE.COM



**Webster Area
Bearcats**

VS



Groton Area Tigers

Region 1A

7 p.m., Monday, March 2

Groton Area Arena

Play-by-Play Commentary by Kaden Kurtz and Cade Guthmiller

Aberdeen Chrysler Center
BaseKamp Lodge
Bierman Farm Sales
BK Custom T's & More
Groton American Legion Post #39
Groton Chiropractic Clinic
Groton Ford
Groton Vet Clinic
Harr Motors - Bary Keith
K&K Pharis Partnership
Lori's Pharmacy
Milbrandt Enterprises
Olson Development
Professional Management Services
S & S Lumber & Hardware Hank
SD Army National Guard
Subway of Groton
Tyson DeHoet Trucking

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Weekly Vikings Roundup

By Jordan Wright

The NFL offseason is here, so now is a good time to look at the Minnesota Vikings' roster to see where they are strong and where they could use an upgrade. One of the fastest ways a team can upgrade the roster is through free agency, but teams pay a premium for veteran players so it's important to do research to ensure that player will fit a team's scheme and chemistry.

This week we'll be identifying the Vikings' defensive needs and which free agents could be a fit. The offense was last week, so if you missed that article, make sure to check it out!

The biggest hole on the Vikings defense is cornerback. Xavier Rhodes was a shutdown corner a couple years ago, but his play has substantially slipped since then, and he will likely be cut – saving the Vikings nearly \$9 million. Trae Waynes and Mackensie Alexander, the other two starting CBs, are free agents so there is a good chance neither one will be on the Vikings' roster for the 2020 season.

Byron Jones and Chris Harris Jr are the top two cornerbacks available through free agency, but both players will likely be too expensive for the Vikings. The most realistic options for the team will be re-signing Waynes and Alexander, but if the team wants to add some outside help, a couple names to keep in mind are Brian Poole and Darqueze Dennard.

Pool, the former Falcon and Jet, is 27 years old and is coming off his best season as a pro. He would be the best option if the Vikings let Alexander go and need a new slot corner.

Dennard is someone the Vikings will look at if Trae Waynes isn't back. The former first round pick has spent his six seasons in the NFL with the Cincinnati Bengals, but injuries have prevented him from reaching his full potential.

Defensive end is another spot where the Vikings might look to find a starter in free agency. Everson Griffen has already opted out of his contract, so he is officially a free agent. There's still a chance the Vikings bring him back, but if they don't, defensive end has plenty of depth in free agency this year. While players like Jadeveon Clowney, Shaquil Barrett, Yannick Ngakoue, and Erik Armstead will get all the headlines, here are a couple players who could step in and provide similar production without costing an arm and a leg.

Robert Quinn is 30 years old but proved last season he still has some gas left in the tank. He has plenty of starts under his belt, so he could come in and produce immediately.

If the Vikings prefer a younger player who has potential just waiting to be unlocked, Matt Judon would be a great pickup. The 27-year-old was drafted by Baltimore in 2016 and really started to turn the corner in 2019.

Defensive tackle might not be the sexiest position on defense, but the Vikings really need to find an upgrade to play alongside Linval Joseph. There are quite a few DTs who fit the mold of what the Vikings are looking for, but here are two names that should be near the top of the list:

Leonard Williams was drafted sixth overall in 2015, and the 25-year-old DT has shown glimpses, but he hasn't been able to put it all together. If he's cheap enough, I'd love to see Mike Zimmer and company get their hands on Williams and unlock his potential.

Mike Daniels, previously with the Green Bay Packers, could be an interesting addition as well. He's on the wrong side of 30, and his pass-rushing ability has been on the decline, but he could be cheap enough that he's worth a look.

If you have any questions or comments, reach out to me on Twitter (@JordanWrightNFL). Skol!

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GT Robotics Travels to State Tournament

Three of GT Robotics' five teams finished the qualifying matches ranked in the top half of the thirty teams that competed in the South Dakota State VEX Robotics Championship in Mitchell Sat., Feb. 29. They were competing against teams from Sioux Falls, Mitchell, Menno, Box Elder, Lead-Deadwood, Spearfish, Harrisburg, Canton, Jefferson-North Sioux City, Vermillion and Eureka.

Galaxy (River Pardick, Jace Kroll, Isaac Higgins) was the top GT Robotics team during the qualifying matches with a record of three wins and two losses. When I congratulated them after the tourney, River gave the credit to Jace and also Garrett Schultz of G-Force, who had helped work on the robot during the week when River was sick and missed three days of school.

G.A.T. Wrenches (Noah Tullis, Adrian Knutson, Corbin Reich) and Gear Heads (Ethan Clark, Jack Dinger, Axel Warrington) were our other two teams that finished in the top half. Both ended qualifying matches with a record of two wins, two losses and a tie.

G-Force made a huge impression on the judges and the crowd each match when their robot expanded from an 18 inch cube to a robot over seven feet tall. This feat earned them the Judges Award. This expansion is really something to see if you get the opportunity, but stand back so you don't get slapped as the robot unfolds. During one match, this unfolding did not go as usual. I watched the crowd's reaction and heard their murmur's, "It didn't expand!" G-Force (Travis Townsend, Tannor McGanon, Dan Feist, Garrett Schultz) ended the qualifying matches with a record of two wins and three losses.

Geek Squad (Charlie Frost, James Brooks) finished the qualifying matches with a record of four losses and one tie.

It was a busy day in the pits for GT Robotics teams. Each team was busy working on something. Autonomous programs that worked on the practice field did not work on the competition field. Cubes did not want to load like they had at home. Latches bent. So the robotists were constantly fixing, correcting, repairing, rebuilding, thinking and rethinking. Hey, doesn't that sound like a typical day at work for most of us? The robotists met the challenges and kept their chins up all day.

We have one team traveling to the CREATE U.S. Open Robotics Championship in Council Bluffs, Iowa April 2-4.

Jim Lane, GT Robotics

Rankings of GT Robotics teams at the end of qualifying rounds for the tournaments

Tournament Location	Groton	Mitchell	Box Elder	Ramsey	Canton	Groton	Harrisburg	State
Teams in Tourney	18	21	20	32	24	18	28	30
Date	Oct	Nov	Nov	Dec	Jan	Jan	Feb 8	Feb 29
9050A G-Force	8	13	6	10	9	17	7	23
9050B Gear Heads	2	9	2	30	5	10	5	15
9050C G.A.T. Wrenches	4	12	13	6	19	16		14
9050D Geek Squad	10	14	3	17	22	9	12	29
9050E Galaxy	15	20	18	11	14	13	25	10

How far did GT Robotics team get in elimination rounds (playoffs)?

Tournament	Groton	Mitchell	Box Elder	Ramsey	Canton	Groton	Harrisburg	State
9050A G-Force	Semi-F	Semi-F	Semi-F	1st rd	Semi F	Qtr-F	1st rd	Qtr-Finals
9050B Gear Heads	Finals	Semi-F	Qtr-F		Qtr-F	Semi-F	1st rd	1st Round
9050C G.A.T. Wrenches	Qtr-F	Qtr-F	Qtr-F	Qtr-F	Semi-F	1st rd		1st Round
9050D Geek Squad	Semi-F	Qtr-F	Finals	1st rd	1st rd	Qtr-F	1st rd	1st Round
9050E Galaxy		Qtr-F	Finals	1st rd	Qtr-F	1st rd	1st rd	Qtr-Finals

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G-Force: Garrett Schultz, Tannor McGannon, Travis Townsend, Dan Feist



Galaxy: Jace Kroll, River Pardick, Isaac Higgins



Geek Squad: Nick Morris, James Brooks, Charlie Frost

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Gear Heads: Axel Warrington, Ethan Clark, Jackson Dinger



G.A.T. Wrenches: Noah Tullis, Corbin Reich, Adrian Knutson

Comfortable Death

He was my neighbor, a guy my age, a man of many talents and interests, and a dear friend. He was one of those fellows who would give the shirt off his back to help you, if needed. When he was diagnosed with cancer of the pancreas spread to liver, he, his daughters, and his friends knew how this was likely going to go. But we didn't realize how graciously he would handle his dying process until it happened.



By Richard P. Holm, MD ~ Prairie Doc® Perspectives

He was treated and truly helped by chemotherapy for a while, but gradually the tumor cells developed resistance to the drugs and the oncologist suggested no more chemo. He was ready to have only pain meds and hospice. In the end, per his direction, with the help of hospice and the caring people at the small-town nursing home, he shuffled off this mortal coil comfortably, surrounded by his family and friends.

Fortunately, he had a compassionate and grounded primary care doctor and oncologist team who were realistic and knew when to stop intervention; loving daughters and friends to surround him with support; plenty of ready-to-heat-and-eat tater-tot-like hot-dishes; an advanced directive that said he was not to have medical intervention if pointless; and plenty of pain medicine for comfort. When I visited him two days before his death, despite an expanding belly full of cancer, he told me he was getting enough meds and was comfortable. Most important, he was absolutely not fearful but courageously accepting of the dying process.

In comparison, I find it tragic and too common that patients and families are overwhelmed with a fear of death. Some suggest this disabling dread comes from our cultural practice of covering up death with the intent to make life easier. Thus, a lifelong apprehension and running from death has become the norm.

Bottom line, too many people choose to be dragged through unnecessary suffering at their end of life, and too often doctors and nurses comply. We could do a better job stopping unnecessary medicines, touching our patients more and providing comfort to not only the patient, but to the patient's family as well.

Dying people have the right to ask for and be reassured that enough comfort medicine will be provided and that it's going to be alright. Our profession has been improving in this regard, but certainly could do better. When it's time, it's important that we all have the opportunity for a comfortable death, just like my neighbor.

Richard P. Holm, MD is currently living with pancreatic cancer. He is founder of The Prairie Doc® and author of "Life's Final Season, A Guide for Aging and Dying with Grace" available on Amazon. For free and easy access to the entire Prairie Doc® library, visit www.prairiedoc.org and follow Prairie Doc® on Facebook, featuring On Call with the Prairie Doc® a medical Q&A show streaming on Facebook and broadcast on SDPB most Thursdays at 7 p.m. central.

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Lana's Annals-Week 7 Report from the House of Representatives

Greetings once again from our Capitol. This week, known as crossover week, was very hectic with long days. The bills either met their demise or were passed by Thursday, the last day to vote on bills in their respective chambers.

In local government we heard HB1241, which asked to re-define a legal newspaper. A west river paper owner recently has been printing a paper and distributing it for free. In it are area news and ads. In re-defining the newspaper in this bill, my fear was to open it up for every shopper and publication to be able to collect money for legal notices that small town newspapers rely on to keep their offices open. After debate, I voted to send this to the 41st day, and the majority of committee members agreed.

HB1279 directs notices to be sent out by March 1, 2021, in this case, from the director of equalization informing property owners that they may qualify for a tax reduction on their houses if they are owned and occupied by a disabled vet, someone who is paraplegic, or lives in a wheelchair home. This passed unanimously. Sometimes people do not know what cost savings programs may be available so this may help.

On the House floor we heard HB1248, which requested that non-commercial trucks 45 years or older be able to be charged a license fee of no more than 150.00. While sounding fair, if one looks at it more closely, the bill would affect 1,938 trucks that are currently registered and would result in a loss of \$191,000 in annual registration revenue used for maintenance of roads and bridges. It was pointed out that a 45 year truck and a 2020 truck weigh the same. To me this meant that both trucks then do an equal amount of damage to the roads. A fellow legislator also mentioned that he had construction trucks that were very old and wondered why he would not be fairly included in the lower fee. At the end, the bill was defeated.

HB1262, known as the electric bill, has been the subject of conversation for over a year now, maybe longer. It is a dispute between the "country and city mice" aka the rural and municipal electric companies. It involves country land being annexed into cities and loss of revenue for the rural companies according to them. Last year the two sides thought they could work it out. When that did not happen, a summer study addressed it...still no consensus as to solutions. Now here we are. This bill only calls for the two sides to have a meeting if there is an area to be annexed. The purpose is to come to some piecemeal agreement or send it to circuit court. We did pass this bill, thus "kicking the can" over to the Senate.

In Education Committee, we heard HB1228, which asked to include hearing loss in reporting criteria for deaf and hard of hearing. Deaf children currently are counted ages 0-5 years old. The bill asked to extend the count to age 18 or even 21 if special needs students remain in school. Because we do not really know how many deaf students are in schools, we have no idea how many are in the state. We heard that the state is not mandated to do the count of all of the aforementioned students. I voted in favor but do not think we have the experts in place to help on a large scale. That, however, is not what the bill wanted us to consider at this time. If this is creating some future mandates or large money allocations, it may not find favor with the Senate.

HB1177, a bill to put school board elections the same time as the general elections, was not a workable bill. Most school board members across the state are elected for three year terms, not four. School board members take office in July, not December. Some districts overlap with different counties so a person would have to vote for board members in their respective districts but would have to drive into their proper legislative districts to cast that vote. It needed so many fixes that I did not see a way to solve this. In the end, the vote was taken, and it was defeated.

This week my education committee will hear bills pertaining to dual credit, the JAG program (junior achievement program), and I will be presenting SB167 on behalf of the Board of Regents. This proposal asks to ratify a super score ACT of 24 or above. Easily put, it allows a student who re-takes the test to be able to pull out the top scores from each portion of the test (math, English, reading, science) and combine the numbers into a super score. I am looking forward to the discussion on this one! The passage of this bill would possibly make more students eligible for the South Dakota Opportunity Scholarship, which requires, along with proper high school credits and GPA, an ACT of 24 (as mentioned before). Another bill to watch for as it continues to the House is the Dakota Promise Scholarship. Its passage would allow

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high school graduates who qualify for Pell grants to be able to get up to 2500 dollars of additional aid per year to attend a college or university. This will create a needs-based scholarship program and requests 2 million dollars.

We have had many schools make a trip to Pierre to attend committee meetings, session, and take a tour of the capitol. This is a wonderful experience and hopefully connects students to the way government works. It is always uplifting to see other people from our local area also take a day or two and come out.

As we approach the last two weeks, we are becoming tired and at times, frazzled. We want to do for the people what is needed, trying to be fair in whatever we do. If we pass a bill and no one is totally happy, it may just be a good one! That does not mean, however, that it immediately becomes law. Our Governor has to also approve it by signing it into law. She and her council look carefully at bills on a larger scope to see the legalities and workability of each.

With that, have a good week.

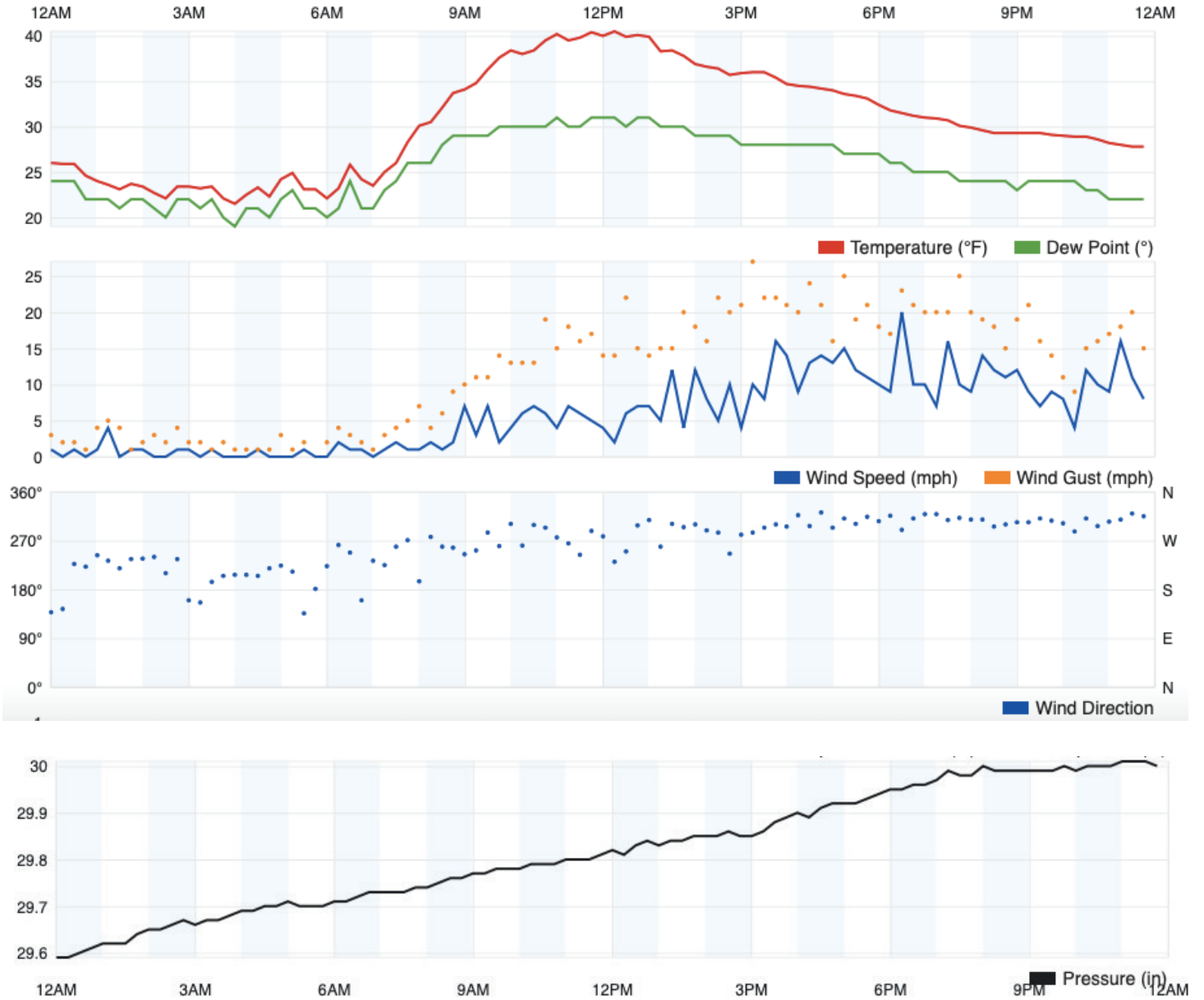
Rep. Lana Greenfield

lane.greenfield@sdlegislature.gov

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Today



Sunny then
Slight Chance
Showers

High: 39 °F

Tonight



Decreasing
Clouds

Low: 26 °F

Tuesday



Sunny then
Slight Chance
Rain/Snow

High: 39 °F

Tuesday
Night



Slight Chance
Rain/Snow
then Partly
Cloudy

Low: 25 °F

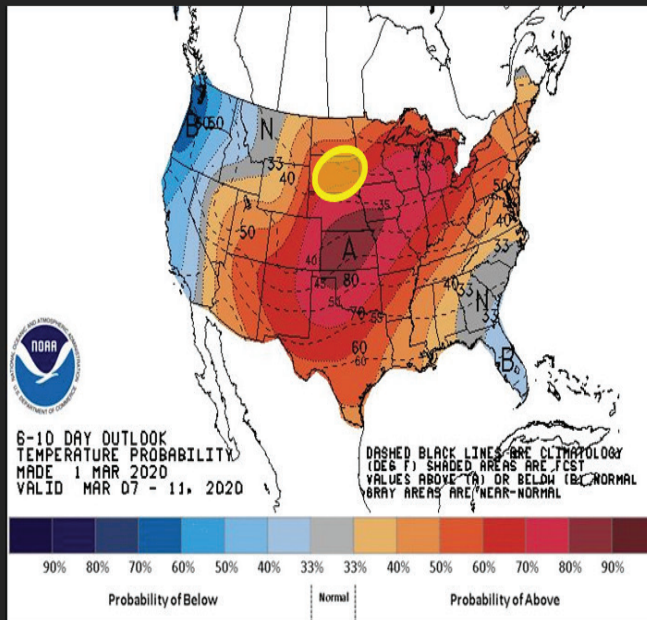
Wednesday



Mostly Sunny

High: 41 °F

**Well Above Freezing Temps Wednesday And This Weekend;
Leading To Considerable Snowmelt; Possibly Speeding Up The
Timetable For Ice Jam/Snowmelt Flooding**



Created at 3:35 PM - Sunday, March 01, 2020

What

Very warm temperatures this week, especially Wednesday and over the weekend

For How Long

Short range and long range outlooks suggest it could be warmer than normal for much of the month of March

Impacts

The melting of area snow-pack and the break up of river-ice is expected to contribute to flooding over the region. The warmer weather this week could speed up the timetable for when flooding begins

NATIONAL WEATHER SERVICE
OCEANIC AND ATMOSPHERIC ADMINISTRATION

Looking at some above normal warm temperatures this week, and probably for much of the month of March, per the latest short and long range temperature outlooks. This could result in a sooner onset of overland and river flooding across the region.

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Today in Weather History

March 2, 1966: The blizzard began late on March 2nd in the west and moved very slowly across the state, reaching the extreme east on the 4th, continuing into the 5th. Snow depths ranged from 2 to 4 inches in southeast South Dakota to nearly 3 feet in north-central South Dakota. Winds of 40 to 55 mph with gusts to 70 mph caused widespread blowing snow and near-zero visibilities during the storm. Drifts up to 30 feet were reported in sheltered areas with open fields nearly bare. The storm caused massive livestock losses. Estimated losses were 50,000 cattle, 46,000 sheep, and 1800 hogs. The most substantial losses were in the central and north-central parts of the state. The heavy snow also collapsed many structures. The storm directly caused three deaths due to exposure, and the storm indirectly caused three deaths; 2 due to heart attacks and one by asphyxiation. The blizzard was rated as one of the most severe that has been experienced in South Dakota. Many roads were blocked for days, along with many schools and businesses closed.

March 2, 2007: An area of low pressure moved slowly northeast across the central and northern plains, bringing widespread snowfall along with intense winds. The combination of the falling snow and the existing snow cover resulted in blizzard conditions with visibilities to zero at times. This blizzard event was part of the same upper-level low-pressure trough that brought the heavy snowfall to the area on February 28th. Additional snowfall occurred on March 1st and 2nd across the region as a large area of snow wrapped in from the east. Widespread blizzard conditions developed by noon on March 2nd and continued into the early morning hours of the 3rd. Snowfall amounts, including the snow on February 28th, ranged from 2 inches to as much as 22 inches across central and northeast South Dakota. The heaviest snowfall amounts were across northeastern South Dakota, where total snow depths were in the 25 to 30-inch range. Northwest winds of 30 to 45 mph with gusts near 60 mph brought zero visibilities at times across the area, along with creating large snowdrifts. Schools, businesses, airports, roads, and interstates were closed for up to two days. Travel was not advised across the area. Also, many cars were ditched, along with several accidents. Many travelers were stranded, and several shelters were opened. The Emergency Operations Center was activated in Pierre, and the Governor declared the blizzard area a disaster. Some of the most significant snowfall amounts over the three days included 11 inches at Andover, Hosmer, and Redfield, 12 inches at Webster, 13 inches at Miller, 14 inches at Victor, Groton, and Clark, 15 inches at Castlewood and Summit, 16 inches at Watertown and Roy Lake, 19 inches at Sisseton, 20 inches at Milbank, 21 inches at Bryant, and 22 inches at Clear Lake.

1927: Raleigh, North Carolina, was buried under 17.8 inches of snow in 24 hours, a record for that location until 2000. On January 25, 2000, Raleigh saw 17.9 inches of snow in 24 hours.

1988: Thunderstorms produced severe weather in the south-central U.S. A tornado in Baton Rouge, Louisiana injured two persons, and another tornado caused five million dollars damage at the airport in Lafayette, Louisiana.

