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Chicken Soup
for the Soul

“WHEN YOU LISTEN, IT'S AMAZING WHAT YOU CAN LEARN. WHEN YOU ACT ON WHAT YOU'VE LEARNED, IT'S AMAZING WHAT YOU CAN CHANGE.”

-AUDREY MCLAUGHLIN

FARMERS ARE STILL WORKING. SO ARE WE.

There isn't a farmer or rancher who hasn't been impacted by the coronavirus. Despite the uncertainty of what lies ahead, you haven't stopped working. We're still working too, with the capacity to meet your financial needs and the expertise to support you through this challenging time.

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of America



CLOSED: 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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GHS March Students of the Month



Tadyn Glover (12th)



Regan Leicht (11th)



Madeline Flihs (10th)



Cole Simon (9th)



Anna Bisbee (8th)



Kaden Kampa (7th)



Logan Warrington (6th)

These students have been chosen as Groton Area MS/HS Students of the month for March.

Groton Area MS/HS School works to ensure that all levels of academic instruction also include the necessary life skills teaching, practicing, and modeling that encourages essential personal life habits that are universally understood to facilitate helping our students become good human beings and citizens.

It is learning with our heads, hearts and hands to be caring and civil, to make healthy decisions, to effectively problem solve, to be respectful and responsible, to be good citizens, and to be empathetic and ethical individuals.

Students are selected based on individual student growth in the areas of: positive behavior, citizenship, good attendance, a thirst for knowledge, and high academic standards.

Trust the Scientific Process

It is the year 2020, and we find ourselves in the midst of a rapidly changing, worldwide pandemic of a novel Coronavirus. This virus and public knowledge of it has spread and changed with greater speed than our scientific method can accommodate. Science, and the progression of medical knowledge, is by nature and necessity slow and methodical. This pandemic is neither. But we ought not abandon our deliberate striving for truth; not now, not because it feels too slow.



By Kelly Evans-Hullinger, M.D. ~ Prairie Doc® Perspectives

The gold standard in medical science, the randomized controlled trial (or RCT), is a relatively new development in the history of medicine. The British epidemiologist Sir Bradford Hill is credited with designing and publishing the first RCT in medical science, a study of streptomycin in treating tuberculosis, in 1948. Sure, even randomized controlled trials are never perfect, and they require large numbers of patients, time, and investment. However, their design does seek to remove variables that are sure to taint all other trial designs. They are the best we have, especially when it comes to evaluating a therapeutic intervention.

Much speculation has arisen, both in the medical community and the media, about possible drug therapies for this disease: hydroxychloroquine, azithromycin, remdesivir, convalescent plasma, and others. Why have so many physicians and scientists been less-than-fully-enthusiastic about these interventions? It is because we do not have sufficient data yet. There has not been time for any quality randomized controlled trials.

Still, if these things might help, why not just throw them at patients with severe cases of COVID-19? What do we have to lose? The truth is, the history of medicine is flush with examples of therapies that we thought would be helpful – studies in the lab were favorable, we had promising initial observational data, and expert opinion was in favor of it – but, when put to the test, they were not. In many of these cases the interventions turned out not only to be not helpful, but harmful, when they were tested in a randomized controlled trial.

We must demand a high threshold of proof before accepting therapy as effective. History has taught us that mistakes are made if we do not. We want solid evidence that an intervention helps more than it hurts before recommending we give it to everyone with this disease. Yes, even if it seems slow.

One thing is for certain: our collective scientific energy will be best spent investing in developing a vaccine for this highly contagious virus. Fortunately, there are very smart people all over the world working around the clock in this endeavor. A vaccine: now that would be a game-changer.

In the meantime, our best defense against this pandemic continues to be social distancing – so stay home and minimize contact with others. The more we flatten the curve now, the more people will benefit from the hard work of science in the future.

Kelly Evans-Hullinger, MD is part of The Prairie Doc® team of physicians and currently practices internal medicine in Brookings, South Dakota. For free and easy access to the entire Prairie Doc® library, visit www.prairedoc.org and follow Prairie Doc® on Facebook featuring On Call with the Prairie Doc® a medical Q&A show streaming on Facebook and broadcast on SDPB most Thursdays at 7 p.m. central.

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One week from today, we'll be reviewing the first three rounds of the NFL draft. For today, we'll continue looking at some rookies in positions of need for the Minnesota Vikings. Last week was the offense, today we focus on defense.

