

Groton Daily Independent

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COVID-19 CASES

	Mar. 20	Mar. 21	Mar. 22	Mar. 23	Mar. 24	Mar. 25
Minnesota	115	137	169	235	262	287
Nebraska	27	42	50	52	61	68
Montana	15	27	34	45	51	65
Colorado	277	475	591	720	912	1,086
Wyoming	18	24	26	28	33	49
North Dakota	26	28	30	32	36	45
South Dakota	14	14	21	28	30	41
United States		15,219	33,276	43,963	54,812	69,147
US Deaths		201	417	560	780	1,046

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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Business Hours Changed

Several businesses have altered hours of operation due to the COVID-19 virus outbreak. Here are the ones that notified the Independent of their operational changes:

Dairy Queen is currently OPEN from 9:30 a.m. to 9:30 p.m. for take out and drive-thru. (Sundays we open at 11:30 a.m.)

Dakota Brush is open normal hours: Mon-Thurs 8:30-4:30 And Speedee is still running as well.

Groton UMC is pausing all events until May 10th now.

Groton C&MA Church will not be having personal service until further notice, but there will be a livestream of their service on their facebook page (GrotonCMA) at 10:45 a.m. on Sundays.

The Legion Lounge will be closed until further notice due to the COVID-19 virus. We thank everyone for there business and support.

City Hall, the City Shop and the Community Center are temporarily closed to the public. City Hall and City Shop staff will still be inside the buildings available by appointment only. Check out our website for building permits, utility payments, etc. at www.city.grotonsd.gov

Phone: City Hall 605-397-8422 City Shop 605-397-2690

JVT/NVC – All locations in Aberdeen, Groton and Redfield are temporarily closed to the public. Staff will continue to answer calls, online chats, emails and text messages. A complete list of contact information can be found online at www.jamesvalley.com or call 605-397-2323 should you have questions. Payment drop boxes are available at the Groton (235 E 1st Ave) and Aberdeen (1812 6th Ave SE #1) locations. Free Public WiFi is available 24x7 from the parking lot at all locations.

The Jungle: take out only. Mon-Fri 11-1 and 4-8. Saturday 4-8. Hoping to start delivery in the evening soon.

Subway is open 9:00 AM till 7:00 PM. Carry out only.

The laundromat remains opened. Free wifi access available by appointment and we will have student desks available inside.

The GDI Living Heart Fitness Center. However, if the COVID-19 takes hold in Brown County, we will switch to an appointment only basis at the fitness center. Please call/text Paul at 605/397-7460 for more information.

Samantha's Massage is closed for this week. Will update on a weekly basis.

Love to Travel to your business list. Our office is closed by we can be reached for future travel via email at becah@lovetotravel.com.

Dueling Piano's Baseball Fundraiser scheduled for April 4th at the American Legion is cancelled.

The Groton Fireman Fun Night scheduled for April 25th is canceled. If you have already purchased a ticket you will be refunded. Contact the person that sold you the ticket or call Patti Woods. Thank you for your support and stay safe and stay home and enjoy your families!

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Covid-19 Update by Marie Miller

Here are the numbers: We're now at 68,508 cases reported in 50 states and 3 territories. Still leading the way with a runaway outbreak is NY with 33,066 cases and 4 more states over 2000 cases: NJ – 4402, CA – 3183, WA – 2585, and MI – 2286. The top ten states (filled out by FL, IL MA, LA, and GA) are still accounting for 80% of US cases. We have 8 states over 1000 cases, 5 more over 500, 13 + DC over 200, and 19 states + 3 territories over 10.

I'm not sure yet—not yet a trend, but it appears things may be moderating somewhat. The rate of increase may be slowing down with the overall US cases increasing by 22% and in NY (the primary driver of increases over the past several days) increasing by 29%. It's early times yet, especially since we got more serious about delaying spread; we'll see over the next week or two.

990 people have died from this infection so far, about a third (325) of them in NY. WA has 130 deaths, and NY and CA have 62 and 67, respectively. There have been 65 deaths in L, 47 in GA, 43 in Mi. Other states in double digits in number of deaths include FL, IL, MA, PA, TX, Co, CT, OH, IN, NV, and OR. Reporting their first deaths today are NC, AL, AR, NH, and NM. The following states and territories have reported no deaths yet: RI, ME, DE, NE, ID, MT, WV, AK, ND, WY, and VI.

New York is on the front lines of this crisis at the moment. Cases were doubling every two days for a while; that rate of increase has slowed in recent days, likely (hopefully) in response to social distancing policies imposed in the past couple of weeks. But since there is about a week's lag time between the beginning of symptoms and hospitalization, there is still going to be a flush of people coming in over the next week or two; and hospitals are really beyond capacity now. They have been converting every available space for patient care. They are using tents and other temporary facilities. FEMA is constructing another 1000 beds at a convention center. The Navy will move in a 1000-bed hospital ship in about three weeks. (The ship was in for repairs and apparently cannot be made available any sooner.) Still, patients are standing in line outside the emergency departments, sometimes for hours, before being seen; they have had to wait for a bed, some of them for more than 24 hours, just sitting in a chair, waiting their turns. One hospital is storing the deceased in a refrigerated truck parked outside. They're not out of ventilators yet because more machines have been flooding in; but they have begun to ventilate more than one patient on a machine, an unprecedented step we discussed a few days ago. Things are serious. We'll see if the system holds as this wave crests. I hope so.

California and Washington are bracing for surges themselves. It is thought that the earlier imposition of social distancing and shelter-in-place policies in these locations and their far lower population density will spare them the critical shortages of care being seen in New York; but whether this holds remains to be seen. Meanwhile, they are preparing. In California, authorities are working with private companies, having largely given up on the federal government, to stockpile tests and PPE. They're clearing out hospitals and expanding capacity. Closed facilities are being prepared to reopen. A Navy hospital ship is on its way to Los Angeles from San Diego, expected to arrive Friday; the plan is to care for non-Covid patients on the ship, freeing up land-based beds for Covid patients. They're also getting more serious about enforcement of policies designed to limit spread; the mayor of Los Angeles is considering shutting off utilities to businesses which remain open despite an order to close. It shouldn't require such a step, but I guess you do what you have to do.

Less populous states, for example, Montana and Kansas, are also seeing surges in cases and are furiously working to free up hospital space and stock supplies before that surge makes its way to the hospitals. My own state of SD has seen eight-fold increases since our first cases were reported just two weeks ago; I

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expect those cases to continue to increase for a while because we have not yet gotten serious about social distancing and policies to require closing nonessential businesses and all the other precautions undertaken in other states. I am hoping the lead time given by seeing what's happened on the coasts is being used wisely in these states to prepare and to enforce policies designed to delay spread. Preparation saves lives.

I don't spend much time here on policy because that veers pretty close to politics, and politics is an inflammatory subject. But I am not insensible to the policy implications of this pandemic, specifically the question being raised recently, what about the economy? We can't leave things shut down forever, and it has been whispered that perhaps the best approach is to just let this thing burn through the population until we've achieved herd immunity from recovered individuals. Alternatively, it has been proposed we shield the elderly and let the rest of America get back to work, whatever the consequences. Marc Lipsitch, a Harvard epidemiology professor disagrees with these approaches, pointing out there's no way to shield elderly because the people they'd rely on for basic needs are part of the "herd" you're letting get sick. He also said, "even with lower death/ICU rates in younger people, in the aggregate there would be a lot of terrible consequences even if we could shield the elderly."

Lipsitch further recommends we use the time we are buying with these social distancing measures "to mobilize a massive political, economic and societal effort to find new ways to cope with this virus." These "new ways" are to reduce interaction among people, to establish a coordinated testing program, to trace contacts, and to use isolation. We also need to do something about the supply of masks and ventilators and PPE for health care workers. The foundation for returning to a more normal life and bringing the economy back is widespread regular testing and contact tracing.

You will note we're back to a theme you've seen here before: testing, testing, and testing. We can't protect anyone from this infection if we don't know who's spreading it. There simply must be far more intense focus on making that happen. Fast. That's going to cost money and take resources; but it won't cost as much as letting this pandemic have its way with us. And it won't kill as many people either.

I remain hopeful we can get a handle on this thing, but concerned we're not doing enough of the right things fast enough. We can still all step up. You know the drill: Stay home. Limit your contacts when you must leave home. Try never to share air with someone who's less than six feet away, and if you must, limit the time you do so. Practice good hand hygiene. Wash down frequently-touched surfaces. Do a little overkill on precautions. And find one way to make things better for someone else. Every single day. If you miss a day, do two deeds tomorrow. I have faith that we are better than we've looked the past couple of years, that we still do care deeply about the welfare of our fellow residents of this country, that we want everyone to thrive. Take care of one other person in just one small way every single day.

And keep yourself healthy. It's a service to you and to the rest of us as well. Take care.



South Dakota Governor Kristi Noem:

Press Pause

The following is the transcript of Governor Kristi Noem's message to South Dakotans on Wednesday:

Good morning.

I'm going to do things a little differently today. For several weeks, sometimes twice a day, I've stood up here or in Rapid City or in Sioux Falls, and I provided a detailed update on everything that we know about COVID-19 in

South Dakota and the decisions that we're making to respond to it.

I've taken hundreds of questions at this point. I've walked you through the modeling and the projections that we have. I've given you the science, the data, and the facts that inform my decision-making, not just on a day-to-day basis, but sometimes on an hour-by-hour basis. I want you to understand that we are doing our absolute best, and our best is very good. This is not an ancient plague – we have the knowledge and the resources of modern medicine that give us the tools to defeat this, as we have so many other illnesses that we've dealt with in the past from polio to flu. Rest assured that we will do so.

Today, though, I want to address something a little bit different. I want to speak to all of you, not as my bosses, but I want to speak to you as my neighbors.

I want to ask each and every one of you to pause. To take a step back.

Last night, I had a staffer that was trying to pick up groceries. She asked the cashier when she went through the line how she was doing, and unprompted, this woman got very emotional. She started to get tears in her eyes, and she said, "I'm really scared." Then for several minutes, the cashier outlined all of her fears and what was keeping her awake at night.

I understand that. I've heard from many of you myself – from my family, my friends, and some total strangers – who feel exactly the same way.

I've spoken about how we're in this for the long-haul. For South Dakota, we expect this to take many, many weeks – perhaps even months – to run its course.

I have state employees who are – quite literally – working around the clock. Just yesterday, I had a young man who passed out in the middle of a meeting from dehydration. He is doing well today and he's at home resting.

But I share that with you because what you need to know and what I need you to know is that the folks who are helping me – the faceless state employees, who are doing everything they can to get information to you, to help those who have questions, who need guidance about what kind of resources there are or how they can help people, they are working 60, 70 to 80 hours a week. This includes EMS workers,

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hospital workers, and many volunteers in your communities.

I have a Secretary of Health who by all accounts has been tremendous. She has been at this since January – she has stood up our operations, she has readied our resources, she has prepared a plan to fight this virus head-on, and she has been steadfast. Day-in and day-out, Kim has been planning, coordinating, and executing all of the decisions that I am making.

I've talked to so many local officials, who are stretched so thin. I know that they are worried; I can see it on faces, I hear it in their voices. I am asking them to be steadfast, to be calm, to be leaders.

Friends and neighbors may be sick. Family members may be worried about how their bills are going to be paid this month... how they're going to put food on the table, how they're going to keep a roof over their head, if this continues much longer.

So my message to you today is please press pause. Put down your smartphones, turn off your TVs, maybe go for a walk. Visit with your families. Spend some time with them. Call a loved one. Just take a break. Focus on the good things that you have in your life, the blessings. Reflect with gratitude and how fortunate we are in this country to live in the modern world. A threat like this can break us down – or it can make us truly appreciate the many blessings that we do have.

If there's anything that we all can rally around today, at this moment, it's that we all have a common enemy – and that's this virus.

It's okay to be uncertain at times.

But at the same time, we can also pour ourselves into our families, into our neighbors, and into our communities. People are afraid, and they're worried. And some may be losing hope.

But my message to you is hang in there. We will get through this, and we will persevere.

So, even if it's just for a little bit today, would you please consider taking a step back. Press pause. Go for a walk. Just be quiet for today, and really reflect on the good things that we do have.

My hope is that despite this situation we all find a way to allow this to help bring us all together. To remind us of what is truly important in life. To remind us of three things: faith, hope and love, and the greatest of these is love.

Thank you.

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COVID-19 IN SOUTH DAKOTA

On the good news, five more people have recovered from COVID-19 for a total of 13 fully recovered.

The positive cases in South Dakota jumped to 41, an increase of 11. New cases in counties are: Brown - 1, Lincoln - 1, Meade - 1, Minnehaha - 8. There is now at least one case in all age groups in South Dakota.

SOUTH DAKOTA CASE COUNTS

Test Results	# of Cases
Positive*	41
Negative**	819
Pending***	268

COVID-19 IN SOUTH DAKOTA

Number of Cases	41
Deaths	1
Recovered	13

SEX OF SOUTH DAKOTA COVID-19 CASES

Sex	# of Cases
Male	22
Female	19

SD COUNTY OF RESIDENCE OF COVID-19 CASES

County	# of Cases
Beadle	13
Bon Homme	1
Brown	2
Brookings	1
Charles Mix	1
Codington	1
Davison	2
Hughes	1
Lincoln	1
Lyman	1
McCook	2
Meade	1
Minnehaha	13
Pennington	1

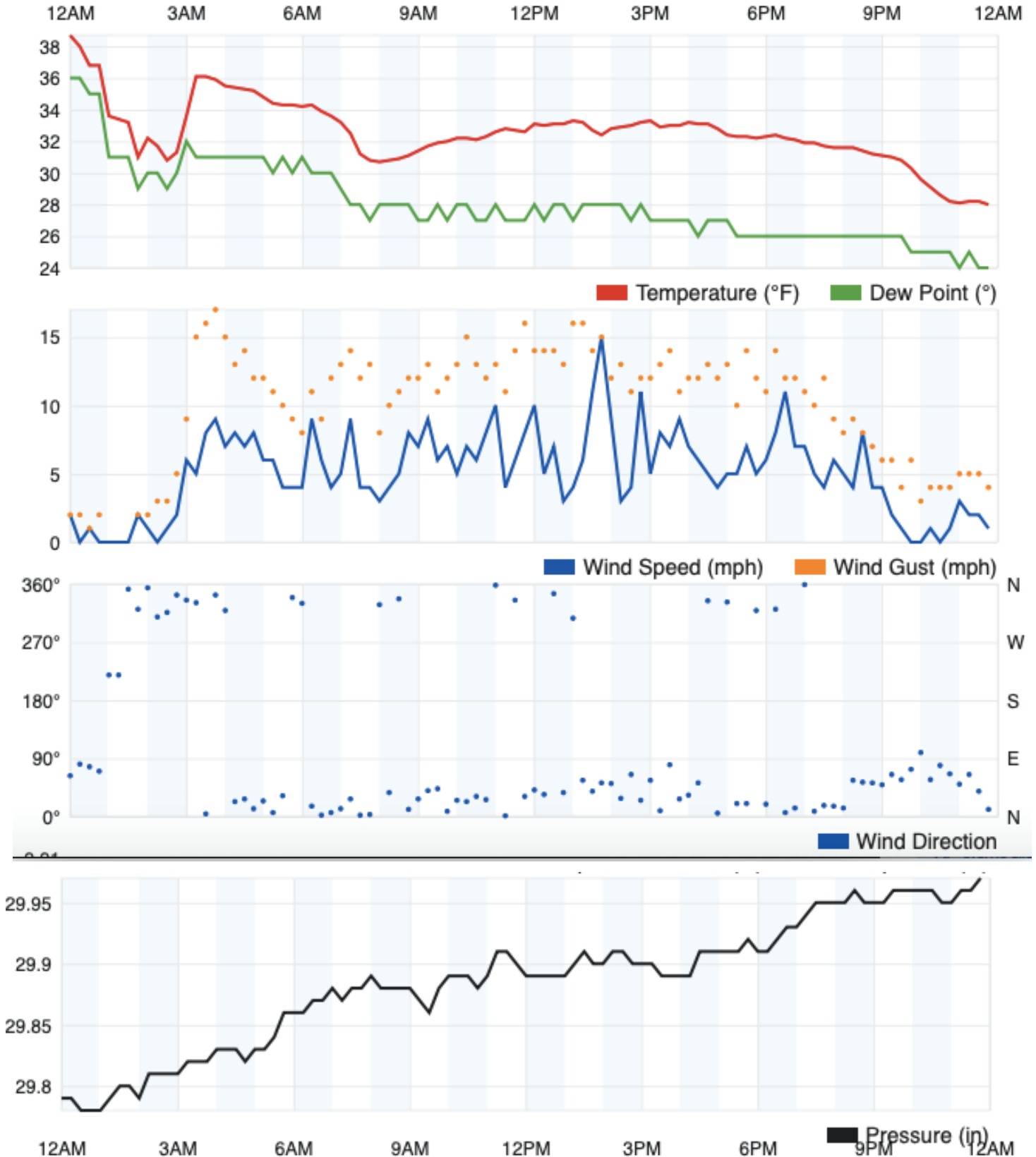
AGE GROUP OF SOUTH DAKOTA COVID-19 CASES

Age Range	# of Cases
0 to 19 years	2
20 to 29 years	7
30 to 39 years	6
40 to 49 years	4
50 to 59 years	12
60 to 69 years	8
70 to 79 years	1
80+ years	1

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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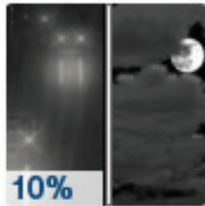
Today



Cloudy then
Chance Rain

High: 42 °F

Tonight



Slight Chance
Rain then
Mostly Cloudy

Low: 31 °F

Friday



Mostly Cloudy
then Slight
Chance Rain

High: 49 °F

Friday
Night



Chance Rain
then Chance
Rain/Snow

Low: 34 °F

Saturday




Chance
Rain/Snow
then Slight
Chance Rain


High: 50 °F

More Precipitation Today/Friday

Today Friday



Highs Mid 30s-Lower 40s Highs Mid 40s-Lower 50s

 National Weather Service
Updated: 3/26/2020 5:43

It will be cloudy today and Friday with a couple periods of rain and snow. Central South Dakota may have up to a half inch of snow today. Highs today will be in the mid 30s to the lower 40s with mid 40s to the lower 50s on Friday.

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Today in Weather History

March 26, 1977: During the early morning, severe weather event, hail up to 1.75 inches in diameter fell 1 mile NE of Watertown in Codington County. Also, hail up to 1.50 inches in diameter fell in Milbank, Grant County.

March 26, 1995: Heavy snow fell over most of central South Dakota, as well as in the northern Black Hills. Heavier accumulations included 14 inches at Murdo, 13 inches at Lead, and 12 inches at Eureka, and Leola. Only a few traffic accidents were reported, although many other vehicles slid into ditches. There was some damage to power lines and poles. Some livestock losses were feared, as the snow fell during the calving season, although this could not be assessed in the short term.

March 26, 2008: An area of low pressure moving across the Northern Plains brought heavy snow from 6 to 15 inches in a band across much of central and northeast South Dakota from the evening to the early morning hours. Schools were delayed or canceled and road travel was difficult, if not impossible. Some snowfall amounts included: 6 inches at Stephan, Willow Lake, Harrold, Miller, and near Hoven; 7 inches at Hayti, east of Hayes, and Eagle Butte; 8 inches at Highmore and Doland; 9 inches at Orient, Bryant, and near Onida; 10 inches at Gettysburg and Faulkton; 11 inches at Seneca and Redfield. Locations with a foot or more of snowfall included: 12 inches 23 miles north of Highmore; 13 inches near Agar; 15 inches 24 miles north of Highmore.

1948: Good Friday tornadoes moved from Terre Haute to Redkey, Indiana killing 20 people. About 80% of the town of Coatesville was destroyed, and 16 people were killed. The Coatesville Carnegie Library was a total loss. The path was a half mile wide.

2009: The proof is in the pudding - A NOAA Weather Radio can save your life. Near Belk, AL, a family was alerted to a tornado by their weather radio; they went to their storm cellar. They heard the "jet roar" of the EF1 tornado as it damaged their home; they were unhurt.

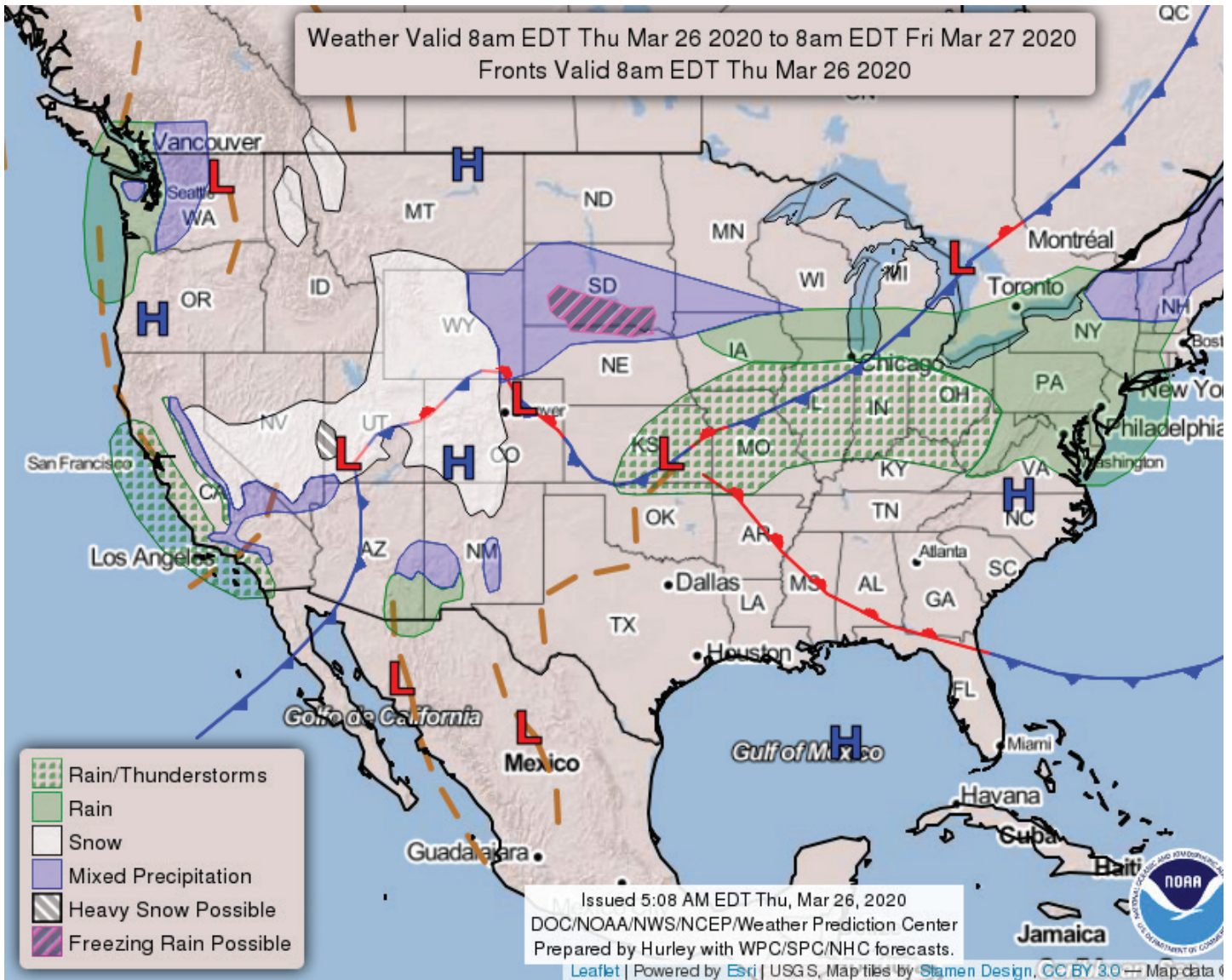
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Yesterday's Groton Weather Today's Info

High Temp: 39 °F at 12:00 AM
Low Temp: 28 °F at 11:57 PM
Wind: 18 mph at 3:36 AM
Snow

Record High: 74° in 1905
Record Low: -13° in 1964
Average High: 45°F
Average Low: 24°F
Average Precip in March.: 0.88
Precip to date in March.: 0.00
Average Precip to date: 1.90
Precip Year to Date: 0.35
Sunset Tonight: 7:55 p.m.
Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:22 a.m.



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WHEN TIMES ARE THREATENING

A young boy was sitting on the roof of his home watching his father repair a leak in the shingles. Not realizing the steep pitch of the roof, he began to inch his way upward and suddenly started to slide downward. Realizing the danger of his situation, he shouted, "O God, help me I'm in trouble and I'm going to fall to my death!"

Suddenly his jeans became snagged on a nail and he stopped sliding. Looking upward he said, "Thank you God, I'm all right now!"

Who do you call upon when you are suddenly faced with a life-threatening situation? We often have a loved one whom we can call upon in a moment's notice. Most of us are blessed with a few faithful friends who respond immediately in times of disaster. But, when we are suddenly and without warning faced with what appears to be an imminent disaster, what are we to do?

Fortunately, our God has promised us that we will never face any adversity alone. Again and again, His Word assures us that He is ready, willing, able and wanting to rescue us when we are in trouble. He is always alert, awaiting our call and anxious to respond.

Prayer : Father, we are grateful for Your promise that we can always "call upon You in the day of trouble." Help us to trust in the greatness of Your goodness and grace In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: Psalm 50:15 Then call on me when you are in trouble, and I will rescue you, and you will give me glory.