1990: Twenty-two ships were trapped by ice in the worst ice jam in the Gulf of St. Lawrence in 10 years. The ice was 23 feet thick.

1846 - A great storm hit Virginia and the Carolinas. The storm caused half a million dollars damage, and in North Carolina drowned fifty families and a thousand cattle on Notts Island. (David Ludlum)

1975 - The governor's Tornado in Atlanta did considerable damage to the governor's mansion and surrounding areas resulting in three deaths and 56.5 million dollars damage. (The Weather Channel)

1985 - A massive winter storm struck the Northern Plains Region. The storm produced up to 33 inches of snow in northeastern South Dakota, at Summit and at Milbank, and also produced high winds which whipped the heavy snow into drifts twenty feet high. (Storm Data)

1987 - A storm in the northeastern U.S. produced heavy snow in Maine, with 16 inches reported at West Grand Lake and Guilford. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - Thunderstorms produced severe weather in the south central U.S. A tornado at Baton Rouge LA injured two persons, and another tornado caused five million dollars damage at the airport in Lafayette LA. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

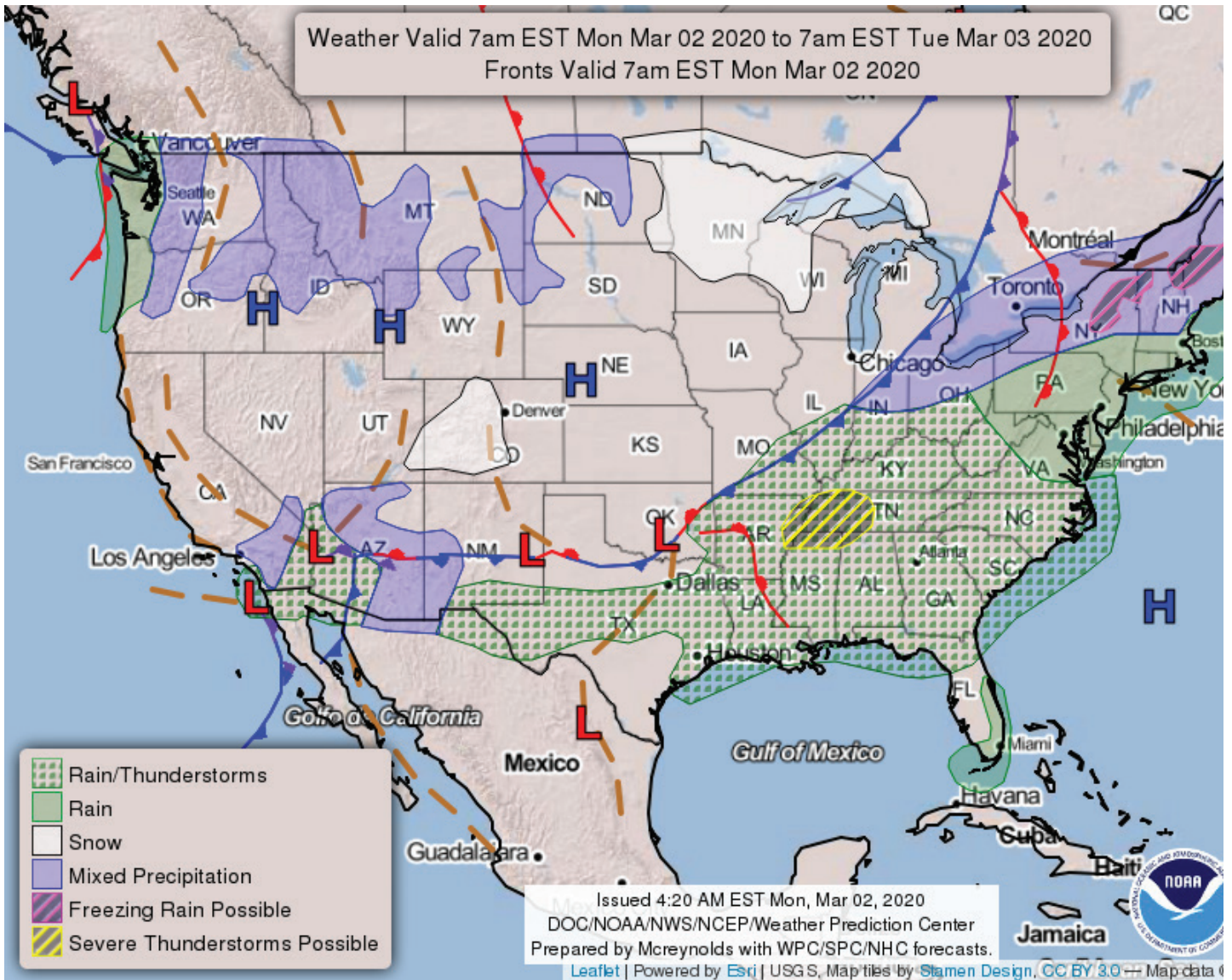
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Yesterday's Groton Weather Today's Info

High Temp: 41 °F at 11:41 AM
Low Temp: 21 °F at 3:59 AM
Wind: 27 mph at 3:08 PM
Snow

Record High: 60° in 1974, 1905
Record Low: -21° in 1913
Average High: 33°F
Average Low: 14°F
Average Precip in March.: 0.03
Precip to date in March.: 0.00
Average Precip to date: 1.05
Precip Year to Date: 0.35
Sunset Tonight: 6:23 p.m.
Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:07 a.m.



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ACORNS AND WATERMELONS

A father and his son were walking through a grove of oak trees. Suddenly the boy turned to his Dad and said, "You know, I think God really goofed. He put a watermelon on a small vine and an acorn on a big oak. I would have done it the exact opposite."

As he was about to continue his speech, an acorn fell from a tree, landed on his head and bounced to the ground. Quickly the father said, "Aren't you glad that wasn't a watermelon?"

We are often puzzled by the events that occur in our lives. We do our best to understand them only to realize that we lack wisdom and insight to interpret or understand them. Try as we might, there are some things that simply do not make sense to us. What then?

God's Word reminds us that "If any of you lack wisdom and insight, ask Me for help and I'll give them to you." Two of God's greatest gifts - wisdom and insight - are available to all of us. But they only come from reading, accepting, and trusting His Word, taking time to be with Him in prayer, meditating, and asking other Christians for ideas. He is willing and able to give us all the knowledge we need as well as the courage it will take to do whatever He asks of us. However, it will take time and discipline. His answers are always available, but we must prove to Him, through obedience to Him, that we are willing to do our part if we expect Him to do His part.

Prayer: Lord, if we are willing to seek and ask, we will surely find the wisdom and insight we need when we trust Your guidance. May we hear and obey Your instructions and find direction and protection for our lives through You. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: Proverbs 3:5-7 Trust in the Lord with all your heart; do not depend on your own understanding.

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2020 Groton SD Community Events

- 03/14/2020 Youth Girls/Boys Basketball Tourney Grades 4th-6th (Baseball/Softball Foundation Fundraiser)
 - 04/04/2020 Groton Lions Club Easter Egg Hunt - City Park (Saturday a week before Easter Weekend)
 - 04/04/2020 Dueling Piano's Baseball Fundraiser at the American Legion
 - 04/25/2020 Fireman's Stag (Same Saturday as GHS Prom)
 - 04/25-26/2020 Front Porch 605 Rural Route Road Trip
 - 04/26/2020 Father/Daughter dance.
 - 05/02/2020 Spring City-Wide Rummage Sales, (1st Saturday in May)
 - 05/11/2020 Girls High School Golf Meet at Olive Grove Golf Course
 - 05/25/2020 Groton American Legion Post #39 Memorial Day Services
 - 06/05/2020 Athletic Fundraiser at Olive Grove Golf Course
 - 06/8-10/2020 St. John's VBS
 - 06/19/2020 SDSU Golf at Olive Grove Golf Course
 - 06/20/2020 Shriner's Golf Tournament at Olive Grove Golf Course
 - 06/22/2020 Olive Grove Golf Course Ladies Invitational
 - 06/26/2020 Groton Businesses Golf Tournament at Olive Grove Golf Course
 - 07/04/2020 Firecracker Golf Tourney at Olive Grove Golf Course
 - 07/12/2020 Summer Fest/Car Show
 - 07/16/2020 Olive Grove Golf Course Pro Am Golf Tourney
 - 07/31-08/04/2020 State American Legion Baseball Tournament in Groton
 - 08/07/2020 Wine on Nine Event at Olive Grove Golf Course
 - 09/12/2020 Fall City-Wide Rummage Sales (1st Sat. after Labor Day)
 - 09/13/2020 Olive Grove Golf Course Couples Sunflower Classic
 - 10/09/2020 Lake Region Marching Band Festival (2nd Friday in October)
 - 10/10/2020 Pumpkin Fest (Saturday before Columbus Day)
 - 10/31/2020 Downtown Trick or Treat
 - 10/31/2020 Groton United Methodist Trunk or Treat
 - 11/14/2020 Groton Legion Annual Turkey Party (Saturday closest to Veteran's Day)
 - 11/26/2020 Community Thanksgiving at the Community Center
 - 12/05/2020 Olive Grove Golf Course Tour of Homes & Holiday Party
 - 12/05/2020 Santa Claus Day at Professional Management Services
 - 01/--/2021 83rd Annual Carnival of Silver Skates
-
- Bingo every Wednesday 6:30pm at the American Legion Post #39
 - Groton Lions Club Wheel of Meat, American Legion Post #39 7pm (Saturday nights November 30th thru April 11th)
 - Groton Lions Club Wheel of Pizza, Jungle Lanes 8pm (Saturday nights November 30th thru April 11th)
-
- All dates are subject to change, check for updates here

News from the Associated Press

Deadwood Mountain Grand resort up for sale

By JIM HOLLAND Rapid City Journal

DEADWOOD, S.D. (AP) — The Deadwood Mountain Grand, an entertainment and lodging resort overlooking the heart of downtown Deadwood, is up for sale, with an asking price of \$27.5 million.

The DMG, rebuilt from a former gold-mining slime plant and opened in 2011, features a 98-room luxury hotel, restaurant, casino and a 25,000 square-foot event center, hosting marquee events ranging from major-name concert acts to nationally televised boxing cards.

The resort also boasts 10,000 square feet of meeting space, fitness facility, indoor swimming pool and Jacuzzi, a three-story parking garage with 220 spaces and, according to sale literature, “the only resort-based spa and salon in the Black Hills.”

Nate J. Greene, executive vice-president of the Nashville, Tenn., office of Colliers, International, a real estate services and investment management firm, told the Rapid City Journal that the current owner Dale Morris of Nashville hopes to find a partner to take a majority ownership role in the resort.

“That would be the goal,” Greene said.

“He (Morris) would love to stay involved in the Deadwood Mountain Grand, with a purchaser that would come in and be the operator. Dale wants to be the silent partner,” Greene said.

In 2010, Morris, a longtime powerbroker in the Nashville music industry, and a number of other investors formed an LLC to redevelop the former Homestake gold processing plant into an entertainment venue.

The LLC, called Tentexkota, also used millions in loans from 65 Chinese investors to move the project forward.

The loans were made through the South Dakota arm of a federal government program known as EB-5, which is shorthand for the employment-based fifth preference visa.

At the time of the Deadwood Mountain Grand deal, foreigners who invested at least \$500,000 in a U.S. project that supported at least 10 jobs could earn the EB-5 visa and eventually a permanent residency green card for themselves and their families.

The EB-5 program became mired in public controversy in 2013, when Richard Benda, a former state government official who worked closely with EB-5 projects, was found dead of what was ruled a suicide.

It was later revealed that Benda had been facing a potential indictment for his alleged theft of \$550,000 in state grant money that was intended for a meatpacking plant supported by EB-5 investments in Aberdeen.

With the state EB-5 program in disarray, Chinese investors filed suit in 2016 seeking return of millions in loans made to build the resort.

In 2018, Morris settled the suit, repaying more than \$32.5 million in loans overseas investors had made to the LLC.

He later bought out other original members of the LLC and formed his own corporation, ZCN LLC, to operate the resort.

“All that’s behind us,” Greene said of the financial and legal issues.

“We’ve got new management in place. Dale is the sole owner and things are just getting better and better,” he said.

There is no urgent timetable to get the property sold, Greene said.

“We’ll take whatever time we need to find the right situation,” he said.

Higgins Gulch residents threaten to close road to public

By JACI CONRAD PEARSON Black Hills Pioneer

DEADWOOD, S.D. (AP) — While Lawrence County maintains the first mile of Higgins Gulch Road, residents maintain the second mile and that point has become a contentious one.

On Feb. 11, residents representing the second-mile landowners, threatened to turn the road into a private road blocking public access starting May 15 unless the county takes over maintenance.

It was the second meeting on the matter this year, the first being held Jan. 21, according to the Black Hills Pioneer. The county did not take action at either meeting.

Lawrence County Deputy State's Attorney Bruce Outka clarified the difference between the two miles of road.

"It is helpful to think about the road in two parts — first mile and second mile," Outka said. "The first mile is considered to be part of the county system and is maintained by the county. The second mile is not on the county system and is therefore not maintained by the county."

The mileage is measured from Hillview Road. Mile 2 is marked by a yellow "County Maintenance Ends Here" sign, and specifically goes to Mile 2.2 where the road enters state land and then the Forest Service land.

Gary Arseneau addressed the commission on behalf of Higgins Gulch Road second mile residents, of which there were around seven in attendance at the Feb. 11 commission meeting.

Citing a Forest Service traffic survey conducted from May 31, 2019 through Sept. 16, 2019, where vehicle counters were placed near the homes along the road, and a second one was placed near the Crow Peak Trailhead parking lot, Arseneau said there are 9,000 traffic movements a month, 306 per day in the summer, on Higgins Gulch Road.

He said approximately 6,000-7,000 traffic movements are by non-Higgins Gulch residents

"This road is used by a lot of people in the entire community. They enjoy it," Arseneau said. "We enjoy it. We are a small portion of actual users and that's the point I want to make."

Referencing an easement document recorded in the Register of Deeds Office in Book 342 Page 265 as controlling the county's obligation to maintain the portion of road, Arseneau stated the document provides Lawrence County with an easement and right-of-way to construct and maintain a road.

Arseneau further added that the Forest Service responsibility for the road is limited only to the extent appropriations are available, concluding that it is the county's obligation to maintain the road if the Forest Service is unable or unwilling to do so.

Arseneau said that while the group has gathered a large amount of data, he chose to focus on one document.

Arseneau specifically referenced Page 265 in the in the county records book.

"This is a document, back in May of 1958. It's between Ed Moeller, Pearl Moeller, and Lawrence County. It says in there, the county has an easement and right of way to construct and maintain a road. That's the county. Not the forest service."

Steve Kozel, Northern Hills district ranger for the Black Hills National Forest, addressed the issue.

"The Forest Service does not have an easement or right of way, so we are not responsible jurisdictionally to manage the road," Kozel said. "Our road maintenance is not for residential purposes. Transportation access, public access, and timber haul is what drives a lot of our road network access."

Kozel said the factual basis for that goes back to early records from the latter part of the 1950s that granted a series of easement rights of way to Lawrence County that describe the Forest Service as building the road and maintaining it subsequent to available funds.

"From what I can discern from the records, the Forest Service did build the road, along with Homestake Timber Company," Kozel said. "That was in the 1950s, and we've maintained it two times a year since the 1950s, making minor improvements. Fast-forward to now and the controversy about increased maintenance and improvements for safety purposes. We don't have any proprietary documents. The easements and right of way have been granted to the county. We don't have any proprietary rights. We're not a public

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road maintenance agency.”

Arseneau said the first mile of Higgins Gulch Road began being maintained by the county in the 1970s and argues that the second mile should also be maintained the same way.

“It’s the same road, with the same kind of easement agreements,” Arseneau said. “We understand, why, up until now, only section 7 (the first mile) was being maintained, was because there were residents down there. And that makes sense. The county’s not going to spend money on maintaining a section of road, where there’s nobody up there. It doesn’t make sense. But now we have residents that are up in section 12 and 13 (the second mile).”

With the development of the Meadows at Higgins Gulch subdivision, about eight more homes have been built in the area.

In anticipation of the commission suggesting a road district be formed, Arseneau said “we don’t need a road district. The county is responsible for maintaining it.”

Arseneau said he wanted the public to know: “Our intention is not to create a big stink storm that this could go into. We don’t want to do that.”

Commissioner Randy Deibert said there is a process for placing a road on the county system and a process for taking one off the county system, both involving the state.

“To my knowledge, we have no record of this road ever becoming officially on our system through that true process,” Deibert said. “Furthermore, on the deed that you’re speaking of, we have no signature by the county or resolution by the county accepting this right of way ... we cannot take on lands except by resolution. If you read the document that you’re quoting so much, it also talks about Exhibit A, which is not attached and it’s not filed at the courthouse. So, if we want to get into this level of detail, we can. But that’s not why we’re here today.”

Arseneau said that if that is true and the road was never on the system, then the easement doesn’t exist. “Back to this document, if it was never even accepted as an easement — which we’re bringing up today, is that that easement doesn’t exist. This is private property,” he said.

Outka said that was a bit of a mischaracterization.

“The language says the county gets the easement to be constructed by or under the supervision of the United States government,” Outka said. “It doesn’t say anything about the county maintaining or anything of that sort. So I just want to point that out.”

Arseneau said that since nobody accepted the easement, the Higgins Gulch group feels that the easement has not been complied with since the county does not maintaining the second mile and thus, the road is private.

Higgins Gulch Road resident Jared Lukens-Black addressed the commission, acknowledging the liability those who maintain the road take on by doing so.

“They’ve been doing that, keeping it open and towing out residents who get stuck heading up to Crow Peak this time of year or when there’s mud up there — they can’t continue to do that,” Lukens-Black said. “We love having it open to the public, because we are part of the public. We enjoy having access to Forest Service and all the amenities in this county from all the other roads that are taken care of, and we don’t wish to keep residents away from the best and easiest access to this area and, particularly Crow Peak — we want to keep the road open. Our intention is not to make it private. Our intention is not to close it off.”

However, Lukens-Black said that if the county does not take on the responsibility, residents in the area would halt public access to the road.

“We’d put up a sign April 1 stating that May 15 we would have to block off the road and that it would be private,” Lukens-Black said. “If we don’t come to an agreement. We hope that we don’t have to get to that.”

Kozel said that for management purposes, the Forest Service still has access to Higgins Gulch via Tinton Road.

Deibert said that at the January meeting, the commission handed out information to Higgins Gulch presenters on how to get the road included into the county’s road system.

“I think that’s a pretty clear process, and I haven’t seen any of that process started,” Deibert said.

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Arseneau said his group looked at the process and based on the documents referenced above, they didn't need to do the process.

"Because the county is already supposed to be maintaining it," he said, adding that the process is cost-prohibitive for the group.

Outka said the commission offered no official position on the proposed road matter.

"The ultimatum to start maintaining the road by the date specified was issued in rapid-fire fashion before any discussion could occur," Outka said.

No further discussion of maintenance of the second mile of Higgins Gulch Road is scheduled by the commission at this time.

"Unless and until that happens, it appears the deadline imposed by the landowners will occur," Outka said.

Reward offered in death of Sioux Falls pizza delivery driver

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — A \$25,000 reward is being offered for information leading to an arrest in the shooting death of a pizza delivery driver in Sioux Falls.

Casey Bonhorst, 30, was making the delivery to an east side home Wednesday night when he was killed. The suspect, wearing a light-colored hoodie sweatshirt and light-colored pants, fled the scene.

Officials with the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives said in a release they have teamed with the Sioux Falls Police Department to provide \$15,000 in reward money. Domino's Pizza is offering up to \$10,000 from various franchises across the U.S., according to ATF officials.

"This was a tragic and unnecessary crime," said ATF special agent in charge William Terry Henderson. "We are committed to finding justice for the victim and his family."

Anyone with information about the case can call 1-800-ATF-GUNS or e-mail ATFTips@atf.gov. To receive a reward, tips must aid in the investigation, arrest and successful prosecution of those responsible, according to the release.

Corps begins spring reservoir drawdowns in Red River Basin

ST. PAUL, Minn. (AP) — The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers is lowering its reservoir elevations within the Red River Basin based on recent snow measurements in order to prepare for potential spring snowmelt, officials with the agency's St. Paul District said.

The Corps is currently lowering the elevation of Lake Ashtabula, located near Valley City, North Dakota. It will be drawn down nearly 2 feet in time for spring runoff, officials said.

Reservation Dam, part of the Lake Traverse project, near Wheaton, Minnesota, will be lowered by a foot and a half by the end of the month.

White Rock Dam, also part of the Lake Traverse project, and Red Lake Dam, near Red Lake, Minnesota, will not be lowered due to high inflows, the Corps said.

Man accused of posting phony documents on city water quality

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — A South Dakota man is facing felony charges after authorities say he posted fabricated water quality results on social media that caused panic in the city of Brandon.

A Minnehaha County Grand Jury earlier this week indicted Kristopher Gagnon, 47, on a pair of forgery charges, the Argus Leader reported. He's accused of posting documents on Facebook in July 2019 that showed the city's tap water wasn't safe to drink.

City officials held a press conference in early August in attempt to calm fears in the community. City Administrator Bryan Read said at the time that the Facebook page "City of Brandon SD, The Dirt" had phony documents showing a water sample taken from a Brandon home that had radium levels higher than EPA standards.

It's unclear if Gagnon is affiliated with that Facebook page, which does not list its creator. Operators of the page have repeatedly declined to share their identities or speak on record with the Argus Leader.

A phone number for Gagnon could not be found.

3 sentenced in South Dakota on meth trafficking charges

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — Three people in South Dakota have been sentenced on methamphetamine trafficking charges in the last week, according to federal authorities.

Terry Paulhamus, 39, of Rapid City, and Joel Boe, 38, of Pierre, were each sentenced to 5 years in federal prison after pleading guilty to conspiracy to distribute meth. Frank Miller Jr., 61, of Fort Pierre, was sentenced to 4 years and 9 months on a meth conspiracy charge.

Prosecutors say Miller traveled to Denver to pick up the meth and was arrested last June during a traffic stop that yielded 236 grams of meth. A co-defendant in the case, Melissa Scull, has pleaded guilty and is scheduled for sentencing on April 6.

Paulhamus was accused of distributing meth on the Rosebud Sioux Indian Reservation and Boe allegedly sold drugs around the Pierre and Fort Pierre communities.

South Dakota heads toward banning university faculty union

By **STEPHEN GROVES** Associated Press

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — South Dakota appears ready to get rid of the faculty union at state universities, even while union members say the move threatens their academic freedom and the viability of the university system.

The Republican-dominated House and Senate passed separate bills last week that would ban faculty at state universities from collective bargaining. Republican Gov. Kristi Noem supports the idea, meaning it appears inevitable that the union, the Council for Higher Education, will soon be extinct. South Dakota would become one of a handful of states, including Virginia, Texas and Wisconsin, to bar faculty unions at public universities.

The union has been in the crosshairs of conservative lawmakers who feel it keeps universities from adapting to tight budgets and declines in enrollment. They say doing away with the union wouldn't affect academic freedom or job protections like tenure, but union members disagree.

"When the contract goes away, all bets are off," said Mark Geary, the president of the union.

Union members worry that sweeping policy changes, including job protections, could be made without first talking to the faculty, which number more than 1,400 across six universities and two special education schools.

The debate this year has centered on the union's opposition to the hiring of "professors of practice" — teachers who do not have advanced degrees but bring real-world experience to university classrooms.

"It's really important for our students to not only have intellectual knowledge but to be able to practice that when they get into the workforce," said Senate Majority Leader Kris Langer, the Dell Rapids Republican who introduced the bill.