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2020 Groton SD Community Events

- 04/04/2020 Groton Lions Club Easter Egg Hunt - City Park (Saturday a week before Easter Weekend)
 - **CANCELLED** Dueling Piano's Baseball Fundraiser at the American Legion
 - **CANCELLED** Fireman's Fun Night (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
 - Jun 2020 Transit Fundraiser (Thursday Mid-June)

News from the Associated Press

SD Lottery

By The Associated Press undefined

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) _ These South Dakota lotteries were drawn Wednesday:

Dakota Cash

07-09-18-21-35

(seven, nine, eighteen, twenty-one, thirty-five)

Estimated jackpot: \$20,000

Lotto America

06-33-36-41-48, Star Ball: 10, ASB: 3

(six, thirty-three, thirty-six, forty-one, forty-eight; Star Ball: ten; ASB: three)

Estimated jackpot: \$8.8 million

Mega Millions

Estimated jackpot: \$107 million

Powerball

05-09-27-39-42, Powerball: 16, Power Play: 2

(five, nine, twenty-seven, thirty-nine, forty-two; Powerball: sixteen; Power Play: two)

Estimated jackpot: \$150 million

State's COVID-19 hotbed, Huron reveals anxiety and resolve

By STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — As South Dakota grappled with the reality that COVID-19 is spreading throughout the state, the city of Huron emerged as the state's early hotbed of the pandemic, prompting fear and a resolve to preserve scarce medical resources.

Huron, known for its meat-packing plant and as the site of the state fair, could not feel more distant from early epicenters of COVID-19 elsewhere in the United States, such as New York City or Seattle. But as Gov. Kristi Noem warns that up to 30% of people in the state could become infected, the community has revealed what many are about to face — anxiety prompted by an invisible foe and the makeshift response required to endure the pandemic.

Huron was one of the first places in South Dakota with community spread — when it's unclear how an infected person contracted the virus. Beadle County, which includes Huron, led the state in the number of cases until Wednesday when officials announced the more populous Minnehaha County and Beadle County both had 13.

Huron residents fear there could be many more.

The state is rationing its testing supplies to those at the highest risk of complications or spreading it to others.

On March 10, state health officials announced South Dakota's first case, in Beadle County. Things went quiet for over a week before the number jumped to 4 on March 20; and then to 10, 12, 13.

"You just don't understand how fast it can kindle," said Denis Drake, a county commissioner who is leading the response.

County and town officials decided during an emergency meeting on Sunday that Beadle would become the first county in the state to close bars, restaurants and non-essential businesses.

"That Sunday, when that number hit ... it was a wake-up call," said Jen Bragg, who runs the local United Way.

A sense of anxiety has settled over the community. Many stay inside, penned up with children home from school and unspent nervous energy. Rumors spread that the infection started in the Karen commu-

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nity, many of whom work at the meat-packing plant. Mayor Paul Aylward refuted that, saying only white people have tested positive.

Noem on Wednesday focused her daily update on telling people to pause and persevere. She said state employees have been working long hours, with one even passing out from dehydration during a meeting this week. The number of cases in the state rose Wednesday from 30 to 41 a day earlier, including one death on March 10.

Also Wednesday, Monument Health in Rapid City announced that a health care worker with COVID-19 came into contact with an estimated 100 patients in its cancer care facility. The worker is now being treated at Monument Health's facilities. The woman also came into contact with 10 other health care workers and two physicians. Most of the patients were in an ambulatory area.

When the family of state legislator Bob Glanzer, a Republican from Huron, announced he had been airlifted to a hospital in Sioux Falls to be treated for COVID-19, many took heed.

Michelle Gascoigne, 61, said some of her Facebook friends had been spreading rumors that it was all an overblown hoax pushed by Democrats. She said she hasn't seen posts like that since Glanzer was hospitalized.

For most people, the coronavirus causes mild or moderate symptoms, such as fever and cough that clear up in two to three weeks. For some, especially older adults and people with existing health problems, it can cause more severe illness, including pneumonia, or death.

Many residents worry that Huron Regional Medical Center, the only hospital for miles, could be overrun if infections spread. The hospital has just 25 beds and 3 spots to give intensive care to COVID-19 patients. It has 12 respirators, but only enough staff to run three at a time. They are trying to figure out ways to run more.

In the emergency, the community has taken a stopgap approach.

A group formed to sew cloth masks that can be placed over the N95 masks to prolong their usefulness. A chiropractic clinic organized testing for people with COVID-19 symptoms away from the hospital. And the emergency response team is considering using buildings at the state fairgrounds for an overflow of COVID-19 patients.

The governor has warned that the state will continue to see an increase in infections until May or June. If Noem's projections hold, well over 30,000 people in the state may need to be hospitalized.

State health officials are assessing the surge capacity of the state's hospitals.

The South Dakota Legislature will meet via teleconference on Monday for the final scheduled day of this year's legislative session. They may be considering adjustments to the state budget or emergency action in light of the pandemic.

Meanwhile, Republican Sen. John Thune decided to return home to South Dakota after waking up Wednesday feeling ill. After consulting with his physician in Sioux Falls, he was advised that no further immediate action was needed but to continue self-monitoring his condition, according to a statement issued by Thune's office.

Follow AP coverage of the virus outbreak at <https://apnews.com/VirusOutbreak> and <https://apnews.com/UnderstandingtheOutbreak>

South Dakota warden resigns after COVID-19 infection, escape

SIoux FALLS, S.D. (AP) — The warden of the South Dakota Women's Prison resigned abruptly this week after nine women escaped from the prison and another tested positive for COVID-19.

Wanda Markland offered her resignation and left the position on Tuesday. There is now an interim warden running the prison.

State officials announced on Monday that an inmate at the prison had tested positive for COVID-19. Nine women escaped from the prison that night. One of the women who escaped has been apprehended, and three others were taken into custody on the Crow Creek Reservation.

Noem confirmed on Tuesday that the escapees were from the same unit as the woman who tested positive, but the governor did not know how close in proximity the women had been. Officials are keeping the woman with COVID-19 in isolation. Secretary of health, Kim Malsam-Rysdon said Tuesday an investigation is underway into how the coronavirus spread to the prison and who might be at risk for infection.

The Latest: Infected caregiver had contact with 100 others

SIoux FALLS, S.D. (AP) — The Latest on the coronavirus outbreak in South Dakota (all times local):
5:45 p.m.

A Rapid City health care worker with COVID-19 came into contact with over 100 patients at Monument Health's cancer care facility, the health care company announced on Wednesday.

Monument Health announced the health care worker, who they identified as a woman, is now being treated at its facilities, the Rapid City Journal reported. Paulette Davidson, the president of Monument Health, said Wednesday that the woman came into contact with an estimated 100 patients, 10 other health care workers and two physicians. Most patients were in an ambulatory area.

People undergoing cancer treatment have weakened immune symptoms. For some people, especially older adults and people with existing health problems, it can cause more severe illness, including pneumonia, or death.

South Dakota officials said Wednesday the number of people who have tested positive for COVID-19 rose from 30 to 41. Several areas in the state have reported the illness spreading throughout communities.
8:30 a.m.

The South Dakota Legislature will meet via teleconference for the final scheduled day of this year's legislative session.

Lawmakers were scheduled to convene on Monday in Pierre to consider action on any vetoes from Gov. Kristi Noem, but decided to hold the meeting remotely due to the outbreak of COVID-19.

The meeting may also be used to consider emergency actions like budget adjustments or legislative action in light of the global pandemic. The public will still be able to listen to the meeting.

Rep. Bob Glanzer, a Huron Republican, was hospitalized on Sunday after being infected with COVID-19. He was airlifted to a hospital in Sioux Falls on Monday and has shown signs of recovering, according to an update from his son.

For most people, the coronavirus causes mild or moderate symptoms, such as fever and cough that clear up in two to three weeks. For some, especially older adults and people with existing health problems, it can cause more severe illness, including pneumonia and death.

Judge orders environmental review of Dakota Access pipeline

DAVE KOLPACK Associated Press

FARGO, N.D. (AP) — A federal judge on Wednesday ordered the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to conduct a full environmental review of the Dakota Access pipeline, nearly three years after it began carrying oil despite protests by people who gathered in North Dakota for more than a year.

U.S. District Judge James Boasberg wrote that the easement approval for the pipeline remains "highly controversial" under federal environmental law, and a more extensive review is necessary than the environmental assessment that was done.

Standing Rock Chairman Mike Faith called it a "significant legal win" and said it's humbling that the protests continue to "inspire national conversations" about the environment.

"Perhaps in the wake of this court ruling the federal government will begin to catch on, too, starting by actually listening to us when we voice our concerns," Faith said in a statement.

Officials with the Corps and Energy Transfer, which owns the pipeline, did not immediately respond to phone messages left by The Associated Press. Craig Stevens, spokesman for the GAIN Coalition, a group that supports large infrastructure projects, said the decision could jeopardize the nation's economic and energy security.

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"This is a stunning decision that flies in the face of decades of widely accepted practice," Stevens said in a statement. "The Dakota Access Pipeline is already the most studied, regulated, and litigated pipeline in the history of our country and has been safely operating for nearly three years."

It's not clear whether the ruling will shut down the pipeline. Boasberg ordered both parties to submit briefs on whether the pipeline should continue operating during the period of the new environmental review.

The pipeline was the subject of months of protests, sometimes violent, during its construction in late 2016 and early 2017 near the Standing Rock Sioux Reservation that straddles the North Dakota-South Dakota border. The Standing Rock tribe continued to press litigation against the pipeline even after it began carrying oil from North Dakota across several states to a shipping point in Illinois in June 2017.

The \$3.8 billion, 1,172-mile (1,886 kilometer) underground pipeline crosses beneath the Missouri River, just north of the Standing Rock reservation. The tribe draws its water from the river and fears pollution. Texas-based Energy Transfer insisted the pipeline would be safe.

Permits for the project were originally rejected by the Obama administration, and the Corps prepared to conduct a full environmental review. In February 2017, shortly after Donald Trump took office, the Corps scrapped the review and granted permits for the project, concluding that running the pipeline under the Missouri River posed no significant environmental issues. The Corps said that opinion was validated after an additional year of reviewing the project, as ordered by the court.

Boasberg said during one of his many opinions on the case that the project "largely complied" with requirements for the National Environmental Policy Act, but left the door open for the tribes when he said there were "substantial exceptions" to meeting those rules. He ordered further review on the potential impact of the project.

The ruling issued Wednesday focused on whether "the project's effects were likely to be highly controversial." The judge cited concerns with the leak detection system, operator safety record, the impact of North Dakota winters and the analysis of a worst-case scenario for a spill.

Much of Boasberg's ruling was based on a 2019 case decided by a Washington D.C. federal appeals court that considered whether agencies adequately dealt with expert criticisms such as those in the Dakota Access Pipeline case. Applying that case, Boasberg wrote that he "ultimately concludes that too many questions remain unanswered."

Earthjustice attorney Jan Hasselman, who represents the Standing Rock Tribe, said the Obama administration "had it right" when it denied the permits and his group will continue to argue the case until the pipeline is shut down. He said because a full environmental review could take a year or two, it could be "potentially conducted under the next presidential administration."

"This gives the Army Corps a new opportunity to get this right," Hasselman said.

Rural America watches pandemic erupt in cities as fear grows

By GILLIAN FLACCUS Associated Press

DUFUR, Ore. (AP) — The social distancing rules repeated like a mantra in America's urban centers, where the coronavirus is spreading exponentially, might seem silly in wide-open places where neighbors live miles apart and "working from home" means another day spent branding calves or driving a tractor alone through a field.

But as the pandemic spreads through the U.S., those living in rural areas, too, are increasingly threatened. Tiny towns tucked into Oregon's windswept plains and cattle ranches miles from anywhere in South Dakota might not have had a single case of the new coronavirus, but their main streets are also empty and their medical clinics overwhelmed by the worried.

Residents from rural Alabama to the woods of Vermont to the frozen reaches of Alaska fear the spread of the disease from outsiders, the social isolation that comes when the town's only diner closes, and economic collapse in places where jobs were already scarce.

"Nobody knows what to do and they're just running in circles, so stay away from me is what I'm saying," said Mike Filbin, a 70-year-old cattle rancher in Wasco County, Oregon, one of the few parts of the state

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that has yet to see a case of COVID-19.

"Right now, we're pretty clean over here, but we're not immune to nothin' — and if they start bringing it over, it'll explode here."

To make matters worse, some of the most remote communities have limited or no internet access and spotty cellphone service. That makes telecommuting and online learning challenging in an era of blanket school and work closures, and it eliminates the possibility of the FaceTime card games and virtual cocktail hours that urban Americans have turned to in droves to stay connected.

The routine ways that rural Americans connect — a bingo night, stopping in at a local diner or attending a potluck — are suddenly taboo.

"Rural people are reliant on their neighbors and have more confidence and trust in their neighbors," said Ken Johnson, a senior demographer at the Carsey School of Public Policy and professor of sociology at the University of New Hampshire. "Now you have people who are supposed to self-isolate themselves. What does that mean when people you depend on, in order to help you, are going to put themselves and their families at risk? I don't know what that will do in rural America."

Neil Bradshaw, the mayor of Ketchum, Idaho, is starting to see the answer in his own community.

The rural resort town has struggled since the arrival of COVID-19, and he fears if the virus lingers too long, it could devastate it. The town is nestled next door to the tony skiing destination Sun Valley Resort and is known as the second-home haven for dozens of celebrities.

It's also become the epicenter of Idaho's caseload, with at least 35 cases and known community spread of the virus. At least 14 of the cases are among health care workers, forcing the town's small medical workers to bring in replacement staffers from nearby cities.

"Our town thrives on people coming to town, and for the first time in our history we are discouraging visitors," said Bradshaw, of the town of 2,700 people. "Initially people had different levels of adoption, but there's tremendous community pressure that we're all in this together. We've gone from being a vibrant town to a ghost town."

The town's coffers rely on a local option tax, and if that drops by half the city will have lost \$700,000 in revenue, he said.

Some communities have pushed back on shutdowns that have brought daily life to a standstill. Leaders from seven Utah counties, for example, sent a letter earlier this week to Gov. Gary Herbert urging a "return to normalcy," and said the closure of schools and business was causing panic and hurting the economy.

"As of (Monday), the total deaths attributed to the virus in the United States stands at ninety," the letter states. "Not nine hundred, not nine thousand, not ninety thousand. Ninety. This number is sure to rise in the near future but we need to keep our wits about us."

Others worry about outsiders bringing the disease to truly remote areas that aren't equipped to deal with it. Across the nation, there are over 51,000 general intensive care beds in urban counties, compared with just 5,600 in rural counties, according to data compiled by The Associated Press.

Those beds serve a smaller population than in urban areas, but it would still take fewer people in rural areas to overwhelm a typical hospital. In fiscal year 2018, the average rural hospital had eight ICU beds, compared with 20 for a typical hospital in an urban area.

In Georgiana, a small town in southern Alabama, the only hospital closed last year, so residents flocked to the health clinic instead when a person in a town 5 miles (8 kilometers) away was diagnosed with COVID-19. More than 30% of Georgiana's 1,600 residents are over age 60, putting them at higher risk with limited medical facilities to serve them, said Mayor Jerome Antone.

For most people, the new coronavirus causes mild or moderate symptoms, such as fever and cough that clear up in two to three weeks. For some, especially older adults and people with existing health problems, it can cause more severe illness, including pneumonia and death.

Georgiana's older residents, Antone said, are "aggressively upset," even though no one there has been diagnosed yet.

In Alaska's Point Hope, an Inupiat whaling village at the edge of the Arctic Ocean nearly 700 miles (1,130

kilometers) north of Anchorage, tribal leaders have been preparing and discussing potential issues such as air travel into town. The state's limited road system doesn't reach the community of 900 people, which relies on planes for much of its connection to the outside world.

This week, one of the two airlines that serve Point Hope will begin restricting flights to cargo and passengers with medical or other essential needs.

Still, residents worry the recent deaths of two elders will bring out-of-town mourners for the funerals.

"We have all kinds of different people who come into our village," said acting Mayor Daisy Sage. "This coronavirus is serious."

Thousands of miles away, in South Dakota, falling prices for beef are generating as much — or more — worry than the virus.

Sam Stoddard, a cattle rancher near the town of Kadoka, population 650, said futures markets for beef have dropped up to 30% because of the coronavirus. He's worried about longtime ranchers being able to hang on.

If the market remains terrible, he said, ranchers can put off selling their calves until later in the year — but no one knows how long the economy will be in upheaval, leaving everyone stressed.

At the same time, the state has not shuttered businesses, leaving residents wondering what to expect next. South Dakota has 30 confirmed cases of the coronavirus.

"Normally this time of year we're more worried about a big blizzard coming in and killing 10% of our calves. You know it's coming, and you can prepare for it," Stoddard said.

"With this, you don't know what's coming or what you should be doing."

Associated Press writers Michael Casey in Boston; Stephen Groves in Sioux Falls, South Dakota; Rebecca Boone in Boise, Idaho; Jay Reeves in Birmingham, Alabama; Rachel D'Oro in Anchorage, Alaska; and Nicholas Forster in New York City contributed to this report.

The Latest: Japan to impose entry bans from Europe

By The Associated Press undefined

The Latest on the coronavirus pandemic. The new coronavirus causes mild or moderate symptoms for most people, but for some, especially older adults and people with existing health problems, it can cause more severe illness or death.

TOP OF THE HOUR:

- China pushes back against "Wuhan virus" label.
- Health minister in Romania resigns.
- In Europe, coronavirus expanding fastest in Spain.

TOKYO — Japan's Prime Minister Shinzo Abe convened a coronavirus task force meeting, instructing all 47 prefectural leaders to plan contingency measures to fight the virus in response to assessments that the coronavirus is now rampant in the country.

The task force is backed by a special law passed this month that allows Abe to declare a state of emergency, though top officials say such a declaration is not planned immediately.

The task force meeting Thursday comes a day after Tokyo Gov. Yuriko Koike asked the 1.3 million residents in the Japanese capital to stay home this weekend, citing a spike of new cases, including those that cannot be traced. She added a lockdown of Tokyo is a possibility if the infections become explosive as in Europe and the U.S.

Abe says Japan will impose entry bans to 21 European countries and Iran and suspend visas from entrants from those countries until the end of April. He says similar measures for China and South Korea are also extended through end of next month.

Tokyo on Thursday had 47 cases, a record single-day increase surpassing 41 from the day before. Japan has about 2,000 cases, including 259 in Tokyo.

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JAKARTA, Indonesia — Indonesian government reported 20 new deaths in the previous 24 hours. That brings the country's death toll in the COVID-19 outbreak to 78, the highest in the Southeast Asia region.

There have been 103 new cases on Thursday to total 893 positive tests in the archipelago nation, mostly in the capital of Jakarta.

MADRID — Spain has become the country in Europe where the coronavirus outbreak is expanding fastest. It's second only to the United States in the number of new cases reported.

Spain's Health Ministry reported 8,578 new infections and 655 deaths on Thursday, bringing the total infections to 56,188 and more than 4,000 fatalities.

Italy's initial steep rise in confirmed cases has started to level off more than two weeks into a nationwide lockdown. On Wednesday, the country reported 5,210 new cases and 683 deaths.

The outbreak is straining Spain's health care system, with medical staff struggling to treat the infected amid a shortage of protective gear and enough ventilator machines and other medical equipment.

One out of 10 of the country's COVID-19 fatalities have been recorded in nursing homes.

BAGHDAD— Iraq has extended a government-imposed curfew for another two weeks, prohibiting large gatherings and non-essential businesses to stem the spread of the coronavirus, according to a cabinet statement.

It is the second extension since the first curfew was imposed on March 17.

Iraqis have struggled to adhere to the curfew, prompting senior Iraqi officials and prominent religious figures to call for the public to stay at home and avoid congregating in crowds.

At least 29 people have died of coronavirus in Iraq amid 346 confirmed cases, according to the Health Ministry.

STOCKHOLM — Sweden's reigning Social Democrats have decided to call off all May Day parades and mark the International Workers' Day digitally because of the coronavirus.

Under the slogan "a stronger society," thousands were expected to rally on May 1 across the Scandinavian country. It has kept primary and elementary schools, restaurants and bars open and encouraged people to enjoy the spring sun. So far, only gatherings of over 500 people are banned.

In a statement, party secretary Lena Radstrom Baastad says the message this year "will become even more important."

BEIJING — China is strongly pushing back on U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo's insistence on referring to the deadly novel coronavirus that has sparked a global pandemic as the "Wuhan virus" after the city in China where it was first detected.

Foreign Ministry spokesman Geng Shuang said Thursday that it was an effort to "stigmatize China and discredit China's efforts in an attempt to divert attention and shift responsibilities."

"He has a very sinister motive," Geng told reporters at a daily briefing.

Geng also defended China's efforts at tackling the virus and denied it was seeking to place responsibility for the outbreak elsewhere. China has been accused of trying to squelch information about the outbreak during its early stages, and some of its diplomats have openly suggested that the virus may have been brought to China from the United States.

Pompeo's call for the virus to be identified by name as the "Wuhan virus" at a virtual meeting of foreign ministers from the Group of 7 leading industrialized countries resulted in their opting against releasing a group statement.

The World Health Organization and others have cautioned against giving the virus a geographic name because of its global nature, and even President Donald Trump has steered away from those terms as

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critics have said they foster discriminatory sentiments and behavior against Asians and Asian Americans.

BUCHAREST, Romania — Romania's prime minister has announced the resignation of the health minister, whose announcement that everyone in the capital city of Bucharest would be tested for the coronavirus had been strongly criticized.

Prime Minister Ludovic Orban said Thursday in a statement that while he regretted Victor Costache's departure, "on the other hand, I understand it and I thank him."

Orban said the government's priority was to acquire protective equipment for hospitals to protect medical staff.

Romania has registered 906 coronavirus cases, with 17 deaths.

PARIS — France has begun evacuating its citizens infected with the coronavirus from the Alsace epicenter onboard a special medicalized high-speed train.

France's health minister said that the TGV train-cum-hospital is a "first in Europe."

Around 20 patients are being evacuated from Strasbourg to hospitals in the Pays-de-la-Loire and other regions Thursday morning, thanks to the medical locomotive.

It consists of five cars, each one kitted out with medical material and attended by an anesthesiologist-resuscitator, an intern, a nurse anesthetist and three nurses.

The train has been employed to relieve the French region worst hit by the coronavirus that has already claimed over 1,300 lives in France — almost half of whom have died in the Grand Est region's hospitals.

MOSCOW — Russia's Defense Ministry promised to build 16 medical centers for treating infectious diseases by mid-May amid the growing coronavirus outbreak in the country. The centers will be spread across a range of Russian regions, Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu said at a government meeting Thursday.

"We need to ensure the fastest construction of these centers in order for our military medicine to be ready to deal with the (coronavirus) infection," Prime Minister Mikhail Mishustin said.

Russia has ramped up measures to prevent the new virus from spreading further as its caseload grew at an increasing pace. Earlier on Thursday, the government announced halting all international flights except for those bringing Russian nationals home from abroad. On Wednesday, President Vladimir Putin declared next week a holiday, during which only essential businesses - such as grocery shops, pharmacies and banks - will operate.

Russian authorities reported 840 cases of the new coronavirus on Thursday, with 182 new cases registered since the day before.

ANKARA, Turkey — Turkey's trade minister says the country is restricting the export of respirator-related medical equipment in order to meet domestic needs.

Ruhsar Pekcan said on Twitter Thursday that the export of equipment including ventilators, intubation devices and intensive care monitors would be subject to government authorization.

The measure aims to ensure that a "disruption to the health services does not occur and the existing capacity is used effectively," the minister said.

Turkey has reported 59 COVID-19 deaths and at least 2,433 infections.

MOSCOW — Moscow officials on Thursday ordered to close restaurants, cafes, bars, shopping malls and some parks in the city for nine days starting from Saturday.

The move, aimed at keeping people at home amid the coronavirus outbreak, comes a day after Russian President Vladimir Putin declared next week a holiday, during which only essential businesses — such as pharmacies, grocery stores and banks — will continue to operate.

The number of coronavirus cases in Russia has been growing rapidly this week. Russian authorities reported 840 cases of the new coronavirus on Thursday, with 182 new cases registered since the day before.

On Tuesday, Moscow Mayor Sergei Sobyenin told Putin that the situation is "serious." Russia's compara-

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tively low caseload could reflect insufficient screening rather than the actual scale of the epidemic, he said, and urged Putin to ramp up testing all across the country.

STOCKHOLM — Sweden saw a surge in the number of deaths that could change the Scandinavian's rather lax approach keeping primary and elementary schools, restaurants and bars open and even encouraging people to go out and enjoy the spring sun.

Health officials have within the past 24 hours seen an increase of 18 deaths since Wednesday, bringing the total to 62 deaths in the country of 10 million that has had 2,510 people tested positive of which 176 are in intensive care.

The head of Stockholm's health service Bjorn Eriksson said "the storm is over us," hours after Anders Tegnell of the Public Health Agency of Sweden told a news conference that the situation was "stable."

In neighboring Denmark, the government allegedly was planning to further tighten the law so that smaller groups — less than 10 — can be banned.

And in Finland, the government says it will in an exceptional move block the movement of citizens into and out of a key southern region that includes the Nordic nation's capital, Helsinki, to prevent the spreading of coronavirus to other areas. The Uusimaa region includes Helsinki and affects the daily lives of some 1.7 million people, nearly a third of Finland's population.

LONDON — Britain's government has ordered 10,000 ventilators to grapple with the COVID-19 crisis.

Billionaire inventor James Dyson told his staff in an email that a team of engineers had been working on a design for the last 10 days since receiving a request for help from Prime Minister Boris Johnson.

Dyson says the device draws on technology used in the company's air purifier ranges and is powered by a digital motor.

The device was created in partnership with Cambridge-based science engineering firm TTP and still must face regulatory approval.

Britain wants to increase the availability of ventilators from 8,000 to 30,000.

TOKYO — Tokyo Olympic organizers announced Thursday that they are canceling a cultural event featuring collaborative performances of kabuki and opera next month due to the spreading of the coronavirus.

The event already had a setback last year after world-famous tenor Placido Domingo withdrew following his sexual harassment allegations.

The cancellation follows Tuesday's agreement between Tokyo's Organizing Committee and the International Olympic Committee to postpone the Tokyo Games until the summer of 2021 due to the ongoing global pandemic.

The revised "Tokyo 2020 Nippon Festival" scheduled for April 18, was to feature Japanese kabuki actor Ebizo Ichikawa and opera singers — Italian soprano Anna Pirozi and Uruguayan bass-baritone Erwin Schrott — in a performance aimed at bringing together the east and the west and contrasting the traditional and the modern.

KUALA LUMPUR, Malaysia — Malaysia's king and queen are under quarantine after seven palace staff members tested positive for COVID-19.

The palace said Thursday that seven staff were hospitalized Tuesday and health authorities were trying to identify the source of the transmission. It said King Sultan Abdullah Sultan Ahmad Shah and his wife Tunku Azizah Aminah Maimunah Iskandariah were tested for the virus, but both were negative. It said the royal couple decided to observe a 14-day self-quarantine from Wednesday, with deep cleansing to be carried out in the palace.

Malaysia, which has 21 deaths and the highest total of cases in Southeast Asia at 1,796, has extended its lockdown by another two weeks to April 14.

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COLOMBO, Sri Lanka: — Sri Lanka's president Gotabaya Rajapaksa has requested international donor agencies to provide a debt moratorium or debt deferment facility to all developing nations facing the risk of being severely affected by coronavirus.

Rajapaksa had urged Director General of the World Health Organization to forward this request to multi-lateral and bilateral lending agencies.

He has pointed out that such "a relief would be helpful to manage COVID-19 Social Distancing, Public Health and Social Security Systems in those countries."

His statement comes as Sri Lanka will have to repay a US \$4.8 billion external debt this year amid an economy that performed poorly last year. The island nation's economy suffered a severe blow last year due to the Easter Sunday bomb attacks by Islamic militants.

Sri Lanka's economic growth is estimated to hit an 18-year low of 2.7 to 2.8% in 2019.

However, the International Monetary Fund said in February that Sri Lanka's economy is gradually recovering from the terrorist attacks last April. The IMF said the real GDP growth is estimated at 2.6% in 2019 and that the GDP growth in 2020 is projected at 3.7%.

MOSCOW — Russian government officials announced the halting of all international flights starting from Friday amid the coronavirus pandemic.

An exception will be made for flights bringing Russians home from abroad, according to a statement published Thursday on the cabinet's website.

Earlier this month, Russian authorities limited its air traffic to regular flights to world capitals and charter flights.

The new measure comes as the number of coronavirus cases in Russia rapidly grows. On Wednesday, the government reported a total of 658 cases, with 163 new cases registered since the previous day. That is a significantly bigger daily increase than in previous weeks, when the number of cases was growing by several dozens a day.

SEOUL, South Korea — South Korea's central bank says it will temporarily provide an "unlimited" amount of money to eligible banks and other financial institutions for three months through repurchase agreements as it tries to calm financial markets rattled by the global coronavirus crisis.

The Bank of Korea on Thursday said the measure was unprecedented but didn't provide an estimate on how much money would be supplied to financial markets through the short-term borrowings.

The bank last week executed an emergency rate cut of 0.5 percentage points to help ease the economic fallout from the coronavirus, which brought its policy rate to an all-time low of 0.75%.

Some experts say it's unclear whether traditional financial tools to boost money supplies would be effective now when the global pandemic has damaged both supply and demand, decimating industrial hubs in China and Italy and forcing millions to stay at home under tightened quarantines.

Virus infections near 500,000 as health systems buckle

By DAVID RISING, ARITZ PARRA and COLLEEN LONG Associated Press

MADRID (AP) — The number of coronavirus infections were set to top a half-million worldwide on Thursday as both Italy and the United States appeared poised to surpass China, where the pandemic began, and Spain's death toll climbed to more than 4,000. Health care systems in Europe and New York buckled under the strain.

Faced with the spread of the pandemic, the U.S. Senate passed a \$2.2 trillion economic rescue package steering aid to businesses, workers and health care facilities. Millions of Americans hoped the measure, which is expected to be voted on in the House on Friday, would give them a lifeline as they lost jobs, income and child care due to lockdowns, travel restrictions and business closures.

At least 2.8 billion people are under severe travel restrictions. But the head of the World Health Organization, Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, scolded world leaders for wasting precious time in the fight against

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the virus that has already killed more than 22,000 people and infected over 480,000, thrown millions out of work and ravaged the world economy.

"The time to act was actually more than a month ago or two months ago," he said Wednesday. "We squandered the first window of opportunity. ... This is a second opportunity, which we should not squander and do everything to suppress and control this virus."

In the United States, where virus deaths passed 1,050 and 70,000 people were infected, a political battle raged between those demanding urgent action for a long siege against the pandemic, like New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo, and President Donald Trump.

Trump has expressed hope churches could return to normal by Easter on April 12, and grumbled that "our country wasn't built to be shut down" — apparently concerned that the outbreak's devastating effects on financial markets and employment will harm his re-election chances. Democrats say Trump is prioritizing the economy over the health and safety of Americans.

"I'd like to say, let's get back to work next Friday," said Joe Biden, the front-runner for the Democratic presidential nomination. "That'd be wonderful. But it can't be arbitrary."

In Brazil, the country's governors are defying President Jair Bolsonaro over his call to reopen schools and businesses, dismissing his argument that the "cure" of widespread shutdowns to contain the spread of the coronavirus is worse than the disease.

Brazil's Supreme Court upheld virus mitigation plans that had been challenged by Bolsonaro. As of Thursday, the country had more than 2,550 cases and 59 deaths.

New York has emerged as a global virus hotspot and Cuomo says infections are doubling nearly every few days. The city's convention center is being turned into a temporary hospital and the state has hit 280 deaths, according to a count by Johns Hopkins University.

Spain has become the country in Europe where the outbreak is spreading the fastest. On Thursday, the Health Ministry reported reported 8,578 new infections and 655 deaths, bringing the total cases to 56,188 and more than 4,000 fatalities — second only to Italy's death toll of 7,503.

"We are collapsing," said Lidia Perera, a nurse at Madrid's Hospital de la Paz. "We need more workers." Watching patients die alone is "killing all of us inside," she said.

"Physically this is extremely complicated, but psychologically it is appalling," said colleague Patricia Núñez, a nurse who is recovering from being infected herself.

In Italy, doctors and nurses have been begging the government daily to provide more masks, gloves and goggles and urged the public to understand how important onerous social distancing measures really are. Scientists say stopping just one person from getting the virus means scores of others will not become infected down the road.

"Please don't leave us alone. Help us help you," Dr. Francesca De Gennaro, who heads a small medical clinic in Italy's hard-hit Bergamo region, wrote in an open letter.

European Union leaders were holding their third summit in three weeks on the virus to manage the havoc it is wreaking on their 27 economies. As the number of deaths in Europe soared past 12,000, Spain prolonged a state of emergency that will allow it to impose broader lockdowns while French President Emmanuel Macron launched "Operation Resilience," a military-backed response to combat the pandemic.

France began evacuating infected citizens from the northeastern hotspot of Alsace using a special high-speed train that its health minister called a "first in Europe." About 20 patients were being taken from Strasbourg to hospitals in the Pays-de-la-Loire and other regions.

Britain ordered 10,000 ventilators to grapple with the COVID-19 crisis, working with engineers from Dyson. The government wants to increase its supply of the breathing machines from 8,000 to 30,000.

For most people, the coronavirus causes mild or moderate symptoms, such as fever and cough that clear up in two to three weeks. For some, especially older adults and people with existing health problems, it can cause more severe illness, including pneumonia and death.

So far, more than 115,000 people have recovered from the virus, and health care experts say the key to fighting it is to "flatten the curve" — slow the spread of the outbreak so that hospitals aren't overwhelmed

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with seriously ill patients all at once. Slowing the rate of infections will also cut the eventual death rate.

China's cases have slowed, with only 67 new cases reported, all recent arrivals.

The leaders of the Group of 20 largest economies were holding a special video conference to better coordinate a response to the pandemic, amid criticism that the world's wealthiest countries have not taken cohesive action. The conference was being chaired by Saudi Arabia's King Salman.

As the virus spreads into new territory, many countries took drastic measures.

India on Thursday began enforcing the world's largest coronavirus lockdown, trying to keep its 1.3 billion people indoors. In neighboring Pakistan, a caseload of nearly 1,100 infections propelled government efforts to persuade the country's more than 200 million people to stay home.

As cases start to rise in Russia, President Vladimir Putin ordered the military in to help. The government announced it would halt all international flights starting Friday and will have troops build 16 medical centers to treat virus victims by mid-May. Russia says it has 658 cases, but experts say those figures underreport the crisis there and may be due to the lack of testing.

Dr. Deborah Birx, coordinator of the White House's coronavirus task force, urged people to understand just how important each one of them is to stopping the pandemic.

"To every American out there, where you are protecting yourself, you are protecting others," Birx said.

Long reported from Washington, Rising reported from Berlin. Associated Press journalists around the world contributed to this report.

Stock rally fades as US aid package heads for new vote

By JOE McDONALD AP Business Writer

BEIJING (AP) — Global stocks and U.S. futures declined Thursday after the U.S. Senate approved a proposed \$2.2 trillion virus aid package following a delay over its details and sent the measure to the House of Representatives.

After two days of broad gains, indexes in London and Frankfurt opened down almost 2% while Tokyo lost 4.5%. Shanghai and Hong Kong also declined.

On Wall Street, the future for the S&P 500 index lost 1.1% after the Senate approved aid late Wednesday to blunt the impact of business shutdowns due to the coronavirus that has killed more than 21,000 people worldwide. The measure goes to the House, which is expected to approve it Friday.

"Investors now have to judge whether tremendous policy support is sufficient to meet worsening economic conditions," said Stephen Innes of AxiCorp. in a report.

The future for the Dow Jones Industrial Average was 0.7% lower ahead of a government report Thursday that forecasters expect to show a record number of Americans filed for unemployment benefits following a wave of layoffs. The S&P 500 rose 1.2% on Wednesday but is down nearly 27% from its peak a month ago.

The Senate vote was delayed by arguments over whether the measure does too much or too little for companies, workers and health care systems. Forecasters say a recession looks increasingly inevitable.

The delay "brings about a wait-and-see tone for markets," said Jingyi Pan of IG in a report issued before the Senate approval.

In Europe, London's FTSE 100 lost 1.5% to 5,601 and Frankfurt's DAX shed 2% to 9,675. The CAC 40 in France retreated 1.9% to 4,349.

In Asia, the Nikkei 225 in Tokyo declined to 18,664.60 while Hong Kong's Hang Seng shed 0.7% to 23,352.34. The Shanghai Composite Index declined 0.6% to 2,764.91. The Kospi in Seoul lost 1.1% to 1,686.24 while Sydney's S&P-ASX 200 added 2.3% to 5,113.30. India's Sensex gained 3% to 29,407.25.

Singapore's benchmark lost 1% after a government forecast the economy will shrink 10.6% in the current quarter compared with the three months ending in December. Singapore is preparing its second stimulus package as more businesses are told close and controls on public activity are tightened.

Global stock prices have swung wildly as business shutdowns spread around the world. Investors say

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they need to see a decline in numbers of new coronavirus infections before prices can bottom out.

Many traders have "reverted to the 2008 case study," when markets saw several 5% rallies during the global financial crisis before bottoming out in March 2009, Chris Weston of Pepperstone said in a report.

An early rally Wednesday on Wall Street faded as disagreements over its details blocked a congressional vote.

Republican Sens. Tim Scott, Ben Sasse and Lindsey Graham demanded changes to ensure laid-off workers don't receive more money than they did while working. Sen. Bernie Sanders said he would block the bill unless the conservatives dropped their objections.

Even optimists say the package provides just the second of three legs the markets need to regain lasting confidence.

Global central banks already have cut interest rates and injected money into financial markets.

Investors are waiting to see the details of Washington's plan. It includes direct payments to most Americans and aid for hard-hit industries.

The number of known infections has leaped past 450,000 people worldwide, according to Johns Hopkins University. Overall, more than 112,000 have recovered.

For most people, the new coronavirus causes mild or moderate symptoms such as fever and cough that clear up in two to three weeks. For some, especially older adults and people with existing health problems, it can cause more severe illness including pneumonia and death.

In energy markets, benchmark U.S. crude lost 57 cents to \$23.92 per barrel in electronic trading on the New York Mercantile Exchange. The contract rose 48 cents on Wednesday to close at \$24.49. Brent crude, used to price international oils, declined 37 cents to \$29.62 per barrel in London. It rose 24 cents the previous session to \$29.99 a barrel.

The dollar declined to 109.69 yen from Wednesday's 111.20. The euro gained to \$1.0966 from \$1.0880.

Trump's push to open economy could come at cost of lives

By **AAMER MADHANI, LAURIE KELLMAN and KEVIN FREKING** Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The contrast could hardly be more stark. Gov. Andrew Cuomo of New York has said that if all of his sweeping, expensive measures to stem the coronavirus saved one life, it would be worth it. President Donald Trump has another view: The costs of shutting down the economy outweigh the benefits, frequently telling Americans that 35,000 people a year die from the common flu.

Though it may seem crass, the federal government actually has long made a calculation when imposing regulations, called "the value of a statistical life," that places a price tag on a human life. It has been used to consider whether to require seat belts, airbags or environmental regulations, but it has never been applied in a broad public health context.

The question is now an urgent one given that Trump in recent days has latched on to the notion that the cure for the pandemic should not be worse than the disease and argued that "more people are going to die if we allow this to continue" if the economy remains closed. He has targeted a return to a semblance of normalcy for the economy by Easter Sunday, April 12.

Critics say he's presenting the nation with a false choice at a moment when deaths and infections from the virus are surging.

"We're not going to accept a premise that human life is disposable," said Cuomo, whose state has seen far more infections and deaths from COVID-19 than any other state. "And we're not going to put a dollar figure on human life."

For decades, the federal government has made calculations on how policies intended to safeguard American health could impact the economy. Since the Reagan administration, federal agencies have been required to perform analysis of any proposed regulations that are expected to have \$100 million or more impact on the economy.

The Environmental Protection Agency, for example, conducts cost-benefit analysis to estimate in dollar terms how much people are willing to pay for reductions in their risk of death from adverse health condi-

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tions caused by pollution. The Transportation Department estimates the additional cost that consumers would be willing to bear for improvements in safety at \$9.6 million.

Now, the push-pull of when to re-open the economy during the coronavirus crisis centers on a similarly bleak question: What's an economically acceptable death toll? Putting dollar figures on the value of life and health is inherently uncomfortable, one expert said.

"People hate that question," said Betsey Stevenson, an economics and public policy professor at the University of Michigan who served on the White House's Council of Economic Advisers during the Obama administration. "By laying out the math in such a crude way, people cringe when they see it."

Days into his own call for Americans to dedicate themselves for 15 days to social distancing, including staying home from work and closing bars and restaurants to help try to stall the spread of the disease, Trump has changed his tune.

Trump has grumbled that "our country wasn't built to be shut down" and vowed not to allow "the cure be worse than the problem."

"The LameStream Media is the dominant force in trying to get me to keep our Country closed as long as possible in the hope that it will be detrimental to my election success," Trump tweeted Wednesday. "The real people want to get back to work ASAP. We will be stronger than ever before!"

He also pushed back against suggestions that he is being cavalier about the prospect of more deaths being caused by a premature reopening of the economy. "How many deaths are acceptable to me?" Trump told reporters Wednesday evening. "None."

But Democrats say that Trump was prioritizing the economy over the health and safety of Americans.

"I'd like to say, let's get back to work next Friday," said former Vice President Joe Biden, the front-runner for the Democratic presidential nomination. "That'd be wonderful. But it can't be arbitrary."

Trump certainly has his defenders. Fox News commentator Britt Hume has called it an "entirely reasonable viewpoint" that older Americans would be willing to sacrifice for the good of the economy, and Texas Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick has said he's "all in" on lifting social distancing guidelines in order to help the economy.

Mike Leavitt, a Health and Human Services secretary in the George W. Bush administration, said the battle against the virus is shaping into a "supremely local fight" and communities may need to periodically adjust as the crisis unfolds.

"Each jurisdiction may not come to the same conclusion — because each jurisdiction may have different situations about shopping and businesses reopening," Leavitt said in an email.

In the recent past, the government has also put a dollar figure on American life in the aftermath of man-made calamities, including the 9/11 attacks and the 2010 BP oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico, which killed 11 and devastated the regional economy, to compensate victims.

Kenneth Feinberg, who administered the victims' funds stemming from those events, said the formula used in the nation's courts was a simple one: What would the victim have earned over the course of their life at work but for the tragedy that took their life? On top of that, there was some added compensation for pain and suffering and emotional distress, he said.

"It is a rather straightforward calculation," Feinberg said.

But when it comes to the current pandemic, Feinberg said calculating the impact is not so simple.

"When somebody says, 'You know the risk of the virus is not as great as the risks to everybody through a deteriorating economy,' that's a choice that everybody will have to make," Feinberg said.

In the case of the coronavirus crisis, some economists and policy experts say the pandemic continues to present too many unknowns to employ the sort of coldly calculated, cost-benefit analysis that's been used to evaluate the impact of policies such as federal highway and air quality rules.

"It doesn't help to save the economy if a tremendous number of people have died or fallen ill and their lives are changed forever," said Lisa Heinzerling, who grappled with regulatory impact on the economy as the head of EPA's policy office at the beginning of the Obama administration.

Northwestern University economists Martin Eichenbaum and Sergio Rebelo and German economist Mathias Trabandt said in a working paper published this week that optimal containment efforts would lead to deeper economic damage and that recession in the U.S. was inevitable. But the economists also

projected that maintaining social-distancing measures before the U.S. hits its peak in infections "saves roughly half a million lives."

Stepping back from efforts to preserve human life in the midst of an event of this scale could also have enormous impact on the trust of institutions for generations to come, said David Ropeik, a former instructor of risk communication at the Harvard School of Public Health,

"The benefit of an all-out fight against a virus includes reassuring the public that the government is on their side. Backing off that fight reasonably questions whether the government we have created to protect us from things like this crisis will do so," said Ropeik, the author of the book "How Risky Is It, Really?"

"The loss of that to protect the economy is undermining that faith. How can you price that?" he asked.

For most people, the new coronavirus causes mild or moderate symptoms, such as fever and cough that clear up in two to three weeks. For some, especially older adults and people with existing health problems, it can cause more severe illness, including pneumonia and death. The vast majority of people recover.

Madhani reported from Chicago.

10 Things to Know for Today

By The Associated Press undefined

Your daily look at late-breaking news, upcoming events and the stories that will be talked about today:

1. UNITED STATES PASSES GRIM TOLL American deaths from the coronavirus pandemic top 1,000, another milestone for a global outbreak that has taken 21,000 lives worldwide and is wreaking havoc on economies and ordinary life.

2. 'PRAY FOR ONE ANOTHER' The Senate passes a \$2 trillion economic rescue package, the largest economic relief bill in U.S. history, steering aid to businesses, workers and health care systems engulfed by the pandemic.

3. PANDEMIC WEIGHS HEAVILY ON MEDICAL FACILITIES U.S. hospitals are rushing to find beds for a coming flood of COVID-19 patients, opening older closed hospitals and re-purposing other medical buildings.

4. TRUMP'S QUANDARY: COMMERCE VS. LIFE The president's desire to reopen the economy by Easter thrusts the administration into the delicate position of weighing the revival of commerce versus the value of American life.

5. G20 TO COORDINATE VIRUS RESPONSE Saudi Arabia will virtually chair leaders of the world's 20 most powerful economies to try and coordinate a response to the fast-spreading coronavirus.

6. ESTONIA'S DRUG WAR TAKES UNLIKELY TURN The shift in the Baltic nation from plant-based drugs, like heroin, to synthetic ones, like fentanyl, boosts unscrupulous chemists and helps cement China's role in the global narcotics trade.

7. 'I'M HAPPY THAT HE HAS ACCEPTED THAT HE IS GUILTY' The man who slaughtered 51 worshippers at two New Zealand mosques unexpectedly pleads guilty to all charges, sparing survivors and relatives of the victims of a trial.

8. HOW MARKETS REACTED TO STIMULUS BILL Global share prices and U.S. futures declined after the U.S. Senate passed a \$2.2 trillion virus aid package and sent it to the House.

9. BALLPARKS REMAIN EMPTY ON 'OPENING DAY' Today was supposed to be Major League Baseball's opening day and it's still unclear when the season might begin.

10. 'HUMBLED AND HONORED' Will Smith personally thanked Joyner Lucas in a video on social media after the rapper released a tribute song honoring Smith's career work.

Jobless after virus lockdown, India's poor struggle to eat

By EMILY SCHMALL and SHEIKH SAALIQ Associated Press

NEW DELHI (AP) — Some of India's legions of poor and people suddenly thrown out of work by a nationwide stay-at-home order began receiving aid distribution Thursday, as both the public and private sector

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work to blunt the impact of efforts to curb the coronavirus pandemic.

India's finance ministry announced a 1.7 trillion (\$22 billion) economic stimulus package that will include delivering monthly grains and lentil rations to an astonishing 800 million people, some 60% of people in the world's second-most populous country.

In the meantime, the police in one state were giving rations of rice to shanty-dwellers, while another state's government deposited cash into the bank accounts of newly unemployed workers. Aid groups, meanwhile, worked to greatly expand the number of meals they can hand out.

The unprecedented order keeping India's 1.3 billion people at home for all but essential trips to places like supermarkets or pharmacies is meant to keep virus cases from surging above the 553 already recorded and overwhelming an already strained health care system.

Yet the measures that went into effect Wednesday — the largest of their kind in the world — risk heap- ing further hardship on the quarter of the population who live below the poverty line and the 1.8 million who are homeless.

Rickshaw drivers, itinerant produce peddlers, maids, day laborers and other informal workers form the backbone of the Indian economy, comprising around 85% of all employment, according to official data. Many of them buy food with the money they make each day, and have no savings to fall back on.

Untold numbers of them are now out of work and many families have been left struggling to eat.

"Our first concern is food, not the virus," said Suresh Kumar, 60, a bicycle rickshaw rider in New Delhi.

He said he has a family of six who rely on his daily earnings of just 300 rupees (\$4),

"I don't know how I will manage," he said.

In the northeastern state of Assam, police started handing out rice in some of the poorest districts, an informal effort they said they hope to ramp up in coming days.

In India's most populous state, Uttar Pradesh, the government already sent 1,000 rupees (\$13) to 2 million informal workers who are registered in a government database and have bank accounts. It was handing out free food rations to those who are not registered, though some in the state capital, Lucknow, said they weren't aware of such handouts.

In New Delhi, authorities teamed up with local charities and aid groups to map out locations where the city's poor tend to congregate, distributing 500 hot meals cooked in government schools, political party headquarters and shelter kitchens.

Details of the programs, from how well-funded they were to how many people they hoped to help, remained scant, however.

"These are extraordinary times and providing food to the poor is a mammoth task," said Vinay K Stephen, who runs a nonprofit group working with the government to feed the capital's homeless. "But we will do it."

Economists had urged the government to create a stimulus package to blunt the effects of the lockdown on the poor, many of whom migrated to big cities for work and now find themselves unable to earn a living or go home to their villages after Indian Railways suspended all passenger service for the first time in its 150 years of operating.

The \$22 billion package announced Thursday, which includes distributing five kilos (11 pounds) of grains and one kilo (2.2 pounds) of lentil beans every month from government stocks to 800 million people, is in addition to an earlier pledged of \$2 billion to bolster the health care system.

It hasn't been only the poor caught out by the lockdown. Even those with money to spend in shops have met with long lines and confusing regulations.

In the city of Bangalore, people crowded roadside vendors outside a closed wholesale vegetable market. Others stood in line outside grocery stores behind chalked markings to maintain social distance.

People ignored India's new social isolation norms to keep at least one meter (3.2 feet) apart and crammed in to buy food at one store in Lucknow during the state government's limited allowed window for shopping.

"I know it is risky and (one can) get infected," said Kamlesh Saxena, a government employee shopping at the store. "But I have no choice."

—

Associated Press writers Biswajeet Banerjee in Lucknow, Dar Yasin in Srinagar, Aijaz Rahi in Bangalore and Wasbir Hussain in Gauhati contributed to this report.

Senate unanimously passes massive coronavirus aid plan

By **ANDREW TAYLOR** Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Senate passed an unparalleled \$2.2 trillion economic rescue package steering aid to businesses, workers and health care systems engulfed by the coronavirus pandemic.

The unanimous vote Wednesday came despite misgivings on both sides about whether it goes too far or not far enough and capped days of difficult negotiations as Washington confronted a national challenge unlike it has ever faced.

The 880-page measure is the largest economic relief bill in U.S. history. Majority Leader Mitch McConnell appeared somber and exhausted as he announced the vote — and he released senators from Washington until April 20, though he promised to recall them if needed.

“Pray for one another, for all of our families and for our country,” said McConnell, R-Ky.

“The legislation now before us now is historic because it is meant to match a historic crisis,” said Minority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y. “Our health care system is not prepared to care for the sick. Our workers are without work. Our businesses cannot do business. Our factories lie idle. The gears of the American economy have ground to a halt.”

The package is intended as relief for an economy spiraling into recession or worse and a nation facing a grim toll from an infection that’s killed more than 21,000 people worldwide. Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin, asked how long the aid would keep the economy afloat, said: “We’ve anticipated three months. Hopefully, we won’t need this for three months.”

Underscoring the effort’s sheer magnitude, the bill finances a response with a price tag that equals half the size of the entire \$4 trillion-plus annual federal budget. The \$2.2 trillion estimate is the White House’s best guess.

Insistently optimistic, President Donald Trump said of the greatest public health emergency in anyone’s lifetime, “I don’t think its going to end up being such a rough patch” and anticipated the economy soaring “like a rocket ship” when it’s over.

“The government has temporarily shut down the economy because of this disease, and the government must help those who are hurt by it,” said Sen. Lamar Alexander, R-Tenn.