But opponents of the ban say it could have far-reaching effects on academic freedom, workplace morale and the appeal of South Dakota universities, especially for newer faculty members.

Conservative lawmakers, led by former Speaker Mark Mickelson, tried in 2017 and 2018 to get rid of the union, while at the same time looking to exert more control over the state's universities. In previous years, Republicans from university towns have been instrumental in swinging enough votes to stop those efforts, but they did not have the numbers this year. Anti-union sentiment is common in the conservative-dominated Capitol.

Union members see a broader threat to the university system in the bills. Lawmakers last year moved to encourage conservative thought on university campuses, and several lawmakers have indicated they are closely watching the state's universities.

The union protects professors from feeling they have to fall in line with the ideological leanings of administration, according to opponents of the ban.

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"That guarantee today protects the most left-leaning professor you can find," said Jeremiah Murphy, a lobbyist for the South Dakota Education Association. "At the same time, it protects the most right-wing professor."

The Board of Regents, which oversees the schools, has not taken a position on the issue.

Langer said the proposal does not threaten freedom of speech or tenure. She argued that the law school and medical school at the University of South Dakota don't have a union, but have remained competitive.

But Vaughan Hennen, a 28-year-old librarian and union member at Dakota State University, said the next generation of faculty — millennials — value the ability to join a union. As millennials make up more of the workforce, public support for unions has risen, according to polling from Gallup and Pew Research.

"I don't think millennials like the idea of shutting up and working and not expressing your opinion in the workplace," he said.

The union argues that with faculty pay already ranked in the bottom 20% of university systems across the nation, the ban will add one more obstacle to recruiting professors. The result could be not just losing talented faculty members, but a decline in the quality of education and number of students, Hennen said.

But barring a major change of heart, both the Legislature and Noem are ready to say goodbye to collective bargaining for faculty.

The only question that appears to remain is whether teachers at schools for deaf and blind students, which is run under the Board of Regents, will still be able to join the teachers' union. The Senate bill leaves them out of the ban; the House bill includes them. Lawmakers will work to reconcile the proposals in the next two weeks.

Israelis vote in 3rd election in a year focused on Netanyahu

By ARON HELLER Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — Israelis were voting Monday in the country's unprecedented third election in less than a year to decide whether longtime Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu stays in power despite his upcoming criminal trial on corruption charges.

Netanyahu, the longest serving leader in Israeli history, has been the caretaker prime minister for more than a year as a divided Israel has weathered two inconclusive elections and a prolonged political paralysis. With opinion polls forecasting another deadlock, Netanyahu is seeking a late surge in support to score a parliamentary majority along with other nationalist parties that will deliver him a fourth consecutive term in office, and fifth overall.

He faces a stiff challenge once again from retired military chief Benny Gantz, whose centrist Blue and White party is running even with Netanyahu's Likud on a campaign message that Israel's longtime prime minister is unfit to lead because of the serious charges against him.

Both parties appear unable to form a coalition with their traditional allies. With the prospect of a unity government between them seemingly off the table after a particularly nasty campaign, Monday's vote may well turn into merely a preamble to another election.

"I hope that today marks the start of a healing process, where we can begin living together again," Gantz said upon voting in his hometown of Rosh Ha'ayin in central Israel, warning voters not to "get drawn in by the lies or by the violence" after the acrimonious election campaign.

There was little fanfare in the days leading up to the vote, with a noticeable absence of campaign posters on the streets and public rallies that typically characterize the run-up to Israeli elections. With voter fatigue clearly a factor, turnout could prove to be decisive. Election day is a national holiday in Israel and the country usually boasts one of the highest voter turnouts among Western democracies. But the second repeat vote and fears of the new coronavirus, which has so far has been kept largely in check, look to hinder turnout.

Israel set up some 15 stations to allow voting by hundreds of Israelis who have been ordered to remain in home-quarantine after possible exposure to the virus.

"The corona thing is completely under control. Today we've taken all the precautions that are necessary,

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people can go and vote, with complete confidence," Netanyahu said, after placing his vote in Jerusalem.

Netanyahu has tried to portray himself as a statesman who is uniquely qualified to lead the country through challenging times. Gantz has tried to paint Netanyahu as divisive and scandal-plagued, offering himself as a calming influence and an honest alternative.

Gantz says he favors a national unity government with Likud, but only if it rids itself of its longtime leader because of the corruption charges against him. Netanyahu, who still enjoys widespread support in his party, insists he must remain prime minister in any unity deal.

With his career on the line, Netanyahu has campaigned furiously. He's taken a hard turn to the right in hopes of rallying his nationalist base, promising to expand and annex West Bank settlements. In a campaign that has been marked by ugly smears, Netanyahu's surrogates have spread unfounded allegations claiming Gantz is corrupt, unstable and susceptible to blackmail by Iran.

The most recent attempt appears to have backfired. Recordings have revealed Netanyahu lied on live television about not being involved in a plot to secretly record a Gantz consultant disparaging his boss. Channel 12 aired audio Sunday night of Netanyahu speaking to the rabbi who clandestinely recorded the Gantz adviser and discussing when it would be leaked to the media.

Netanyahu is desperate to score a narrow 61-seat majority in parliament with his hard-line religious and nationalist allies before heading to trial two weeks later. Netanyahu has failed to secure himself immunity from prosecution, but with a strong hold on power he could seek other avenues to derail the legal proceedings against him.

Netanyahu goes on trial March 17 for charges of bribery, fraud and breach of trust stemming from accusations he accepted lavish gifts from billionaire friends and promised to promote advantageous legislation for a major newspaper in exchange for favorable coverage. He vowed he will prove his innocence in court.

Opinion polls forecast similar results to the previous two stalemates, and the deadlock raises the possibility of a fourth election in quick succession.

Maverick politician Avigdor Lieberman once again looms as a potential kingmaker, with neither Netanyahu nor Gantz able to secure a parliamentary majority without his support. Lieberman has not committed himself to either candidate, though he has promised there will not be a fourth election.

Polling stations opened across the country at 7 a.m. Monday with exit polls expected at the end of the voting day at 10 p.m. (20:00 GMT) Official results are projected to come in overnight.

That's when the real jockeying may get underway, with attention shifting to President Reuven Rivlin who is responsible for choosing a candidate for prime minister. He is supposed to select the leader who he believes has the best chance of putting together a stable coalition. The honor usually goes to the head of the largest party, but not necessarily. Just as important is the number of lawmakers outside his own party who recommend him to the president.

Rivlin's selection will then have up to six weeks to form a coalition. If he fails, another candidate then has 28 days to form an alternative coalition. If that effort fails, new elections would be forced. It's a procedural process that remained hypothetical for Israel's first 70 years of existence until it played out after the last election in September. Should results match current opinion polls, and all the major player stick to the campaign promises, it may well repeat itself.

"This is usually a holiday, but to be honest I have no festivity in me just a sense of deep shame before you, the citizens of Israel," Rivlin said as he cast his ballot. "We don't deserve this. We don't deserve another horrible and filthy campaign like the one that ends today and we don't deserve this endless instability. We deserve a government that will work for us."

Follow Heller at www.twitter.com/aronhellerap

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World economy may shrink because of virus, watchdog says

PARIS (AP) — A global agency says the spreading new virus could make the world economy shrink this quarter, for the first time since the international financial crisis more than a decade ago.

In a special report on the impact of the virus, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development said Monday that the world economy is still expected to grow overall this year and rebound next year.

But the OECD lowered its forecasts for global growth in 2020 by half a percentage point, to 2.4% — and said the figure could go as low as 1.5% if the virus lasts long and spreads widely.

In addition to the “considerable human suffering” the virus has wrought, with more than 3,000 deaths worldwide, the OECD said “Global economic prospects remain subdued and very uncertain.”

The last time world GDP shrank on a quarter-on-quarter basis was at the end of 2008, during the depths of the financial crisis. On a full-year basis, it last shrank in 2009.

The OECD said China’s reduced production is hitting Asia particularly hard but also companies around the world that depend on its goods.

It urged governments to act fast to prevent contagion and restore consumer confidence.

The Paris-based OECD, which advises developed economies on policy, said the impact of this virus is much higher than past outbreaks because “the global economy has become substantially more interconnected, and China plays a far greater role in global output, trade, tourism and commodity markets.”

China’s viral outbreak has already disrupted global supply chains and cut business profits. And as the disease spreads, economists now worry about a graver scenario: That quarantines and greater caution among consumers will lead people to cancel travel plans, skip restaurant meals, avoid stores or stay home from work.

Already the European Union’s markets commissioner, Thierry Breton, estimated Monday that the virus has cost Europe 2 billion euros (\$2.2 billion) this year in tourism revenue alone, mainly because of the drop in number of Chinese tourists. Things are expected to get worse for Europe with the eruption of cases in northern Italy and the cancellation of events like the Venice Carnival.

Virus kills member of council advising Iran’s supreme leader

By **NASSER KARIMI** and **JON GAMBRELL** Associated Press

TEHRAN, Iran (AP) — A member of a council that advises Iran’s supreme leader died Monday after falling sick from the new coronavirus, state radio reported, becoming the first top official to succumb to the illness that is affecting members of the Islamic Republic’s leadership.

The death of Expediency Council member Mohammad Mirmohammadi came as Iran announced the virus had killed 66 people among 1,501 confirmed cases in the country.

Iran has the highest death toll in the world after China, the epicenter of the outbreak.

Mirmohammadi died at a north Tehran hospital of the virus, state radio said. He was 71.

The council advises Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, as well as settles disputes between the top cleric and parliament.

His death comes as other top officials have contracted the virus in Iran.

Those sick include Vice President Masoumeh Ebtekar, better known as “Sister Mary,” the English-speaking spokeswoman for the students who seized the U.S. Embassy in Tehran in 1979 and sparked the 444-day hostage crisis, state media reported. Also sick is Iraj Harirchi, the head of an Iranian government task force on the coronavirus who tried to downplay the virus before falling ill.

Iran has reported 978 confirmed cases of the new virus with 54 deaths from the illness it causes, called COVID-19. Across the wider Mideast, there are over 1,150 cases of the new coronavirus, the majority of which are linked back to Iran.

Experts worry Iran’s percentage of deaths to infections, around 5.5%, is much higher than other countries, suggesting the number of infections in Iran may be much higher than current figures show.

Iranian government spokesman Ali Rabiei, himself addressing journalists by teleconference over concerns about the virus, acknowledged the challenges remaining for the Islamic Republic.

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"We will have two difficult weeks ahead," he said.

Trying to stem the outbreak of the new coronavirus, Iran also on Monday held an online-only briefing by its Foreign Ministry. China as well has held similar teleconference briefings.

Foreign Ministry spokesman Abbas Mousavi opened the online news conference addressing the outbreak, dismissing an offer of help for Iran by U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo.

Iran and the U.S. have seen some of the worst tensions since its 1979 Islamic Revolution in recent months, culminating in the American drone strike that killed a top Iranian general in Baghdad and a subsequent Iranian ballistic missile counterattack against U.S. forces.

"We neither count on such help nor are we ready to accept verbal help," Mousavi said. He added Iran has always been "suspicious" about America's intentions and accused the U.S. government of trying to weaken Iranians' spirits over the outbreak.

Judiciary chief Ebrahim Raisi acknowledged some people had begun stockpiling medical supplies for profit in the country, urging prosecutors to show "no mercy for hoarders."

"Hoarding sanitizing items is playing with people's lives and it is not ignorable," Raisi said.

Raisi also urged officials to grant "maximum" leave to prisoners. Activists have raised concern about the spread of the new coronavirus in Iran's prisons.

The British Embassy meanwhile has begun evacuations over the virus.

"Essential staff needed to continue critical work will remain," the British Foreign Office said. "In the event that the situation deteriorates further, the ability of the British Embassy to provide assistance to British nationals from within Iran may be limited."

While Iran has closed schools and universities to stop the spread of the virus, major Shiite shrines have remained open despite civilian authorities calling for them to be closed. The holy cities of Mashhad and Qom in particular, both home to shrines, have been hard-hit by the virus. Shiites often touch and kiss shrines as a sign of their faith. Authorities have been cleaning the shrines with disinfectants.

Police have arrested one man who posted a video showing himself licking the metal enclosing the Imam Reza shrine in Mashhad, the most-important Shiite saint buried in the country, according to reports by semiofficial news agencies. In the video, the man said he licked the metal to "allow others to visit the shrine with peace of mind."

Meanwhile Monday, the virus outbreak saw itself dragged into the yearslong boycott of Qatar by four Arab nations over a political dispute.

A prominent columnist at Dubai's government-owned Al-Bayan newspaper on Twitter falsely described the virus as being a plot by Qatar to hurt the upcoming Expo 2020 world's fair in Dubai and Saudi Arabia. Noura al-Moteari later described the tweet as "satire" to The Associated Press after it gained widespread attention.

The Dubai Media Office similarly described the tweet as being written in a "cynical style" while distancing the Arabic-language daily from al-Moteari.

"Noura is a freelance writer and is not an employee of Al-Bayan nor does she represent the publication's views," it told the AP. "That being said, this has no relevance to any social media policy being practiced by the publication nor the state."

The tweet comes after Qatar expressed disappointment Sunday that nearly all of its Gulf neighbors snubbed invitations to attend the weekend peace signing ceremony between the U.S. and the Taliban.

Gambrell reported from Dubai, United Arab Emirates.

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2020 Watch: How long will Joe Biden's moment last?

By STEVE PEOPLES AP National Political Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — Presidential politics move fast. What we're watching heading into a new week on the 2020 campaign:

Days to Super Tuesday: 1

Days to general election: 256

THE NARRATIVE

The Democrats' 2020 nomination fight is at a crossroads. Vermont Sen. Bernie Sanders remains the front-runner. And with former Vice President Joe Biden's resounding victory in South Carolina, Biden can now make a credible case that he is the strongest Sanders alternative — especially now that Pete Buttigieg is out. But will the party's moderate wing unite behind him? The moderate lane is still somewhat crowded even after Buttigieg's departure given billionaire and former New York Mayor Mike Bloomberg's looming presence. On the eve of Super Tuesday, we're about to learn whether this truly is a two- or three-person race or if Sanders will build an insurmountable delegate lead. Either way, this could be headed to the convention.

THE BIG QUESTIONS

How long will Biden's moment last?

Biden probably had the best night of his political career Saturday in South Carolina. He scored his first win of 2020, which actually marked his first primary victory over three presidential runs. Now comes the hard part. Biden has little organization, paid advertising or time to help turn the South Carolina landslide into an equally strong showing on Tuesday, when 14 states, one U.S. territory and Democrats abroad weigh in on the race. Also standing in his way: Bloomberg, who draws from a similar pool of voters and will be on the Super Tuesday ballot as well.

How will Bloomberg's billions stand up?

At last count, Bloomberg had spent more than half a billion dollars on his 2020 campaign before appearing on a ballot. That investment will finally be tested on Tuesday, when a series of states representing one third of 2020's presidential delegates have the option of picking Bloomberg's name. That's even as some establishment Democrats are quietly calling for him to quit the race to allow for the anti-Sanders vote to consolidate behind Biden.

Where do Buttigieg's votes go?

Buttigieg surprised everyone by suspending his campaign Sunday evening in the wake of Biden's South Carolina victory and his own dismal showing among voters of color. Buttigieg earned just 3% of the non-white vote, according to AP VoteCast. Conventional wisdom suggests that much of the former South Bend, Indiana, mayor's vote share would go to Biden, an ideological ally. But these things are never quite so simple. Buttigieg had definite overlap with Massachusetts Sen. Elizabeth Warren, who drew from the same collection of educated, suburban white voters. And of course, fellow Midwesterner Amy Klobuchar, a senator from Minnesota who barely registered in South Carolina on Saturday, could pick up some votes. It's also fair to wonder how much support Buttigieg was poised to win as the race becomes nationalized. Polls suggested he may have struggled to hit the 15% threshold in several Super Tuesday states, so there may not be as much to go around as his rivals hoped.

Who gets out next?

Even after billionaire Tom Steyer and Buttigieg's weekend departure, there are still six Democrats in the race. And four of the six have yet to finish better than third place in any of the first four primary contests. For the record, that's Bloomberg, Rep. Tulsi Gabbard of Hawaii, Klobuchar and Warren. History suggests most of these candidates would be out of the race by now. If the trend holds on Super Tuesday, we could see the field down to two or three by this time next week.

Will Sanders' Latino support put him over the top?

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California and Texas offer by far the largest trove of delegates. It just so happens that both states also feature large Latino populations. That's good news for Sanders. The question is how good. Tio Bernie (Uncle Bernie in Spanish) dominated the Nevada caucuses last week on the backs of the Hispanic vote. If Hispanic voters stick by Sanders on Tuesday in the two states that matter most, he could build an insurmountable delegate lead.

Will coronavirus hurt Trump?

President Donald Trump insists that there's no reason to panic about the coronavirus, yet the public health threat — and the related Wall Street slump — creates a high-stakes leadership test just eight months before his reelection test. Few issues will matter more to voters this year than their health and the economy. That creates incredible pressure on Trump to get this situation right.

THE FINAL THOUGHT

Buttigieg's abrupt departure was a surprise. And it marks a big step forward in Biden's fight to emerge as the leading Sanders alternative. But as long as Bloomberg stays in, Biden's comeback is far from certain.

2020 Watch runs every Monday and provides a look at the week ahead in the 2020 election.

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Catch up on the 2020 election campaign with AP experts on our weekly politics podcast, "Ground Game."

India's riot toll rises to 46 as capital remains on edge

By SHEIKH SAALIQ Associated Press

NEW DELHI (AP) — The death toll in India's capital from riots last week between Hindus and Muslims rose to 46, officials said Monday, a day after false rumors of new violence led to panicked calls to police in many parts of the city.

The riots in New Delhi began over a disputed new citizenship law, which led to clashes in which hundreds were injured and houses, shops, mosques, schools and vehicles were set on fire.

Tensions between Hindu hard-liners and Muslims protesting the Hindu-first policies of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government had been building for months when the violence exploded a week ago Sunday, the eve of U.S. President Donald Trump's state visit to India.

Apart from a single tweet after the riots had almost ended, Modi has been publicly silent on the violence.

His powerful home minister, Amit Shah, has accused opposition parties of inciting the riots by spreading misinformation about the citizenship law, which fast-tracks naturalization for religious minorities from several neighboring countries but not Muslims.

The rumors spreading on Sunday included reports of armed groups marching in neighborhoods while chanting slogans, and houses being set on fire.

The panic subsided when police reached out to both Hindu and Muslim religious leaders and asked them to help maintain calm in their neighborhoods. Police also issued statements and some lawmakers took to the streets to reassure people that the situation was normal.

On Monday, India's top court agreed to hear cases filed by riot victims accusing leaders of Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party of hate speech. Some of the victims accuse Kapil Mishra, a local leader of Modi's party who lost his Delhi state assembly seat in recent elections, of stoking the violence.

Mishra had demanded at a rally that police shut down a Muslim-led protest in the city or else he and his followers would do it themselves.

Hours later, Hindus and Muslims fought each other with guns and swords, metal rods and axes, leaving the streets where the rioting occurred resembling a war zone.

The violence had largely subsided by Wednesday, but the Indian capital has remained on edge.

Most of the dead and injured were Muslims, with thousands fleeing their homes in fear.

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The main opposition Congress party on Monday demanded that Home Minister Shah resign. Shah controls the city's police force, which has been accused of aiding Hindu mobs in the clashes. Police have denied the allegations.

Senior Congress leaders including Rahul Gandhi protested near Parliament as party supporters demonstrated on the streets outside. Many were detained by police after they burned an effigy of Shah.

Authorities are yet to provide an official account of what sparked the violence. Police spokesman Manjeet Singh Randhawa did not respond to repeated questions about how many of the hundreds of people detained in the riots had been charged.

The violence is the latest in a long line of communal clashes that date to the British partition of the Indian subcontinent in 1947, when the country was split into secular, Hindu-majority India and the Islamic state of Pakistan.

Patients fill hospitals in more places as new virus expands

By **HYUNG-JIN KIM and KIM TONG-HYUNG Associated Press**

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — Virus cases in South Korea surged and millions of children in Japan stayed home from school Monday as officials struggled to contain the epidemic in more than 60 countries, including the United States, where two people have died and signs of a bigger outbreak loomed.

As new battle fronts against the coronavirus opened with surprising speed around the globe, recovered patients left China's hastily built hospitals and isolation wards, freeing up patient beds in the city where the COVID-19 illness has hit hardest.

China, where the epidemic began in December, reported only 202 new cases over the previous 24 hours with another 42 deaths. That brings the country's total number of reported cases to 80,026 with 2,912 deaths in all. The city of Wuhan accounted for most of the new cases, but also saw 2,570 patients released.

Monday's increase was China's lowest since Jan. 21. China still has about three-fourths of the world's nearly 89,000 cases worldwide, but outbreaks were surging in other countries, with South Korea, Italy and Iran seeing sharp increases.

The United States counted 80 cases as of Sunday and two deaths, both men with existing health problems who had been hospitalized in Washington state. The U.S. total includes evacuees from a virus-stricken cruise ship and from Wuhan, but new cases among California health workers, in New York, Rhode Island and Washington raised concerns on both U.S. coasts.

The second U.S. fatality was a man in his 70s from a nursing facility near Seattle where dozens of sick people were tested for the virus, Washington state health officials said. Researchers said earlier the virus may have been circulating for weeks undetected in Washington state.

Indonesia confirmed its first cases Monday, in two people who contracted the illness from a foreign traveler.

In South Korea, at a hastily arranged news conference, the 88-year-old leader of the Shincheonji church, a religious sect which has the country's largest cluster of infections, bowed down on the ground twice and apologized for causing the "unintentional" spread of the disease.

"I don't know what words of apology I should offer. ... We also did our best but weren't able to contain it fully," Lee said, wearing a white face mask. "We immediately cooperated (with quarantine efforts), but there's really nothing I can say."

Lee's church is viewed by mainstream Christian organizations as a cult. As he spoke Monday, some people shouted "Cult" and "Disband the Shincheonji church."

South Korea on Monday reported 599 new cases for a total of 4,335, most of them in the southeastern city of Daegu and nearby areas. A total of 26 people have died. More than half of the cases have links to a Shincheonji branch in Daegu. The city's first known patient is a church member who attended services before being diagnosed with the disease on Feb. 18. Before her case was confirmed, South Korea had reported only 30 cases.

South Korea's surging outbreak has overwhelmed its health system. At least four infected elderly people

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have died in Daegu while waiting to be hospitalized.

Kim Gang-lip, South Korea's vice health minister, said hospitals' capacities from now on will be reserved for patients with serious symptoms or preexisting medical conditions, while mild cases will be isolated in designated facilities outside hospitals.

"Considering our limited medical resources, it will be crucial to make quick assessments of patients' conditions and provide quick, professional and active treatment to those with serious symptoms and minimize fatalities," Kim said. "If we continue to hospitalize mild patients amid the continued surge in infections, we would be risking overworking medical professionals and putting them at greater risk of infections."

South Korea's education minister, Yoo Eun-Hae, said the start of the new school year will be delayed by two more weeks until March 23. South Korea previously delayed the start by one week.

A sense of a burgeoning crisis around the globe has sent financial markets plummeting, emptied major streets and tourist attractions and forced millions of people to adjust their daily lives.

In Japan, many schools began following through on Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's plan to close them for more than a month through the end of the Japanese academic year.

While the virus has caused serious illness mainly for the elderly and those with existing health problems, most patients have had mild cases and some infected people apparently show no symptoms at all.