The drive by leaders to speed the bill through the Senate was slowed as four conservative Republican senators from states whose economies are dominated by low-wage jobs demanded changes, saying the legislation as written might give workers like store clerks incentives to stay on unemployment instead of return to their jobs since they may earn more money if they’re laid off than if they’re working. They settled for a failed vote to modify the provision.

Other objections floated in from New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo, who has become a prominent Democrat on the national scene as the country battles the pandemic. Cuomo, whose state has seen more deaths from the pandemic than any other, said, “I’m telling you, these numbers don’t work.”

Ardent liberals like Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez were restless as well, but top Washington Democrats assured them that additional coronavirus legislation will follow this spring and signaled that delaying the pending measure would be foolish.

The sprawling measure is the third coronavirus response bill produced by Congress and by far the largest. It builds on efforts focused on vaccines and emergency response, sick and family medical leave for workers and food aid.

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., swung behind the bipartisan agreement, saying it “takes us a long way down the road in meeting the needs of the American people.”

Senate passage delivered the legislation to the Democratic-controlled House, which is expected to pass it Friday. House members are scattered around the country. House Majority Leader Steny Hoyer, D-Md., said the measure would pass by voice vote without lawmakers having to return to Washington.

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The package would give direct payments to most Americans, expand unemployment benefits and provide a \$367 billion program for small businesses to keep making payroll while workers are forced to stay home.

It includes a heavily negotiated \$500 billion program for guaranteed, subsidized loans to larger industries, including airlines. Hospitals would get significant help as well.

Six days of arduous talks produced the bill, creating tensions among Congress' top leaders, who each took care to tend to party politics as they maneuvered and battled over crafting the legislation. But failure was not an option — nor was starting over — which permitted both sides to include their priorities.

"This is a proud moment for the United States Senate and the country, and we're going to win this battle," McConnell told reporters afterward. "We've pivoted from impeachment to 100-to-nothing on this rescue package ... this is about as flawless as you could possibly be." The vote actually was 96-0 because several members missed the vote out of concerns they have been exposed to the virus.

Sen. Rand Paul, R-Ky., has tested positive for it, while GOP Whip John Thune returned to South Dakota on Wednesday after feeling ill.

The bill would provide one-time direct payments to Americans of \$1,200 per adult making up to \$75,000 a year and \$2,400 to a married couple making up to \$150,000, with \$500 payments per child.

A huge cash infusion for hospitals expecting a flood of COVID-19 patients grew during the talks to an estimated \$130 billion. Another \$45 billion would fund additional relief through the Federal Emergency Management Agency for local response efforts and community services.

Democrats said the package would help replace the salaries of furloughed workers for four months, rather than the three months first proposed. Furloughed workers would get whatever amount a state usually provides for unemployment, plus a \$600-per-week add-on, with gig workers like Uber drivers covered for the first time.

Businesses controlled by members of Congress and top administration officials, including Trump and his immediate family members, would be ineligible for the bill's business assistance.

Schumer boasted of negotiating wins for transit systems, hospitals and cash-hungry state governments that were cemented after Democrats blocked the measure in votes held Sunday and Monday.

But Cuomo said the Senate package would send less than \$4 billion to New York, far short of his estimate that the crisis will cost his state up to \$15 billion over the next year. More than 280 New Yorkers have died from the virus, a death toll more than double that of any other state.

Still, Pelosi said the need for more money for New York is "no reason to stop the step we are taking."

Pelosi was a force behind \$400 million in grants to states to expand voting by mail and other steps that Democrats billed as making voting safer but Republican critics called political opportunism. The package also contains \$15.5 billion more for a surge in demand for food stamps as part of a massive \$330 billion title for agency operations.

State and local authorities would receive up to \$150 billion in grants to fight the virus, care for their residents and provide basic services.

Republicans won inclusion of an employee retention tax credit that's estimated to provide \$50 billion to companies that retain employees on payroll and cover 50% of workers' paycheck up to \$10,000. Companies would also be able to defer payment of the 6.2% Social Security payroll tax.

A companion appropriations package ballooned as well, growing from a \$46 billion White House proposal to \$330 billion, which dwarfs earlier disasters — including Hurricane Katrina and Superstorm Sandy combined.

Europe is enacting its own economic recovery packages, with huge amounts of credit guarantees, government spending and other support.

Germany, Europe's biggest economy, has agreed to commit more than 1 trillion euros (\$1.1 trillion) in fiscal stimulus and support — roughly 30% of that nation's entire annual output. France, Spain and Italy have launched similar programs.

For most people, the new coronavirus causes mild or moderate symptoms, such as fever and cough that clear up in two to three weeks. For some, especially older adults and people with existing health problems, it can cause more severe illness, including pneumonia, or death.

In the United States, more than 69,000 people have been sickened and more than 1,000 have died.

Associated Press writers Matthew Daly, Alan Fram, Mary Clare Jalonick, Ricardo Alonso-Zaldivar and Padmananda Rama contributed to this report.

World leaders to meet virtually to coordinate virus response

By AYA BATRAWY Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — Leaders of the world's most powerful economies will convene virtually on Thursday to try and coordinate a response to the fast-spreading coronavirus, which has shuttered businesses and forced well over a quarter of the world's population into home isolation.

The meeting for the Group of 20 nations will be chaired by Saudi Arabia's King Salman. The kingdom, which is presiding over the G20 this year, said it organized the extraordinary meeting to advance global efforts to tackle the pandemic and its economic implications as people lose their incomes amid closures, curfews and lockdowns.

The meeting comes amid criticism that the world's wealthiest countries have not taken cohesive action to combat the virus or its economic impact on people around the world.

Saudi Arabia has also been criticized for rocking oil markets by ramping up production next month and slashing prices to gain market share after Russia, another major G20 oil producer, refused to extend a production cut agreement that had propped up crude prices.

The U.S. has already called on Saudi Arabia to rethink its strategy. In a call this week with Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo stressed that Saudi Arabia, as a leader of the G20 and an important energy leader, "has a real opportunity to rise to the occasion and reassure global energy and financial markets" at this time of economic uncertainty.

The global death toll from the new coronavirus, which causes an illness called COVID-19, has climbed past 21,000 and the number of infections has surpassed 472,000, according to a count kept by Johns Hopkins University. The number of dead in the U.S. rose to 1,041 as of late Wednesday, with nearly 70,000 infections. Spain's death toll has risen past 3,400, eclipsing that of China, where the virus was first detected in December.

For most people, the new coronavirus causes mild or moderate symptoms, such as fever and cough that clear up in two to three weeks. For some, especially older adults and people with existing health problems, it can cause more severe illness, including pneumonia and death.

There was sparring this week among foreign ministers from the Group of 7 leading industrialized democracies over whether to call out China as the source of the coronavirus. The ministers were unable to agree on a U.S. push to identify the coronavirus as the "Wuhan virus," in reference to the city in China where it first appeared. As a result, the foreign ministers opted against releasing a group statement.

Chinese President Xi Jinping and Russian President Vladimir Putin are among the heads of state who will take part in Thursday's G20 leaders' summit. German Chancellor Angela Merkel is taking part in the summit from her apartment in Berlin, where she is in quarantine after a doctor who gave her a pneumonia vaccination tested positive for the virus. Two tests on Merkel have come back negative for the virus, but she'll still need more tests.

The virtual summit will also include leaders from the World Health Organization, the United Nations, World Bank, International Monetary Fund, International Labor Organization and others.

Officials from Spain, Jordan, Singapore and Switzerland will also take part in the call, as well as chairs of regional bodies like the African Union, the Association of South-East Asian Nations and the Gulf Cooperation Council.

The International Labor Organization says nearly 40% of the world's population has no health insurance or access to national health services and that 55% — or 4 billion people — do not benefit from any form of social protection whatsoever. It said the current health crisis makes clear that not nearly enough progress has been made by governments in the years since the 2008 financial crisis to expand access to health services, sickness benefits, and unemployment protection.

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The International Monetary Fund and World Bank issued a call on G20 countries ahead of the Thursday's meeting, warning of severe economic and social consequences for developing countries, home to a quarter of the world's population and where most of the world's poorest people reside.

The lenders called for a suspension of debt payments from these countries and asked G20 leaders to task the World Bank and IMF with making the needed assessments on which countries have unsustainable debt situations and immediate financing requirements.

"It is imperative at this moment to provide a global sense of relief for developing countries as well as a strong signal to financial markets," the lenders said in a joint statement.

IMF Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva has said the lender stands "ready to deploy all our \$1 trillion lending capacity." She said earlier this week the IMF expects a recession at least as bad as during the 2008 global financial crisis or worse. Nearly 80 countries are requesting IMF help.

Ethiopia's government told G20 finance ministers and Central Bank chiefs in a call ahead of Thursday's summit that Africa needs a \$150 billion emergency financing package due to the impact of the virus.

U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres urged G20 leaders to adopt a "wartime" plan including a stimulus package "in the trillions of dollars" for businesses, workers and households in developing countries trying to tackle the coronavirus pandemic.

Associated Press writer David Rising in Berlin contributed.

Estonia won its war on fentanyl, then things got worse

By ERIKA KINETZ ASSOCIATED PRESS

TALLINN, Estonia (AP) — Igor Smirnov was introduced to opiates the day his first son was born, when he got celebratory drunk and a neighbor injected him with an intoxicating extract of opium poppies.

"I've never tried anything better in my life," he said. "It's natural, it's a clean high."

Smirnov graduated to heroin during a stint in prison for robbery in the mid-'90s, as the Estonian economy was reeling from the 1991 collapse of the Soviet Union and drug abuse rates shot up. After the Taliban banned poppy production in Afghanistan, decimating the 2001 harvest, a new drug appeared to take the place of heroin on the quaint, cobbled streets of Estonia's capital, Tallinn: Fentanyl. People called it "China White."

Smirnov didn't like the drug at first, but soon learned to live with it.

"Fentanyl costs too much," he said. "If you use fentanyl, the dealers are simply collecting money because the high lasts a short time."

Smirnov has lived the arc of illicit drug abuse in Estonia, a tiny Baltic state that for nearly two decades has battled a fentanyl epidemic so severe its overdose death rate was almost six times the European average.

Once fentanyl landed in Estonia, heroin disappeared. Even after poppies started growing again in Afghanistan and Estonian police choked off fentanyl supply in 2017, heroin didn't come back. Instead, users turned to cocktails of other kinds of synthetic drugs, including amphetamines, alpha-PVP, a dangerous stimulant also known as flakka, and prescription drugs, harm reduction workers, users, public health officials and police told The Associated Press.

There are signs that the U.S. is on a similar path, tipping from plant-based drugs like heroin to synthetic ones like fentanyl and methamphetamine. That could herald big changes in global narcotics supply chains and cement the role of China -- an important source of illicit synthetic drugs -- as a vital link in the worldwide drug trafficking business.

"The trajectory is toward full synthetics," said Daniel Ciccarone, a professor at University of California San Francisco School of Medicine, who researched heroin and opioid supply chains under a federally-funded study. "Name the major drug producers in world -- Afghanistan, Colombia -- only people in the know would say China. Well, guess what? China."

Fentanyls are easier to make and smuggle than heroin, and far more profitable to sell. One kilogram of

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fentanyl bought in China for \$3,000 to \$5,000 can generate over \$1.5 million, according to the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration. Fentanyl is also at least 30 times more potent, which can make it hard for users to return to heroin after getting used to the punch of synthetics.

"What happens after fentanyl is heroin doesn't work anymore," said Jaan Vaart, who used to use drugs and now runs a mobile outreach bus for Convictus, a harm reduction center in Tallinn. "Nobody wants to spend their money on water. Heroin was like injecting water after that."

HEALTH EXPERTS WARN: "BE AFRAID"

Estonia won its war on fentanyl in 2017. A massive law enforcement surveillance operation led to a clandestine laboratory hidden beneath a staircase in a brick home outside Tallinn. It was one of two major busts by police that year that effectively cut off fentanyl supplies to the tiny nation, which is roughly twice as big as New Hampshire. Police seized nearly 10 kilograms of fentanyl that year, up from 314 grams in 2016. Overdose deaths plunged after the busts.

What happened next took many by surprise.

Users unable to find good fentanyl didn't return to heroin. Instead, they began injecting combinations of different synthetic drugs, including amphetamines, the opioids isotonitazene and tramadol, benzodiazepine sleeping pills and cathinones. Unidentifiable mystery drugs have also appeared.

"Something fishy is going on. They don't like heroin after this. They prefer stimulants," said Katri Abel-Ollo, a researcher at the center for addiction prevention of Estonia's National Institute for Health Development. "They use different types of drugs, it's like Lego construction. Our harm reduction workers say the mental state of patients is becoming worse and worse. They are unpredictable in how they behave."

Ekaterina, a thin 30-year-old in methadone treatment, said if you know where to look you can still find fentanyl in Estonia. But people are increasingly into new things, especially something her friends call "crystal."

She said crystal hits like a bunch of different drugs all at once. Her friend had the chemical formula for the main ingredient tattooed on her arm: C15H21NO, or alpha-PVP, the drug known as flakka.

"In Estonia, it's new," said Ekaterina, who did not want her last name published.

Flakka gained notoriety in the U.S. five years ago for the insane things it made people do: One user impaled himself on a fence. Another reportedly jumped off a bridge. A young woman in South Florida, also believed to be on flakka, ran through the streets naked and covered with blood screaming about God and Satan. After China banned the drug in late 2015, flakka use plummeted in the U.S.

New synthetics like flakka are bringing agitation and volatility to the streets of Estonia.

"A person who uses fentanyl compared to a person who uses alpha-PVP is still more in control," said Aljona Kurbatova, head of the drug abuse prevention center at Estonia's National Institute for Health Development. "They are mostly a danger to themselves, but with alpha-PVP, people don't really control how they act."

Looking ahead, Kurbatova sees two possibilities, neither good. Fentanyl comes storming back into Estonia and users with diminished tolerance overdose in droves. Another possibility is that alternative synthetics dominate the market, creating costly new health and social problems that Estonia's drug treatment systems, calibrated to address opioid abuse, are ill-equipped to handle.

"Be afraid. Be very, very afraid," she said. "It was so much easier when it was just heroin."

A GLOBAL NARCOTICS SHIFT

Supply and demand drivers are fueling the rise of synthetics in other countries as well, according to a sweeping 2019 analysis by the RAND Corporation, a nonprofit policy research group headquartered in Los Angeles.

In U.S. regions with the most extensive exposure to fentanyl, synthetic opioids appear to be replacing heroin just as they did in Estonia, drug seizures and mortality data show. Rising overdose rates from methamphetamine, often with opioids present, and studies that show growing numbers of people taking both opioids and stimulants suggest users in the U.S. also may be turning to cocktails of synthetic drugs, as they did in Estonia.

In Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Ohio and West Virginia, per capita heroin seizures started falling

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around 2014, while seizures of synthetic opioids rose. By 2017, there were more fentanyl seizures than heroin seizures in all those states except West Virginia.

"It's kind of all we see now," said Brian Boyle, DEA special agent in charge of New England. "We do not just see pure heroin anymore."

It's a global trend. Illicit drug markets in Latvia and parts of Canada also appear to be tipping from heroin toward fentanyls, while in Finland, heroin has been largely replaced by the semi-synthetic opioid buprenorphine, according to RAND.

"This is a new dawn," said Bryce Pardo, a lead author of RAND's report. "It's no longer plant-based."

CHINA'S RISE ON THE SYNTHETIC DRUG FRONT

That shift is potentially bad news for Mexican poppy farmers and good news for unscrupulous chemists at clandestine Chinese labs.

The rise of e-commerce, darknet marketplaces and the cryptocurrency bitcoin helped China emerge as a global supplier of novel synthetic drugs. Before Chinese suppliers exported fentanyls and fentanyl precursors, they were selling cathinones, stimulants sometimes sold as "bath salts," cannabinoids and sending methamphetamine precursors to super-labs in Mexico, according to U.S. and international law enforcement agencies and officials, as well as U.S. legal cases and U.S. Treasury Department sanctions.

"China has been doing this for the last ten years," Pardo said. "The synthetic opioid phenomenon is one chapter in the new psychoactive substances saga."

The U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration says China's vast, freewheeling chemicals industry is the largest source of synthetic opioids that end up in the U.S., either via mail directly or through Mexico.

Beijing disagrees. Chinese officials have lashed out at U.S. assertions that Chinese supply is at the root of America's opioid problem and called for evidence to support claims that China is the top supplier.

DEA data shows that after China bans a specific kind of fentanyl, seizures of that substance in the United States drop, suggesting that China is a meaningful source of synthetic opioids. In May, China designated all kinds of fentanyls as a class of controlled substances, a move that appears to be having an impact.

"We are seeing less coming directly from China, and more fentanyl and precursors being routed through Mexico," Mary Brandenberger, a DEA spokeswoman, said in an email.

The takedown of Estonia's main Russia-linked fentanyl networks in 2017 did not appear to disrupt flows of fentanyl analogs, suggesting alternative supply chains may still be active.

"While fentanyl is reported to enter the country from Russia, the new fentanyl derivatives mainly originate in China," according to the European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction's 2019 report on Estonian drug markets.

Estonian police told the AP they'd gathered a few investigative leads implicating Chinese sources but have struggled to trace supply chains definitively. Estonian customs said each year a handful of packages with synthetic drugs shipped directly from China are seized, but more may be transshipped via larger European countries.

China's National Narcotics Control Commission told the AP that Estonian authorities have not asked for help. "We really have not received this kind of cooperation request from Estonian police, nor have we received contacts providing leads," a NNCC spokesperson said.

Meanwhile, the volume of synthetic narcotics coming into Estonia by mail is growing and new psychoactive substances, or NPS, are proliferating.

"We see more and more drugs being sold in crypto markets and more and more drugs are being shipped by post," said state prosecutor Vahur Verte. "We see the emergence of more and more NPS."

Many long for the simpler days of heroin.

Today, Smirnov is in treatment and, like Estonia itself, is off fentanyl. He still yearns for a lost organic past, when he could head out into Estonia's poppy fields and harvest the bulbs for a clean, natural high.

"Poppy liquid is better," he said wistfully. "One hundred percent."

Associated Press newsperson Kali Robinson in Washington and researcher Chen Si in Shanghai contributed to this report.

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Daily bread? In France, fighting virus 1 baguette at a time

By JOHN LEICESTER Associated Press

LE VESINET, France (AP) — In France, the fight against COVID-19 is being waged one baguette at a time. No longer just a mere staple, the iconic loaf and the French daily ritual of buying it have become loaded with moral, civic and public health considerations that could never have been imagined before the new coronavirus turned life upside down.

In a nation in lockdown, popping out for a fresh baguette is proving a handy excuse for people to get out of the house. There is one notable exception: a town on the Mediterranean coast where the mayor has banned people from doing just that, to keep them indoors.

But eschewing the crusty comfort of a fresh-baked baguette has become significant, too — a small sacrifice in this new era where sacrifices are being asked of many. For some, not buying bread daily and instead staying indoors to try to stay healthy has become an act in itself, a gesture of solidarity with the doctors and nurses fighting to save lives in stressed emergency wards.

For most people, the new coronavirus causes mild or moderate symptoms, such as fever and cough that clear up in two to three weeks. For some, especially older adults and people with existing health problems, it can cause more severe illness, including pneumonia, and death.

Trying to steer a path between their love of bread and beating the virus, some in France are now buying baguettes by the armful and freezing them. That would have been a gastronomic no-no in normal times. But defrosting and reheating is now a pragmatic, civic-minded and health-conscious compromise, certainly better than no baguette at all.

The French have baked long loaves for centuries and coined “baguette” — or stick — around 120 years ago in Paris. Millions of French consume billions of baguettes each year, and not just as fuel. Diners use hunks of bread as tools for pushing food around their plates and onto their forks. The crust makes the bread easy to grip; its airy internal sponge soaks up sauces and the bloody juices of cooked meats. A baguette’s saltiness accentuates flavors, while its doughy neutrality tames the tang of the most pungent cheeses.

“It’s indispensable. You need bread to push your food stuffs, to give them taste, for nourishment. It is good for everything,” masked shopper Yves Lagrellette said this week as he made what has now become his weekly baguette run in Le Vesinet, west of Paris. He bought five in one go, for freezing. He used to buy one daily.

When the government locked down France earlier this month, shutting down schools and stores deemed non-essential and forcing families indoors, it also gave bakers special dispensation to work every day of the week if they wish.

Baker Margot Hazard says she and her husband, Cyril, feel that with their breads and cakes, they are providing a slice of normalcy to customers who line up, standing apart, outside their door, respecting each other’s space and handwritten signs on the window that read: “Three people maximum in the bakery.”

“The work really is tough at the moment,” Hazard said. “Some clients are very worried about us touching their bread and touching their change. They are all a bit on edge. And we are on edge, too.”

But “it is super important for everyone’s morale,” she added. “It’s important that people eat what they want to eat, to keep their spirits up.”

“A life without bread, cheese and wine is not French,” she said.

Customers Marie and Jean-Claude Lemeux, now work-from-home bankers, agreed. No sooner had he bought their baguette that he ripped one end off and nibbled it, right there in the street. That crusty nub of pleasure even has its own name — “le quignon.”

“It’s better fresh. It’s hot, crusty,” he said. And baguette-buying “allows us to get out.”

“The sharing of bread is an anchor at the dinner table, at family meals,” she said. “We feel a need to

focus on family, on food, for life to go on. It's symbolic."

But in the Mediterranean town of Sanary-sur-Mer, buying only one baguette risks a police fine of 135 euros (\$146). Mayor Ferdinand Bernhard says people shouldn't be using the buying of bread as an excuse to go out every day.

"Anyone caught coming out of a bakery with just one loaf will be fined," he said in a telephone interview. "If you go once a week, you cut the risk by a factor of seven — for you, the baker, his entourage and yours."

"This is no time for people's moods. The priority is to not get sick," he said. "You can freeze bread. You can even live without it."

"It's not a sacrifice. It's an adaptation."

Follow AP coverage of the virus outbreak at <https://apnews.com/VirusOutbreak> and <https://apnews.com/UnderstandingtheOutbreak>

Follow John Leicester on Twitter at <http://twitter.com/johnleicester>

Coronavirus delivers tough blow to Lebanon's dying economy

By **BASSEM MROUE** and **ZEINA KARAM** Associated Press

BEIRUT (AP) — Through 15 years of civil war and various bouts of violence since, Lebanon's Barbar eatery never closed its doors, serving up sandwiches to customers even if it meant doing so from behind sandbags.

The coronavirus pandemic, however, has managed to do what various wars could not: Close bars, restaurants and entertainment spots across the tiny Mediterranean country. It's an economic gut punch at a time when Lebanon is already mired in the worst financial crisis in its history.

While residents of many other countries are counting on a government bailout, that's not an option in the country teetering on the edge of bankruptcy.

"We have never gone through something like this — ever," said Barbar owner Ali Ghaziri, standing outside his shop on Beirut's normally busy Hamra street, now completely deserted.

Earlier this month, heeding orders from the government amid the spread of the new coronavirus, Ghaziri closed the iconic chain's two branches in Beirut, leaving only its delivery service operating.

Nearby, in Beirut's Gemayzeh neighborhood, pubs and restaurants usually spilling onto the street with noisy, beer-toting youngsters are shuttered. Even Lebanon's famous corniche, usually dotted with coffee vans, corn-on-the-cob vendors and people doing their morning exercise, is now empty.

Lebanon has suffered in recent years from a lack of economic growth, high unemployment and a drop in hard currency inflows from abroad. But the financial crisis erupted after nationwide protests over widespread corruption and decades of mismanagement by the ruling political class engulfed the country in October.

That in turn has led to bank closures and crippling capital controls on cash withdrawals and transfers, raising fears about depositors' savings in U.S. dollars. The local currency has already lost up to 60% of its value on the dollar on the black market.

Earlier this month, as the crisis deepened, the government announced it would no longer pay its foreign loans, marking the country's first-ever default amid ongoing popular unrest.

Among the sectors hardest hit by the crisis has been the food and beverage sector, a mainstay of Lebanon's economy.

Between September and December 2019, more than 800 food and beverage institutions closed and around 25,000 people — or 17% of those who work in the sector — lost their jobs, according to various estimates. In January, a further 200 institutions closed.

The Lebanese government ordered the lockdown in mid-March, closing its only international airport as well as ports and land border crossings until March 29. Restaurants and night clubs were also ordered closed in a severe blow to one of the most vital sectors in Lebanon, known for its cuisine and bustling night life.

"We reached a point where we were hit by one catastrophe after the other, and when we reached the

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coronavirus crisis we had no more reserves at all," said Maya Bekhazi Noun, general secretary of the syndicate for restaurant owners.

"We were at the bottom, bottom, bottom, taking the last breath," she said. "This now was a mortal blow to the sector."

Unlike in other countries under lockdowns, where banks remained open, the banking association in Lebanon decided to defy government orders and close for two weeks, in an apparent effort to preserve liquidity.

"It's going to be devastating on the economy in the short-term and the long-term," said economist Kamel Wazni, speaking about businesses that have closed. "There's going to be a lot of pain among many sectors of the economy."

He said the government will also be affected since it will not be able to collect taxes, further increasing the budget deficit.

Lebanon's prime minister has acknowledged that the state is struggling to tackle the coronavirus fallout amid the crippling crisis. In a report this week, Human Rights Watch said Lebanon's financial crisis and dollar shortage has resulted in a scarcity of medical supplies necessary to deal with the COVID-19 outbreak.

While governments abroad scramble to approve stimulus packages to compensate for lost businesses, experts here warn of extremely dire times ahead with no potential for bailouts. Government officials have said they are not seeking an IMF bailout for now, fearing it would come with conditions that would be too painful.

Ghaziri, the owner of Barbar, said he is worried about his staff, 75% of whom he had to send home after sales dropped 75%.

His father founded the Barbar chain — a household name in Lebanon — in 1979, four years after the country's 15-year civil war erupted. The eatery continued to serve up kebabs, shawarma and other treats throughout the conflict and various other wars. They closed for a few hours only when Ghaziri's grandfather passed away and in 2005 for the funeral of the late Prime Minister Rafik Hariri after he was assassinated.