But attempts to contain the spread of the virus have been far-reaching.

The Louvre Museum was closed after France curbed large gatherings, and the U.S. issued an advisory against travel to the region of northern Italy where its outbreak is concentrated. The outbreaks and rising travel concerns could deal a heavy blow to those countries' tourism industries. Spring, especially Easter, is a hugely popular time for schoolchildren to visit France and Italy.

Thousands of migrants rush to cross Greek-Turkish border

By **COSTAS KANTOURIS** and **ELENA BECATOROS** Associated Press

KASTANIES, Greece (AP) — Thousands of migrants were trying to find a way across Turkey's western border with Greece Monday, with only dozens managing to pass through either border fences or fording the river there, after Turkey opened its side of the frontier to migrants and refugees to leave the country for Europe.

Greek police made use of tear gas against the crowds trying to push through. Holding white flags, the crowd of several hundred shouted "peace, peace," asking to be let through into Greece.

Other migrants were trying to reach Greek islands from the Turkish coast, with one dinghy capsizing, leaving one child dead, Greek authorities said.

Turkey declared its borders open to pressure the European Union into helping it handle the fallout from the war in neighboring Syria. Thousands of Turkish troops are supporting the last rebel forces holed up there in the northwestern province of Idlib against the onslaught of Russian-backed Syrian government forces.

The offensive into the last Syrian rebel areas has driven almost one million civilians to flee toward the sealed border with Turkey, threatening that country which hosts already 3.5 million Syrian refugees with a new and dramatic influx of displaced people.

Thousands of migrants have massed at the Turkish-Greek border since Ankara declared its side open, and hundreds more crossed from the Turkish coast to nearby Greek islands in dinghies over the weekend.

The Greek coast guard said 48 migrants on one dinghy heading to the island of Lesbos Monday morning, accompanied by a Turkish patrol vessel in Turkish waters, deliberately overturned their boat once in Greek waters, triggering a rescue operation.

The coast guard said they rescued 46 people, while two children who were pulled from the water were transported to hospital, one of them unconscious.

Resuscitation efforts on the unconscious child failed, the coast guard said. The other child was hospitalized and was considered out of danger.

Greek authorities said that in the 24 hours from 6a.m. local time Sunday, they thwarted 9,877 attempts

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to cross the northeastern land border, either through the river or through the border fence. Authorities arrested 68 people and charged them with illegal entry into the country.

Therose Ngonda, a 40-year-old woman from Cameroon, made it into Greece by wading across the Evros river that runs along the two countries' border.

Speaking in the morning, her feet still wet from the river crossing, she said she had been told migrants had 72 hours from Friday to leave the country. She got on one of dozens of buses and minibuses that have been ferrying people from Istanbul to the border, among about 2,000 people, including families with young children and Syrians.

Ngonda said she was put into the river on the Turkish side of the border. "They told me 'go that way'."

Greece says it is faced with what has all the markings of an organized campaign by Ankara to push people through its borders. The government has sent Greek army and police reinforcements to its northwestern land border with Turkey, saying it was suspending all asylum applications for a month, and would return those entering the country illegally without registering them.

The army announced a 24-hour live fire exercise along the Greek border for Monday, declaring the area dangerous and banning any movement of people or livestock during the exercise.

Police said migrants were concentrated at 10 parts of the border Monday morning, after a relatively quiet night. Over the weekend, Greek authorities used tear gas, water cannon and stun grenades to push back efforts by the crowd to push through the border. They also said Turkey had fired tear gas at Greek authorities on the Greek border.

Afghan university student Karimi Khalmahammad, 22, also managed to make it across the frontier. He said he had spent time inside a Taliban prison in Afghanistan, and now hoped to make it to Germany.

But many of the new arrivals were being picked up by Greek authorities shortly after they crossed the border, and were being driven away in white vans.

Greek islands near the Turkish coast also saw a major increase in arrivals from Turkey. The coast guard said that in the 24 hours until Monday morning, 977 people had reached the islands in dinghies, most of them on Lesbos but also on Chios, Samos and some of the smaller islands.

On Lesbos, local anger at the migration situation boiled over, with some residents preventing people, including young children and babies, from disembarking from a dinghy that reached a small harbor. Elsewhere on the island, they prevented buses from taking new arrivals to Lesbos' massively overcrowded migrant camp of Moria. The new arrivals spent the night on the beach.

Turkey's communications director, Fahrettin Altun, said Sunday the fighting in Idlib was directly linked to Turkey's decision to open the gates for refugees to Europe. He said Ankara had changed its focus to preparing for the possibility of new arrivals from Syria "instead of preventing refugees who intend to migrate to Europe."

Bulgarian Prime Minister Boyko Borissov is heading to Ankara on Monday to discuss with Erdogan the migrant situation following recent events in Syria.

Borissov said that a new migrant wave would threaten stability in the region as Europe is struggling to deal with the new coronavirus.

So far there is no direct migrant pressure on Bulgaria's border with Turkey, its Defense Minister Krasimir Karakachanov said. He added that some 400 troops are ready to be deployed immediately at the border with Turkey or Greece in case of attempted illegal border crossings.

Bulgaria has beefed up security at its 250-km (155-mile) long border with Turkey, deploying additional forces of the national guard and border police to stave off a possible migrant influx.

Beccatoros reported from Athens. Associated Press writer Veselin Toshkov in Sofia, Bulgaria, contributed to this report.

North Korea fires presumed short-range missiles into the sea

By **KIM TONG-HYUNG** and **HYUNG-JIN KIM** undefined

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — North Korea fired two presumed short-range ballistic missiles into its eastern sea on Monday, South Korean officials said, resuming weapons demonstrations after a months-long hiatus that may have been forced by the coronavirus crisis in Asia.

The launches came two days after North Korea's state media said leader Kim Jong Un supervised an artillery drill aimed at testing the combat readiness of units in front-line and eastern areas.

South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff said the projectiles were fired from an area near the coastal town of Wonsan and flew about 240 kilometers (149 miles) northeast on an apogee of about 35 kilometers (22 miles). It said the South Korean and U.S. militaries were jointly analyzing the launches. JCS officials later told reporters that the weapons were presumed to be short-range ballistic missiles.

North Korea likely tested one of its new road-mobile, solid-fuel missile systems or a developmental "super large" multiple rocket launcher it repeatedly demonstrated last year, said Kim Dong-yub, an analyst from Seoul's Institute for Far Eastern Studies. Experts say such weapons can potentially overwhelm missile defense systems and expand the North's ability to strike targets in South Korea and Japan, including U.S. bases there.

Kim Jong Un had entered the new year vowing to bolster his nuclear deterrent in the face of "gangster-like" U.S. sanctions and pressure, using a key ruling party meeting in late December to warn of "shocking" action over stalled nuclear negotiations with the Trump administration.

He also said North Korea would soon reveal a new "strategic weapon" and insisted the country was no longer "unilaterally bound" to a self-imposed suspension on the testing of nuclear and intercontinental ballistic missiles. But Kim did not explicitly lift the moratorium or give any clear indication that such tests were impending and seemed to leave the door open for eventual negotiations.

South Korea's presidential office said National Security Director Chung Eui-yong discussed the launches with the South's defense minister and spy chief, and that the officials expressed "strong concern" over the North's resumption of testing activity, which could raise military tensions.

Japan said that it had not detected any projectile landing in its territory or its exclusive economic zone, and that no sea vessels or aircraft had been damaged.

"The repeated firings of ballistic missiles by North Korea is a serious problem for the international community including Japan, and the government will continue to gather and analyze information, and monitor the situation to protect the lives and property of the people," the Defense Ministry's statement said.

The recent lull in North Korea's launches had experts wondering whether the North was holding back its weapons displays while it was fighting the coronavirus, which state media has described as a matter of "national existence." Some analysts speculated that the North cut back training and other activities involving large gatherings of soldiers to reduce the possibility of the virus spreading within its military.

Kim's latest show of force is apparently aimed at boosting military morale, strengthening internal unity and showing that his country is doing fine despite outside worries of how the North would contend with an outbreak.

North Korea in previous years has intensified testing activity in response to springtime military exercises between South Korea and the United States that it has described as invasion rehearsals. But the allies announced last week that they were postponing their annual drills due to concern about the coronavirus outbreak in South Korea, with soldiers from both countries being infected.

The launches were the latest setback for dovish South Korean President Moon Jae-in, who despite the North's indifference has repeatedly pleaded for reviving inter-Korean engagement. In a speech on Sunday marking the 101st anniversary of a major uprising against Japanese colonial rule, Moon called for cooperation between the two Koreas to fight infectious diseases amid the COVID-19 outbreak in Asia.

Amid the deadlock in larger nuclear negotiations with the Trump administration, Kim has suspended virtually all cooperation with South Korea in the past months while demanding that Seoul defy U.S.-led international sanctions and restart inter-Korean economic projects that would jolt the North's broken economy.

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North Korea has yet to confirm any COVID-19 cases, although state media have hinted that an uncertain number of people have been quarantined after exhibiting symptoms. North Korea has shut down nearly all cross-border traffic, banned tourists, intensified screening at entry points and mobilized tens of thousands of health workers to monitor residents and isolate those with symptoms. South Korea last month withdrew dozens of officials from an inter-Korean liaison office in Kaesong after North Korea insisted on closing it until the epidemic is controlled.

Kim and President Donald Trump have met three times since embarking on their high-stakes nuclear diplomacy in 2018, but negotiations have faltered since their second summit in February last year in Vietnam, where the Americans rejected North Korean demands for major sanctions relief in exchange for a partial surrender of its nuclear capability.

Following the collapse in Hanoi, the North ended a 17-month pause in ballistic activity and conducted at least 13 rounds of weapons launches last year, using the standstill in talks to expand its military capabilities.

Those weapons included road-mobile, solid-fuel missiles designed to beat missile defense systems and a developmental midrange missile that could eventually be launched from submarines, potentially strengthening the North's ability to strike targets in South Korea and Japan, including U.S. bases there.

In December, the North said it conducted two "crucial" tests at a long-range rocket facility that would strengthen its nuclear deterrent, prompting speculation that it's developing a new ICBM or preparing a satellite launch that would further advanced its long-range missile technology.

Associated Press writer Mari Yamaguchi in Tokyo contributed to this report.

Q&A: What's next for the Tokyo Olympics as virus spreads?

By STEPHEN WADE AP Sports Writer

TOKYO (AP) — The spreading virus from China has been reported in more than 60 countries and puts the Tokyo Olympics at risk. The Olympics are to open on July 24 — less than five months away. The Paralympics follow on Aug. 25.

IOC President Thomas Bach, in an interview last week limited to Japanese media, said the "IOC is fully committed to have the opening ceremony there on July 24th in Tokyo." He declined to speculate about a postponement, cancellation, or any combination of those possibilities.

Bach told the Japanese: "I'm not ready to add fuel to the flames of speculation there in any way."

Others are.

An Irish bookmaker last week began taking bets: 4/6 the opening ceremony will not go ahead in Tokyo as scheduled, or 11/10 that it will. In gambling terms, that means it's slightly above 50-50 that it will.

Senior IOC member Dick Pound last week suggested Tokyo and the IOC had roughly until the end of May to announce a decision. Pound, a former International Olympic Committee vice president, said there's no decision so far and stressed talks were nearly constant with the World Health Organization.

He has characterized the virus as the "elephant" in the room, likening the fight against it to "the new war."

"You just don't postpone something on the size and scale of the Olympics," Pound told the Associated Press. "There are so many moving parts; so many countries, so many different seasons and competitive seasons, television seasons. You can't say: 'We'll do it in October.' It's a big, big, big decision and you just can't take it until you have all the reliable facts on which to base it."

The virus has caused more than 3,000 deaths, the vast majority in China. Japan has reported 12 deaths with almost 1,000 cases.

Q: WHAT'S THE NEXT THING TO WATCH?

A: Tokyo 2020 CEO Toshiro Muto is holding a teleconference on Wednesday with the IOC executive board in Switzerland. The 14-member board along with Bach made the big decisions.

There could be changes to the torch relay, which is set to open March 26 in Fukushima prefecture, northeast of Tokyo. The event is heavily sponsored by Coca-Cola and Toyota. It might face crowd limits the way Sunday's Tokyo Marathon did. Preseason baseball games are being played in empty stadiums,

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soccer's J-League has suspended play, and a large Sumo event will be held without fans. Training for Tokyo's 80,000 unpaid volunteers has been postponed until at least May.

A month ago, Muto said he was "seriously worried" by the spread of the virus. He has become more cautious with his words since then.

Q: WHAT'S UP WITH THE TEST EVENTS?

A: There are 18 remaining test events. Many are small and involve only Japanese athletes, a chance for organizers to test venues and logistics. Two in the next several weeks are planned to have non-Japanese attending: Paralympic wheelchair rugby on March 12-15, and a gymnastics meet on April 4-6. They'll be watched to see if non-Japanese athletes compete.

Crowd restrictions could be put in place, although many don't call for fans in the first place.

Q: WHAT ABOUT OLYMPIC QUALIFYING EVENTS?

Officials announced on Monday that an Olympic baseball qualifying event was postponed from April to June. It will be held in Taiwan as scheduled, but on June 17-21 instead of April 1-5. The World Baseball Softball Conference said it was because of "player, personnel and spectator health and safety measures against the spread of the coronavirus."

Olympic qualifiers have been moved from China. Bach said that many Chinese teams and athletes are out of China and training elsewhere: the table tennis team is in Qatar, the women's basketball team is in Croatia, and wrestlers are in Serbia.

"We have managed to move qualification competitions and tournaments within weeks from China to other countries where the safety of the athletes could be ensured," Bach said.

Q: IOC MEMBER POUND MENTIONED LATE MAY AS A DEADLINE. IS THAT FIRM?

A: Pound is a senior IOC member. But he was speaking as a rank-and-file member when he speculated that late May was a deadline to decide on Tokyo's future. The call will be made by the IOC executive board, the WHO, and local organizers.. It seems reasonable that a decision will have to be made with two months to go.

The Olympics have thousands of moving parts. Sponsors who have paid billions must activate ad programs. More than 11,000 Olympic athletes and 4,400 for the Paralympics have to know their training schedules. Add to that: flights, hotel reservations, catering, ticketing, and broadcast schedules. Almost 75% of the IOC's income of \$5.7 billion in a four-year cycle is from broadcast rights.

Tokyo is officially spending \$12.6 billion to organize the Olympics, although a national audit board says it's twice that much.

Pound said all of the alternatives had major drawbacks: pushing the start back a few months, postponing until 2021, moving events to scattered venues or another city, or an outright cancellation. The modern Olympics dating from 1896 have been canceled three times during the two World Wars, and faced boycotts in 1976, 1980 and 1984.

Q: WHAT IS THE MOOD IN JAPAN?

A: It's uncertain and stressful, prompting some fear and hoarding in shops. On the other hand, daily life seems about normal, perhaps with fewer commuters on Tokyo's trains and more people wearing masks.

The government has asked all schools to close for more than a month. Prime Minister Shinzo Abe has been criticized for getting started late fighting the virus. He announced a 270 billion yen (\$2.5 billion) emergency economic aid package on Saturday. He said the country was at a critical juncture to determine whether it can keep the outbreak under control ahead of the Olympics.

"Frankly speaking, this battle cannot be won solely by the efforts of the government," Abe said. "We cannot do it without understanding and cooperation from every one of you, including medical institutions, families, companies and local governments."

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Biden fights for momentum in Democrats' shifting primary

By **STEVE PEOPLES, BILL BARROW and ALEXANDRA JAFFE** Associated Press

SELMA, Ala. (AP) — An emboldened Joe Biden is trying to cast himself as the clear moderate alternative to progressive Bernie Sanders as the Democrats' shrinking presidential field raced toward Super Tuesday.

One of Biden's leading moderate rivals, former South Bend, Indiana, mayor Pete Buttigieg, dropped out of the campaign Sunday just 24 hours after Biden scored a resounding victory in South Carolina, his first of the 2020 rollercoaster nomination fight.

While other rivals appeared undeterred, Biden pressed his case during a round of national television interviews that reflected a stark reality a day after his resounding primary victory in South Carolina: The former vice president was forced to rely upon free media coverage because he was understaffed, underfunded and almost out of time as he fought to transform his sole win into a national movement.

Biden vowed to improve his campaign operation, his fundraising haul — and even his own performance — in an interview on ABC's "This Week." He warned of a "stark choice" between him and Sanders, while making the case he was the candidate who could win up and down the ballot and in states beyond those voting next week.

Biden added a swipe at one of Sanders' signature lines during an appearance on "Fox New Sunday": "The people aren't looking for revolution. They're looking for results."

The newfound confidence came at a crossroads in the Democratic Party's turbulent primary season. Sanders remained the undisputed front-runner. But the rest of the field was decidedly unsettled, even after Biden's South Carolina blowout and Buttigieg's sudden departure.

Most notably, New York billionaire Mike Bloomberg could create problems for Biden as the race sped toward Super Tuesday, when 14 states from Maine to Alabama to California hold Democratic elections as the 2020 primary moved into a new phase. No longer would individual states hold primaries every week. Starting Tuesday, and most Tuesdays through early June, batches of states would vote at the same time in what had essentially become a national election.

Biden claimed a handful of new endorsements and fundraising successes on Sunday in his quest to project strength. Perhaps the most powerful endorsement would come from former President Barack Obama, who has a relationship with most of the candidates and has talked with several in recent weeks as primary voting has begun. He spoke with Biden after his South Carolina victory, but still has no plans to endorse in the primary at this point.

But a handful of high-profile political strategists with ties to the former president encouraged Biden's rivals — including Bloomberg — to quit the race to allow anti-Sanders' Democrats to unify behind Obama's former vice president.

"Most of them have seen the writing on the wall for at least the last week," said Rufus Gifford, who held top fundraising posts on both of Obama's campaigns and was part of Biden's fundraising operation. "It's clear the Democratic alternative to Bernie Sanders is Joe Biden."

Text messages reviewed by The Associated Press revealed an outpouring of interest in Biden from donors supporting other candidates, including Buttigieg and Elizabeth Warren.

Biden announced he took in \$5 million immediately after his South Carolina win, by far his best single day of fundraising over the last year. But in an example of Biden's challenge ahead, Sanders said Sunday he raised an eye-popping \$46.5 million for February. That compared to \$29 million for Warren and \$18 million for Biden over the same period.

Sanders, who dominated the money race for much of the year even though he did not court wealthy donors, said it was not the overall fundraising haul that should impress but the enthusiasm of working people fueling his candidacy.

"No campaign out there has a stronger grassroots movement than we do," Sanders said on CBS's "Face the Nation." "That's how you beat Trump."

Biden allies conceded that the post-South Carolina fundraising surge would have little impact on Super Tuesday.

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"Super Tuesday is too close," said former Pennsylvania Gov. Ed Rendell, a Biden supporter. "Fortunately, Joe Biden has been on the national scene for 35 years. He has less need to advertise."

Barry Goodman, a top Biden donor in Michigan and a prominent member of the Democratic National Committee, said he'd heard from about "a dozen or so" regular party donors who had been on the sidelines and now wanted to support Biden. He said he had personally targeting at least 20 Bloomberg supporters who had been sitting on their checkbooks at Bloomberg's request.

"If Mike had known what was going to happen last night in South Carolina, he'd never have gotten in," Goodman said.

As he exited the race on Sunday, Buttigieg said he was acknowledging reality: "The path has narrowed to a close for our candidacy."

Buttigieg didn't endorse any of the remaining candidates, though he and former Biden traded voicemails on Sunday. Buttigieg has spent the past several weeks warning that nominating progressive leader Bernie Sanders to take on President Donald Trump would be risky. Biden's other rivals showed no interest in getting out of the race. In fact, some vowed to keep fighting no matter what happened on Super Tuesday.

Warren campaign manager Roger Lau spoke brazenly of pushing into a floor battle at the Democratic National Convention this summer if no candidate emerged from the primary season with a clear majority, which was possible even if someone had a large delegate lead.

"The convention in Milwaukee is the final play," Lau wrote in a Sunday memo.

And Bloomberg, who this week will be on the ballot for the first time, insisted that he was not going anywhere before Tuesday's primaries.

"I'm optimistic," he told voters in Selma, Alabama, where many of the White House hopefuls gathered for ceremonies commemorating civil rights heroism.

Yet Bloomberg received a mixed reception as he spoke from the pulpit of Selma's Brown Chapel AME Church. Multiple parishioners stood and turned their backs to the New York billionaire neared the end of his 10-minute speech. That was after the pastor told the congregation that Bloomberg initially said he was too busy to attend because he had to "beat Donald Trump."

Biden declined to ask rivals to bow out when given the opportunity. "It's not for me to tell another candidate to get out of the race," Biden said on Fox.

Through four primary contests, the AP allocated at least 58 delegates to Sanders, including two added Sunday as South Carolina's remaining votes dribbled in. Biden vaulted past Buttigieg into second place with at least 50 delegates — shrinking Sanders' lead from what had been 30 delegates before South Carolina to eight. Buttigieg, Warren and Sen. Amy Klobuchar remained stuck at 26, eight and seven, respectively.

But the first four states were always more about momentum more than math. Super Tuesday states offer a trove of 1,344 new delegates based on how candidates finish. California alone offers 415, which is more than double the amount of delegates allocated through Iowa, New Hampshire, Nevada and South Carolina.

As Biden and Bloomberg courted African Americans in Alabama, Sanders spent his Sunday rallying thousands of supporters in California, the crown jewel of Super Tuesday. He predicted victory there and attacked Biden's record on foreign policy, trade and Social Security, among other issues.

"My point here is not just to be negative about Joe," Sanders said. "My point here is to ask you, 'What campaign is going to beat Donald Trump?'"

Peoples reported from Washington and Barrow reported from Columbia, South Carolina. Associated Press writers Brian Slodysko, Will Weissert, Hope Yen, Julie Pace and Seth Borenstein in Washington contributed to this report.

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Inside the final month of Buttigieg's historic campaign

By **STEVE PEOPLES** and **THOMAS BEAUMONT** Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — He opened February by sharing victory with one of the Democratic Party's best-known figures and ended it with a humbling defeat at the hands of another. Yet Pete Buttigieg's unlikely path over the last 30 days exceeded virtually everyone's expectations of his presidential ambitions, except perhaps his own.

The former mayor of Indiana's fourth largest city, an openly gay 38-year-old whose name most voters still can't pronounce, formally suspended his White House bid Sunday night. He did so acknowledging that he no longer had a viable path to the Democratic Party's presidential nomination, even after finishing in the top four in each of the first four contests of the 2020 primary season.

"By every historical measure, we were never supposed to get anywhere at all," Buttigieg reminded his hometown crowd, which was disappointed and hopeful at the same time. They interrupted his speech with chants of "2024."

Buttigieg began the month effectively in a first-place tie with progressive powerhouse Bernie Sanders in Iowa's presidential caucuses. The mayor made history as the first openly gay candidate to earn a presidential delegate, never mind becoming the first to finish on top in any presidential primary contest.

He won over Iowa as a fresh-faced Democrat with a pragmatic Midwestern message backed by an aggressive strategy to reach voters in overlooked rural communities. And if not for the state's chaotic struggle to report its results, the Feb. 3 contest could have vaulted him to further heights.

Buttigieg and his competitors pivoted quickly to New Hampshire, where he was a decided underdog in a field that featured two neighboring senators and a former vice president. Yet the mayor from nearly 1,000 miles away showed surprising strength again.

He nearly tripled Massachusetts Sen. Elizabeth Warren's vote total and finished just one percentage point behind Sanders, the winner.

"You know, he very nearly pulled it off," said David Axelrod, who served as the senior adviser to former President Barack Obama and was at times an unofficial Buttigieg booster.

Axelrod cited Iowa's reporting fiasco and Minnesota Sen. Amy Klobuchar New Hampshire surge as key factors that limited Buttigieg's rise.

"If those two things would have been different, we would be having a different conversation now," he said.

Questions about Buttigieg's appeal with voters of color loomed over strong finishes in overwhelmingly white Iowa and New Hampshire, however. And as soon as the race shifted into more diverse terrain, Buttigieg's star began to fade.

In Nevada, he finished in third place behind Sanders and former Vice President Joe Biden, even as he bested two senators and a billionaire. And by the time the race moved to South Carolina a week later, Buttigieg's weakness with African-American voters was painfully exposed.

He failed to hit double digits in the first-in-the-South contest on Saturday, scoring a distant fourth place in a state in which more than half of Democratic primary voters were not white. Less than two hours after holding what would be his final rally in Raleigh, North Carolina, Buttigieg was hunkered on the phone in a hotel near Americus, Georgia, working out the details of ending his campaign, people familiar with the conversation said.

On the phone with him were communications strategist Lis Smith, senior strategist Michael Halle, pollster Katie Connolly, media adviser Larry Grisalano, deputy campaign manager Hari Sevugan and longtime campaign manager Mike Schmul, according to aides familiar with the conversation who spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to share internal discussions.

Having laid out a narrow but viable path to the nomination through an uncertain state-by-state fight, advisers painted a picture of a difficult road ahead.

After someone interjected that Buttigieg should speak, the candidate, known for an understated deliberative style, noted effectively that if the conversation had reached that point the decision was pretty clear.

Though there were details to work out about how to handle his appearances on Sunday news programs,

the conversation quickly turned to the logistics of pulling down his Texas campaign events scheduled for Sunday and how to arrange for the speech in South Bend.

When discussion during the call turned to a possible endorsement, the team decided it might detract from what was a speech heavy with references to Buttigieg's ground-breaking campaign and his eye on the future.

It marked a humbling end to a history-making month for the young Democrat, who could wait another 10 presidential elections to run again and still be the same age as the man who knocked him out of the race.

Buttigieg's decision reflected the urgency of the moment as establishment Democrats feared Sanders' rise might be unstoppable unless the party's moderate wing united behind Biden's candidacy. It also reflected the no-time-to-waste analytical nature of Buttigieg himself, a former Rhodes scholar who worked for the McKinsey & Company management consulting firm soon after finishing his Ivy League education.

"The truth is the path has narrowed to a close for our candidacy if not for our cause," Buttigieg told supporters in South Bend. "We must recognize that at this point in the race, the best way to keep faith with those goals and ideals is to step aside and help bring our party and country together."

He didn't endorse any of the six candidates still in the race, though he and Biden traded voicemails on Sunday. Buttigieg has spent the past several weeks warning that nominating Sanders would be risky.

And as the first openly gay candidate to seriously contend for the presidency, he nodded to the historic nature of his campaign. He kissed his husband, Chasten, as he walked onto the stage and offered a message for children who might be watching.

"We send a message to every kid out there wondering if whatever marks them out as different means they are somehow destined to be less than," Buttigieg said. "To see that someone who once felt that exact same way can become a leading American presidential candidate with his husband by his side."

Meanwhile, Axelrod said "the Pete Buttigieg story isn't over."

"He's 38 years old," the former Obama strategist said. "He's vaulted himself into the national conversation. He obviously has work to do on some things that -- some weaknesses we've seen in this election -- but whenever there is a conversation again about Democratic candidates, he'll be in that conversation. And that's a remarkable achievement, given where he started a year ago."

Beaumont reported from Des Moines, Iowa.

Media faces challenges in covering coronavirus outbreak

By DAVID BAUDER AP Media Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Covering the coronavirus story requires careful navigation and constant attention.

News organizations trying to responsibly report on the growing health crisis are confronted with the task of conveying its seriousness without provoking panic, keeping up with a torrent of information while much remains a mystery and continually advising readers and viewers how to stay safe.

"It's a 24-hour-a-day, seven-day-a-week, around-the-world story," said Michael Slackman, international editor at The New York Times.

The Times maintains a live news blog about the coronavirus that is refreshed 24 hours a day, with editors in New York, London and Hong Kong dividing responsibility. The Slack channel set up by Associated Press journalists to discuss coverage among themselves and contribute to the story has more than 400 members. Starting Monday, NBC News is turning its morning newsletter solely into a vehicle for talking about the disease.

The coronavirus has sickened thousands, quarantined millions and sent financial markets reeling — all while some cultural critics say the story is overblown.

"It's hard to tell people to put something into context and to calm down when the actions being taken in many cases are very strong or unprecedented," said Glen Nowak, director of the Grady College Center for Health and Risk Communication at the University of Georgia.

But that's what journalists in charge of coverage say they need to do.

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"We have been providing a lot of explainers, Q-and-A's, trying to lay out in clear, simple language what the symptoms are and what the disease means for people," said Jon Fahey, health and science editor at the AP.

Fear is a natural response when people read about millions of people locked down in China, he said. Yet it's also true that, right now, the individual risk to people is very small.

Late last week, the Times' Vivian Wang tried to illustrate some of the complexities in writing about a disease that has struck more than 80,000 people, with a death toll approaching 3,000. Most people have mild symptoms — good fortune that paradoxically can make the disease harder to contain because many won't realize they have the coronavirus, she noted.

"I keep reminding the viewers that still, based on two very large studies, the vast majority of people who get this infection are not going to get sick," said Dr. Sanjay Gupta, CNN's medical correspondent. "They're going to have a mild illness, if any, and they're going to recover. This tends to be very reassuring to people. But I don't want to minimize this. We're dealing with something that is growing and becoming a legitimate pandemic."

"Pandemic" — defined by Webster's as an outbreak that occurs over a wide geographic area and affects an exceptionally high proportion of the population — is one of the scary-sounding words and phrases that some journalists take care about using.

Fahey said the AP avoids calling it a "deadly" disease because, for most people, it isn't. Dr. John Torres, medical correspondent at NBC News, edits out phrases like "horrific" or "catastrophic."

"I try not to delve too much in adjectives," Torres said.

Nearly every day brings word of more cases, in more countries. That's news. Yet should journalists consider the cumulative impact of a statistical drumbeat? "At some point the numbers become less meaningful," Gupta said.

Images, too, merit careful consideration. Pictures of people wearing face masks often illustrate stories, despite evidence that the masks matter little in transmission of the virus, Nowak said.

Sensational headlines can grab attention yet also unnecessarily frighten. The banner of an Atlantic magazine article last week, "You're Likely to Get the Coronavirus," earned author James Hamblin a segment on MSNBC's "Morning Joe."

Sensationalism actually tends to decline in these situations, said Peter Sandman, a consultant and expert in risk communication.

"Reporters love to sensationalize trivia or rare risks — think flesh-eating bacteria — to give their audience a vicarious thrill," Sandman said. "But when risks get serious and widespread, media coverage gets sober."

The words and actions of journalists and other public figures send signals of their own.

CNN's Gupta has talked about people needing to consider "social distancing" if pockets of infection build in the United States. He has revealed on the air that his own house is stocked with supplies in case his family has to remain home for any period of time.

"People could be frightened by that," Gupta conceded. "It's not the intent. It's in the way that you convey these things."

It was news last week, and also a little scary, when it was revealed that a federal health official had checked on the coronavirus readiness of her child's school district. Donald G. McNeil, a science reporter at The New York Times, attracted attention for talking about his own preparedness on the newspaper's podcast, "The Daily."

"I spend a lot of time thinking about whether I'm being too alarmist or whether I'm not being alarmist enough," he said.

Besides constantly reminding people about basics of the disease, journalists say it's important to explain what they don't know.

"It lets them know that we're not just ignoring the questions or dismissing them, and it's an opportunity to show readers how science progresses in real time," said Laura Helmuth, health and science editor at The Washington Post.

The Post's Lena H. Sun and Yasmeen Abutaleb wrote last week about the U.S. Department of Health and

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Human Services sending workers without proper training or protective gear to meet the first Americans who left the coronavirus epicenter of Wuhan, China.

The virus produces a seemingly endless supply of stories that stretch beyond the medical: Wall Street's tumble, school and business closings, concert cancellations. The makers of Corona beer denied reports that the similarity of its name to the virus was hurting business. Italians are shying away from traditional kisses on the cheek. Churchgoers are nervous about handshake greetings of peace.

Last Thursday, the AP listed 17 coronavirus stories on the digest it sends to subscribers, including pieces from Japan, Italy, Australia, South Korea and China.

The Times takes pride in how it profiled the lives of people stuck in Wuhan, through reporting by Chris Buckley, Amy Qin and Elsie Chen. Such front-line reporting illustrates another need: The paper maintains a hotline with a medical professional to answer questions from reporters concerned about their own health, Slackman said.

As is inevitable in divided times, the coronavirus has become a political issue in the United States, where commentators are weighing in on how President Donald Trump is reacting to the crisis. On Fox News, Donald Trump Jr. said of the Democrats: "For them to try to take a pandemic, and hope it comes here and kills millions of people so they can end Donald Trump's streak of winning, is a new level of sickness."

CNN's Gupta said he tries to be wary of what politicians say about the coronavirus.

"As a medical journalist, I don't have the luxury of just getting somebody's opinion about something," he said.

Authorities announce 2nd coronavirus death in US

By CARLA K. JOHNSON and GILLIAN FLACCUS Associated Press

SEATTLE (AP) — Health officials in Washington state said Sunday night that a second person had died from the coronavirus — a man in his 70s from a nursing facility near Seattle where dozens of people were sick and had been tested for the virus.

Researchers said earlier the virus may have been circulating for weeks undetected in Washington state.

In a statement, Public Health—Seattle & King County said the man died Saturday. On Friday, health officials said a man in his 50s died of coronavirus, the first death from the virus in the U.S.. Both had underlying health conditions, and both were being treated at a hospital in Kirkland, Washington, east of Seattle.

Washington state now has 12 confirmed cases.

State and local authorities stepped up testing for the illness as the number of new cases grew nationwide, with new infections announced in California, Florida, Illinois, Rhode Island, New York and Washington state.

Authorities in the Seattle area reported four new cases Sunday night, including the man who died. Two health care workers in California were also diagnosed. Of the new Washington state cases, two were women, one in her 80s and another in her 90s. Both were in critical condition. A man in his 70s was also in critical condition. All three were from the LifeCare nursing facility in Kirkland, Washington, where health officials said 50 people are sick and being tested for the virus.

On Sunday night, the International Association of Fire Fighters said 25 members who responded to calls for help at the nursing facility are being quarantined.

The first U.S. case was a Washington state man who had visited China, where the virus first emerged, but several recent cases in the U.S. have had no known connection to travelers.

In California, two health care workers in the San Francisco Bay area who cared for an earlier coronavirus patient were diagnosed with the virus on Sunday, the Alameda and Solano counties said in a joint statement.

The health care workers are both employed at NorthBay VacaValley Hospital in Vacaville, California, and had exposure to a patient treated there before being transferred to UC Davis Medical Center in Sacramento, the statement said. That patient was the first person in the U.S. discovered to have contracted the coronavirus with no known overseas travel.

Alameda County declared a state of emergency on Sunday following the news.

In Oregon, the state Health Authority said Sunday that a second person in the state tested positive for

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the virus. The person is an adult in household contact with the first Oregonian to test positive and does not need medical attention, the authority said.

Elsewhere, authorities announced Sunday a third case in Illinois, a second in Rhode Island and a first case in New York as worried Americans swarmed stores to stock up on basic goods such as bottled water, canned foods and toilet paper.

The patients in Rhode Island were on a school trip to Italy together in February. A third person from the trip is being tested, and the school is shutting down for the week.

In New York, officials confirmed Sunday that a woman in her late 30s contracted the virus while traveling in Iran. She has been quarantined to her home in Manhattan.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said Sunday that it was retesting someone in San Antonio, Texas, who had been released from isolation Saturday but later returned after a lab test was "weakly positive." The patient had been treated at a local medical facility for several weeks after returning from Wuhan, China. The agency said the patient had met the criteria for release and was asymptomatic. Bexar County Judge Nelson Wolff told the San Antonio Express-News that the patient was a woman who had come into contact with around a dozen people at a hotel. Both Wolff and San Antonio Mayor Ron Nirenberg expressed concerns over the patient's initial release in a statement.

As the fallout continued, Vice President Mike Pence and Health and Human Services Secretary Alex Azar sought to reassure the American public that the federal government is working to make sure state and local authorities are able to test for the virus. Both said during a round of TV talk show appearances Sunday that thousands more testing kits had been distributed to state and local officials, with thousands more to come.

"They should know we have the best public health system in the world looking out for them," Azar said, adding that additional cases will be reported and the overall risk to Americans is low.

As the cases ticked up, some Americans stocked up on basic supplies — particularly in areas with diagnosed cases — and began to take note of the impact on daily life. Stores such as Costco sold out of toilet paper, bottled water and hand sanitizer outside Portland, Oregon, where a case was announced Friday. Sports games and practices were canceled into the coming school week. Some churches said they would not offer communion because of fears of viral spread.

As Americans prepared, researchers at the Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center and the University of Washington on Sunday said they had evidence the virus may have been circulating in the state for up to six weeks undetected — a finding that, if true, could mean hundreds of undiagnosed cases in the area. They posted their research online, but it was not published in a scientific journal or reviewed by other scientists.

Trevor Bedford, an associate professor who announced the preliminary findings on the virus in Washington state, said on Twitter late Saturday that genetic similarities between the state's first case on Jan. 20 and a case announced Friday indicated the newer case may have descended from the earlier one. The Jan. 20 case was the first known case in the U.S.

"I believe we're facing an already substantial outbreak in Washington State that was not detected until now due to narrow case definition requiring direct travel to China," he said on Twitter.

Bedford did not immediately reply to an e-mail requesting an interview Sunday.

Scientists not affiliated with the research said the results did not necessarily surprise them and pointed out that for many people — especially younger, healthier ones — the symptoms are not much worse than a flu or bad cold.

"We think that this has a pretty high rate of mild symptoms and can be asymptomatic. The symptoms are pretty non-specific and testing criteria has been pretty strict, so those combinations of factors means that it easily could have been circulating for a bit without us knowing," said Justin Lessler, an associate professor of epidemiology at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health.

Dr. Adam Luring of University of Michigan called the findings "high quality work" from scientists who've done similar work with the flu virus for years.

"They show their data and they show their work," Luring said. "It's more than a series of tweets" be-

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cause the researchers back up what they found with data that they've shared online. "If there's something wrong, someone will find it."

Dr. Carlos del Rio of Emory University School of Medicine said the findings are from respected researchers in genomic sequencing and they make sense because of the geographic proximity of the two cases.

"This is a good time to reinforce the things we all should be doing to stop the spread of flu. Wash your hands. Don't touch your face. If you have a cold, stay home ... It's a good time to remind ourselves of that," he said.

Pence, named by the president to be the point-person overseeing the government's response, said more than 15,000 virus testing kits had been released over the weekend. And, the administration is working with a commercial provider to distribute 50,000 more, he said.

The vice president said testing was among the first issues raised by governors he's spoken with so far. Several states have begun their own testing, including Washington state, Oregon and Illinois.

"We're leaning into it," Pence said.

Azar said more than 3,600 people already have been tested for coronavirus and the capability exists to test 75,000 people. He forecast a "radical expansion of that" in the coming weeks.

Pence and Azar spoke a day after President Donald Trump approved new restrictions on international travel to prevent the spread within the U.S. of the new virus, which originated in China. There are now more than 80,000 cases worldwide and about 3,000 deaths.

The number of known coronavirus cases in the U.S. had reached at least 80 as of Sunday, counting people evacuated from a cruise ship and Wuhan.

Trump said Saturday at a White House news conference that he was thinking about closing the southern border with Mexico as a precaution. Azar said Sunday that Mexico has few coronavirus cases and that it would take a dramatic change in the circumstances there to prompt serious consideration of a border shutdown.

The president, Azar said, "was trying to say everything's on the table."

"We will take whatever measures are appropriate and necessary to protect the American people, but we don't forecast doing that any time soon," he said of closing the border.

This story has been corrected to reflect that the hospitalized patient in Rhode Island is a man, not a woman, who traveled to Italy in February.

Flaccus reported from Portland, Oregon. AP writers Darlene Superville in Washington and Chris Grygiel in Seattle contributed.

Bloomberg's biggest test: winning votes on Super Tuesday

By ALEXANDRA JAFFE and KATHLEEN RONAYNE Associated Press

SELMA, Ala. (AP) — Moments before Mike Bloomberg stood in the pulpit of Brown Chapel AME Church, the pastor noted that the former New York mayor initially declined an invitation to speak at the church where, 55 years ago, civil rights activists prepared for the historic march to Montgomery. The pastor praised Bloomberg's change of heart, but the Democratic presidential candidate struggled to win over his audience. Multiple parishioners stood and turned their backs to him.

A short time later, the church erupted in cheers when former Vice President Joe Biden — fresh off his victory in the South Carolina primary — strode into the sanctuary and sat behind the pulpit.

The contrasting responses on Sunday were a stark reminder that Bloomberg's unprecedented investment in the presidential campaign may have little payoff if a diverse coalition of voters spurn him in the 14 states that vote Tuesday, including Alabama. The billionaire former New York mayor seemed to be aware of the high stakes he faces on Super Tuesday.

"I've got a primary to run and to win," he said at the Martin and Coretta King Unity Breakfast in Selma, Alabama. "We'll see what happens."

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Bloomberg has sought to make issues of race central to his campaign. He has acknowledged his privilege as a white man, released several criminal justice proposals and landed endorsements from prominent black elected officials, including the mayor of Washington and several members of the Congressional Black Caucus. He has also been frank in expressing regret for the stop-and-frisk policing program that disproportionately affected black and Latino New Yorkers during his tenure as mayor.

On Sunday, just hours after he campaigned in Selma, he won the endorsement of California state Assemblywoman Shirley Weber, a black legislator who authored one of the nation's strictest laws on when police can use deadly force.

But after Biden's commanding win in South Carolina, which was powered by support from African Americans, Bloomberg is facing mounting pressure to justify his presence in the race. Some Democrats fear that Bloomberg will take votes on Super Tuesday that would otherwise go to Biden, making it harder for the party to unite behind a single moderate alternative to Bernie Sanders, who some in the party establishment think is too liberal to beat President Donald Trump.

"Mike Bloomberg says that Bernie Sanders can't beat Trump, yet his presence in the race makes it much more likely that Bernie Sanders will enter the convention with the delegate lead," said Dan Pfeiffer, a longtime aide to former President Barack Obama who recently called on Bloomberg to drop out. "Given how many delegates are at stake on Super Tuesday, particularly in California and Texas, Bloomberg could massively strengthen Sanders' grip on the nomination next week."

Even if Bloomberg has a poor showing on Tuesday, he's likely to press on. His campaign hasn't set clear expectations for victory on Tuesday, but adviser Tim O'Brien said there's no scenario in which he exits the race due to the results. He's already invested heavily in states that come next, including general election battleground states like Florida, where he'll appear Tuesday night.

"It's our first test with voters so it's very important to us," O'Brien said. "But we're also in this for the long haul. There's still a lot of the country to be heard from and we're in 45-plus states and territories, so we're going to be fighting it through."

Bloomberg spent much of last week campaigning in a handful of Southern and Western states where his aides say they believe he could notch a win, largely because he's the only candidate who's been able to visit multiple times or air ads in many of them. His campaign believes he has a particular appeal to suburban Democrats — those well-educated, upper middle-class voters who may be more moderate on financial issues and may have followed his political advocacy on gun control and climate change.

Arkansas, Alabama, North Carolina, Virginia and Tennessee are the Super Tuesday states with significant black populations. Texas and California, the biggest delegate prizes, meanwhile, are each roughly 40% Latino, a group of voters Sanders has aggressively targeted. Other states that vote Tuesday, like Utah, Maine and Vermont, are heavily white, but offer low delegate hauls.

Bloomberg's aides admit Biden's South Carolina win makes their path tougher. But they believe the coronavirus outbreak gives Bloomberg an opportunity to make an even stronger case for his candidacy as the only proven problem-solver in the field. The campaign aired a three-minute ad Sunday night on two major networks touting his leadership in times of crisis as New York mayor, including in the aftermath of 9/11.

Bloomberg is campaigning for the presidency in the same way he ran three times for City Hall in New York: overwhelming his rivals with so much spending that it becomes hard to compete.

He's the only candidate on air in all 14 states, and has staff on the ground in every state, including some teams that campaign leadership says are bigger than any campaign has built for a prior election.

Bloomberg has spent nearly \$180 million on television advertising alone in the 14 Super Tuesday states, with more than \$100 million of that spent just in California and Texas, the two biggest delegate hauls in the primary contest. That's nearly \$3 per registered voter in both states.

"I've just never seen anything quite as dramatic as these buys," said Sheri Sadler, who runs a political media buying firm based in California and consulted for Tom Steyer's nascent campaign.

While Bloomberg only campaigned in Texas in the final week before the primary and did not personally visit California, he's purchased ads in every single media market in both states in the 10 days leading up

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to Super Tuesday, according to TV spending data obtained by The Associated Press. As of Saturday, when South Carolina voted, about 1.4 million California Democrats had already returned mail-in ballots. That's roughly 20% of the ballots that went out.

Someone in San Diego, the state's second-largest city and a former Republican stronghold that's seen its politics shift over the last decade, could see a Bloomberg ad as many as 40 times in that window. In North Carolina, some TV viewers in the northeastern corner of the state may have seen Bloomberg ads as many as 180 times since he entered the race and began spending money there.

He's even spending big in the home states of rivals Elizabeth Warren and Amy Klobuchar, at more than \$9 million in Massachusetts and nearly \$8 million in Minnesota.

The ads are just one piece of Bloomberg's unmatched campaign spending. Attendees get free T-shirts at every Bloomberg event, with one of his general campaign slogans including "I Like Mike," or specialized T-shirts for whatever state the event is in. Nearly every event has specialized signage and a backdrop themed to the city the event is in; a massive sign with Nashville's city skyline outlined in red framed Bloomberg as he spoke to voters in a concert venue in mid-February. They're treated to catered buffets ranging from cheese plates and small sandwiches to mini quiches to barbecue.

For Cookie Arthur Smith, an undecided voter at a Bloomberg event in Wilmington, North Carolina, on Saturday, that was enough to pique her interest.

"I think he's a rough and tough businessman who really has made money on his own and not coasted along on his daddy's coattails," she said. "And, my God, he gave us this free barbecue. What's not to like?"

Associated Press writer Jay Reeves in Selma, Alabama, contributed to this report.

AP FACT CHECK: Trump's viral spin; Sanders' delegates flip

By HOPE YEN and CALVIN WOODWARD Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump has not proved to be the bearer of reliable information when calamity threatens and people want straight answers about it. That's happening again as he addresses the prospect of a coronavirus outbreak in the U.S.

With numbers still low, but the first death in the U.S. now reported, the infectious disease risks not only public health but the economy he holds up to voters for his reelection. To date, his comments have largely seemed intended to put a positive spin on hard information from the scientists, as if he were wishing the problem away.

Trump has a record of unreliability on this front. In one hurricane episode, he displayed a map doctored to reflect his personal and ill-founded theory that Alabama would take it on the chin. In another, he dismissed the Puerto Rico death toll as a concoction by Democrats.