"During the civil war, there were street battles. So, you could talk yourself out of problems. Now you cannot do anything," Ghaziri said of the coronavirus.

Some 220,000 people have lost their jobs in Lebanon since October, according to a survey released last month by information provider InfoPro.

InfoPro said the number of companies that have closed increased by 20% between November and January. One third of all companies have reduced their work force by 60%.

The World Bank had projected 0.2% negative growth in 2020 before the protests began in October but more recent estimates suggest the contraction in the country's economy could be more than 1% of GDP.

Prime Minister Hassan Diab, whose government is negotiating debt restructuring, said Lebanon's debt reached \$90 billion or 170% of GDP, making it one of the highest in the world.

According to government estimates, about half of Lebanon's population could end up living below poverty levels.

Ali Badran lost his job at the restaurant where he worked for 11 years in October as a result of the crisis. He was left jobless just as he was preparing to marry his longtime fiance in a few months.

With no income, the 36-year-old stopped renovation work in the apartment he bought and started looking for a new job as of late October. That was days after massive nationwide protests broke out against the country's political elite.

On March 1, he started a new job at another restaurant in Beirut but now he is worried the lockdown means he could be laid off again.

"I am worried that if things stay as they are I might lose my new job," he said.

The Associated Press Health and Science Department receives support from the Howard Hughes Medical Institute's Department of Science Education. The AP is solely responsible for all content.

US hospitals rush to find beds for surge of virus patients

By CARLA K. JOHNSON and NICKY FORSTER AP Medical Writer

SEATTLE (AP) — With her due date fast approaching, Kelly McCarty packed a bag with nursing tops, a robe, slippers and granola bars. Last week's ultrasound, she said, showed "this baby is head down and ready to go."

But the new coronavirus has thrown her a curveball, bouncing her and about 140 other expectant moms from their first-choice hospital to another 30 minutes away. The birth unit at the Edmonds, Washington, hospital is needed for COVID-19.

With capacity stretched thin, U.S. hospitals are rushing to find beds for a coming flood of patients, opening older closed hospitals, turning single rooms into doubles and re-purposing other medical buildings.

Louisiana is making deals with hotels to provide additional hospital beds and has converted three state parks into isolation sites for patients who can't go home. Illinois is reopening a 314-bed suburban Chicago hospital that closed in September.

In New York, the city's convention center is being turned into a temporary hospital. At Mount Sinai Morningside hospital, heart surgeons, cardiologists and cardiovascular nurses now care for coronavirus patients in a converted cardiac unit. Floating hospitals from the U.S. Navy are heading to Los Angeles and, eventually, New York. Military mobile hospitals are promised to Washington state.

Simple math is spurring hospital leaders to prepare. With total U.S. cases doubling every three days, empty intensive care unit beds, needed by an estimated 5% of the sick, will rapidly fill.

U.S. hospitals reported operating 74,000 ICU beds in 2018, with 64% filled by patients on a typical day. But available ICU beds are not evenly distributed, according to an Associated Press analysis of federal data on hospitals that provided a cost report to Medicare in fiscal year 2018.

The AP found more than 7 million people age 60 and older — those most at risk of severe COVID-19 illness — live in counties without ICU beds. AP included ICU beds in coronary units, surgical units and burn units in the count.

"Better to be over-prepared than react in the moment," said Melissa Short, who directs women's health for Seattle's Swedish Medical Center, which is using data from China and Italy as it attempts to double its capacity to 2,000 beds.

In South Korea, some died at home waiting for a hospital bed. In northern Italy, an explosion of cases swamped the hospital system. Video and photos from two Spanish hospitals showed patients, many hooked to oxygen tanks, crowding corridors and emergency rooms.

About 10 days ago, Dr. Tanya Sorensen got a call from the doctor leading the response to the virus at Washington state's Swedish Medical Center. How could the system consolidate its birth services to keep healthy delivering moms away from the sick?

"It took me aback," said Sorensen, medical director for the hospital system's women's services. "It brought home the fact that we are going to be facing a huge surge of cases of COVID very soon."

Swedish's Edmonds facility — where McCarty had planned to deliver — announced Saturday it is closing its 7th floor birth center temporarily, gaining 35 beds for the expected influx. McCarty will go instead to an affiliated hospital in Everett.

"They need more beds. If they can open up a whole floor, I understand," said McCarty, a public school teacher who is busy coaching colleagues about online learning during the state's lockdown.

For most people, the coronavirus causes mild or moderate symptoms, such as fever and cough that clear up in two to three weeks. For some, especially older adults and people with existing health problems, it can cause more severe illness, including pneumonia, and death.

If other countries have the same experience as China, 15% to 20% of COVID-19 patients will have severe illness. About 5% could become sick enough to require intensive care.

Equipment is a challenge. About 20% of U.S. hospitals said they didn't have enough breathing machines for patients and 97% were reusing or otherwise conserving N95 masks, according to a survey conducted last week by hospital group purchasing organization Premier.

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Who will staff the needed ICU beds is keeping U.S. hospital leaders awake at night.

In western Massachusetts, Nancy Shendell-Falik, a nurse turned hospital executive, is planning Baystate Health's response. The system's community hospitals and flagship hospital in Springfield are finding space for 500 additional beds, including 140 ICU beds.

She asks herself: Will cross-training staff and working in teams help the ICU nurses handle a surge of patients needing breathing machines? Will there be enough masks, gowns and face shields? She also worries about exhaustion, burnout and nurses falling sick.

"Beds don't take care of patients. We need the staff to do so," she said.

During 9/11, she worked as a chief nurse at a hospital eight miles from the twin towers. She also worked at a Boston hospital that took in casualties of the 2013 marathon bombing.

"Those things changed our world forever, but they were very time-limited activities. What's scary about this," she said, is "we don't know the duration."

This weekend, McCarty and her husband plan to drive to the Everett hospital, a trial run for when she goes into labor. When her contractions start, they'll call her dad to come stay with their 4-year-old daughter. McCarty is taking it in stride, knowing the depth of the need.

"If it was my first child, I think it would be a little harder," McCarty said of adjusting her birth plan for COVID-19. "I know what it's like and I've been through it before. Where I deliver isn't necessarily that big of a deal. I'm happy to oblige."

Forster, an AP data journalist, reported from New York. AP journalists Kathleen Foody in Chicago, Melinda Deslatte in Baton Rouge and Linda A. Johnson in Trenton, New Jersey contributed.

The Associated Press receives support for health and science coverage from the Howard Hughes Medical Institute's Department of Science Education. The AP is solely responsible for all content.

Stocks have first back-to-back gains since sell-off began

By JOE McDONALD AP Business Writer

BEIJING (AP) — Asian stocks were mixed Thursday after Wall Street gained as U.S. lawmakers wrangled over a proposed \$2 trillion virus aid package.

Market benchmarks in Tokyo and Shanghai declined. Australia and Southeast Asian markets gained. Jakarta jumped 10%.

New York futures were lower, with the contract for the S&P 500 down 0.7%, while that for the Dow fell 0.2%.

On Wall Street, the benchmark S&P 500 index rose 1.2% on Wednesday but is down nearly 27% from its peak a month ago.

Congress was due to vote Wednesday on an aid plan to blunt the impact of business shutdowns due to the coronavirus. But some legislators balked at its terms.

"Uncertainty with regards to the passage of the fresh U.S. stimulus bill brings about a wait-and-see tone for markets," said Jingyi Pan of IG in a report.

Tokyo's Nikkei 225 fell 3.2% to 18,917.96 and Hong Kong's Hang Seng was flat, at 23,527.82. The Shanghai Composite Index slipped 0.2% to 2,776.64.

The KOSPI in Seoul gained 0.9% to 1,719.23 and Sydney's S&P-ASX 200 added 3.4% to 5,169.00. New Zealand and Indonesia also advanced, with the Jakarta benchmark up 9.6% by late morning.

Singapore's benchmark lost 1.4% after a government forecast that the economy will shrink 10.6% in the current quarter compared with the three months ending in December. Singapore is preparing its second stimulus package as more businesses are told close and controls on public activity are tightened.

Prices have swung wildly as business shutdowns spread around the world. Investors say they need to see a decline in numbers of new coronavirus infections before prices can bottom out.

Many traders have "reverted to the 2008 case study," when markets saw several 5% rallies during the

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global financial crisis before bottoming out in March 2009, Chris Weston of Pepperstone said in a report.

The U.S. aid package would be the country's largest stimulus ever, but an early rally on Wall Street faded Wednesday as disagreements over its details blocked a congressional vote, raising questions about when the plan might take effect.

Republican Sens. Tim Scott, Ben Sasse and Lindsey Graham demanded changes to ensure laid-off workers don't receive more money than they did while working. Sen. Bernie Sanders said he would block the bill unless the conservatives dropped their objections.

The S&P 500 advanced to 2,475.66 and the Dow Jones Industrial Average rose 2.4% to 21,200.55. The Nasdaq lost 33.56 points to 7,384.30.

Even optimists say the package provides just the second leg of three that markets need to regain lasting confidence.

Global central banks have cut interest rates and injected money into financial markets.

Investors are still waiting to see the details of Washington's plan. It includes direct payments to most Americans and aid for hard-hit industries. It's unclear when the House of Representatives could vote on it.

The number of known infections has leaped past 450,000 people worldwide, and more than 20,000 have died, according to Johns Hopkins University. Overall, more than 112,000 have recovered.

For most people, the new coronavirus causes mild or moderate symptoms such as fever and cough that clear up in two to three weeks. For some, especially older adults and people with existing health problems, it can cause more severe illness including pneumonia and death.

Economists expect a report Thursday to show a record number of Americans filed for unemployment benefits.

Boeing soared 24.3% on Wednesday on expectations it stands to gain from the aid package. Other travel-related stocks also stormed higher to recoup a fraction of their losses. Royal Caribbean Cruises jumped 23% but is down 68.2% for the year.

Nike climbed nearly 9.2% after it said stronger online sales in China during the coronavirus outbreak helped it offset plunges in revenue caused by the shutdown of stores across the country. The company said it will follow a similar playbook in other countries as the outbreak has spread around the world. It also said sales are bouncing back in China, where the outbreak has eased and most Nike stores have reopened.

In energy markets, benchmark U.S. crude lost 34 cents to \$24.15 per barrel in electronic trading on the New York Mercantile Exchange. The contract rose 48 cents on Wednesday to close at \$24.49. Brent crude, used to price international oils, declined 22 cents to \$29.77 per barrel in London. It rose 24 cents the previous session to \$27.39 a barrel.

The dollar declined to 110.82 yen from Wednesday's 111.20. The euro gained to \$1.0910 from \$1.0880.

Trump's Easter goal in war on virus a nod to faith, business

By JILL COLVIN and ELANA SCHOR Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump's "beautiful" idea to reopen the U.S. economy by Easter Sunday and pack church pews that day was dreamed up during a conference call among business leaders desperate to get the country back up and running.

But his target date for easing coronavirus restrictions is another outstretched hand to a group he has long courted: evangelical Christians.

Cooped up at the White House and watching the stock market tumble, Trump had already been eager to ease federal guidelines aimed at halting the spread of a virus that had infected more than 55,000 Americans when about a dozen business leaders convened a conference call on Sunday.

"There was a concern — not unanimity, but consensus — that you had to have a reopening of the economy at some point soon," said Stephen Moore, a conservative economist and informal Trump adviser. On the call, Moore said, he argued in favor of setting a specific date as a goal by which point the economy could gradually begin to be reopened.

"One of the things we were saying was that this would instill some confidence in people, that there would

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be some kind of light at the end of the tunnel," he said.

While many wanted to see that date set even sooner than Easter, "it's something that's coming up that would be obviously a mark on someone's calendar," Moore said. "I had made this point that we should call this economic resurrection day."

Though it's unclear exactly when the idea made its way to Trump or whether others in his orbit had pegged the date as well — one official said they had heard the idea mentioned multiple times around the Oval Office — by late Sunday, Trump was publicly siding with such thinking, tweeting: "WE CANNOT LET THE CURE BE WORSE THAN THE PROBLEM ITSELF." On Monday, he said he was considering easing his administration's recommendations that Americans largely stay home within weeks, not months. And on Tuesday, he formally endorsed the idea of an Easter goalpost during a Fox News Channel virtual town hall.

"Easter's a very special day for me. Wouldn't it be great to have all of the churches full?" Trump later told Fox. "You'll have packed churches all over our country. I think it would be a beautiful time."

The idea drew alarm from many public health experts, who noted that even New York — thought to be several weeks ahead of the rest of the nation — has yet to reach its peak in infections. Unless Americans continue to isolate themselves for weeks, those experts warn, a virus that has already killed more than 1,000 people in the U.S. will continue to spread like wildfire across the nation, overwhelming hospitals already starved of needed supplies. The number infected has risen to more than 69,000.

But for conservative evangelicals who remain among Trump's most ardent supporters, the president's choice of the holiest date on their faith's calendar was meaningful even as a purely aspirational goal to reboot American life.

The timeline "injected hope into an indefinite ordeal," said Johnnie Moore, an evangelical adviser to the administration. "And it was very clear in hearing him speak that not only is there an end to this ... but when we do win it, we're going to have a celebration, and that celebration will partly include gratitude to God."

Ralph Reed, a veteran GOP activist and Trump ally who chairs the Faith & Freedom Coalition, cautioned that restrictions shouldn't be eased "if it's a bad idea from a public health standpoint," but also welcomed the Easter target.

"I will be encouraging the White House, again within the parameters of what makes sense from a public health standpoint, to do everything we can to make that date," Reed said, "because I think it would be symbolic, it would be significant, it would be inspirational."

To that end, the White House has been discussing the mechanics of a rollback aimed at getting Americans back to work if they don't live in current virus hot spots. Among the ideas under discussion: advising that those who are most at risk for severe complications — including seniors — continue to isolate themselves, while younger people go back to work.

For most people, the coronavirus causes mild or moderate symptoms, such as fever and cough, that clear up in two to three weeks. But for some, especially older adults and people with existing health problems, it can cause more severe illness, including pneumonia, and death. The vast majority of people recover.

Even if Trump were to ease federal guidelines, states across the country, from California to New York, have already put in place a patchwork of rules to try to halt the virus' spread. The administration has so far said it has no plans to try to overrule local restrictions.

The White House, meanwhile, has been holding calls with those who might publicly back its plans, including conservative allies of the president. Reed said he was among two dozen allies who participated in one call Tuesday with Vice President Mike Pence on which the Easter target was not discussed.

Pence did "make it clear that the objective is to get the country open again in weeks, not months," while relying on "data and public health imperatives," Reed said.

Three separate faith outreach calls, including one that drew more than 1,200 allies, were held last week alone.

Pastor Tony Suarez, another evangelical Trump ally, said he hopes the Easter target can be achieved, to "celebrate a national resurrection and an economic resurrection as we celebrate the Resurrection."

But even among white evangelicals who are a key component of the president's political base, there

were reservations. National Association of Evangelicals President Walter Kim said that many who share his faith "wish to do what is in the best interest of society as a whole," citing decisions to cancel physical worship services and various programs.

Kim added that any "celebrations we pursue on Easter would need to be in that spirit of life."

For Suarez, Trump's choice of an Easter target remains an important gesture regardless of whether he goes through with it. Suarez, executive vice president at the National Hispanic Christian Leadership Conference, described the president's elevation of that date as a fresh signal of the "respect within the administration for the word of God and for Christian faith."

Among those signals, Suarez noted, was Pence's call during a Saturday briefing by the coronavirus task force he leads for Americans to keep donating to their local ministries when most houses of worship have moved their services online.

Schor reported from New York.

Follow Colvin and Schor on Twitter at <https://twitter.com/colvinj> and <https://twitter.com/eschor>.

New York struggles with coronavirus, US deaths top 1,000

By JENNIFER PELTZ and COLLEEN LONG Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — New York authorities mobilized to head off a public health disaster Wednesday, with the city's emergence as the nation's biggest coronavirus hot spot a warning flare — and perhaps a cautionary tale — for the rest of the country as U.S. deaths from the pandemic topped 1,000.

A makeshift morgue was set up outside Bellevue Hospital, and the city's police, their ranks dwindling as more fall ill, were told to patrol nearly empty streets to enforce social distancing.

Public health officials hunted down beds and medical equipment and put out a call for more doctors and nurses for fear the number of sick will explode in a matter of weeks, overwhelming hospitals as has happened in Italy and Spain. Spanish lawmakers agreed to extending by two weeks a state of emergency that has allowed the government to maintain a national lockdown.

In Washington, the Senate in a unanimous, late-night vote passed an unparalleled \$2.2 trillion economic rescue package steering aid to businesses, workers and health care systems that is the largest economic relief bill in U.S. history. The House could pass it Friday.

Worldwide, the death toll climbed past 21,000, according to a running count kept by Johns Hopkins University. The number of dead in the U.S. rose to 1,041 as of late Wednesday, with nearly 70,000 infections.

New York State alone accounted for more than 30,000 cases and close to 300 deaths, most of them in New York City.

Gov. Andrew Cuomo, again pleading for help in dealing with the onslaught, attributed the cluster to the city's role as a gateway to international travelers and the sheer density of its population, with 8.6 million people sharing subways, elevators, apartment buildings and offices.

"Our closeness makes us vulnerable," he said. "But it's true that your greatest weakness is also your greatest strength. And our closeness is what makes us who we are. That is what New York is."

Some public health experts also attributed the city's burgeoning caseload in part to the state's big push to test people.

Troy Tassier, a Fordham University professor who studies economic epidemiology, suggested the increase shows New York would have fared better had it acted sooner to order social distancing.

Nearly 7 million people in the San Francisco area were all but confined to their homes on March 17, and California put all 40 million of its residents under a near-lockdown three days later.

The order to stay at home in New York State did not go into effect until Sunday evening, March 22, and New York City's 1.1 million-student school system was not closed until March 15, well after other districts had shut down.

Dr. Mark Dworkin, an epidemiology professor at University of Illinois-Chicago, said he hadn't followed

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New York's situation closely enough to say whether he would have done it differently, but he noted that moving quickly is critical -- and sometimes difficult to do at early points, when the public doesn't sense an imminent threat.

"At first, I think there's a certain amount of disbelief that goes on," he said. "I think that contributes, to some extent, to the lack of putting the foot on the gas pedal on some of the control measures that we know we need to do."

After New York's first positive test came back on March 1 — in a health care worker who had traveled to Iran and secluded herself upon returning — Mayor Bill de Blasio and Cuomo initially cast the disease as a dangerous threat but one that the city's muscular hospital system could handle.

The risk to most New Yorkers, they said, was relatively low.

But their message shifted, as it did with many other leaders, who found themselves acting on new information in an uncharted, fast-changing situation.

Tassier said it wasn't too late: "We can still make things better than they would be otherwise."

In a measure of how the virus is permeating life in ways big and small, the mayor said authorities would remove basketball hoops at 80 public courts where people were not respecting social-distancing instructions not to shoot around with anyone outside their households, while leaving up roughly 1,700 others where there were no problems.

Dr. Deborah Birx, the coordinator of the White House's coronavirus task force, said at a briefing that the number of new cases in New York City has been relatively constant over the last three days.

But she warned hospital cases will continue to increase because they reflect people who contracted the illness before full mitigation efforts kicked in, and urged city residents to follow White House recommendations.

"To every American out there, where you are protecting yourself, you are protecting others," Birx said.

In other developments around the globe:

— The legislation passed by the Senate is intended as relief for an economy spiraling into recession or worse and a nation facing a grim and mounting death toll. The package would give direct payments to most Americans, expand unemployment benefits and help small businesses make payroll. A controversial, heavily negotiated \$500 billion program would guarantee subsidized loans to larger industries, including airlines. Hospitals would get significant help as well. Stocks rallied on Wall Street for the second day in a row.

— Prince Charles, the 71-year-old heir to the British throne, tested positive for the virus but was showing only mild symptoms and was isolating himself at a royal estate in Scotland, his office said.

— Spain's death toll rose past 3,400, eclipsing China's, after a one-day spike of 700 fatalities. It is now second only to Italy, with over 7,500 deaths. "We are collapsing. We need more workers," said Lidia Perera, a nurse at Madrid's 1,000-bed Hospital de la Paz. The Parliament's vote will let the government extend strict stay-at-home rules and business closings until April 11.

— China's Hubei province, where the outbreak first emerged late last year, started lifting its lockdown. The 67 new cases reported Thursday were all recent arrivals from abroad, and once again there were no new cases reported in Wuhan, the capital of Hubei.

— Russian President Vladimir Putin postponed a vote on proposed constitutional amendments that could enable him to extend his hold on power. The decision came as Russia reported its first deaths from the virus, two elderly patients who had underlying conditions.

— The French Riviera city of Cannes opened the site of its world-famous film festival to the homeless.

— British Prime Minister Boris Johnson said more than 400,000 people responded within a day to the government's call for volunteers to help the country's most vulnerable people. They will deliver medicine, drive people home from doctor's appointments and make phone calls to check on patients.

— The Pentagon halted for 60 days the movement of U.S. troops and Defense Department civilians overseas, a measure expected to affect about 90,000 troops scheduled to deploy or return from abroad. A Marine became the first person stationed at the Pentagon to test positive for the virus.

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Around the U.S., other states braced for a version of New York's nightmare, with fears over public events held in the weeks before the virus exploded.

A month after Mardi Gras in and around New Orleans, Louisiana is seeing a ballooning number of cases and now has the third-highest rate per capita in the U.S., according to the governor. Sixty-five have died, and the virus has been confirmed in three-quarters of the state's 64 parishes.

Small towns and rural areas are beginning to sound the alarm as well.

In Georgia, a state that has seen cases grow to more than 1,200, an Albany hospital's three intensive care units were already full, and doctors were working to discharge people as quickly as possible to make way for new patients.

"We're quickly approaching the point of maximum capacity. We need a relief valve," said Steven Kitchen, chief medical officer at Phoebe Putney Memorial Hospital.

Colorado Gov. Jared Polis issued a stay-at-home order through April 11, saying the "extreme measure" was necessary because restrictions so far haven't done enough to reduce the virus' spread.

Ski resort operators are grappling with an economic "body blow" as they shut down at a time they normally would be welcoming hordes of spring break revelers.

For most people, the coronavirus causes mild or moderate symptoms, such as fever and cough that clear up in two to three weeks. For some, especially older adults and people with existing health problems, it can cause more severe illness, including pneumonia.

This story has been corrected to show that the first positive coronavirus test in New York City came back March 1, not March 2.

Long reported from Washington. Associated Press journalists around the world contributed to this report.

Fears for civil rights mount amid fight against coronavirus

By MICHAEL TARM AP Legal Affairs Writer

CHICAGO (AP) — The orders seem prudent in the bid to thwart the spread of the novel coronavirus: Don't go out, don't gather with others and keep your stores closed. But growing segments of the U.S. population say state and federal governments are trampling on freedoms central to American life in the name of protecting public health.

The case is already being made. A church-goer in New Hampshire says prohibitions against large gatherings violate her religious rights. A Pennsylvania golf course owner argues that gubernatorial edicts shuttering his business amount to illegal seizure of his private property.

If civil libertarians aren't yet sounding alarms, many have their hands hovering over the button.

"So far, we haven't had draconian methods, like armed police blocking people's movement in the streets, surveillance and phone tapping," said Larry Gostin, a public health lawyer at Georgetown University. "But we are seeing lockdowns of millions of citizens like we have never seen before."

He added: "We are on the precipice of something that could transform American values and freedoms."

Questions about the extent of governmental power to impose restrictions haven't been fully resolved since New York cook Mary Mallon, a typhoid carrier, defied public health department orders to isolate. Mallon, better known as Typhoid Mary, lost her legal battle for freedom and ended up effectively imprisoned for 28 years on an island cottage, dying there in 1938.

Responses are no longer as severe. But thousands of Americans are already confined to their homes under threat of fines and even jail. Businesses are losing thousands of dollars. Workers are laid off.

One man infected with the coronavirus in Kentucky recently left a hospital and refused to quarantine; an armed county deputy was posted outside his home to ensure the 53-year-old stayed put.

"It's a step I hoped I'd never have to take, but we can't allow one person who we know has the virus to refuse to protect their neighbors," Kentucky Gov. Andy Beshear told reporters.

Authority to order shutdowns and quarantines inside states rests almost entirely with states under provi-

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sions in the U.S. Constitution ceding power not explicitly delegated to the federal government to states. The federal government itself can't order nationwide quarantines or business closures, courts have ruled over the years. It does, however, have clear power under constitutional clauses regulating commerce to quarantine international travelers or those traveling state to state who are suspected of carrying an infectious disease.

At least some legal scholars believe the Constitution's Commerce Clause may vest President Donald Trump with powers to impose a national lockdown, but he'd likely have to resort to persuading all 50 states to agree to uniform restrictions if he ever seriously contemplated such a move.

That doesn't appear to be his inclination. He said this week he was hoping to lift restrictions in a bid to boost the plummeting U.S. economy as early as Easter Sunday, April 12, setting up a standoff with state officials who have said they can't risk it.

"The federal government has done guidelines. And then states can follow the guidelines, states can fashion the guidelines to fit their specific circumstances," New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo said. "What works for New York isn't necessarily going to work for Tulsa or San Antonio. The federal government isn't saying we mandate anything."

Laws spelling out what steps a state can take during a pandemic can be complex and difficult for judges to sort through. Some haven't been updated in decades, according to a report by the Congressional Research Service.

And they also differ state to state. The maximum penalty in most states if someone violates mandatory quarantines — often backed by a court order — is no more than a year in jail. In Mississippi, it can be 10 years in some circumstances, according to the National Conference of State legislatures.

A few Americans are already fed up and have taken their grievances to court by suing their respective states. But a relative trickle of legal challenges will likely become a flood if lockdowns drag on for weeks and frustrations mount. The number of dead in the U.S. has reached 1,042 with more than 69,000 infections, and scientists warn the peak has not happened.

The Pennsylvania lawsuit filed on behalf of the Blueberry Hill Golf Club says Gov. Tom Wolf's power to close businesses under state law is limited to man-made or natural disasters such as oil spills, tornadoes and mudslides. The coronavirus, it argues, doesn't fall into those categories. The state has more than 1,280 cases.

For most people, the virus causes mild or moderate symptoms, such as fever and cough that clear up in two to three weeks. For some, especially older adults and people with existing health problems, it can cause more severe illness, including pneumonia.

The state-court filing says the golf course has a short window that starts with an influx of golfers in spring to recoup costs of maintaining greens and fairways. With cash flow now cut, it may not be able to make vital bank payments, the lawsuit says.

The owner would undertake COVID-19 prevention protocols if permitted to re-open, the lawsuit said, including but not limited to "requiring golfers to walk, or if golfers wish to ride in carts, require golfers to use individual carts for each golfer."

So far, judges have rejected the few legal challenges to state restrictions. Pennsylvania's Supreme Court refused to freeze Wolf's sweeping shutdown orders. In response to complaints, Wolf did ease restrictions on some businesses.

A New Hampshire court issued a similar ruling in the lawsuit by the church-goer. It upheld Gov. Chris Sununu's ban on large gatherings, the court's written ruling saying it couldn't imagine a more critical public objective "than protecting the citizens of this state and this country from becoming sick and dying from this pandemic." New Hampshire reports more than 130 cases.

But courts have never been asked whether the unprecedented lockdowns are constitutional "and in violation of individual rights," Gostin said.

A battle all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court on that issue, he says, may be looming.

Follow Michael Tarm on Twitter at <http://twitter.com/mtarm>

Many businesses cautious about restarting economy amid virus

By MICHELLE R. SMITH and DEE-ANN DURBIN Associated Press

PROVIDENCE, R.I. (AP) — President Donald Trump wants the country open for business by mid-April, but some experts warn it's not as easy as flipping a switch: Economies run on confidence, and that is likely to be in short supply for as long as coronavirus cases in the United States are still rising.

Trump this week said he wants businesses "opened up and just raring to go by Easter," which falls on April 12. That contradicts many public health experts, who warn that restrictions should only be lifted gradually and once more data about infection rates is available. They expect efforts to curb the disease will continue for several months at least.

Despite wild swings in financial markets and signs that unemployment is surging — both of which could hurt Trump in an election year — many businesses say it's not clear that reopening will be even an option in a few weeks: They have to follow the orders set in each state, and many of those are open ended or could be extended at any time. They are worried that opening too soon could be seen as irresponsible. And even if they did reopen, would customers come if the virus isn't under control?

"He's not being realistic. How can you open if the cases are climbing day after day?" asked Paul Boutros, who owns East Side Pockets, a small restaurant that has lost most of its business since nearby Brown University sent students home two weeks ago.

Business groups, including the U.S. Chamber of Commerce and the National Federation of Independent Business, are cautious. They say reopening is a call health experts will have to make; in the meantime, they're focused on getting financial help for businesses.

Some business leaders and workers, of course, back the idea of a shorter shutdown. In a weekend post on Twitter, former Goldman Sachs CEO Lloyd Blankfein said those at lower risk should return to work in a few weeks.

"Extreme measures to flatten the virus 'curve' is sensible — for a time — to stretch out the strain on health infrastructure. But crushing the economy, jobs and morale is also a health issue — and beyond," he said.

Taggart Barron, who is in finance and is working from his home in Bentonville, Arkansas, during the outbreak, said he would go into the office more if he were allowed — and that would mean he would be spending more, too, like on lunches out.

"I worry about the human and economic impact of a forced shutdown with no defined end in sight," said Barron. "We are killing a fly with a missile."

New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo — whose dire warnings and sometimes scolding tone in his daily briefings have often made him a foil for Trump during the outbreak — has suggested a staged opening eventually. He said that perhaps younger people who appear to be less affected or people who had recovered from the virus — if scientists are able to confirm that means they have immunity — could start to go back to work.

Cuomo said there was no need to "choose between a smart health strategy and smart economic strategy. We can do both and we must do both."

For most people, the new coronavirus causes mild or moderate symptoms that clear up in two to three weeks. For some, especially older adults and people with existing health problems, it can cause more severe illness and death.

In Europe, government and industry leaders are debating the extent of the shutdown and which sectors are "essential." In Italy, which leads the world in deaths from the virus, the government is tightening its lockdown further, while French President Emmanuel Macron recently urged employees in key industries to continue showing up for work. Three months after the start of the outbreak in China, business has not yet returned to normal.

But as difficult as it was to shut down large parts of the American economy, restarting them may be even harder, especially if it happens while there is still uncertainty about the outbreak's trajectory. If a

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restart comes too early, it could also further fuel the pandemic, in which more than 20,000 people have already died globally.

Economic research on previous pandemics that weren't as severe has found that people voluntarily pulled back on shopping, travel and other activity to avoid exposure from crowds, according to Constance Hunter, chief economist at KPMG. So consumer spending would likely remain weak even if businesses largely reopened.

"It's very tough to say to people, 'Hey, keep going to restaurants, go buy new houses, ignore that pile of bodies over in the corner. We want you to keep spending because there's some politician who thinks GDP growth is what really counts,'" Bill Gates, a major philanthropist to global public health efforts, said in an interview that was part of a series organized by TED.

The travel industry, for one, expects that even if severe restrictions are lifted after three months, demand for air travel will be weakened by the loss of jobs and consumer confidence, according to an analysis released Tuesday by the International Air Transport Association, an industry trade group. The association expects global passenger demand to be down 65% in the April-June period. By the fourth quarter, that could narrow to a 10% decline, the group said.

There are also added burdens on workers these days that could make a partial reopening difficult. Many people in the workforce have family members at home that might need care or who are vulnerable to the virus or the workers may themselves be quarantined, noted Laurie White, president of the Greater Providence Chamber of Commerce. In many places, schools are closed for the foreseeable future, so caring for their children may prevent some from returning to work.

The cost of the virus will have to be paid one way or another, said Gabriel Ehrlich, director of the Research Seminar in Quantitative Economics at the University of Michigan. We can pay it now, by using shutdowns to slow down the virus' spread while we ramp up our ability to manage it, or later, in the form of increased public health costs if infections surge.

"I don't want to downplay or minimize the fact that there are really substantial economic costs," Ehrlich said. "But the reality is getting the disease under control is also beneficial for the economy."

James Mark, who owns the restaurants North and Big King in Providence, said pushing to restart the economy before the health crisis is over would put businesses like his in a terrible position. As things are now, there's some leverage for small businesses to negotiate with landlords or banks over rents, mortgages and debt payments. If things reopened while the coronavirus was still spreading, he'd be under pressure to put his staff and customers at risk to pay those bills.

"I don't think there's any economic solution until the health side of this gets solved," Mark said. "We can't rush this."

Durbin reported from Ann Arbor, Michigan. Associated Press writer Chris Rugaber in Washington contributed to this report.

Family: US believes ex-FBI agent Robert Levinson has died

By ERIC TUCKER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The U.S. government has concluded that retired FBI agent Robert Levinson, who vanished more than a decade ago, died while in the custody of Iran, his family and administration officials said Wednesday.

The circumstances and timing of Levinson's death were unclear, but White House national security adviser Robert O'Brien said Wednesday evening that the U.S. believes Levinson "may have passed away some time ago." Hours earlier, his family said information U.S. officials had received had led them to conclude he was dead. Neither the government nor the family described that information.

The death is believed to have occurred before the recent outbreak of the coronavirus that has gravely affected Iran and another countries, according to a statement from Levinson's family.

The government's acknowledgment of Levinson's death came hours after a White House briefing in which

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President Donald Trump appeared to equivocate on the news, saying, "I won't accept that he's dead."

U.S. officials communicated the news to Levinson's family in a meeting in Washington in recent weeks, according to a person familiar with the situation who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss the private encounter. The person said the information about Levinson had come from Iran's foreign minister.

"It is impossible to describe our pain," the family's statement said. "Our family will spend the rest of our lives without the most amazing man, a new reality that is inconceivable to us. His grandchildren will never meet him. They will only know him through the stories we tell them."

Levinson disappeared on March 9, 2007, when he was scheduled to meet a source on the Iranian island of Kish. For years, U.S. officials would say only that Levinson was working independently on a private investigation. But a 2013 Associated Press investigation revealed that Levinson had been sent on a mission by CIA analysts who had no authority to run such an operation.

The Trump administration has made it a priority to seek the release of American hostages and prisoners detained overseas. Last week, administration officials touted the release from Lebanon of a New Hampshire restaurant owner jailed on decades-old allegations and the medical furlough of a Navy veteran from an Iranian prison.

The Levinson family thanked multiple U.S. officials for their help, including FBI Director Chris Wray, CIA Director Gina Haspel, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and O'Brien, who before his post as national security adviser also served as the State Department's chief hostage negotiator.

But the family statement also said: "Those who are responsible for what happened to Bob Levinson, including those in the U.S. government who for many years repeatedly left him behind, will ultimately receive justice for what they have done. We will spend the rest of our lives making sure of this, and the Iranian regime must know we will not be going away."

The family said it does not know when or if Levinson's body will be returned for burial.

At a White House briefing on the coronavirus, Trump resisted confirming the family's account, saying that Iranian officials had not told the U.S. about Levinson's fate and that "I won't accept that he's dead."

But he also acknowledged that "it's not looking promising" and said Levinson, who had diabetes and high blood pressure, had had "some rough problems" prior to his disappearance.

"He was a great gentleman," he said.

Around the same time, though, the White House's acting national intelligence director appeared to confirm Levinson's death with a tweeted statement conveying condolences to the family. And by the evening, the White House issued a new statement designed to remove some of the uncertainty expressed by the president.

"As President Trump said today, Iran must provide a complete accounting of what occurred with Bob Levinson before the United States can fully accept what happened in this case," O'Brien said. "While the investigation is ongoing, we believe that Bob Levinson may have passed away some time ago."

The family received a video in late 2010 as well as proof-of-life photographs in 2011 in which he appeared disheveled with a long beard and wearing an orange prison jumpsuit like those given to detainees at the Guantanamo Bay prison. Even then, his whereabouts and fate were not known.

Iran repeatedly has said that it has no information about Levinson, though U.S. diplomats and investigators have long said they thought he was taken by Iranian government agents.

In November, the Iranian government unexpectedly responded to a United Nations query by saying that Levinson was the subject of an "open case" in Iranian Revolutionary Court. Although the development gave the family a burst of hope, Iran clarified that the "open case" was simply an investigation into his disappearance.

The announcement of his death comes just weeks after a federal judge in Washington held Iran liable for his disappearance, saying the country was "in no uncertain terms" responsible for Levinson's "hostage taking and torture."

The judge's decision followed a weeklong trial of emotional testimony from Levinson's family, including from each of his seven children.

Associated Press writer Darlene Superville in Washington contributed to this report.

Follow Eric Tucker on Twitter at <https://www.twitter.com/etuckerAP>

New Zealand mosque gunman pleads guilty to murder, terrorism

By NICK PERRY Associated Press

WELLINGTON, New Zealand (AP) — The man who committed the worst atrocity in New Zealand's modern history when he slaughtered 51 worshippers at two Christchurch mosques unexpectedly pleaded guilty to all charges Thursday.

The attacks targeting people praying at the mosques a year ago shocked the nation and prompted new laws banning the deadliest types of semi-automatic weapons. It also prompted global changes to social media protocols after the gunman livestreamed his attack on Facebook, where it was viewed by hundreds of thousands of people.

The sudden turn in the case took survivors and relatives by surprise, and brought relief to people across New Zealand. Many had feared Australian white supremacist Brenton Harrison Tarrant would try to use his trial as a platform to promote his views. He'd outlined those views in a 74-page manifesto he published online shortly before the attacks.

Tarrant, 29, pleaded guilty to 51 counts of murder, 40 counts of attempted murder and one count of terrorism at the Christchurch High Court. He had previously pleaded not guilty to all charges and his trial had been scheduled to start in June.

Tarrant is the first person to be found guilty of terrorism in New Zealand under laws passed after the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks in the U.S.

The change in plea came less than two weeks after New Zealanders commemorated those who died on the anniversary of the March 15, 2019, attacks.

"Honestly, I'm still trying to process what just happened," said Aya Al-Umari, whose brother Hussein was killed in the attack on the Al Noor mosque. "I feel conflicted."

She said that on the one hand, she had wanted to find out more details about what happened at the trial but on the other hand was feeling relieved about not having to face the trauma of sitting through it.

Temel Atacocugu, who survived being shot nine times during the attack at Al Noor, said he was surprised by the turn of events and hoped the judge would set an example at the sentencing by imposing the harshest punishment in the country's history and helping ensure nothing like it would happen again.

"I'm happy that he has accepted that he is guilty," Atacocugu said.

Judge Cameron Mander has not yet set a sentencing date. Tarrant faces life imprisonment, with the judge having some discretion in deciding the minimum number of years Tarrant must serve before becoming eligible for parole.

The change in plea came at a hastily arranged court hearing at a time that New Zealand was beginning a four-week lockdown to try and combat the new coronavirus. The lockdown meant Tarrant appeared in the court via video link from his jail cell in Auckland and only a handful of people were allowed inside the courtroom, including the imams from the two mosques that were attacked.

Mander said it was unfortunate the lockdown prevented victims and family members from being able to attend the hearing but the imams were helping to represent them. He said he wanted to quickly move ahead with the hearing, especially with the COVID-19 response threatening delays to the court schedule.

Tarrant, who was wearing a gray prison sweater, showed little emotion as he pleaded guilty. He didn't indicate why he had changed his pleas, and his lawyer could not immediately be reached for comment.

New Zealand's Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern, who was praised around the world for her empathetic response to the Muslim community after the attacks, said it was "deeply disappointing" the victims didn't get to attend the hearing.

But she said there was "a certain sense of relief that the whole nation, but particularly our Muslim community, are being spared from a trial that could have otherwise acted as a platform."

Tarrant moved to New Zealand in 2017 and kept a low profile in the university city of Dunedin. He frequented a gym, practiced shooting at a rifle club range and built up an arsenal of weapons. He didn't appear to be employed, and said in some online posts that he'd inherited a significant amount of money when his father died.

Tarrant appeared to have a fascination with religious conflicts in Europe and the Balkans, and visited a number of sites in Eastern Europe in the years before he committed the massacre. After his attack at the second mosque, Tarrant was driving, possibly to carry out a shooting at a third mosque, when two police officers rammed his car off the road, dragged him out and arrested him.

What you need to know today about the virus outbreak

By The Associated Press undefined

President Trump was urging passage of an unprecedented aid package as Senate leaders grappled with last-minute snags in the emergency legislation to rush aid totaling some \$2 trillion in assistance to businesses, workers and a health care system slammed by the coronavirus pandemic.

New York authorities mobilized to head off a potential public health disaster, which has emerged as a kind of a warning flare for the crisis in America as the overall U.S. death toll passed 900. India's 1.3 billion people joined the global lockdown, and Prince Charles has tested positive for the new coronavirus.

Here are some of AP's top stories Wednesday on the world's coronavirus pandemic. Follow APNews.com/VirusOutbreak for updates through the day and APNews.com/UnderstandingtheOutbreak for stories explaining some of its complexities.

WHAT'S HAPPENING TODAY:

— A makeshift morgue has been set up outside New York's Bellevue Hospital as authorities mobilize to head off a potential public health disaster as the overall U.S. death toll passed 900. The city's police, their ranks dwindling as more fall sick, are being told to patrol nearly empty streets to enforce social distancing as the city has emerged as the nation's biggest coronavirus hot spot. Gov. Andrew Cuomo has attributed the cluster to the city's role as a gateway to international travelers and the sheer density of its population of 8.6 million.

— Pressure is mounting on the Trump administration to release people from immigration detention facilities where at least one detainee has tested positive for COVID-19 and advocates fear tight quarters and overall conditions could cause rapid spread of the virus. The U.S. holds around 37,000 people in immigration detention.

— An international aid group says closures aimed at containing the coronavirus pandemic are preventing it from reaching 300,000 people in conflict zones across the Middle East, as the virus arrived in war-torn Libya and case counts rose in Syria and the Gaza Strip, among the world's most vulnerable places. The Norwegian Refugee Council said it was unable to reach people in Syria, Yemen and the Gaza Strip, where authorities have imposed strict measures to halt the spread of the virus.

— China's National Health Commission has reported 67 new COVID-19 cases, all of which it says were imported infections in recent arrivals from abroad. Once again, there were no new cases reported in Wuhan, the central Chinese provincial capital where the coronavirus emerged in December. After a months-long lockdown, Wuhan residents are allowed out of the city, but cannot leave Hubei province until April 8.

— Restaurants, hotels, airlines, automakers and entertainment venues have been hit hard around the world as cities, states and entire countries have ordered the closure of nonessential businesses and directed residents to remain at home. There are more suddenly jobless Americans than during the Great Recession.

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW:

For most people, the coronavirus causes mild or moderate symptoms, such as fever and cough that clear up in two to three weeks. For some, especially older adults and people with existing health problems, it can cause more severe illness, including pneumonia and death. The vast majority of people recover.

Here are the symptoms of the virus compared with the common flu.

One of the best ways to prevent spread of the virus is washing your hands with soap and water. The

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U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends first washing with warm or cold water and then lathering soap for 20 seconds to get it on the backs of hands, between fingers and under fingernails before rinsing off.

You should wash your phone, too. Here's how.

Misinformation overload: How to separate fact from fiction and rumor from deliberate efforts to mislead.

ONE NUMBER:

\$300,000: The money donated by the Michael Jackson estate to help people in the entertainment industry hurt by the coronavirus pandemic. The donations will focus on Broadway workers, as well as workers in Las Vegas and in the music industry. Jackson's estate announced Wednesday that it will give \$100,000 apiece to Broadway Cares, Three Square food bank in Nevada and the Recording Academy's MusiCares. The estate's co-executor John Branca tells The Associated Press the gifts are personal for the keepers of Jackson's affairs and legacy and are in line with the singer's charitable endeavors during his lifetime.

IN OTHER NEWS:

PLAYING THROUGH: Many golf courses around the country have remained open during the coronavirus pandemic. The hope is that golf can provide an outlet for the stir crazy and a dose of normalcy. The question is whether recreational golf is safe enough under the circumstances. Courses have barred touching the flagsticks and turned the hole cups upside down so golfers don't need reach in to retrieve the ball.

AP PHOTOS: A look at how homelessness is accentuating the coronavirus pandemic in Madrid and Barcelona, where a growing number of people are living on the street. Spain, which ranks fourth worldwide among the countries with the most virus cases, is under a government-imposed lockdown that has closed stores, emptied office buildings and left cities largely deserted, day and night. With many day centers and soup kitchens either closed or with reduced hours, the homeless have nowhere to go.

Follow AP coverage of the virus outbreak at <https://apnews.com/VirusOutbreak> and <https://apnews.com/UnderstandingtheOutbreak>

Loughlin, Giannulli: College bribery charges must be tossed

By ALANNA DURKIN RICHER Associated Press

BOSTON (AP) — "Full House" Actress Lori Loughlin, her fashion designer husband, Mossimo Giannulli, and other prominent parents urged a judge Wednesday to dismiss charges against them in the college admissions bribery case, accusing prosecutors of "extraordinary" misconduct.

Defense attorneys for the the famous couple and other parents still fighting the charges say the case cannot stand because investigators bullied their informant into lying and then concealed evidence that would bolster the parents' claims of innocence.

"The extraordinary government misconduct presented in this case threatens grave harm to defendants and the integrity of this proceeding. That misconduct cannot be ignored," the lawyers wrote.

The U.S. attorney's office in Boston declined Wednesday to comment.

Loughlin and Giannulli are scheduled to go on trial in October on charges that they paid \$500,000 to get their daughters into the University of Southern California as crew recruits even though neither girl was a rower. Prosecutors say they snapped photos of the girls sitting on rowing machines to help make fake athletic profiles that portrayed them as star athletes.

Six other wealthy parents accused of participating in the scheme will stand trial alongside them. Another six parents are scheduled to face trial in January.

The defense says prosecutors withheld evidence that would support the parents' argument that they believed the payments were legitimate donations that would benefit the schools, rather than bribes for coaches or officials. The evidence — notes from the phone of the scheme's admitted mastermind, admis-

sions consultant Rick Singer — was not given to the defense until last month.

Singer wrote in the notes that FBI agents yelled at him and told him to lie to get parents to say things in recorded phone calls that could be used against them. Singer wrote that FBI agents told him to say that he told parents the payments were bribes.

"They continue to ask me to tell a fib and not restate what I told my clients as to where there money was going — to the program not the coach and that it was a donation and they want it to be a payment," Singer wrote, according to the filing.

The defense says the notes show that agents bullied Singer into fabricating evidence and try to trick parents into falsely agreeing that the payments were bribes.

"For government agents to coerce an informant into lying on recorded calls to generate false inculpatory evidence against investigative targets—and to then knowingly prosecute those targets using that false evidence—is governmental malfeasance of the worst kind," the lawyers wrote.

Instead of immediately handing over the notes when they first saw them in Oct. 2018, prosecutors "buried" the evidence and repeatedly told the defense it had provided everything it was supposed to, the parents' lawyers wrote.

The defense also accused investigators of allowing Singer to delete thousands of text messages from his cellphone and then mounting an "aggressive (and highly successful) pressure campaign" to get parents to plead guilty.

"While withholding the notes and many other examples of material exculpatory information, the government attempted to coerce defendants into pleading guilty by threatening that if they did not, they would face additional charges," the parents' lawyers wrote.

Singer's notes weren't given to the defense until February because the government believed they were privileged and didn't review them further after discovering them, prosecutors have said. Prosecutors say it doesn't matter whether Singer called the payments bribes or donations, because it was still an illegal quid pro quo.

The defense said if the judge doesn't dismiss the case, he should at least prevent prosecutors from using the "tainted recordings" at trial and order a hearing to "uncover the full truth about the recordings and the government's efforts to fabricate and conceal evidence."

Nearly two dozen other parents have pleaded guilty in the case, including "Desperate Housewives" star Felicity Huffman, who was sentenced to two weeks in prison for paying \$15,000 to have a proctor correct her daughter's SAT answers.

Out of medication, US woman finally boards flight from Peru

By MITCH WEISS, HOLBROOK MOHR and MATTHEW LEE Associated Press

A 33-year-old American woman running out of her life-saving medication to treat her auto-immune disease finally boarded a flight home Wednesday after being stuck in Peru for about 10 days, but hundreds of other U.S. citizens remained stranded after the South American nation closed its borders due to the coronavirus pandemic.

"I could not be happier," Anna, who requested that her last name not be made public due to privacy concerns related to her medical condition, said after getting on the plane in Cusco.

At the same time, it was bittersweet. On the way to the airport, Anna and her husband saw a long line of Americans hoping to get on the flight. Her husband told The Associated Press that some people have been "sitting outside the airport for a week."

"So obviously not everyone on line was getting on this flight," he said, adding that there were 167 passengers on the LATAM plane, which was organized by the U.S. State Department and allowed to land by Peruvian authorities, unlike previous planes.

The flight from Cusco to Miami with a stop in the Peruvian capital of Lima was the culmination of more than a week of desperately trying to get out of South American nation. The couple had tried to charter a plane to leave Cusco, nestled high in the Andes near the ancient ruins of Machu Picchu, but the Peruvian

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government refused to give it permission to land. And when they asked the State Department for help, they said they were told the agency was working on the situation.

"There are other foreign governments that are able to take out their citizens, but it seems that with the U.S. there is some gridlock in the Peruvian government granting those airplanes permission to land," Anna said Tuesday. "But there are many citizens here that are just desperate to go home."

Thousands of U.S. citizens have found themselves trapped abroad because of the pandemic. Anna and her husband, like many others, said they had a hard time getting help or information.

Ian Brownlee, head of the U.S. State Department's task force on repatriations, said Wednesday that State and the U.S. Embassy in Peru had secured the needed permissions from the Foreign Ministry for the flight Tuesday to land, but that agreement apparently did not "trickle down to the appropriate people" who run the airport.

Brownlee said the situation was chaotic but it appeared to have been resolved and that two flights — one from Lima and one from Cusco — left Wednesday. More flights are expected to depart this week, he told reporters in a conference call. Brownlee said there were about 4,000 Americans still in Peru and another large number in nearby Ecuador.

Peruvian President Martín Vizcarra, a soft-spoken U.S. ally, was among the first in Latin America to close borders over the coronavirus pandemic, deploy the military and require people to stay in their homes. Initially he allowed waivers for chartered repatriation flights, but that ended Saturday.

The pandemic has infected more than 400,000 people around the world and killed over 20,000. The COVID-19 illness causes mild or moderate symptoms in most people, but severe, life-threatening symptoms are possible especially for the elderly or those with existing health problems — like Anna.

Peru confirmed its first case of the virus March 6, three days before she arrived to meet her husband who was there as part of a South American trip. When Vizcarra declared an emergency and closed the borders March 15, they were given just 24 hours to leave.

Anna's husband immediately turned to the U.S. Embassy for help, telling officials about her precarious health condition and dwindling supply of medication. He provided a note from her U.S. doctor attesting that it was "very urgent and important that she returns to USA" for treatment.

Then he contacted political leaders in Texas including Sens. Ted Cruz and John Cornyn, who he said tried to help. The couple believed an American plane would arrive Tuesday, but that didn't happen.

Another flight was also turned away that day. American Airlines spokesman Ross Feinstein said a charter flight from Miami reached Peruvian airspace that afternoon but was denied permission to land, and circled until fuel levels dictated a return to Florida. The State Department said Peru also did not provide clearances for a LATAM flight to pick up Americans in Cusco.

Various private air charter companies had been working feverishly to find a way to bring them home, according to communications that Anna showed to the AP.