Meanwhile, leading the Democratic primary race and heading into Super Tuesday contests, Bernie Sanders misrepresented his past stance on how many delegates a candidate must amass before clinching the party's presidential nomination.

Here are the facts behind some of the recent political rhetoric:

DEMOCRATIC PRIMARY

SANDERS: "If I, or anybody else, goes into the Democratic convention with a substantial plurality, I believe that individual, me or anybody else, should be the candidate of the Democratic Party." — CNN town hall on Feb. 24.

JOE BIDEN, arguing Sanders flipped his position from 2016: "There's not a lot of consistency coming out of some of these campaigns." -- interview Sunday on ABC's "This Week."

SANDERS: "I'm not being inconsistent with what I said in 2016. ... If we go into Milwaukee, into the Democratic Convention with a lead, having won many, many states, having won the people's vote, and that is reversed at the convention, how do you think people all over this country are going to feel?" — interview Sunday on ABC.

THE FACTS: Biden is right. Sanders' position has shifted since 2016, when he said superdelegates should

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consider backing him even though he trailed Hillary Clinton in the number of pledged delegates because he had other strengths, such as an ability to beat Donald Trump. Late into the 2016 primary season, Sanders also publicly urged a "contested convention," saying democracy is "messy" and requires vigorous debate.

At one point in May 2016, after falling behind Clinton by more than 300 pledged delegates and millions in primary votes, Sanders called on superdelegates -- members of Congress and other party leaders who can support the candidate of their choice -- to side with him.

"The responsibility that superdelegates have is to decide what is best for the country and what is best for the Democratic Party," he said at the time.

His top strategist then, Tad Devine, argued that a plurality of pledged delegates should only be one factor in picking a nominee, along with a candidate's momentum over the course of the primary season, such as winning the California primary being held in June.

Ultimately, Clinton prevailed in the California primary, and Sanders conceded the nomination after superdelegates showed no signs of switching their support from her.

Under new DNC rules, if no candidate receives support from a majority of pledged delegates on the first ballot at the convention, about 770 superdelegates would be allowed to vote on a second ballot.

Those rules changes came about after the 2016 election because Sanders and top advisers insisted on diminishing the influence of superdelegates at the convention.

Sanders is now dismissing a process that his own campaign team helped create.

VIRUS OUTBREAK

TRUMP: "We are rapidly developing a vaccine. ... The vaccine is coming along well, and in speaking to the doctors, we think this is something that we can develop very rapidly." — news conference Wednesday.

THE FACTS: No vaccine is imminent for the coronavirus.

A candidate vaccine for the virus causing COVID-19 is approaching first-step safety tests, but federal experts say anything widely usable is probably more than a year away.

"We can't rely on a vaccine over the next several months," said Dr. Anthony Fauci, the top infectious disease chief at the National Institutes of Health.

TRUMP: "The level of death with Ebola — you know, at the time, it was a virtual 100%. ... There's a very good chance you're not going to die. It's very much the opposite. You're talking about 1 or 2%, whereas in the other case, it was a virtual 100%. Now they have it; they have studied it. They know very much. In fact, we're very close to a vaccine." — news conference Tuesday in New Delhi.

THE FACTS: "Close" is not correct. A vaccine has already been developed for Ebola. The FDA approved an Ebola vaccine in December. Even before its U.S. approval, it was being used in Congo to help stem the current outbreak.

TRUMP, on U.S. coronavirus cases: "We're going down, not up. We're going very substantially down, not up." — news conference Wednesday.

THE FACTS: That was false assurance. He was referring to the fact that most of the people he cited as having COVID-19 in the U.S. are getting better. But that is not indicative of the spread or containment of the disease since most victims, by far, recover.

Cases in the U.S. are almost certain to increase, his own officials have said repeatedly, and he acknowledged as much Saturday.

TRUMP: "Unfortunately, one person passed away overnight. She was a wonderful woman, a medically high-risk patient in her late 50s." — news conference Saturday.

THE FACTS: The patient who died of the disease was a man. Dr. Robert Redfield, director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, said the CDC mistakenly told Trump and Vice President Mike Pence that the victim was female.

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TRUMP: "The flu in our country kills from 25,000 people to 69,000 people a year; that was shocking to me. And so far, if you look at what we have with the 15 people, and they are recovering." — news briefing Wednesday.

THE FACTS: His remarks on the coronavirus risks are misleading. Scientists don't know enough about how deadly the new virus actually is, and so far it hasn't infected nearly as many people as the flu. Of the cases cited by Trump, they are not "all recovering." One died and four others are "very ill," he said Saturday. On Sunday, Washington state officials said a second man had died.

Flu deaths fluctuate depending on which strain is circulating and how well each year's vaccine is working, but Trump's cited range is in the ballpark. Two flu seasons ago, the CDC estimated there were 80,000 U.S. deaths, the highest death toll in at least four decades. This year's flu season isn't as deadly; so far this season, the CDC estimates there have been 16,000 to 41,000 deaths from the flu.

As to COVID-19, an illness characterized by fever and coughing and in serious cases shortness of breath or pneumonia, there are now about 80 cases in the U.S. In addition to the ones Trump cited, 45 were among groups the U.S. government evacuated and quarantined either from China or the Diamond Princess cruise ship.

In the hardest-hit part of China, the death rate from the new coronavirus was between 2% and 4%, while in other parts of China it was 0.7%. In contrast, the death rate from seasonal flu on average is about 0.1%, said Fauci, of the U.S. National Institutes of Health. That's far lower than what has been calculated so far for COVID-19. But millions of people get the flu every year around the world, leading to a global annual death toll in the hundreds of thousands.

MIKE BLOOMBERG: "There's nobody here to figure out what the hell we should be doing. And he's defunded — he's defunded Centers for Disease Control, CDC, so we don't have the organization we need. This is a very serious thing." — Democratic presidential debate Tuesday.

JOE BIDEN, comparing the Obama-Biden administration with now: "We increased the budget of the CDC. We increased the NIH budget. ... He's wiped all that out. ... He cut the funding for the entire effort."

THE FACTS: They're both wrong to say the agencies have seen their money cut. Bloomberg is repeating the false allegation in a new ad that states the U.S. is unprepared for the virus because of "reckless cuts" to the CDC. Trump's budgets have proposed cuts to public health, only to be overruled by Congress, where there's strong bipartisan support for agencies such as the CDC and NIH. Instead, financing has increased.

Indeed, the money that government disease detectives first tapped to fight the latest outbreak was a congressional fund created for health emergencies.

Some public health experts say a bigger concern than White House budgets is the steady erosion of a CDC grant program for state and local public health emergency preparedness — the front lines in detecting and battling new disease. But that decline was set in motion by a congressional budget measure that predates Trump.

The broader point about there being "nobody here" to coordinate the response sells short what's in place to handle an outbreak.

The public health system has a playbook to follow for pandemic preparation — regardless of who's president or whether specific instructions are coming from the White House. Public-health experts outside government have praised the CDC's work so far and noted that its top scientific ranks have remained stable during the past three years.

HEALTH CARE

BERNIE SANDERS: "What every study out there — conservative or progressive — says, 'Medicare for All' will save money." — Democratic debate.

THE FACTS: Not true. Some studies say that, some don't.

Sanders, a Vermont senator, cites a recent medical journal article in *The Lancet*, which estimated "Medi-

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care for All" would save more than \$450 billion annually, or about 13%.

But other studies have found a Sanders-like single-payer plan would cost more, partly because free health care would increase the demand for services.

A study last fall from the Commonwealth Fund and the Urban Institute estimated that such a plan would increase national health spending by about \$720 billion. A Rand study estimated spending would increase 1.8% under a national single-payer plan.

GUN CONTROL

JOE BIDEN: "A hundred and fifty million people have been killed since 2007, when Bernie voted to exempt the gun manufacturers from liability." — Democratic debate.

THE FACTS: Biden vastly overstated gun deaths. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reports about 413,000 gun deaths from 2007 to 2018, a far cry from 150 million, which equates to close to half the U.S. population. More than half of the gun deaths in 2018 were from suicide, says the CDC. His campaign acknowledged he misspoke.

AMY KLOBUCHAR: "I am the author of the bill to close the boyfriend loophole that says that domestic abusers can't go out and get an AK-47."

BIDEN: "I wrote that law."

KLOBUCHAR: "You didn't write that bill, I wrote that bill."

BIDEN: "I wrote the bill, the Violence Against Women Act, that took (guns) out of the hands of people who abused their wife."

KLOBUCHAR: "OK we'll have a fact check look at this." — Democratic debate.

BIDEN: "No, let's look at the fact check. The only thing (is) that that boyfriend loophole was not covered, I couldn't get that covered. You, in fact, as a senator tried to get it covered and Mitch McConnell is holding it up on his desk right now."

THE FACTS: Klobuchar, a Minnesota senator, correctly called out the former vice president for seeming to take credit for legislation closing the "boyfriend loophole." Biden conceded the point, then correctly pointed out that the loophole has not been eliminated in law.

In short, Biden did write the legislation that became the Violence Against Women Act, one of his most prominent achievements. The 1994 law sets out services and specific protections for victims of domestic violence.

Klobuchar took the lead in the Senate on legislation passed by the House that would extend the law's protections to help women who are threatened by abusive partners who are not a spouse, ex-spouse or parent of a common child — in other words, boyfriends or dating partners. But that effort, opposed by the National Rifle Association, has been hung up in the Senate.

WOMEN IN THE WORKPLACE

BLOOMBERG, responding to Elizabeth Warren's demand that he lift non-disclosure agreements for all women who signed them: "We are doing that, senator." — Democratic debate.

THE FACTS: He hasn't done that.

Bloomberg agreed to release three women from non-disclosure agreements in situations where they specifically identified an issue with him. But many more former Bloomberg employees have signed such agreements, having to do with the culture and work environment at his company. He hasn't freed them from their obligation to stay quiet about their complaints.

WARREN: "At least I didn't have a boss who said to me 'kill it' the way that Mayor Bloomberg is alleged to have said to one of his pregnant employees."

BLOOMBERG: "I never said that." — Democratic debate.

THE FACTS: The woman who made the allegation against Bloomberg recounted it in a legal filing.

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Former Bloomberg employee Sekiko Sekai Garrison, 55, filed a complaint against Bloomberg and his company with the New York Division of Human Rights in 1995. In Garrison's written complaint, she recounted several personal interactions with Bloomberg when she worked at the company.

In one incident, Garrison said Bloomberg approached her near the office coffee machines and asked if she was still married, according to the complaint.

Garrison says she responded that her marriage was great and that she was pregnant with her first child, and alleged that Bloomberg replied: "Kill it." Bloomberg has denied that the exchange happened, but in her complaint, she transcribed a voicemail she says Bloomberg later left on her voicemail, apologizing and saying he meant the "kill it" remark as a joke. Her complaint was eventually settled as part of a lawsuit with no admission of guilt, and she resigned from the company.

CHINA

BLOOMBERG, on China's president, Xi Jinping: "In terms of whether he's a dictator, he does serve at the behest of the Politburo, their group of people. There's no question he has an enormous amount of power. But he does play to his constituency." — Democratic debate.

THE FACTS: He's minimizing Xi's broad powers in China.

Xi serves as the head of the ruling Communist Party's Politburo Standing Committee and is also head of state and leader of the party's military wing, the People's Liberation Army. The Politburo and its standing committee aren't generally viewed as a check on his power. Although Xi's moves to accumulate power have been criticized by some non-party intellectuals, he faces no clear rivals or constraints on his power.

However, a faltering economy and the knock-on effects of the coronavirus outbreak that originated in China are seen as placing him under greater pressure than he has previously faced.

Associated Press writers Luran Neergaard, Ricardo Alonso-Zaldivar and Matthew Daly in Washington, Alexandra Jaffe in Charleston, South Carolina, and Amanda Seitz in Chicago contributed to this report.

EDITOR'S NOTE — A look at the veracity of claims by political figures.

A clinic prepares for Supreme Court abortion fight

By REBECCA SANTANA and MARK SHERMAN Associated Press

SHREVEPORT, La. (AP) — The Hope Medical Group for Women in northern Louisiana fields phone calls every day from anxious pregnant women who ask if abortion is still legal and if the clinic, one of only three that provides abortions in the state, is still open.

Despite the protesters who sometimes gather outside, the threats that forced the clinic to board up all the windows and the repeated restrictions put upon abortion providers in this staunchly anti-abortion state, the clinic stands. Abortion remains legal in Louisiana and elsewhere in the United States. But a Supreme Court case set for arguments Wednesday could lead to the clinic's closure and, more fundamentally, a retreat from protecting the right to abortion that the high court first announced in 1973.

The case is just one in a series of high-stakes disputes the more conservative court, now with two appointees of President Donald Trump, is expected to decide by late June as the 2020 election campaign gathers steam.

"We're fighting this as hard as we possibly can. And for now, all three clinics are still open. And for now, abortion is still legal in all 50 states," said Hope's administrator, Kathaleen Pittman.

Pittman tries to keep her focus on the women who come through the door every day — generally poor women who are forced to travel increasingly longer distances as other clinics in Louisiana and neighboring states have closed. Pittman estimates as many as 80% of the women who come in get financial assistance to help pay for the abortion.

They travel from 200 miles or even 300 miles away and from neighboring states to do a state-mandated counseling session and then return another day to have the abortion, Pittman said.

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"I've been here for 27 years. And the constant refrain we hear regarding the reason for terminating a pregnancy has always been primarily lack of financial resources. People are broke," she said. "It's the women who have the least that are going to suffer the most."

Anti-abortion groups, the Trump administration and members of Congress hope the court will take its first steps to roll back protections for abortion and uphold a Louisiana law that would require doctors at abortion clinics to have admitting privileges at a nearby hospital. "This case is about the health and safety of women," said state Sen. Katrina Jackson, a Democrat who sponsored the 2014 law.

More than 200 members of Congress, almost all Republican, suggest in a court filing that the court could go further and overrule the landmark 1973 *Roe v. Wade* decision.

States have passed dozens of abortion restrictions in recent years, including measures that would ban abortion as early as six weeks into a pregnancy. Those laws have so far been blocked by courts.

The issue of abortion providers' relationship with local hospitals is familiar to the high court because in 2016, the court struck down a similar law from Texas.

The only thing that has changed since then is the makeup of the Supreme Court, notably Trump's appointment of Justice Brett Kavanaugh to take the place of the retired Justice Anthony Kennedy. Trump pledged to appoint "pro-life justices" and his opposition to abortion has been crucial to his support among socially conservative voters.

The outcome, though, will likely come down to the vote of one man, Chief Justice John Roberts. Roberts has mainly voted in favor of abortion restrictions, including joining the dissent in 2016 that would have upheld the Texas law. But he cast the decisive vote a year ago to prevent the Louisiana law from being enforced while the legal case played out.

Roberts did not explain his vote. But it is extremely rare for a justice to cast the key vote in a case at a preliminary stage and then vote the other way later on.

A trial judge had said the law would not provide health benefits to women and would leave only one clinic open in Louisiana, in New Orleans. That would make it too hard for women to get an abortion, in violation of the Constitution, the judge ruled. But an appeals court upheld it in 2018. The clinic appealed to the Supreme Court.

As recently as 2011, there were seven abortion clinics in Louisiana, according to the New Orleans Abortion Fund, which raises money to pay for women who want to have an abortion.

Two doctors perform abortions at the hospital, Pittman said. One has admitting privileges and the other does not. A third doctor, who also does not have admitting privileges, rotates in as needed. If the law were to take effect, the one doctor with the admitting privileges has testified he would not continue as the lone doctor performing abortions in northern Louisiana, which would force Hope to close.

On a recent day in February, the clinic waiting room was filled with women — some alone and some who appeared to be accompanied by friends, partners or relatives. Oil paintings with occasional pieces of abortion rights artwork or signs covered the waiting room's walls. A small sticker pasted to the receptionist's window read "Mind Your Own Uterus." Outside the clinic, a small sign read "Please do not feed (or speak to) the protesters."

There were no protesters on this cold and rainy day but just a few blocks away a tall billboard, one of the many across the state, asks women to "Choose life" and gives them a number to call for help.

Two women at the Hope clinic who agreed to speak to The Associated Press said they did not want their names used because of the stigma around abortion. One was a pregnant woman who already has a year-old daughter. She said abortion is morally wrong, but that she cannot take care of another baby. She questioned why anyone would want to force a woman to have a baby she didn't want and worried those children will be mistreated.

The other pregnant woman is 27 years old. She drove about three hours from southern Louisiana for her counseling session. She knew almost immediately when she found out she was pregnant that she wanted to have an abortion, she said, because she did not feel ready physically, emotionally or mentally for motherhood.

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She feels strongly that women shouldn't be forced to have children if they're not prepared and able to give them all the love and attention that children deserve. If the Shreveport clinic and others in the state were to close, she worried about how she or others could access abortion.

"I think I'd find a way, but it would be much more difficult and much more just exhausting and stressful," she said. "And I think women are going to do this no matter what. So ... why not help us?"

Judge rules head of immigration agency was unlawfully named

By ELLIOT SPAGAT Associated Press

SAN DIEGO (AP) — A federal judge has ruled that Ken Cuccinelli was unlawfully appointed to lead the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services agency and, as a result, lacked authority to give asylum seekers less time to prepare for initial screening interviews.

Cuccinelli, a former Virginia attorney general and an immigration hardliner, was named to a new position of "principal deputy director" in June, which immediately made him acting director because Lee Francis Cissna had just resigned. The agency grants green cards and other visas and also oversees asylum officers.

U.S. District Judge Randolph Moss in Washington found Cuccinelli's appointment violated the Federal Vacancies Reform Act, a 1998 law governing who is eligible to lead federal agencies in an acting capacity. The impact of the ruling wasn't immediately clear.

The ruling issued Sunday was at odds with President Donald Trump's penchant for temporary appointments. At Homeland Security, Chad Wolf is acting secretary, and the heads of Customs and Border Protection, Immigration and Customs Enforcement and Citizenship and Immigration Services are also in acting roles.

The judge wrote that Cuccinelli didn't qualify for exceptions for officials who won Senate approval for other positions or spent 90 days in the previous year at the agency.

The administration's reading of the law "would decimate this carefully crafted framework," Moss wrote in his 55—page ruling. "The President would be relieved of responsibility and accountability for selecting acting officials, and the universe of those eligible to serve in an acting capacity would be vastly expanded."

Moss, an appointee of President Barack Obama, set aside a Cuccinelli directive to give asylum seekers less time to consult attorneys before an initial screening interview, but his decision applies only to the five Hondurans who sued. He did not address other Cuccinelli actions.

The asylum directive gives asylum seekers at least one calendar day to prepare for the screening interview, instead of 72 hours for families and generally 48 hours for single adults. Extensions are granted only "in the most extraordinary circumstances," such as a serious illness or mental or physical disability.

The directive is a foundation for new policies aimed at quickly completing the screening, known as a "credible fear interview," without leaving Customs and Border Protection custody.

Homeland Security Department spokeswoman Heather Swift said, "We obviously disagree with the court's opinion and are looking more closely at it."

Cuccinelli is now acting deputy Homeland Security secretary, the department's No. 2 position. Joseph Edlow, a longtime congressional aide who joined Citizenship and Immigration Services in July, was named last month to run the agency's day-to-day operations.

France closes the Louvre as virus spreads to new fronts

By JOHN LEICESTER and COLLEEN BARRY Associated Press

PARIS (AP) — Coronavirus cases surged in Italy, and France closed the world-famous Louvre Museum as the epidemic that began in China sent fear rising across Western Europe, threatening its tourism industry.

The virus has spread to more than 60 countries, and more than 3,000 people have died from the COVID-19 illness it causes.

New battle fronts in the battle opened rapidly, deepening the sense of crisis that has already sent financial markets plummeting, emptied the streets in many cities and rewritten the routines of millions of people.

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More than 88,000 have been infected, on every continent but Antarctica.

Australia and Thailand reported their first deaths Sunday, while the Dominican Republic and the Czech Republic recorded their first infections.

Italian authorities said the number of people infected in the country soared 50% to 1,694 in just 24 hours, and five more had died, bringing the death toll there to 34. Cases in France jumped to 130, an increase of 30 in one day.

China, where the epidemic began in December, reported 202 new cases in its update Monday, the lowest increase since Jan. 21. The city of Wuhan had most of the new cases but also saw 2,570 patients released, continuing a trend that frees up patient beds in the prefabricated isolation wards and hastily built hospitals in the area where the disease has hit hardest.

That brings China's totals to 80,026 cases, with 2,912 deaths, the vast majority in Wuhan and surrounding Hubei province, which still accounts for about three-quarters of the world's cases.

South Korea has the world's second-highest cases with 4,212, mostly in and near the southeastern city of Daegu. It has reported 22 deaths. Iran's death toll climbed to 54 and its cases jumped overnight by more than half, to 978.

Cases in the U.S. climbed to at least 80 with two deaths, both in Washington state.

While the virus has caused serious illness mainly for the elderly and those with existing health problems, most have had mild illness and some infected apparently show no symptoms at all.

But attempts to contain the spread of the virus have been far-reaching.

Sports teams have played in deserted stadiums in Japan and South Korea after leaders discouraged public gatherings. Tourist attractions across Asia, Europe and the Mideast were closed or deserted. Islam's holiest sites have been closed to foreign pilgrims. And governments have closed schools and encouraged working from home.

Adding to global travel curbs that have sharply cut visitors to places with outbreaks, the U.S. government advised Americans against traveling to the two northern Italian regions with growing caseloads, among them Lombardy, which includes Milan. Major American airlines began suspending flights to Milan. American Airlines will waive fees for changing all flights over the next two weeks.

The travel restrictions against Italy and the rising alarm in France could deal a heavy blow to the countries' tourism industries. Spring, especially Easter, is a hugely popular time for schoolchildren to visit France and Italy.

"We had already registered a slowdown of Americans coming to Italy in recent days," Bernabo Bocca, president of Italy's hotel association, said in a statement Saturday. "Now, the final blow has arrived."

Tourism accounts for 13% of the economy in Italy, with its art museums, archaeological sites and architectural treasures. More than 5.6 million Americans visit Italy every year, representing 9% of foreign tourists.

The United Nations said Sunday it is releasing \$15 million from an emergency fund to help countries with fragile health systems contain the virus.

"We must act now to stop this virus from putting more lives at risk," U.N. humanitarian chief Mark Lowcock said. The aid "has the potential to save the lives of millions of vulnerable people."

In France, the archbishop of Paris told parish priests to put the Communion bread in worshippers' hands, not in their mouths. In South Carolina, the Roman Catholic Diocese of Charleston asked its parishioners to not drink from the Communion cup or shake hands during the sign of peace.

French officials also advised people to forgo the customary kisses on the cheek upon greeting others.

The Louvre, home of the "Mona Lisa" and other priceless artworks, closed after workers expressed fear of being contaminated by the stream of visitors from around the world. Staffers were also concerned about museum workers from Italy who had come to the Louvre to collect works by Leonardo da Vinci that were loaned for an exhibition.

The Louvre, the world's most popular museum, received 9.6 million visitors last year, almost three-quarters of them from abroad.

"We are very worried because we have visitors from everywhere," said Andre Sacristin, a Louvre employee and union representative. "The risk is very, very, very great." While there are no known infections

among the museum's 2,300 workers, "it's only a question of time," he said.

The shutdown followed a government decision Saturday to ban indoor public gatherings of more than 5,000 people.

Among the frustrated visitors was Charles Lim from Singapore. He and his wife, Jeanette, chose Paris to celebrate their first wedding anniversary and bought tickets in advance for the Louvre.

"We waited for about three hours before giving up," he said. "It was incredibly disappointing."