Steve Panzella, president of Horizon Jets Charter Inc., said Tuesday that the couple contacted him about an air ambulance and said they were willing to pay to bring other Americans home on any flight they chartered, but the holdup was securing permission from Peru.

"I have been getting calls 24 hours a day from people stuck all over Central and South America, but nothing like Peru," Panzella said. "People are desperate."

In interviews, other Americans who traveled to Peru painted a bleak picture of armed troops patrolling the streets during the lockdown and making sure they stay in their hotels. Some told AP they didn't know how or when they would get home. Others managed to leave by buying tickets through local travel companies. But they were given little advance notice about the flights and didn't know until they boarded if there would be enough seats.

To help Peruvian aviation authorities, Brownlee said the State Department's Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement had vacated a hanger on the military side of Lima's airport so it could serve as a waiting and staging area for passengers waiting to leave.

"We're doing what we can to help the Peruvians," he said.

For Anna, at least, the ordeal is over.

She's looking forward to having access to her medications. And after more than a week confined to a hotel, she was looking forward to something else: "Walking around the green grass of our backyard."

Associated Press writers Joshua Goodman in Miami, Franklin Briceno in Lima, Peru, and David Koenig in Dallas contributed to this report.

Trump administration urged to free migrants as virus surges

By **BEN FOX, PHILIP MARCELO and NOMAAN MERCHANT** Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Pressure was mounting on the Trump administration Wednesday to release people from immigration detention facilities where at least one detainee has tested positive for COVID-19 and advocates fear tight quarters and overall conditions could cause rapid spread of the virus.

The U.S. holds around 37,000 people in immigration detention. Detainees and advocates say many are vulnerable because of age and pre-existing medical conditions, and because they are often held in open rooms, beds 3-feet apart, and without adequate supplies of masks or other protections.

"It's impossible to stay calm," said Marco Battistotti, an Italian who is among 170 people detained by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement at the Bristol County jail in Massachusetts. "People are panicking. People are in fear."

The 54-year-old Battistotti was among about 100 detainees at the county jail near Cape Cod who signed a letter released by a local immigration lawyer detailing conditions inside. They asked to be released to await decisions on their immigration cases.

"I don't want to die in an ICE jail," he said in a phone interview with The Associated Press. "Why can't I fight my case on the outside?"

The agency, which reported the positive test of a 31-year-old man from Mexico held in Bergen County, New Jersey, on Tuesday, has announced steps to protect detained migrants and staff from the virus, but hasn't said whether it plans to review cases for possible release because of the outbreak. It did not immediately respond to a request to comment on the complaints about conditions from the detainees and their advocates.

The administration has tried to balance its overall hard line on immigration, a signature policy of President Donald Trump, and its response to the outbreak, with ICE announcing previously that it would "temporarily adjust" operations to focus on apprehending people who pose a risk to public safety or are subject to mandatory detention because of a criminal record.

Immigrant advocates, including the American Civil Liberties Union, filed lawsuits in California, Maryland, Pennsylvania and elsewhere, seeking court orders for the immediate release of people in immigration detention, especially those at risk because of their age or medical conditions.

Advocates have also asked a court in Los Angeles to order the Office of Refugee Resettlement to release to eligible sponsors around 1,200 migrant children who were apprehended without parents or legal guardians and have been held in government-contracted shelters for more than 30 days. They said two staff members at two such facilities in New York have tested positive for COVID-19.

It's unclear how many immigration detainees overall are at higher risk, but one California suit alone had 13 plaintiffs, all over 55.

A federal judge in Boston on Wednesday ordered the release of a 36-year-old man from the Dominican Republic who was detained in a local jail south of the city where an employee tested positive. The ACLU sued for the release of two others held there.

A panel of the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals in San Francisco on Monday, citing the "rapidly escalating public health crisis," ordered the immediate release of a 37-year-old woman who is fighting deportation to Mexico.

The woman's lawyer, Max Carter-Oberstone, said the government told him it would not oppose the decision but she still had not been released as of early Wednesday. The court took the action on its own initiative in a rare move on behalf of a woman who says she has been threatened with death by members

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of a Mexican drug cartel.

"It wasn't something we asked for or were expecting," Carter-Oberstone said. "The court is clearly reacting to the greater public health crisis that we're in right now and re-evaluating how it's going to dispose of its immigration cases in light of that crisis that we're all experiencing."

The situation in immigration detention, which include facilities run by local jurisdictions and private contractors, is similar to that facing jails and prisons, with staff also at risk from a virus that already has sickened at least 55,000 people and killed about 800 in the U.S.

One difference is that more than half of ICE detainees have no criminal charges or conviction and are held only for immigration reasons. Under previous administrations, many would likely have been released on bond as they pursued their cases.

ICE has reported one positive test of an employee at a detention facility in Elizabeth, New Jersey, and 18 confirmed cases among staff not involved in detaining migrants. A contractor reported a positive case of a staff member at a facility in Harris County, Texas. The agency says it is screening new detainees and isolating detainees who show symptoms of the coronavirus disease.

Detainees say those measures won't do much, with people staying in dorm-like bays with no social distancing possible or in smaller rooms that they sometimes have to clean themselves, with insufficient cleaning supplies.

Francisca Morales Diaz, a 45-year-old from Mexico who was released Friday from an ICE detention center in Louisiana, said she and others were issued soap and toilet paper for their own use once a week and they would run out. When they complained, she says they were told there were shortages on the outside as well.

"There isn't enough medicine. It's not well-maintained," Morales told AP. Her fear is that "at any moment, they're going to come and take me back there."

Pepper spray was used Tuesday by guards inside the Pine Prairie jail in Louisiana against migrants who say they were demanding the facility do more to protect them from the virus, according to the Southern Poverty Law Center. ICE spokesman Bryan Cox said seven people were sprayed after they refused to follow guards' directives.

Ira Alkalay, a lawyer representing some of the detainees at the jail near Cape Cod, said the detainees are responsible for cleaning their unit, which includes a dining area and bathrooms, but aren't even given bleach. Some who signed the letter suffer from respiratory ailments such as tuberculosis, emphysema and asthma that put them at higher risk to the virus.

"These are not sanitary conditions at all," Alkalay said. "If the virus is introduced, many people could get sick all at once. Hospitals in the area can become quickly overwhelmed."

The office of Bristol County Sheriff Thomas Hodgson, who has made headlines for offering to send the jail's ICE detainees to help build Trump's promised border wall, has stressed there are currently no confirmed or suspected cases of the virus at the facility.

"We suspect these detainees are working with outside political activist groups to use the coronavirus crisis to advance their political agenda," the sheriff's spokesman, Jonathan Darling, said this week.

Eunice Cho, an ACLU lawyer, warned that if the virus spreads through a facility the number of sick people who would require advanced care could overwhelm nearby hospitals. Many ICE jails are in rural areas with smaller hospitals.

"This is closely related to the public health of our entire community," Cho said.

Marcelo reported from Boston. Merchant reported from Houston.

Associated Press writer Amy Taxin in Orange County, California contributed to this report.

Chicago uses hotels for quarantine to ease hospital demand

By KATHLEEN FOODY Associated Press

CHICAGO (AP) — Hours before his first shift cooking for people with mild cases of COVID-19 who are being quarantined in a downtown Chicago hotel, Jose Gonzalez made a plan to protect his family from the coronavirus.

Chicago's plan to reserve at least 1,000 hotel rooms through partnerships with five hotels is the first such sweeping strategy unveiled in the U.S. aimed at relieving the pressure on hospitals that are the only option for the seriously sick.

But it will assuredly not be the last.

Government officials nationwide are searching for facilities that could act as a relief valve for hospitals amid building concern that demand will exceed available space and equipment for coronavirus patients with severe symptoms.

Gonzalez, 27, said he has been reassured that only city employees will interact with patients. But he's planning to frequently wash his hands and take other steps to limit his chances of becoming ill or spreading the virus to his 5-year-old daughter and fiancée.

"My biggest concern is just making sure I don't catch the virus," he said.

Samir Mayekar, deputy mayor for neighborhood and economic development in Chicago, said the city's public health team wanted a plan that teamed with hotel owners and their staff, rather than a takeover run entirely by public employees as in cities in Asia and Europe.

"Quarantine and isolation units are going to be used in every city across the country eventually, in their own way, shape and form," Mayekar said. "Every hour, every day counts."

New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo said Wednesday that he's also considering hotels and dormitories for treatment sites as work continues to turn the city's Jacob K. Javits Convention Center into a temporary field hospital. In Michigan, a suburban Detroit university offered up its basketball gym for a makeshift hospital and parking lots for drive-thru testing sites.

The first patients moved into Hotel 166 on Tuesday, but the city has not said how many, nor has it named the other hotels that are joining the effort.

The hotel rooms are intended for people who have tested positive for COVID-19 but have mild symptoms that don't require a hospital stay. They also could be used by people awaiting test results who are unable to go home due to the risk of spreading the virus to family members, particularly those who are vulnerable to more severe symptoms due to their age or health issues.

"We need to build this excess network of other spaces so we can take pressure off of hospitals and reserve those acute care beds for those that are most in need of intensive medical treatment," Mayor Lori Lightfoot said Tuesday.

For most people, the coronavirus causes mild or moderate symptoms, such as fever and cough that clear up in two to three weeks. For some, especially older adults and people with existing health problems, it can cause more severe illness, including pneumonia, or death.

Public health officials or hospitals will inform patients who test positive that the rooms are available, but the decision to use a room is voluntary, Mayekar said.

No one is making public predictions about demand.

City officials have said Chicago's hospitals aren't at the critical level seen in New York this week. But Illinois Gov. J.B. Pritzker said Tuesday that the state will need almost 38,000 additional hospital beds — double what's available — as the number of cases continues to rise.

On Wednesday afternoon, Illinois reported 1,865 COVID-19 infections and 19 deaths linked to the virus.

Americans probably wouldn't respond positively to being forced into quarantine outside their home, so it's wise to choose appealing options like hotels that can provide comfort and familiarity, said Effi Benmel-ech, director of the Guthrie Center for Real Estate Research at Northwestern University's Kellogg School of Management.

A more forceful approach, as deployed in China and Israel, would likely be rejected here, he said.

"In the U.S., we need to think about the carrot, the incentive," he said.

Public health and other city employees will handle all face-to-face interactions with patients in the Chicago hotels, delivering food to their doors and announcing it with a quiet knock, Mayekar said.

Hotel cooks will prepare three meals per day and housekeeping staff will receive training from public health employees on cleaning linens and handling trash or meals. Fresh linens will be delivered outside patients' rooms as needed, not daily.

If maintenance is required inside a hotel room, the patient will move to another room and their first room will be sanitized before workers enter, Mayekar said.

"This is not going to be a day-to-day, normal experience in a hotel," he said.

The agreements also made the city responsible for extensive cleaning of the hotels when they are no longer needed for quarantining patients.

The deal comes as a life raft for some Chicago hotel industry workers, who saw customers and their income disappear as the virus began to spread in the U.S.

Hotels in some markets have seen occupancy dive to single digits and reports of hotel employees being laid off throughout the country began this week, said Michael Jacobson, president of the Illinois Hotel and Lodging Association.

"By no means is a hotel making money off of this," he said. "The money that is being collected is really just helping these hotels get by."

Gonzalez said his decision to sign on as a cook for hotel-bound patients in Chicago was influenced by his family's financial situation. Until Monday's announcement, he was part of an 18-month strike by Hotel 166 workers.

Gonzalez had been working overnight shifts at another hotel to get by. But warnings about the coronavirus slowed guest arrivals there and had slashed his work hours in recent weeks.

"I'm leaving my trust in the city of Chicago and their health department," Gonzalez said. "At the end of the day, I've got bills to pay and I have to move my family forward."

Associated Press video journalist Noreen Nasir and writer Corey Williams in Detroit contributed.

Follow AP coverage of the virus outbreak at <https://apnews.com/VirusOutbreak> and <https://apnews.com/UnderstandingtheOutbreak>

'The whole city laid off': US jobless claims climb sky high

By **REBECCA SANTANA** and **DAVID A. LIEB** Associated Press

NEW ORLEANS (AP) — Barely a week ago, David McGraw was cooking daily for hundreds of fine diners at one of New Orleans' illustrious restaurants.

Today, he's cooking for himself, at home — laid off along with hundreds of thousands of people across the U.S. in a massive economic upheaval spurred by efforts to slow the spread of the coronavirus.

U.S. Department of Labor figures to be released Thursday are expected to shatter the old record for the greatest number of new unemployment claims filed in a single week. There are more suddenly jobless Americans than during the Great Recession — and more than in the aftermath of major natural disasters such as hurricanes, fires and floods.

But McGraw, and others like him, don't need official numbers to understand the new realities of life in one of the nation's hot spots for the virus that causes the COVID-19 disease.

"The whole city, laid off. Everybody," said McGraw, using an exaggeration that didn't seem like much of one. "Everybody who worked at a restaurant is laid off."

Restaurants, hotels, airlines, automakers and entertainment venues all have been hit hard as cities, states and entire countries have ordered the closure of non-essential businesses and directed residents to remain at home.

The goal is to prevent the spread of the new coronavirus. For most people, it causes mild or moderate

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symptoms, such as fever and cough that clear up in two to three weeks. But for some, especially older adults and people with existing health problems, it can cause more severe illness, including pneumonia and death.

Virus precautions have affected the worldwide economy. Companies in Europe are laying off workers at the fastest pace since the global financial crisis in 2009, according to surveys of business managers.

Official labor statistics for Europe are not yet out, but companies have been announcing tens of thousands of job cuts, both permanent and temporary. The rise in joblessness may not be as sharp as in the U.S., however, because it is harder to fire workers in Europe, where many governments are supporting companies financially to keep workers on partially paid leave.

Some economists project that the U.S. could see around 3 million new unemployment insurance claims when figures are released for the week of March 15-21. That would be around 12 times as many as the previous week.

"It's going to be an astronomical increase," said Constance Hunter, president of the National Association for Business Economists and chief economist at the accounting firm KPMG. "We don't have any recorded history of anything like this."

In Labor Department records dating to 1967, the largest seasonally adjusted one-week number of new unemployment insurance claims was 695,000 in October 1982, when the national unemployment rate was around 10%.

Before coronavirus concerns escalated this month, the U.S. unemployment rate had been at a 50-year-low of 3.5%

That is certain to rise as the number of laid-off workers soars.

In Louisiana alone, 71,000 people filed new unemployment applications last week, compared to the usual 1,400 or 1,500 people per week, said state labor secretary Ava Dejoie.

Louisiana has one of the highest per capita counts of coronavirus cases in the U.S. Democratic Gov. John Bel Edwards has ordered nonessential businesses to close, limited restaurants to takeout and delivery, banned gatherings over 10 people and directed residents to remain at home.

New Orleans restaurant owner and caterer Keisha Henry said she lost \$10,000 in revenue last week after three big functions she was slated to cater ended up canceling. Meanwhile, she still has expenses related to launching a bar and lounge six months ago. Henry said she had to lay off several employees.

"I wish I could just keep them on and pay them, but being a small business, I don't have enough capital to pay for the employees when we are not putting out a product," she said.

Workers can seek unemployment benefits from their home state immediately after losing their jobs. But it typically takes two to three weeks before they receive any money, because state agencies first have to contact their former employers to verify their work history and then calculate the amount of their weekly benefits based on their previous wages.

That wait could last longer because of the sudden spike in unemployment claims. People should expect "that first benefit payments will take much longer than 21 days," California's Legislative Analyst's Office warned earlier this week.

California Gov. Gavin Newsom said Wednesday that 1 million unemployment claims had been filed in his state since March 13, a span a little longer than the federal reporting period.

Until last week, many state unemployment agencies had been staffed to handle a comparative trickle of claims. Now they are scrambling to add workers to handle the influx.

"Nobody can ramp up that fast without a little bit of a hiccup," said Michele Evermore, a senior policy analyst at the National Employment Law Project, a New York-based group that advocates for low-wage workers and the unemployed.

Legislation signed last week by President Donald Trump could distribute \$1 billion among states to help with the administration of unemployment claims. But it could take a while for that money to reach the states.

Under legislation pending Wednesday in Congress, unemployed workers would get whatever amount a state usually provides for jobless benefits, plus a \$600 per week add-on funded by the federal government. That boost could last up to four months.

Though the extra money could help, it may not eliminate the uneasiness among the newly unemployed. "I think we are putting a lot of hope that the system will return to business as usual in the coming weeks, and I just don't believe that to be true," said Ian Smith, who was laid off from his job as a server at an Atlanta-area restaurant. "The biggest thing keeping many of us up at night is what will the new normal look like?"

Many recently unemployed workers have reported frustrations with jammed phone lines and overloaded internet sites as they try to apply for unemployment aid.

Corey Rickmers, of Rockville, Maryland, was furloughed last week from his job as a digital engagement manager for a publishing company. This was his first time filing for unemployment benefits, and his claim was complicated by the fact he had previously worked out of state.

Rickmers said it took several hours of phone calls on Monday before he finally reached a person who could help him at the state's labor department.

"The process is frustrating," he said. "I can only imagine what millions of people around the country ... are having to fight for right now."

Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis, a Republican, said a recent survey of more than 6,600 businesses in his state showed more than half have laid off employees. Normally, the state's Department of Economic Opportunity receives between 250 and 1,000 unemployment claims a day. But DeSantis said the agency received 21,000 claims on Monday.

"We are working on getting them the relief," DeSantis said. "But, man, that's not only going to have an economic cost, that will have a health cost unless we work hard to remedy that as soon as possible."

Rene Morgan, a web developer who lives in Davie, Florida, is among those filing new claims.

He had been working for only a couple of weeks at a biotechnology startup when he was let go earlier this month after the company's supply chain from China was disrupted by the coronavirus crisis. He is putting his collection of iconic typewriters for sale on eBay to make money to pay rent while he waits to receive unemployment benefits from the state.

"I check back every day, and it keeps saying that my application is being processed," Morgan said.

Lieb reported from Jefferson City, Missouri.

Associated Press writers Michael Kunzleman in Silver Spring, Maryland; Adriana Gomez Licon in Miami; Carlo Piovano in London; Christopher Rugaber in Washington; Adrian Sainz in Memphis, Tennessee; and Angie Wang in Atlanta contributed to this report.

Darius Swann, who fought for school integration, dies at 95

By TOM FOREMAN Jr. Associated Press

The Rev. Darius L. Swann, whose challenge to the notion of segregated public schools helped spark the use of busing to integrate schools across the country, has died at his Virginia home. He was 95.

The Rev. David Ensign, interim pastor at Burke Presbyterian Church, where Swann's family attended church, confirmed in an email that Swann died on March 8.

Swann's wife, Vera, told The Washington Post that her husband died of pneumonia.

On Sept. 2, 1964, Swann wrote a letter to the Charlotte-Mecklenburg school board, asking that his son James be allowed to attend Seversville School, two blocks from his home, rather than the all-black Biddleville School, which was more than twice as far away. He was allowed to argue his case at a subsequent meeting of the school board, which suggested that the Swanns enroll James in Biddleville, then request a transfer.

The Swanns said no thanks.

"We figured that the system was really protecting segregation," Swann told The Associated Press in an interview in 2000. "What they wanted to do was decide things on a case-by-case basis, when what they needed to do was change the whole system; there was a systemic problem."

Enlisting the support of local activist Reginald Hawkins and civil rights attorney Julius Chambers, Swann

sued the school system in January 1965. While they pursued their legal fight, the Swanns enrolled James and his younger sister, Edith, in a private Lutheran school. After one year there, the Swanns moved their children to Eastover, a public school in the affluent, predominantly white Myers Park neighborhood.

Chambers continued the lawsuit even after the Swanns moved to New York, where Swann and his wife worked at Columbia University, and later to Hawaii before moving to India, where he researched Asian theater.

"Sure he got tired of it," Chambers said of the lawsuit. "He had difficulty understanding all the opposition and how mean people could be, but he never to my knowledge ever thought about bailing out."

In 1971, the U.S. Supreme Court upheld court-ordered busing in the Charlotte-Mecklenburg school district, clearing the way for the use of busing as a means of desegregation. Swann learned of the decision while he was in a mountain village in India and read about it in an English-language newspaper.

At the time, Swann said he had no regrets about the long legal battle he endured on behalf of his children and children across the country.

"I felt that schools were a means of our becoming one society," Swann explained. "Perhaps I was overly optimistic, but I still think it's a significant factor. ... We have to have an integrated society in order to be one, and if we don't have an integrated society, we will continue to be two people, separate, unequal."

'We are collapsing': Virus pummels medics in Spain and Italy

By JOSEPH WILSON and ARITZ PARRA Associated Press

MADRID (AP) — By the time Patricia Núñez's cough started, she was already familiar with the dreaded dry hacking sound tormenting patients who had for weeks been filling the Madrid emergency ward where she works.

"We were fed up of hearing it at the hospital, so it was just a matter of time before I would contract it," said Núñez, a 32-year-old nurse who tested positive for the new coronavirus about a week ago.

Speaking via video call from her home, Núñez said she is eager to recover, so she can relieve overworked colleagues dealing with a rising wave of patients and dwindling numbers of healthy nurses and doctors.

"The worst thing is that you need to stay at home, worried about infecting relatives, while knowing that you are dearly needed at work," she told The Associated Press.

The coronavirus is waging a war of attrition against health care workers throughout the world, but nowhere is it winning more battles at the moment than in Italy and in Spain, where protective equipment and tests have been in severely short supply for weeks.

Spain's universal health care system is a source of national pride and often hailed as a reason for its citizens' legendary longevity, but the outbreak is exposing its shortcomings, some of which are the result of years of budget cuts.

The country's hospitals are groaning under the weight of the pandemic: Video and photos from two hospitals in the Spanish capital showed patients, many hooked up to oxygen tanks, crowding corridors and emergency rooms. At the 12 de Octubre University Hospital, patients could be seen on the floor as they waited for a bed in recent days. The hospital says the patients have since been accommodated elsewhere.

On Wednesday, the number of medical personnel infected was nearly 6,500 nationally, health authorities said, representing 13.6% of the country's 47,600 total cases and about 1% of the health system's workforce. At least three health care workers have died.

"We are collapsing. We need more workers," said Lidia Perera, a nurse who works with Núñez at Madrid's Hospital de la Paz, which has 1,000 beds.

This week, 11 of the hospital's 14 floors are devoted to caring for those suffering from COVID-19, and there is still not enough room: The patients with less serious cases of the disease are being put in the hospital's gym or in a large tent outside.

"If you had told me three months ago that I would be working in these conditions in Spain, I wouldn't have believed you," Perera said, adding that staff at La Paz are only being tested for the virus if they have symptoms. "If they did (regular testing), they might end up without any workers."

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Widespread infections among health workers reflect the universal difficulty of stemming the spread of the pandemic. But sick health workers do double damage: They add to the toll while also hampering the ability to respond to the crisis. On top of that, they raise the specter of hospitals becoming breeding grounds of infection.

Spain's experience has been reflected elsewhere.

The World Health Organization's director-general this week called reports of large number of infections among health workers "alarming."

"Even if we do everything else right, if we don't prioritize protecting health workers, many people will die because the health worker who could have saved their lives is sick," Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus told journalists.

In Italy, where nearly one-tenth of more than 74,000 infections are among medical workers, doctors and nurses have been begging the government daily to provide more masks, gloves and goggles.

"Please don't leave us alone: Help us help you," Dr. Francesca De Gennaro wrote in an open letter, asking for gear. De Gennaro heads a small private medical clinic in hard-hit Bergamo — where some 90 of 460 workers have tested positive.

In addition, 33 doctors have died, according to the Italian federation of doctors, although it was not clear if all were in service at the time.

There was no immediately available data on infections among health care workers in the United States. Neither Iran nor France is disclosing those figures.

But in China, where the outbreak started and where more than 80,000 people became infected in three months, over 3,000 medical workers were believed to have fallen ill by the end of February, according to Dr. Liang Wannian, the leader of a team of Chinese experts working with WHO to study the outbreak.

For most people, the new coronavirus causes mild or moderate symptoms that clear up in two to three weeks. For some, especially older adults and people with existing health problems, it can cause more severe illness, including pneumonia and death.

Spanish authorities have repeatedly said that protecting medical staff is central their efforts to do what's known as "flattening the curve": spreading out the time period of over which infections occur, in order to reduce the burden on intensive care units. But health workers say that even simple things such as gowns and masks are still in short supply, as are tests.

"All over the country, you see examples of workers inventing homemade suits using plastics," said Dr. Olga Mediano, a lung specialist in Guadalajara, some 65 kilometers (40 miles) east of Madrid.

Unions blame budget cuts during the decade that followed the last global economic crisis for leaving Spanish hospitals ill-prepared.

In response to the criticism, authorities have promised to distribute hundreds of thousands of masks and COVID-19 fast tests this week. On Wednesday, Health Minister Salvador Illa announced a 432-million-euro purchase of Chinese medical material, including 500 million masks, 5.5 million test kits and 950 ventilators.

Authorities have also called up over 50,000 additional workers, including recent graduates and retired doctors and nurses.

Asked about supply shortages, the head of Spain's health emergency coordination center acknowledged that the country has struggled to secure the necessary equipment.

"There is an international fight now to acquire the needed supplies," Fernando Simón said Wednesday.

For many health professionals, the virus itself is only one part of the equation: The overwork, the constraints on physical contact with patients, and the stress of knowing they are putting their own loved ones at risk also have an emotional toll.

Perera said watching patients die alone is "killing all of us inside."

"Physically this is extremely complicated, but psychologically it is appalling," said Núñez, the recovering nurse. "But we need to deal with the outbreak first, and then we'll think later how to deal with the knock-on effects that it leaves in each of us."

Wilson reported from Barcelona, Spain. Associated Press writers Angela Charlton in Paris, Nicole Winfield

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and Frances D'Emilio in Rome, Maria Cheng in London, Ken Moritsugu in Beijing, and Nasser Karimi in Tehran, Iran, contributed to this report.

The Associated Press receives support for health and science coverage from the Howard Hughes Medical Institute's Department of Science Education. The AP is solely responsible for all content.

Follow AP coverage of the virus outbreak at <https://apnews.com/VirusOutbreak> and <https://apnews.com/UnderstandingtheOutbreak>

Drugmaker backpedals on specialty status for COVID-19 drug

By MATTHEW PERRONE AP Health Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — Facing public criticism, the maker of a promising coronavirus drug said Wednesday it will waive a special regulatory designation that could have allowed it to block competition and boost profits for its treatment.

Gilead Sciences said it will ask U.S. regulators to revoke the so-called "orphan drug" status it received for its experimental drug remdesivir. The status would have entitled the company to financial incentives and exclusive marketing intended for rare disease treatments.

The Food and Drug Administration granted the company's request for the designation on Monday, noting that COVID-19 qualified as a rare disease under U.S. rules, since fewer than 200,000 Americans are infected.

But experts and public advocates blasted Gilead for seeking the status.

"COVID-19 is anything but a rare disease," stated a letter sent to the company earlier Wednesday by more than 50 consumer and patient advocacy groups. The groups noted that millions of Americans are expected to eventually be infected with the virus. As of Wednesday, cases in the U.S. topped 61,000.

Gilead said in a statement Wednesday afternoon that it asked the FDA to rescind the orphan drug designation and that the company "recognizes the urgent public health needs posed by the COVID-19 pandemic."

Currently, there are no FDA-approved drugs, vaccines or specific treatments for the coronavirus. A few existing and experimental drugs are being studied, and vaccines are being developed.

Remdesivir, originally developed for Ebola, is being tested in at least five experiments. The drug interferes with viral reproduction and has shown some promise in lab and animal studies against other coronaviruses that cause similar diseases, MERS and SARS.

The drug has been given to hundreds of COVID-19 patients thus far, but rigorous studies are needed to determine if it works before it is approved.

Congress created the orphan drug program more than 35 years ago to encourage companies to develop drugs for niche diseases and conditions. Since then, filing for the program has become a standard industry tactic.

Under FDA rules, manufacturers of orphan drugs receive seven years of exclusive U.S. marketing rights and tax credits on their research and development costs.

For most people, the new coronavirus causes mild or moderate symptoms, such as fever and cough that clear up in two to three weeks. For some, especially older adults and people with existing health problems, it can cause more severe illness, including pneumonia.

Follow Matthew Perrone on Twitter: www.twitter.com/AP_FDAWriter

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Census address work succeeded despite trouble hiring staff

By MIKE SCHNEIDER Associated Press

ORLANDO, Fla. (AP) — Even though the U.S. Census Bureau had trouble finding workers for its mas-

sive address-verification work late last summer, it managed to complete the job under budget because of better-than-expected productivity of its staffers, according to a new report.

The 32,000 workers sent out across the U.S. to double-check addresses ahead of the start of the 2020 census verified almost 20 addresses an hour compared with the expected goal of almost 16 addresses an hour, according to the report released this month from the U.S. Government Accountability Office.

The workers verified 50 million addresses from last August to October, and the work cost \$118.6 million compared with the \$185 million budgeted for the job. Despite the success, the Census Bureau had trouble finding workers. In some parts of the country, workers from other states were brought in, incurring unplanned costs for travel and hotel stays, the GAO said.

The Census Bureau credited the increased efficiency to new technology and automation.

The address-verification work required the largest deployment of workers ahead of the launch of the 2020 count.

It also offered a preview of what may happen this summer when the bureau needs to deploy hundreds of thousands of workers for the once-a-decade count of very U.S. resident, the GAO said.

The 2020 census started in remote Alaska villages in January, but most U.S. residents didn't get to start answering the once-a-decade questionnaire until mid-March.

The Census Bureau is planning to hire 320,000 to 500,000 census takers to go out this summer to knock on the doors of homes whose residents haven't responded yet.

The spread of the coronavirus, though, is complicating hiring efforts, as the bureau has suspended all field operations until the start of April. The spread of the virus is responsible for the bureau pushing back by two weeks the deadline for wrapping up the 2020 count to mid-August, and it's also delaying counts for the homeless, college students and nursing home residents. Bureau officials said last week they may need to hire more workers because of the delays caused by virus' spread.

The address-verification is important for letting the bureau know where to send notices telling people they can start answering the questionnaire and where census takers need to do followup questioning if they don't get responses.

Follow Mike Schneider on Twitter at <https://twitter.com/MikeSchneiderAP>

Veterinarians donate vital supplies to coronavirus fight

ALLEN G. BREED AP National Writer

RALEIGH, NC (AP) — Veterinary hospitals are donating breathing machines, masks, gowns and other vital equipment and supplies purchased with Fido in mind, but now being redeployed to help doctors fight the spread of COVID-19 among humans.

"We buy at the same stores," said Paul Lunn, dean of the North Carolina State University College of Veterinary Medicine in Raleigh, which on Monday turned over two full-service ventilators, 500 protective suits and 950 masks for use in area hospitals. "There's no difference in the equipment."

In response to a call last week by U.S. Agriculture Secretary Sonny Perdue for materials to combat the pandemic, vet schools from North Carolina to Colorado to New York are stepping up.

There are 30 fully accredited veterinary medical schools in 26 states, according to the Association of American Veterinary Medical Colleges. Of those, 27 have veterinary teaching hospitals with comprehensive services treating everything from pet cats and dogs to horses and other large animals. Lunn said the schools have identified more than six dozen ventilators that could be commandeered for human treatment.

The 2009 outbreak of H1N1 influenza had veterinarians readying to help in this kind of emergency, he added: "This isn't the first time we've prepared for this, although it's the first time in my personal experience that we've actually had to pull the trigger."

Private institutions are also heeding the call.

Dr. Virginia Sinnott-Stutzman, chair of the Infection Control Committee at Angell Animal Medical Center in Boston, said members of the Veterinary Emergency and Critical Care Society have identified about 100

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full-service ventilators that can provide long term breathing support. She said there are also hundreds more relatively simple anesthesia ventilators — “basically like an automated hand squeezing a bag ... to get air into the patient” — nationwide that could be pressed into service, though it amounts to just a dent in the overall need with officials saying tens thousands of ventilators are needed in New York alone.

“While that may not seem like a lot, if it’s, you know, your grandmother, spouse that gets that ventilator, we’re hoping it can save a life,” she said.

For most people, the new coronavirus causes mild or moderate symptoms, such as fever and cough that clear up in two to three weeks. For some, especially older adults and people with existing health problems, it can cause more severe illness, including pneumonia and death. The vast majority of people recover.

Experts say there is no evidence that household pets can contract the disease.

The Colorado State University vet school delivered to Poudre Valley Hospital in Fort Collins a breathing machine that was “brand new, right out of the box,” professor Tim Hackett said. “We did not get a chance to use it.”

And in New York, the hardest-hit place in the United States by the new coronavirus, the Cornell University College of Veterinary Medicine has loaned two full-service ventilators and a high-flow oxygen unit to a hospital in Manhattan. It is also preparing to send three full-service breathing machines and 19 of the smaller anesthesia ventilators to Cayuga Medical Center in Ithaca, where the vet school is located.

Dean Lorin Warnick, whose institution has also provided hundreds of respirator and surgical masks, and testing materials, said the college is providing only essential emergency service to animal patients and following FDA guidelines on conserving protective equipment.

The aim, Warnick said, is “to make sure we can divert as much of our supply as possible to human health care.”

Beyond equipment and supplies, veterinarians are looking to help out with operating and bed space, and even to detail staffers to coronavirus duty.

“We also made contingency plans to go a lot further,” Lunn said. To provide our people ... as technical experts who could work under the supervision of medical doctors, possibly to provide our physical facility. Because we have large hospital spaces with piped oxygen and a variety of other medical supplies.”

Hackett said the veterinary and human health systems already collaborate a lot.

“There are times we have to run over there and get drugs that we don’t carry, pieces of equipment or parts,” he said. “They’ve always been very open. So it’s really, it’s really nice to be able to pay that back.”

Kevin Unger, president and CEO of Poudre Valley, said he’s heard stories animals coming to its facilities after hours for CAT scans and MRIs, and agreed it’s a relationship that “goes both ways.”

“Colorado State really stepped up in a big way,” he said. “Go Rams!”

But fear not for the nation’s furry critters — Warnick and others said they have retained enough equipment to care for people’s pets.

“They are really part of the family,” Warnick said. “We are in it together.”

While nonstop global news about the effects of the coronavirus have become commonplace, so, too, are the stories about the kindness of strangers and individuals who have sacrificed for others. “One Good Thing” is an AP continuing series reflecting these acts of kindness.

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

Game Zero: Spread of virus linked to Champions League match

By TALES AZZONI and ANDREW DAMPF AP Sports Writers

ROME (AP) — It was the biggest soccer game in Atalanta’s history and a third of Bergamo’s population made the short trip to Milan’s famed San Siro Stadium.

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Nearly 2,500 fans of visiting Spanish club Valencia also traveled to that Champions League match.

More than a month later, experts are pointing to the Feb. 19 game as one of the biggest reasons why Bergamo has become one of the epicenters of the coronavirus pandemic — a “biological bomb” was the way one respiratory specialist put it — and why 35% of Valencia’s team became infected.

The match, which local media have dubbed “Game Zero,” was held two days before the first case of locally transmitted COVID-19 was confirmed in Italy.

“We were mid-February so we didn’t have the circumstances of what was happening,” Bergamo Mayor Giorgio Gori said this week during a live Facebook chat with the Foreign Press Association in Rome. “If it’s true what they’re saying that the virus was already circulating in Europe in January, then it’s very probable that 40,000 Bergamaschi in the stands of San Siro, all together, exchanged the virus between them. As is possible that so many Bergamaschi that night got together in houses, bars to watch the match and did the same.

“Unfortunately, we couldn’t have known. No one knew the virus was already here,” the mayor added. “It was inevitable.”

Less than a week after the game, the first cases were reported in the province of Bergamo.

At about the same time in Valencia, a journalist who traveled to the match became the second person infected in the region, and it didn’t take long before people who were in contact with him also had the virus, as did Valencia fans who were at the game.

While Atalanta announced its first positive case Tuesday for goalkeeper Marco Sportiello, Valencia said more than a third of its squad got infected, “despite the strict measures adopted by the club” after the match in Milan.

As of Tuesday, nearly 7,000 people in the province of Bergamo had tested positive for COVID-19 and more than 1,000 people had died from the virus — making Bergamo the most deadly province in all of Italy for the pandemic. The Valencia region had more than 2,600 people infected.

Luca Lorini, the head of the intensive care unit at the Pope John XXIII hospital in Bergamo, currently has 88 patients under his care with the coronavirus; not including many more in other parts of the hospital.

“I’m sure that 40,000 people hugging and kissing each other while standing a centimeter apart — four times, because Atalanta scored four goals (the final result was 4-1) — was definitely a huge accelerator for contagion,” Lorini told The Associated Press on Wednesday.

“Right now we’re at war. When peace time comes, I can assure you we will go and see how many of the 40,000 people who went to the game became infected,” Lorini added. “Right now we have other priorities.”

Silvio Brusaferrò, the head of Italy’s Superior Institute of Health, said over the weekend at the nightly nationally televised briefing by the civil protection agency that the game was “one of the hypotheses” being evaluated as a source of the crisis in Bergamo.

“It’s certainly an analysis that can be made,” Brusaferrò said.

By last week, Bergamo’s cemetery became so overwhelmed by the number of dead that military trucks began transporting bodies to a neighboring region for cremation.

Italy remained the European country with the most cases, nearly 70,000, and with almost 7,000 deaths — the most worldwide and more than twice as many as China.

Spain is the next country in Europe with the most cases, nearly 48,000, and it has surpassed China in the number of deaths with more than 3,400.

More than 435,000 people worldwide have been infected and the number of dead closed in on 20,000, according to the running count kept by Johns Hopkins University. Overall, more than 100,000 have recovered.

For most people, the new coronavirus causes mild or moderate symptoms, such as fever and cough that clear up in two to three weeks. For some, especially older adults and people with existing health problems, it can cause more severe illness, including pneumonia and death.

The official attendance for the Feb. 19 game was 45,792 — a “home” record for Atalanta, a small club making its debut in Europe’s top club competition.

Atalanta captain Alejandro “Papu” Gómez told Argentine daily Olé it was “terrible” to have played that

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game.

"It's a city of 120,000 people and that day (40,000) went to the San Siro," the Argentine said. "It was a historic match for Atalanta, something unique. To give you an idea, my wife took three hours to get to Milan, when that trip normally takes 40 minutes."

The game was played in Milan because Atalanta's stadium in Bergamo didn't meet the requirements set by European soccer governing body UEFA.

Before the match, Valencia fans freely roamed around Milan and gathered at some of the city's plazas, including the Piazza del Duomo, drinking and chanting team songs.

Looking back, the conditions for virus contagion were high, with thousands of people gathering without much concern — at a time when the outbreak in Europe wasn't yet known — and then traveling back home. Nearly 30 busloads of fans made the 60-kilometer (37-mile) trip from Bergamo to Milan.

The evening before the match, there was no social distancing as officials from both clubs mingled and exchanged gifts and handshakes at a gala dinner offered by Atalanta.

"I have heard a lot (of theories), I'll say mine: Feb. 19, 40,000 Bergamaschi went to San Siro for Atalanta-Valencia," Fabiano di Marco, the chief pneumologist at the hospital in Bergamo, told Italian newspaper *Corriere della Sera*. "In buses, cars, trains. A biological bomb, unfortunately."

Valencia defender Ezequiel Garay was the first Spanish league player to test positive for COVID-19. The team played a Spanish league game against Alavés about two weeks after the game in Milan, and later Alavés reported that 15 people in the club were infected, though it did not say the cases were directly related to the match against Valencia.

Italian soccer players' association president Damiano Tommasi believes sports authorities should look long and hard at the Atalanta match before restarting leagues.

"Look at what's happening in China, where players are testing positive for the coronavirus now — despite all the safety rules and precautions being taken," Tommasi told the AP, referring to a recent positive test for former Manchester United midfielder Marouane Fellaini with Chinese club Shandong Lunen.

Fellaini's positive test was alarming because, while the outbreak began spreading in China, the virus has reportedly been receding there.

"It's not going to be enough to just test the athletes," Tommasi added. "The entire setting needs to be safe. Because if one team is stuck, it blocks the entire system."

After winning the first leg, Atalanta advanced to the Champions League quarterfinals following another victory in the second leg on March 10, which was played in an empty Mestalla Stadium in Valencia after Spanish authorities prohibited games involving teams from northern Italy to be played with fans. A few thousand Valencia supporters gathered at the Mestalla to welcome the team, though, and to watch the match together in nearby bars and restaurants.

Over the past month, Atalanta has mourned the deaths of five former staff members. While announcements on the club website made no mention of the virus, local media have reported that at least four of them died with COVID-19.

Still, only one positive test from Atalanta has been announced.

"Some squads have chosen not to test their players unless they show symptoms," Tommasi said. "Other squads tested everyone. These are individual choices."

"The head of the civil protection agency has talked about the likelihood that for every proven positive case there are probably 10 actual positives. ... The high number of positives at Valencia makes you wonder."

With the Champions League suspended because of the pandemic, Atalanta has no idea when it might play in the quarterfinals — which again would be the club's biggest game in its history. In the meantime, both the Bergamo team and Valencia are left wondering about the unforeseen effects of their match in February.

Azzoni reported from Madrid.

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Associated Press writers Daniella Matar in Milan and Joseph Wilson in Barcelona, and reporter Patricia Thomas in Rome contributed to this report.

More AP sports: <https://apnews.com/apf-sports> and https://twitter.com/AP_Sports

Of America and sacrifice: Is the country ready to step up?

By MICHAEL TACKETT Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — For most Americans alive today, the idea of shared national sacrifice is a collective abstraction, a memory handed down from a grandparent or passed on through a book or movie.

Not since World War II, when people carried ration books with stamps that allowed them to purchase meat, sugar, butter, cooking oil and gasoline, when buying cars, firewood and nylon was restricted, when factories converted from making automobiles to making tanks, Jeeps and torpedoes, when men were drafted and women volunteered in the war effort, has the entire nation been asked to sacrifice for a greater good.

The civil rights era, Vietnam, the Gulf wars, 9/11 and the financial crisis all involved suffering, even death, but no call for universal sacrifice. President George W. Bush encouraged people to buy things after the terrorist attacks to help the economy — “patriots at the mall,” some called it — before the full war effort was underway. People lost jobs and homes in the financial crisis, but there was no summons for community response.

Now, with the coronavirus, it’s as though a natural disaster has taken place in multiple places at once. Millions of people will likely lose their jobs. Businesses will shutter. Schools have closed. Thousands will die. Leaders are ordering citizens into isolation to stop the virus’ march.

Suddenly, in the course of a few weeks, John F. Kennedy’s “ask what you can do for your country” injunction has come to life. Will Americans step up?

“This is a new moment,” said Jon Meacham, a historian and author of “The Soul of America.”

“Prolonged sacrifice isn’t something we’ve been asked to do, really, since World War II,” Meacham said. “There was a kind of perpetual vigilance in the Cold War — what President Kennedy called ‘the long twilight struggle’ — but living with the fear of nuclear war is quite abstract compared to living with the fear of a virus and of a possible economic depression.”

The second world war involved a common enemy and common purpose, with clear sides drawn across the globe. While President Donald Trump has at times tried to summon that feeling about attacking the coronavirus, he has abruptly changed course, suggesting Monday that restrictions he has sought on American life may be as short-lived as his slogan about “15 days to slow the spread,” even as others are warning that most of the country is about to be hit by a crush of new cases.

In Congress, some talk of coming together while others excoriate their partisan opposites. On Monday, Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., laid the early blame for lack of congressional action entirely at the feet of Democrats.

“A request to do anything becomes a point of attack, and we are always 10 steps back from where we should be on big legislative agreements,” said Julian Zelizer, a professor of history at Princeton. “So intense polarization in a moment of crisis — with a president who is not interested in time-tested forms of governance and the job of uniting — make this much more difficult.”

That has not been universal. Gov. Mike DeWine, R-Ohio, moved swiftly to shut down most activity in his state and he implored Ohioans to help.

“We have not faced an enemy like we are facing today in 102 years,” DeWine said recently. “You have to go back to the 1918 influenza epidemic. We are certainly at war. ... In the time of war, we must make sacrifices, and I thank all of our Ohio citizens for what they are doing and what they aren’t doing. You are making a huge difference, and this difference will save lives.”

As a nation, Americans are accustomed to seeing swaths of the country destroyed by hurricanes, floods, wildfires and blizzards. But there is then a season of rebuilding and renewal. The coronavirus, with its rapid spread, is giving Americans a public-health Katrina that knows few borders or boundaries, even though

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some parts of the country are suffering far more than others.

To date, for many, the sacrifices have been mere inconveniences. No restaurants or movie theaters. Maybe the need to buy exercise equipment because the gym has closed. Or to leave the cardboard box from Amazon outside for 24 hours to make sure the virus doesn't somehow enter the home.

A week of being told to work from home can resemble a working vacation. A week of not being able to work at all is frustrating but, potentially, eventually reversible.

But when a week bleeds into a month, or longer, how will we react?

"We used to tax in times of crisis. Now we don't," Zelizer said. "We asked people to ration in times of crisis. Now we don't. We asked people to serve in times of crisis. Now we don't. So this is a sea change. The thing is, Americans might not have a choice."

For many, the choices are personal and painful. Rep. Abigail Spanberger, D-Va., cannot see her parents or her in-laws for the foreseeable future because she may have been exposed to the virus. But she is also seeing the impact of the virus in many other ways that are far more harmful.

"I think we are at the beginning stages of people understanding what the sacrifice is," Spanberger said. "People with loved ones in nursing homes are told they can't go visit their loved ones. That brings it home. For people who have kids, trying to explain why they can't go to school, can't have playdates, can't see friends, can't see family members.

"It is this element of everyone needs to disrupt their lives so that other people won't die," she said. "It's different than eating less meat because of war or working in a factory because a husband is overseas. But you also can't engage with the community, so it makes it harder. You can't lean on your social circle, church, or school. All of those things are taken from us trying to keep people safe."

With people being asked to sacrifice their jobs, their children's education, their ability to commune with family and friends, Spanberger said, "the depth of empathy that that should be available and the strength of concerns over these decisions needs to be unparalleled and we do not see that, at least not from the administration."

What the nation's leaders do or don't do will shape the course of the pandemic and its lethality. But it will be Americans' willingness to sacrifice that may well matter more.

"In the end, this presents a great and compelling test of our national sense of ourselves as exceptional, generous and resilient," Meacham said. "Perhaps we are all of those things. One thing's for sure: We're about to find out."

Michael Tackett is deputy Washington bureau chief for The Associated Press. Follow him on Twitter at <https://twitter.com/tackettdc>.

Today in History

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Thursday, March 26, the 86th day of 2020. There are 280 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On March 26, 1945, during World War II, Iwo Jima was fully secured by U.S. forces following a final, desperate attack by Japanese soldiers.

On this date:

In 1812, an earthquake devastated Caracas, Venezuela, causing an estimated 26,000 deaths, according to the U.S. Geological Survey.

In 1827, composer Ludwig van Beethoven died in Vienna.

In 1911, American playwright Tennessee Williams ("The Glass Menagerie," "A Streetcar Named Desire," "Cat on a Hot Tin Roof") was born in Columbus, Miss.

In 1962, the U.S. Supreme Court, in Baker v. Carr, gave federal courts the power to order reapportionment of states' legislative districts.

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In 1964, the musical play "Funny Girl," starring Barbra Streisand as Fanny Brice, opened on Broadway.
In 1979, a peace treaty was signed by Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin (men-AH'-kem BAY'-gihn) and Egyptian President Anwar Sadat and witnessed by President Jimmy Carter at the White House.

In 1982, groundbreaking ceremonies took place in Washington, D.C., for the Vietnam Veterans Memorial.
In 1988, Jesse Jackson stunned fellow Democrats by soundly defeating Michael S. Dukakis in Michigan's Democratic presidential caucuses.

In 1992, a judge in Indianapolis sentenced former heavyweight boxing champion Mike Tyson to six years in prison for raping a Miss Black America contestant. (Tyson ended up serving three years.)

In 1997, the bodies of 39 members of the Heaven's Gate techno-religious cult who committed suicide were found inside a rented mansion in Rancho Santa Fe, California.

In 2013, Italy's top criminal court overturned the acquittal of American Amanda Knox in the grisly murder of British roommate Meredith Kercher and ordered Knox to stand trial again. (Although convicted in absentia, Knox was exonerated by the Italian Supreme Court in 2015.)

In 2018, a toxicology report obtained by The Associated Press revealed that the late pop music superstar Prince had levels of fentanyl in his body that multiple experts described as "exceedingly high."

Ten years ago: The U.S. and Russia sealed the first major nuclear weapons treaty in nearly two decades, agreeing to slash the former Cold War rivals' warhead arsenals by nearly one-third. A South Korean warship exploded and sank near a disputed maritime border with North Korea, killing 46 sailors. (South Korea blamed North Korea, which denied involvement.) A truck collided with a van on I-65 in Kentucky, killing 10 Mennonites in the van and the truck driver. NBA player Gilbert Arenas was sentenced to 30 days in a halfway house for bringing guns into the Washington Wizards locker room.

Five years ago: Indiana Gov. Mike Pence signed a measure prohibiting state and local laws that "substantially burden" the ability of people to follow their religious beliefs; opponents charged the new law could legalize discrimination against gay people.

One year ago: The House failed to override President Donald Trump's first veto, allowing him to steer billions of extra dollars to construct border barriers. The Senate defeated a motion to take up the Green New Deal, rejecting an opportunity to debate a comprehensive climate change plan offered by Democrats. Prosecutors in Chicago abruptly dropped all charges against Jussie Smollett, the "Empire" actor who was accused of faking a racist, anti-gay attack on himself; they said they still believed that Smollett had concocted the assault. (A grand jury revived the criminal case with new charges against Smollett in February 2020.) Rockland County in New York City's northern suburbs declared a state of emergency over a measles outbreak that had infected more than 150 people; the action included a ban against unvaccinated children in public places.

Today's Birthdays: Retired Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O'Connor is 90. Actor Alan Arkin is 86. Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas is 85. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi is 80. Actor James Caan is 80. Author Erica Jong is 78. Journalist Bob Woodward is 77. Singer Diana Ross is 76. Actor Johnny Crawford is 74. Rock singer Steven Tyler (Aerosmith) is 72. Singer and TV personality Vicki Lawrence is 71. Actor Ernest Thomas is 71. Comedian Martin Short is 70. Country singer Ronnie McDowell is 70. Movie composer Alan Silvestri is 70. Rock musician Monte Yoho is 68. Transportation Secretary Elaine Chao is 67. Radio talk show host Curtis Sliwa is 66. Country singer Dean Dillon is 65. Country singer Charly McClain is 64. TV personality Leeza Gibbons is 63. Actress Ellia English is 61. Actress Jennifer Grey is 60. College and Pro Football Hall of Famer Marcus Allen is 60. Actor Billy Warlock is 59. Actor Eric Allan Kramer is 58. Basketball and College Basketball Hall of Famer John Stockton is 58. Actor Michael Imperioli is 54. Rock musician James Iha (EE'-hah) is 52. Country singer Kenny Chesney is 52. Movie director Martin McDonagh (Film: "Three Billboards Outside Ebbing, Missouri") is 50. Actress Leslie Mann is 48. Actor T.R. Knight is 47. Rapper Juvenile is 45. Actress Amy Smart is 44. Actress Bianca Kajlich (KY'-lihk) is 43. Moderator Margaret Brennan (TV: "Face the Nation") is 40. Actor Sterling Sulieman is 36. Actress Keira Knightley is 35. Rapper J-Kwon is 34. Actress Carly Chaikin is 30.

Thought for Today: "Life's like a play; it's not the length but the excellence of the acting that matters."
— Seneca the Younger, Roman statesman and philosopher (3 B.C.-A.D. 65).