Barry reported from Milan. Associated Press writers Foster Klug and Mari Yamaguchi in Tokyo; Hyung-jin Kim in Seoul, South Korea; Nasser Karimi in Tehran, Iran; Joe McDonald in Beijing; Zarar Khan in Islamabad; and Edith M. Lederer in New York contributed to this report.

Q&A: Wuhan's biggest temporary hospital could close in March

By DAKE KANG Associated Press

BEIJING (AP) — The head of the largest of 16 temporary hospitals in the Chinese city at the center of the coronavirus outbreak says his staff has had a heavy workload but should be able to wrap up operations by the end of this month.

Dr. Zhang Junjian is director of a facility opened in an exhibition center in Wuhan, the capital of Hubei province, on Feb. 7. With a staff of 1,260, it is designed to treat 1,500 to 2,000 patients.

The temporary hospitals were hastily set up in gyms and other locations to handle an overflow of patients and try to stem the spread of the disease by separating them from the rest of the city's 11-million inhabitants.

Zhang, a neurologist at Wuhan University, said the hospital now has 700 patients. About 600 have been released, and another 400 severe cases were transferred to other hospitals. He spoke to The Associated Press in a video interview from Wuhan.

DO DOCTORS AND NURSES HAVE THE SUPPLIES THEY NEED? HAVE ANY BEEN INFECTED?

No doctors and nurses are infected so far. ... Medical supplies can basically meet our needs now, and there is a good improvement in supply. At the beginning of construction of the hospital, during the first week, we were very nervous. Some materials and goods were in short supply. Supplies of protective materials were insufficient. The facilities are in place now. Our protective materials can meet the needs for normal operation.

IS THERE ANY PRESSURE OR UNSOLVED PROBLEMS?

The biggest problem is that, compared with traditional hospitals, the number of doctors and nurses here is relatively small and their workload is relatively heavy. They need to communicate with patients, right? Talking to patients while making the rounds of the wards is a heavy workload and it's quite intensive. Intensive work for a long time will cause many problems. It seems that at present, more medical staff are being assigned, so the pressure is eased.

After three weeks of operation, we find patients are in a relatively stable mood. They interact with medical workers or patients. That's good. ... Patients carry out a lot of activities, for example, talking to each other, reading books, reciting poems and other activities, such as dancing. Generally, it's in relatively good order and the atmosphere is fairly good.

HOW DOES THE HOSPITAL DEAL WITH THE RISK OF CROSS-INFECTIOIN, OR A PATIENT GIVING THE VIRUS TO A PATIENT WHO MIGHT NOT BE INFECTED?

Although these patients had mild symptoms, they were all diagnosed as novel coronavirus pneumonia. So if we let them stay together, there is no such problem as infecting each other. Just like treating tuberculosis patients and hepatitis patients in one ward. Although they receive treatment together, all arrangements conformed with the guidelines for treating infectious disease. For example, two passages (one for patients, one for workers), protective measures for medical staff, a polluted zone, a clean zone and a semi-polluted zone. ... It basically meets the demands in terms of isolation, protecting medical staff and treating patients with infectious diseases.

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WHAT IS YOUR OUTLOOK ON HOW MUCH LONGER THIS HOSPITAL WILL BE REQUIRED TO OPERATE? We expect maybe in mid-March or during the last ten days of March, our patients will be basically discharged from the hospital, because fewer patients are being admitted and the number of patients being discharged is gradually increasing now. So we can have at least 50 to 100 people discharged every day, according to current discharge standards. If nothing special happens, I expect the operation of our makeshift hospital, the biggest one in Wuhan, could complete its historical mission by the end of March.

Associated Press video producer Olivia Zhang contributed to this story.

Buttigieg ends historic presidential campaign, urges unity

By THOMAS BEAUMONT, MEG KINNARD and STEVE PEOPLES Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Pete Buttigieg, who rose from relative obscurity as an Indiana mayor to a barrier-breaking, top-tier candidate for the Democratic presidential nomination, ended his campaign on Sunday.

The decision by the first openly gay candidate to seriously contend for the presidency — and among the youngest ever — came just a day after a leading rival, Joe Biden, scored a resounding victory in South Carolina. That sparked new pressure on the party's moderate wing to coalesce behind the former vice president.

"The truth is the path has narrowed to a close for our candidacy if not for our cause," Buttigieg, 38, told supporters in South Bend, Indiana. "We must recognize that at this point in the race, the best way to keep faith with those goals and ideals is to step aside and help bring our party and country together."

He didn't endorse any of his former rivals, though he and Biden traded voicemails on Sunday. Buttigieg has spent the past several weeks warning that nominating progressive leader Bernie Sanders to take on President Donald Trump would be risky.

Buttigieg on Sunday called on supporters to ensure that a Democrat wins the White House in November and that the party's success carries over to down-ballot races for House and Senate. During previous debates, Buttigieg said Sanders could threaten Democratic seats in Congress.

More broadly, Buttigieg urged Americans to move beyond the divisive politics of the Trump era to embrace a more inclusive, unifying approach.

"Politics at its worst is ugly," he said. "But at its best, politics can lift us up. It is not just policymaking. It is moral. It is soulcraft. That's why we're in this."

Buttigieg kissed his husband, Chasten, as he walked onto the stage and offered a message for children who might be watching.

"We send a message to every kid out there wondering if whatever marks them out as different means they are somehow destined to be less than," Buttigieg said. "To see that someone who once felt that exact same way can become a leading American presidential candidate with his husband by his side."

Voters saw Buttigieg in the more moderate lane of the Democratic field, and he flourished early with a top finish in the Iowa caucuses and a close second place finish in New Hampshire. But as the race moved to more diverse states, less dependent on college-educated voters, Buttigieg struggled.

Despite robust organizations in Iowa and New Hampshire and supporters who included an influx of former independents and Republicans, Buttigieg failed to overcome daunting questions about his ability to draw African American support key to the Democratic base.

He earned just 3% of the nonwhite vote in South Carolina's Saturday primary, according to AP VoteCast, a wide-ranging survey of the electorate.

As mayor of a city that is 25% black, Buttigieg faced criticism for firing the first African American police chief in the history of South Bend and for his handling of the case of a white police officer who fatally shot an armed black man in June.

A Black Lives Matter group from South Bend released a statement saying it was "excited" that Buttigieg left the race. "We hope that he learned his lesson — that neoliberalism and anti-Black policies will no longer be tolerated," the group wrote.

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After his unexpected rise to contention in Iowa and New Hampshire last fall, Buttigieg became the target of Massachusetts Sen. Elizabeth Warren for the high-dollar fundraisers he was hosting, notably one in a wine cave in California.

Minnesota Sen. Amy Klobuchar also went at Buttigieg in the months before the caucuses for lacking national experience. She noted that he had lost his only statewide race as a candidate for Indiana treasurer in 2010, while she had won three statewide terms in Minnesota in part by carrying Republican-heavy regions.

Buttigieg presented a starkly different figure on the debate stage than the other leading candidates — all septuagenarians — and drew admirers for his calm, reasoned demeanor and rhetorical skills that reflected his Harvard-trained, Rhodes scholar background but that some voters and operatives described as “robotic.”

Buttigieg had modeled his campaign somewhat on that of former President Barack Obama, who won the 2008 Iowa caucuses largely based on a message of unity and by drawing in a healthy bloc of first-time caucus participants, often the key in a crowded, high-turnout contest.

Jim Ward, a volunteer on the campaign in South Bend, said he and others were at the local campaign office training at around 6 p.m. when they learned of Buttigieg’s decision.

“They got word and left rather quickly,” he said in a text with the AP, noting that he had mixed emotions.

“I am so proud the campaign and proud of Pete for making this decision when he’s making it and not prolonging the campaign any longer than necessary,” Ward said. “I am just so, so sad that it didn’t work out this time.”

Democratic strategist David Axelrod said “the Pete Buttigieg story isn’t over.”

“He’s 38 years old,” Axelrod said. “He’s vaulted himself into the national conversation. He obviously has work to do on some things that -- some weaknesses we’ve seen in this election -- but whenever there is a conversation again about Democratic candidates, he’ll be in that conversation. And that’s a remarkable achievement, given where he started a year ago.”

Kinnard reported from Columbia, South Carolina, and Beaumont from Des Moines, Iowa. Associated Press writers Kathleen Ronayne in San Jose, California, Bill Barrow in Atlanta and Michelle Smith in Providence, Rhode Island contributed to this report.

Catch up on the 2020 election campaign with AP experts on our weekly politics podcast, “Ground Game.”

Biden warmly welcomed in Selma as Dems court black voters

By JAY REEVES Associated Press

SELMA, Ala. (AP) — Joe Biden received a warm reception Sunday in this crucible of the civil rights movement as he and other Democratic presidential hopefuls appealed for black support in a town where demonstrators were once beaten for marching for the right to vote.

Themes of fighting voter suppression, providing the poor with a way up and defeating President Donald Trump took center stage at events marking the 55th anniversary of “Bloody Sunday,” the day in 1965 white police attacked black marchers in Selma. This year’s commemoration came two days before Alabama Democrats join voters in more than a dozen states in the Super Tuesday cluster of primary elections.

Just hours after strong support by black voters in South Carolina lifted Biden to his first primary victory, the former vice president spoke during the morning worship at historic Brown Chapel AME Church.

An excited buzz and cheers arose as Biden entered the sanctuary, and many in the congregation stood to applaud as he moved toward the pulpit. Quoting the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr., former President Barack Obama and the Bible, Biden said the country has moved the wrong way under Trump.

“We’ve been dragged backward and we’ve lost ground. We’ve seen all too clearly that if you give hate any breathing room it comes back,” he said.

Former New York Mayor Mike Bloomberg, who split endorsements of leading black political groups in Alabama with Biden, received a lukewarm reception during a 10-minute talk at the pulpit. Bloomberg highlighted his ability as mayor of New York to work with activist Al Sharpton, seated a few feet away.

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"For too long we have gone on with just listening and letting the status quo continue," Bloomberg said. As he spoke, about 10 audience members stood and turned their backs toward him.

Rep. John Lewis, who was beaten in the Bloody Sunday fracas, made a surprise appearance at the apex of the Edmund Pettus Bridge to start an annual re-enactment of the '65 march. Lewis' schedule has been limited since he announced earlier this year he had advanced cancer.

Speaking to a massive crowd that included Bloomberg and Sen. Elizabeth Warren, Lewis told the throng that "we cannot give in."

"Speak up, speak out, get in the way," Lewis said in a strong voice from atop a short ladder. "Get in good trouble, necessary trouble, and help redeem the soul of America."

Former South Bend, Indiana, Mayor Pete Buttigieg was among the candidates who joined the crowd of thousands on the bridge even though he ended his campaign just hours later. Warren and Sen. Amy Klobuchar appeared at a late afternoon forum. Tom Steyer also was in town despite suspending his campaign after a poor showing in South Carolina.

Rep. Terri Sewell, the lone black member of Alabama's congressional delegation, urged hundreds of people attending a community breakfast to vote for Biden and enable "a return to civility."

"Joe Biden not only knows me, he knows you," she said.

On March 7, 1965, Alabama state troopers beat and tear-gassed hundreds of voting-rights demonstrators trying to march from Selma to Montgomery, the capital. Only 25 at the time and years away from joining Congress, Lewis led the marchers and was among the injured.

The confrontation set the stage for the massive Selma-to-Montgomery voting rights march led by King weeks later and helped inspire passage of the Voting Rights Act that year.

The years since have been tough on Selma, where shuttered businesses and vacant, dilapidated homes stand just blocks from magnificent antebellum mansions. The city and surrounding Dallas County typically have some of the highest jobless rates in the state.

The town's population is steadily declining, and census statistics show 41% of the estimated 17,800 people who remain live in poverty. About 82% of the town's residents are black, and both schools and neighborhoods are mostly segregated by race with blacks attending public schools and whites attending private academies. Crime, much of it linked to gangs, is a constant problem, authorities say.

Selma Mayor Darrio Melton endorsed Biden as someone who could help. "Joe understands the issues families in Selma and communities across the country face," he said.

Located about 50 miles west of Montgomery, Selma has deep ties to both civil rights and the Civil War. Aside from being the site of Bloody Sunday, the Edmund Pettus Bridge is named for a Confederate general and U.S. senator who advocated for white supremacy.

Faith before basketball for Yeshiva University champions

By LUIS ANDRES HENAO Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Each of the mighty Maccabees has his role on the men's basketball team. Gabriel Leifer sinks three-pointers; Daniel Katz is the defense wizard; Simcha Halpert makes the perfect alley-oop passes to Ryan Turell who soars for dunks.

Kids pretend to be them in pickup games. The home crowd sings in Hebrew and roars when they score. But before tipoff, the team always gathers around Tyler Hod, a senior guard and their unofficial rabbi.

Reading passages from the Torah, Hod shares a story, all the while drawing lessons to inspire them on and off the court in a pregame ritual that ends when they huddle and yell: "Amen!"

Yeshiva University's basketball team can't play on the Sabbath, on Jewish Holidays or fast days. They've also faced anti-Semitic taunts and ethnic slurs from opponents and spectators. But they continue to beat their rivals, many proudly wearing the skullcap that identifies them as Jewish.

The best team in the Jewish Orthodox institution's history won the Skyline Conference on Sunday with fans flooding the court and celebrating. The Maccabees extended their record winning streak to 27 games, beating Purchase College 86-74 and qualifying for the NCAA Division III tournament. The championship is

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the second time in three years the school has won the title. Its first ever conference championship came in 2018. They reached the final in 2019.

"It's important for us to capitalize on what we're going for and not just play to the last day of conference but play to the last day of the last game of Division III basketball," co-captain Katz said on a day that began with practice right after dawn, followed by morning prayer, and that ended with a traditional Shabbat dinner. "That's what we want to do: win the national championship."

It's an improbable rise for a team that had a spotty record competing in the Skyline Conference championship until it stepped into the spotlight when it won it two years ago. This season, the Maccabees, named after the ancient Jewish rebel warriors, have been unstoppable.

Their records include the best start in school history, the longest winning streak and their first national ranking. Halpert also moved into third on the school's all-time scoring list, ahead of Hod's father, Lior Hod, a 1987-1988 team captain who records the games from the stands with a handheld camera; while Turell became the first sophomore to reach 1,000 points.

It began with Elliot Steinmetz, a former YU player, who in 2014 took the coaching job with one goal: recruiting the best Jewish players nationwide.

"He sold us all on that dream of bringing Jewish basketball to the forefront and making us relevant," Halpert said. His brother, Eitan, also plays for the Macs. "And we really bought into it."

This season they played one of their toughest games against Sarah Lawrence winning when Leifer hit a three-pointer a few seconds before the buzzer. In the locker room, their coach reminded them that it goes beyond basketball.

"You see all these kids who want to take a picture with you - they remember these guys who won two years ago," Steinmetz said about the legion of young fans who snap selfies with the players after the games. "You have an opportunity to represent your university and something bigger ... you have an opportunity for something extremely special."

The players come from across the U.S. Some turned down offers at Ivy League and Division I schools to play for Yeshiva. They also vary in their observance of their faith - from Hod who will go to rabbinical school after he graduates this year, to Ofek Reef, a 6-foot freshman from Texas who goes on the court without the skullcap, wearing tattoos and a Star of David-shaped earring, and who enralls the crowds when he defies gravity and dunks over taller rivals. All of them, though, are united by their Jewish identity and their love of basketball.

"I have a close connection to God," said Turell, a 6-foot-7-point guard from Los Angeles, who turned down an opportunity to attend West Point.

"To be able to follow my religion and to play basketball at the same time at a high level is amazing. It's the best of both worlds."

Many of the players met at high school tournaments, or at a Jerusalem camp run by Tamir Goodman, who was dubbed in 1999 by Sports Illustrated magazine as "The Jewish Jordan." He retired at the age of 27 after playing in college in the U.S., and professionally in Israel.

"When I watch YU play, there are two levels of pride: on the macro, these guys are inspiring the whole world," Goodman said in a telephone interview. "And on the micro: I'm proud because I worked really hard with several of those guys in Jerusalem during camps and in the gym. I have tears in my eyes. It's like one of my kids playing."

It's a brotherhood: Some lived together for years in dorms and then moved to the same building after they married. On the road, they'll find a room to wrap the leather straps of tefillin and pray together. At home court, they practice shooting and drills early in the morning, listening to rap.

They attend Jewish classes on top of their other coursework and sometimes they relax with a slice of kosher pizza and playing "Fortnite" or the NBA 2K videogame. Their families chat on WhatsApp and fly or drive long distances to watch them.

"What is important is not just that the Macs are winning - it is the way they are winning: with selflessness, teamwork and great sportsmanship," said Rabbi Ari Berman, the president of Yeshiva. "They are an

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embodiment of our mission to bring our positive Jewish values out into the world.”

The Macs also see themselves as ambassadors for their Jewish identity at a time of an alarming series of recent anti-Semitic attacks across the U.S. Growing up in Baltimore, Katz remembers coins being thrown at him from the bleachers. Even today, some have faced hateful chants and jeers from the stands.

“We got a couple of road games far away, and the crowds have been very loud,” said Halpert, a co-captain who is known as a sharpshooter. “There was one time that they were chanting: “Hitler was right!” ... It’s the 21st century. There’s no room for that kind of hate in any capacity. I try not to harp on it so much, but we’ve heard a lot of things. I just tell the guys: we’re just here to play ball.”

For years, their coach told them to ignore the taunts and anti-Semitic slurs. Steinmetz said that changed this year and he has asked his players to report it. Security has also increased with New York police officers at the games. But it has not deterred the loyal fans of the Macs.

Rabbi Yigal Sklarin, and his nine-year-old son Yonatan, are among the hundreds who fill the Max Stern Athletic Center for home games and follow them on the road.

“We don’t have a television at home, so we only know Yeshiva University Maccabees basketball,” Sklarin said. “He can name more players on the Macs than he can in the NBA,” he said smiling at his son in the stands. “When he plays at home on his basketball, he acts out like he’s the Macs. He’ll take his free throws like Ryan Turell.

He’ll go: ‘It’s Simcha, to Ryan to Gabe for the dunk’... It’s like you’re on your backyard saying: ‘Michael Jordan for three’ - he says: ‘Simcha, for three!’

Associated Press religion coverage receives support from the Lilly Endowment through the Religion News Foundation. The AP is solely responsible for this content.

Ernesto Cardenal, Nicaraguan poet and priest, dies at 95

By **GABRIELA SELSER** Associated Press

MANAGUA, Nicaragua (AP) — Ernesto Cardenal, the renowned poet and Roman Catholic cleric who became a symbol of revolutionary verse in Nicaragua and around Latin America, and whose suspension from the priesthood by St. John Paul II lasted over three decades, died Sunday. He was 95.

Known for his trademark black beret and loose white peasant shirts, the author of works such as “Epigrams” and “Zero Hour” was one of the most important and honored poets in Nicaraguan history. Cardenal penned verse that went around the globe, and lived until his last days with a lucidity that inspired amazement and admiration in the literary world.

“Our beloved poet has begun the process of integrating with the universe, with the greatest intimacy with God,” his personal assistant, Luz Marina Acosta, said Sunday.

Bosco Centeno, a close friend of Cardenal, told The Associated Press the poet was hospitalized in Nicaragua’s capital of Managua a couple of days ago with a heart problem.

Cardenal received numerous awards during his lifetime including the Reina Sofia poetry prize in 2012, and the Peace Prize of the German Book Trade in 1980.

Argentine poet Jorge Boccanera once said of Cardenal’s writing that he “loses his life and at the same time discovers it in a profound delivery; in consecrating and offering himself in that dialogue of soul and blood.”

Cardenal was also an essayist and sculptor, and the herons he fashioned from stone and metal are highly prized in Central American cultural circles.

Born Jan. 20, 1925, to a wealthy family in the colonial city of Granada southeast of the Nicaraguan capital, Cardenal became a priest in Colombia and later became enamored of the leftist Liberation Theology movement that swept through Latin America during the 1960s, centered on ministering to the poor and liberating the oppressed.

On the Solentiname Islands in Lake Nicaragua, he founded a community of peasants, poets and paint-

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ers in 1966 that came to symbolize artistic opposition to the dictatorship of Anastasio Somoza, who was overthrown in 1979 by Sandinista rebels.

Cardenal actively supported the revolution and served as culture minister during the first government of former Sandinista guerrilla Daniel Ortega — causing him to run afoul of then-Pope John Paul II, who firmly held that clerics should not hold political office. The pontiff was also staunchly anti-communist and opposed some parts of Liberation Theology.

In 1983, John Paul publicly upbraided Cardenal at Managua's international airport at the beginning of a tense visit. When Cardenal knelt in front of the pope and moved to kiss his hand, the pontiff withdrew it and pointed his finger at him in a moment caught in a widely circulated photograph.

"You should regularize your situation," the pope scolded. Later that year he suspended Cardenal from the priesthood along with his brother Fernando, who was then serving as minister of education.

Only late in life was Cardenal's suspension lifted by Pope Francis: In February 2019, as Cardenal was in the hospital, the Vatican noted that he had accepted the punishment, refrained from pastoral activity and long ago abandoned the political arena.

The Vatican's ambassador to Nicaragua visited him at the hospital and joined him in celebrating Mass, a moment that Cardenal's personal assistant described as "very moving" and said made him "very happy."

While Cardenal never held political office again, that didn't mean he shied away from speaking his mind, and the erstwhile supporter of Ortega distanced himself from his former Sandinista sympathizers over his disagreement with the ex-guerrilla's partisan leadership.

After Ortega returned to the presidency in 2007, Cardenal denounced what he called the beginning of "a family dictatorship." And in 2018, when anti-government protests broke out that posed the biggest challenge to Ortega's increasingly authoritarian hold on power, Cardenal quickly aligned himself with the opposition.

"What we want is for there to be a different government, a democratic republic," he said in a handwritten message of support, adding that dialogue with the Ortega camp would be useless.

"Now suddenly across the country the young people have risen up in protests, taking the streets," Cardenal said, "something that was unexpected because the youth had seemed to be sleeping, or that a sepulchral slab had fallen on them."

As he turned his back on Ortega, Sandinista officialdom turned its back on him.

Cardenal faced legal problems he attributed to "political persecution" for his criticisms of Ortega and Rosario Murillo, Ortega's first lady and currently vice president. And in 2015, when Cardenal turned 90, he was feted in Mexico — where he had lived and studied theology as a young man — as the Sandinista government had nothing but silence for a man it viewed as a turncoat.

Cardenal continued to hold a dim view of John Paul for decades after their run-in, calling his canonization in 2014 a "monstrosity."

He was more supportive of Francis and his calls to build a better world for those on the margins of society.

"I try to live with the message of the gospel," Cardenal once said, "which is a political message, which is changing the world so that there is a better world after 100,000 years of inequality."

Turkey, Syria fighting escalates; refugees mass at EU border

By **COSTAS KANTOURIS** and **ANDREW WILKS** Associated Press

KASTANIES, Greece (AP) — Thousands of migrants and refugees massed at Turkey's western frontier Sunday, trying to enter Greece by land and sea after Turkey said its borders were open to those hoping to head to Europe. In Syria, Turkish troops shot down two Syrian warplanes after the Syrian military downed a Turkish drone, a major escalation in the direct conflict between Syrian and Turkish forces.

Turkey's decision to ease border restrictions came amid a Russia-backed Syrian government offensive into Syria's northwestern Idlib province. That offensive has killed dozens of Turkish troops and led to a surge of nearly a million Syrian civilians fleeing the fighting toward Turkey's sealed border.

Turkey backs the Syrian rebels fighting in Idlib province, and has sent thousands of troops into the area. Idlib is the last opposition-held stronghold in Syria, and is dominated by al-Qaida linked fighters.

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A Turkish official said the fighting in Idlib was directly linked to Turkey's decision to open the gates for refugees to Europe. He said Ankara had changed its focus to preparing for the possibility of new arrivals from Syria "instead of preventing refugees who intend to migrate to Europe."

"Europe and others must take robust action to address this monumental challenge," said Fahrettin Altun, the communications director for Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdogan. "We can't be expected to do this on our own."

Erdogan's decision open his country's borders with Europe made good on a longstanding threat to let refugees into the continent. His announcement marked a dramatic departure from a previous policy of containment, an apparent attempt to pressure Europe into offering Turkey more support in dealing with the fallout from the Syrian war to its south.

Under a 6 billion euro deal in 2016, Turkey agreed to stem the tide of refugees to Europe in return for financial aid, after more than a million people entered Europe in 2015. Turkey has since accused the EU of failing to honor the agreement, and Erdogan has frequently threatened to allow refugees into Europe unless more international support was provided.

Turkey already hosts 3.6 million Syrian refugees, as well as many others from Africa, Asia and the Middle East. Turkey borders Greece and Bulgaria, both European Union members.

On the Greek-Turkish land border, Greek army and police patrols using tear gas and stun grenades to thwart attempts by thousands to push into the country overnight.

Officials said the situation was much calmer Sunday morning. But in the afternoon, authorities used tear gas and water cannons to push back another crowd attempting to cross. Migrants threw rocks and other objects, and one policeman was injured. Greek authorities said they stopped about 10,000 crossing attempts Saturday, and another 5,500 on Sunday.

Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis convened the defense and foreign affairs committee Sunday evening. Afterward, a government spokesman said Greece was starting a one-month freeze on accepting asylum applications from migrants who enter illegally.

Europe's border agency Frontex said it was "redeploying equipment and additional officers to Greece."

A Greek government official said the Turkish authorities also fired teargas at the Greek border, using drones flying close to the border. The official spoke on condition of anonymity because he wasn't authorized to discuss the matter with the media.

Stavros Zamalides, the president of the Greek border community of Kastanies, said Turkish soldiers used wire cutters to actively help people cross.

The United Nations migration organization reported at least 13,000 people had massed on Turkey's land border by Saturday night, the vast majority apparently from Afghanistan.

In Istanbul, a steady stream of buses, taxis, cars and minibuses were ferrying hundreds more throughout Sunday to Edirne, a town near the border with Greece. The vehicles weren't part of any regular bus route.

Those boarding the buses — the vast majority Afghans — said they were heading to Greece and eventually hoped to get to Germany.

On the Greek islands, more than 500 people had arrived from the nearby Turkish coast by Sunday evening, a clear increase in the usual number of people who arrive on eastern Aegean islands from Turkey.

Existing migrant camps on the islands are already dramatically overcrowded, and tensions there have mounted.

In a small harbor on Lesbos, angry local residents refused to allow migrants — including families with young children and babies — to disembark from a dinghy that had just arrived. Groups who arrived on other parts of the island remained there for hours because locals prevented buses from reaching them to transport them to the main camp.

On Sunday night, a former staging area used for new arrivals on Lesbos was set on fire.

More than 19,300 people already live in and around island's migrant camp, which has a capacity of 2,840. Protests by island residents last week over the situation degenerated into clashes with riot police on Lesbos and Chios.

Greece said it was using "all available means" to tell migrants that the country's borders were closed,

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including text messages to foreign mobile phones in the border area.

In Syria, fighting escalated on the ground and in the skies between Turkish and Syrian troops. Russia, a key ally of Syrian President Bashar Assad's government, remained largely on the sidelines through the weekend even as a Turkish-led counter offensive blunted and in some cases reversed Syrian government advances.

But the head of the Russian military's Reconciliation Center in Syria, Rear Adm. Oleg Zhuravlev,, warned Turkey that its aircraft could be in danger if they fly over Syria.

"In view of the sharp exacerbation of tensions in the air space over Idlib, the Syrian government was forced to declare it closed," Zhuravlev said in a statement released late Sunday. "In this situation, the Russian troops' command can't guarantee security of flights of Turkish aircraft in the skies over Syria."

Syria's official news agency SANA said the four pilots in the two jets shot down Sunday had ejected and landed safely. Turkey's Defense Ministry said it had hit the two SU-24 aircraft as well as Syrian air defense systems after one of its aerial drones was downed.

Earlier Sunday, Syria said northwestern airspace was closed and any aircraft or drone that entered "will be treated as hostile and shot down."

The Syrian announcement followed two days of Turkish drone strikes in Idlib province. Syrian activists said the strikes killed more than 50 Syrian government forces and allied fighters. Turkey has lost 54 soldiers in February, including 33 killed Thursday in a single airstrike. Outraged, Erdogan announced his country's European borders were open Saturday.

The crisis in Idlib stems from a Syrian government offensive with Russian military support, which began Dec. 1. Turkey is worried it might come under renewed international pressure to open its now-sealed border with Syria and offer refuge to hundreds of thousands more Syrian civilians.

Turkish Defense Minister Hulusi Akar, speaking from a military headquarters near the Syrian border, said Turkey aimed to confront Syrian government forces rather than Russian troops. He called on Moscow to persuade Assad to withdraw to 2018 cease-fire lines on the edges of Idlib.

Referring to losses inflicted on Syria, he said Turkey had "neutralized" more than 2,200 Syrian troops, 103 tanks and eight helicopters. The operation is Turkey's fourth in the war-torn country since 2016.

Altun, the Turkish communications director, claimed 80,888 migrants had left Turkey for Europe "in the past several days." There was no evidence to support his claim. Greece's Foreign Ministry tweeted that these numbers were "false and misleading."

Wilks reported from Ankara, Turkey. Robert Badendieck in Istanbul, Albert Aji in Damascus, Syria, Elena Becatoros in Athens and Zeina Karam in Beirut contributed to this report.

Virus accelerates in Italy; US urges citizens to avoid north

By COLLEEN BARRY Associated Press

MILAN (AP) — Coronavirus infections in Italy rose 50% Sunday and the U.S. government issued its strongest travel warning yet, advising Americans against any travel to two regions in northern Italy that have been hard hit by the virus that first emerged in China in December.

Authorities said the total number of people infected in Italy had risen to 1,694, a 50% jump from just 24 hours earlier. Five more people infected with the virus have died, bringing the deaths in Italy to 34, while 83 people have fully recovered.

Italian health authorities said the increases were expected, since it takes as long as two weeks for containment measures to take effect, and because Italy has a large number of elderly people. Still, the numbers highlighted the rapid impact the virus is having on Italy, the epicenter of the outbreak in Europe.

"This acceleration was expected, unfortunately," said Giovanni Rezza, director of the infective illness department at the National Health Institute. He said it would be another week or 10 days until the spread of the virus slowed down in the country.

With numerous cases in other European countries traced back to Italy, many countries have issued travel

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warnings for the 11 Italian towns that have been on lockdown since the virus exploded there on Feb. 21. But none have gone as far as the U.S. government, which on Sunday urged Americans not to travel to the regions of Lombardy and Veneto, raising the warning to the highest level. It is one step shy of the U.S. travel advisory for China, which urged Americans to leave the country.

In the wake of the warning, Delta and American Airlines have both suspended flights to Italy's financial capital of Milan, which can have a potentially devastating business impact beyond just tourism. Already a major furniture and design fair has been postponed due to the virus until June.

Tourism officials said an earlier U.S. travel warning covering all of Italy was potentially calamitous to the industry, which represents 13% of gross domestic product in a country famed for its world-class museums, archaeological sites, art cities and natural beauty.

More than 5.6 million Americans visit Italy every year, representing 9% of foreign tourists and the second-largest national group behind Germans, according to the most recent statistics.

China accounts for the vast majority of the 88,000 people infected by the virus and the 3,000 killed by it.

Lombardy, which includes Milan, accounts for over half of the cases while Veneto and Emilia-Romagna have 15% and 17%, respectively. All three regions have closed schools for at least another week. In Veneto and Lombardy, closures also have hit museums, theaters, cinemas and most public offices, emptying cities like Milan, where many companies have permitted office workers to telecommute.

Earlier Sunday, the French community church in Rome, St. Louis of the French, closed its doors to the public after a priest was infected with the new virus.

The church in the historic center of Rome is famous for three paintings by the Baroque master Caravaggio, making it a destination for tourists and the faithful alike. A sign on the door Sunday noted in French that the church had been closed as a precaution by the French Embassy for both Masses and tourist visits until further notice.

The Religious Information Service news agency reported the church was closed after a 43-year-old priest who had returned to Paris was hospitalized after being infected. It carried a statement by the archbishop of Paris, Michel Aupetit, who said the priest, who had been living in Rome, returned to Paris by car in mid-February and tested positive for the virus on Friday. He was in good condition, Aupetit said.

It was the first church in Rome closed by the virus. Churches in much of Veneto and Lombardy have closed their doors under widespread measures aimed at containing the spread of the virus. Televised Masses have been available for the faithful.

Follow AP's coverage of the new coronavirus outbreak at <https://apnews.com/VirusOutbreak>

AP VoteCast: Black voters carry Biden to his first victory

By **JOSH BOAK** and **HANNAH FINGERHUT** Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Vice President Joe Biden has for weeks looked to the black voters of South Carolina to hand a win to his flagging campaign. On Saturday, they delivered.

Biden won 61% of the votes cast by non-white voters, dominating a crowded Democratic field among a group that made up more than half of the electorate. Biden also performed strongly with older voters, women, regular churchgoers and moderates and conservatives, according to AP VoteCast, a wide-ranging survey of more than 1,400 voters in South Carolina's Democratic primary.

Biden's strength with the state's African American voters helped him edge out second-place finisher Bernie Sanders. The Vermont senator won roughly 14% of African American voters, while billionaire Tom Steyer won 15%.

Sanders had hoped to chip away at Biden's support by winning over young black voters, who may be more likely to be drawn to Sanders' liberal politics and less likely to give Biden credit for serving as President Barack Obama's No. 2.

But black voters under 45 were roughly split between the two candidates — a sign that Sanders' appeal among younger voters had its limits in South Carolina. Sanders held on to young voters under 30 overall,

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but his grip weakened among liberal voters.

South Carolina's primary provides the first deep look at the opinions and beliefs of African American voters, will continue to wield influence in upcoming races and will be critical to Democrats' chances of winning the White House. The inability of Democrats to mobilize African Americans in Wisconsin, Pennsylvania and Michigan likely contributed to their 2016 loss to President Donald Trump.

Biden has staked his campaign on mobilizing these voters and harkening to the legacy of the nation's first non-white president. It's a message that appeared to carry special appeal in South Carolina, where voters held a greater sense of nostalgia for the Obama presidency than voters in earlier contests.

Forty-five percent of voters in South Carolina wanted to return to the politics of the past, compared with about a third in Iowa and New Hampshire. That includes the 52% of African American voters who said they want a Democratic presidential nominee who would emulate Obama's presidency. Overall, Biden won 65% of voters who preferred a return to politics before Trump.

Compared with Iowa and New Hampshire, where Biden never placed in the top three, South Carolina delivered some built-in demographic advantage for the former vice president.

Its voters were somewhat more likely to identify as moderate or conservative — 7 in 10 using either label. They were less likely to hold a college degree. More than half were nonwhite, compared with roughly 9 in 10 white voters in Iowa and New Hampshire.

But even among liberals, college graduates and white voters, Biden fared somewhat better on Saturday than he did in the previous contests.

White voters gave just a slight advantage to Biden over Sanders. Biden beat Sanders handily among women, and by a slightly narrower margin among men.

Biden won support from more than half of moderate and conservative voters, a group that has previously been divided between Minnesota Sen. Amy Klobuchar and Pete Buttigieg, the former mayor of South Bend, Indiana.

Both Buttigieg and Klobuchar have struggled to attract non-white voters — and showed no real progress Saturday. Buttigieg managed to get just 3% of the non-white vote. Klobuchar, whose support among all voters in South Carolina was in the low single digits, drew a negligible share of this group.

Among self-described liberals, about a third backed Sanders, who had been leading the pack after previous contests, only a slightly higher share than for Biden.

About half of South Carolina voters say they attend church services at least once a month; Biden won a majority.

On issues, South Carolina's voters were more focused on health care than voters in other early states. About 4 in 10 called it the most important issue. Twenty-one percent viewed the economy as the top priority, while 14% identified climate change. Democrats in Iowa and New Hampshire put greater emphasis on climate change and less importance on the economy.

As Super Tuesday looms with 14 states and one territory voting, it's unclear just how much more important TV ads are over name recognition.

Steyer pumped money into ads in South Carolina, while media mogul and former New York Mayor Mike Bloomberg — worth about \$60 billion — has been doing so nationwide. But voters are unsure whether having a financial titan challenging Trump, a reputed billionaire, in November's election would be helpful.

Only 21% said a billionaire would have an easier time against Trump, compared with 55% who said it would make no difference.

After finishing third in South Carolina, Steyer dropped out Saturday night.

AP VoteCast is a survey of the American electorate conducted by NORC at the University of Chicago for The Associated Press and Fox News. The survey of 1,499 voters in South Carolina was conducted for seven days, concluding as polls closed. Interviews were conducted in English or Spanish. The survey is based on interviews with a random sample of registered voters drawn from the state voter file. The margin of sampling error for voters is estimated to be plus or minus 3.7 percentage points.

Catch up on the 2020 election campaign with AP experts on our weekly politics podcast, "Ground Game."

Pentagon sees Taliban deal as allowing fuller focus on China

By **ROBERT BURNS** AP National Security Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Trump administration's peace deal with the Taliban opens the door for an initial American troop withdrawal that Defense Secretary Mark Esper sees as a step toward the broader goal of preparing for potential future war with China.

Esper has his eye on "great power competition," which means staying a step ahead of China and Russia on battlefields of the future, including in space and in next-generation strategic weapons like hypersonic missiles and advanced nuclear weapons. He sees China in particular as a rising threat to American pre-dominance on the world stage.

To do more to prepare for the China challenge, Esper wants to do less in Afghanistan, Iraq and other places. It's less about moving troops directly to Asia from elsewhere in the world, and more about reducing commitments in lower-priority regions so that more military units can train together at home on skills related to conventional warfare. Predecessors in the Pentagon have had similar hopes, only to be drawn back to crises in the greater Middle East. In the past year alone, the U.S. has sent an extra 20,000 troops to the Middle East, mainly due to worries about Iran.

With President Donald Trump's emphasis on ending America's wars against extremists and insurgents, including in Afghanistan, Esper wants to bring home as many troops as he thinks he prudently can so they can prepare for "high end" warfare.

Stephen Biddle, a policy analyst and a Columbia University professor of international and public affairs, is skeptical that the Pentagon will be able to fully shift away from Afghanistan and other regional hot spots like Iraq, recalling that the Obama administration tried the same thing — also with China's rise in mind — in the 2011-2014 period.

"The trouble was the Islamic State burst onto the scene," in Iraq and Syria, Biddle said in an interview, and "lo and behold it was right back to a focus on the Middle East and small wars."

In remarks Saturday in Kabul, Esper kept the focus on prospects for a complete U.S. withdrawal, while cautioning that the United States "will not hesitate" to strike what he called terrorist threats in Afghanistan if the Taliban falters in its promise to prevent extremist groups to use Afghan soil to launch attacks on the homelands of the U.S. or its allies.

"We still have a long way to go," Esper said.

Reducing U.S. troops levels in Afghanistan to zero is "our ultimate objective," he said, but added that it will take "many months."

Late last year, Esper said he would be willing to reduce troop levels even if no deal could be made with the Taliban.

"I would like to do that because what I want to do is reallocate forces to" the Asia-Pacific region, he said at the Ronald Reagan National Defense Forum in December. He said he wants to do the same thing in the Mideast, Africa and Europe.

"All of these places where I can free up troops where I could either bring them home to allow them to rest and refit and retrain or/and then reallocate them (to the Asia-Pacific region) to compete with the Chinese, to reassure our allies, to conduct exercises and training," he said.

The Pentagon has not publicly spelled out a precise timetable for troop reductions in Afghanistan, but Esper has said the peace deal signed Saturday in Doha, Qatar by American officials and Taliban representatives triggers the start of a drawdown from the current total of nearly 13,000 to about 8,600, similar to the number Trump inherited when he entered the White House three years ago. The reduction won't happen immediately; it will be carried out over a period of several months and could be slowed, stopped or even reversed if peace prospects turn sour.

Secretary of State Mike Pompeo on Sunday said the U.S. will hold the Taliban and Afghan national security forces to their commitments to reduce the level of violence and predicted a "rocky and bumpy"

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path ahead. "It's not about trust, it's about what happens on the ground not only yesterday, which was an important day, but in the days to follow," he told CBS' "Face the Nation."

Gen. Mark Milley, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and a former commander of U.S. forces in Afghanistan, told a House committee on Wednesday, "The whole thing is dependent upon conditions and dependent upon Taliban behavior."

A U.S. withdrawal, while conditioned on Taliban compliance, raises questions not just about the country's stability but also the prospects for continuing to combat non-Taliban extremists such as al-Qaida and the Islamic State affiliate in Afghanistan. Some in Congress, including Republican Rep. Liz Cheney of Wyoming, are pressing Pentagon officials for assurances that they will not cooperate or coordinate with the Taliban as a counterterror partner.

It would be "lunacy," Cheney said Wednesday, to trust the Taliban, which was running Afghanistan and harboring al-Qaida when U.S. forces invaded in October 2001. As part of the negotiated deal with Washington, the Taliban promised not to let al-Qaida use the country as a staging ground for attacking the United States or its allies.

If the peace process succeeds and the U.S. ends up withdrawing entirely, it might opt for an "over-the-horizon" counterterrorism force. In that case, U.S. special operations troops would be stationed in one or more nearby countries such as Uzbekistan and slip in and out of Afghanistan when necessary to monitor or to attack al-Qaida or IS fighters.

It was the Taliban's close association with al-Qaida, after the terrorist group led by Osama bin Laden carried out the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks on the United States, that prompted President George W. Bush to invade Afghanistan a month later.

U.S. force levels in Afghanistan ebbed and flowed over the years. Early on, the Americans hoped that a small force could keep a lid on al-Qaida and train an Afghan army. But from about 2,500 troops at the end of 2001, the force jumped to about 22,000 five years later. President Barack Obama ballooned the number from about 34,000 at the start of his first term to 100,000. By the time he left the White House the number had dropped to 8,400.

Trump entered office in January 2017 with no appetite for continuing the Afghan stalemate. He was persuaded, nonetheless, in August 2017 to add several thousand troops as part of what he called a new strategy for the region. That included designating Zalmay Khalilzad, a former U.S. ambassador to Kabul, to lead negotiations with the Taliban that eventually produced Saturday's deal and a chance for the United States to move beyond Afghanistan.

Today in History By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Monday, March 2, the 62nd day of 2020. There are 304 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On March 2, 1962, Wilt Chamberlain scored 100 points for the Philadelphia Warriors in a game against the New York Knicks, an NBA record that still stands. (Philadelphia won, 169-147.)

On this date:

In 1877, Republican Rutherford B. Hayes was declared the winner of the 1876 presidential election over Democrat Samuel J. Tilden, even though Tilden had won the popular vote.

In 1917, Puerto Ricans were granted U.S. citizenship as President Woodrow Wilson signed the Jones-Shafroth Act.

In 1932, the 20th Amendment to the Constitution, which moved the date of the presidential inauguration from March 4 to January 20, was passed by Congress and sent to the states for ratification.

In 1933, the motion picture "King Kong" had its world premiere at New York's Radio City Music Hall and the Roxy.

In 1939, Roman Catholic Cardinal Eugenio Pacelli (puh-CHEL'-ee) was elected pope on his 63rd birthday; he took the name Pius XII. The Massachusetts legislature voted to ratify the Bill of Rights, 147 years after

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the first 10 amendments to the U.S. Constitution had gone into effect. (Georgia and Connecticut soon followed.)

In 1940, the cartoon character Elmer Fudd made his debut in the Warner Bros. animated short "Elmer's Candid Camera," in which the title character finds himself pitted against a rascally rabbit that was a precursor to Bugs Bunny.

In 1943, the three-day Battle of the Bismarck Sea began in the southwest Pacific during World War II; U.S. and Australian warplanes were able to inflict heavy damage on an Imperial Japanese convoy.

In 1972, the United States launched the Pioneer 10 space probe, which flew past Jupiter in late 1973, sending back images and scientific data.

In 1985, the government approved a screening test for AIDS that detected antibodies to the virus, allowing possibly contaminated blood to be excluded from the blood supply.

In 1989, representatives from the 12 European Community nations agreed to ban all production of CFCs (chlorofluorocarbons), the synthetic compounds blamed for destroying the Earth's ozone layer, by the end of the 20th century.

In 1990, more than 6,000 drivers went on strike against Greyhound Lines Inc. (The company, later declaring an impasse in negotiations, fired the strikers.)

In 1995, the Internet search engine website Yahoo! was incorporated by founders Jerry Yang and David Filo.

Ten years ago: Authorities in San Diego County found the body of 17-year-old Chelsea King, who'd been missing since Feb. 25, 2010. (John Albert Gardner III later pleaded guilty to raping and murdering King and another victim, 14-year-old Amber Dubois; he was sentenced to life in prison without the possibility of parole.)

Five years ago: Iraqi forces launched a large-scale offensive to take Saddam Hussein's hometown of Tikrit from the Islamic State group, the first step in a campaign to reclaim parts of northern Iraq from the Sunni extremists. Sen. Barbara Mikulski, D-Md., who rose to become the longest-serving woman in the history of Congress, announced she would not seek re-election when her fifth term ended.

One year ago: Bernie Sanders kicked off his 2020 presidential campaign, proclaiming himself the Democrat best prepared to beat Donald Trump. Speaking at a conservative conference in Washington, President Donald Trump railed against the policies of "socialism" in a continued attempt to portray Democrats as out of touch with ordinary Americans.

Today's Birthdays: Actor John Cullum is 90. Former Soviet President and Nobel peace laureate Mikhail S. Gorbachev is 89. Actress Barbara Luna is 81. Author John Irving is 78. Actress Cassie Yates is 69. Actress Laraine Newman is 68. Former Sen. Russ Feingold, D-Wis., is 67. Former Interior Secretary Ken Salazar is 65. Singer Jay Osmond is 65. Pop musician John Cowsill (The Cowsills) is 64. Former tennis player Kevin Curren is 62. Country singer Larry Stewart (Restless Heart) is 61. Rock singer Jon Bon Jovi is 58. Blues singer-musician Alvin Youngblood Hart is 57. Actor Daniel Craig is 52. Actor Richard Ruccolo is 48. Rock musician Casey (formerly w/Jimmie's Chicken Shack) is 44. Rock singer Chris Martin (Coldplay) is 43. Actress Heather McComb is 43. Actress Rebel Wilson is 40. Actress Bryce Dallas Howard is 39. NFL quarterback Ben Roethlisberger is 38. NHL goalie Henrik Lundqvist is 38. Musician Mike "McDuck" Olson (Lake Street Dive) is 37. Actor Robert Iler is 35. Actress Nathalie Emmanuel is 31. Country singer Luke Combs is 30. Singer-rapper-actress Becky G is 23.

Thought for Today: "Don't cry because it's over. Smile because it happened." — Theodor Seuss Geisel (aka "Dr. Seuss"), American children's author (born this day, 1904; died 1991).

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