The Vikings have had one of the best defenses in the NFL since Mike Zimmer became head coach, and a large part of that is because most of the starters have been in this system for multiple years. This year will be different, as five starters will need to be replaced on defense. The biggest need on the defense is cornerback, but the Vikings will also be looking at defensive tackle and defensive end.



By Jordan Wright

Cornerback

The top two corners will likely be gone by the time the Vikings are on the clock at pick #22, and we can all but rule out the Vikings taking Trevon Diggs, but there will still be some good options if the Vikings decide to spend one of their two first-round picks on the position. One CB to keep an eye on is Jaylon Johnson from Utah. The 6', 193-pound cornerback has all the makings of a true lock-down corner. He played last year with a shoulder injury, but if his medicals check out his potential is off the charts.

If the Vikings decide to wait for a corner (or, more likely, draft two of them), one player they could look at is Amik Robertson from Louisiana Tech. If Amik was four inches taller, he'd likely be a first-round pick, but the 5'8", 187-pound CB will likely be limited to the slot in the NFL. He might be on the smaller side, but he is extremely feisty and will pester receivers all game as well as holding his own in the run game. He should be available in the fourth round.

Defensive tackle

The Vikings signed Michael Pierce to replace Linval Joseph at defensive tackle, but there is still a need for a starter next to him. The Vikings will be looking for a defensive tackle who can penetrate the line of scrimmage and win one-on-one battles against centers and guards. Ross Blacklock from TCU is a player who could intrigue the Vikings in round one. The 6'3", 290-pound DT is exactly what the Vikings are looking for – a pass-rushing defensive tackle who has incredible short-area quickness.

If the Vikings are looking for a value pick at defensive tackle, Raekwon Davis should be on their radar. The 6'6", 311-pound DT was a top-100 recruit coming out of high school and has shown flashes of being a dominant defensive tackle. The Vikings will have to figure out why his production slipped as a junior and senior at Alabama, but if those issues are correctable, he has the potential to be one of the biggest steals on draft day.

Defensive end

The Vikings hit the jackpot when they drafted a defensive end from LSU in 2015, and they might try to recreate that magic this year with K'Lavon Chaisson from the same school. Chaisson is 6'3", 254-pounds and is extremely athletic. There is a good chance he'll be gone by the time the Vikings are on the clock, but if he's still there the Vikings will be very tempted.

If the Vikings are looking for a player in the later rounds who could develop into a starter with a couple years of coaching, Anfernee Jennings from Alabama is someone to keep an eye on. He is 6'2", 256-pounds and was one of the best players on one of the best teams in college football last year, as evidenced by being selected as one of four permanent team captains in 2019.

Make sure to tune in to the NFL draft, which airs this Thursday at 7pm (CT). If you have any questions or comments, reach out to me on Twitter (@JordanWrightNFL). Skol!

Connect with the arts while staying safe

As the situation in our state continues with a growing number of cases of COVID-19, most of us are trying to shelter in place to do our part to not spread the virus. We are all grateful to those essential services employees who continue to keep things going while so many of us work from home, help our children get their lessons done online and try to maintain a new normal in the face of something completely outside our experience.

With everything that's going on, we need the arts more than ever. Our cultural ties help keep us grounded. Sharing creative experiences links us to others who share our interests. Learning new skills—or discovering our own creativity at home—occupies our minds in helpful, positive ways. We are fortunate that the Internet provides so many opportunities for us to stay connected to our friends and families, and to arts activities throughout our state as well.

The Arts South Dakota website is a great place to start for a variety of links, ideas and scheduled online cultural events. From free drawing lessons with artist Jessie Rasche to virtual concerts from the Sioux Falls Jazz and Blues Society and The Brickhouse in Madison to online art galleries from the South Dakota Art Museum, the Dahl and everywhere in between, you can immerse yourself in creative excitement anytime you choose.

Families are discovering that art projects can be a valuable pastime during this stay-at-home period. Creative activities boost educational goals and can be a time of sharing for parents and children. And speaking of discovery, many of us are finding time to play the guitar that's been sitting in the corner, pull out that sketchbook and renew a love of drawing or find a new author recommended by a friend. Occupying our stay-at-home hours with the world of creativity available online both connects us and lifts our spirits!

Arts South Dakota shares new online arts experiences weekly on our Facebook page, email calendars and the South Dakota arts calendar on our website. You can also post updates about arts events at www.ArtsSouthDakota.org.



By Jim Speirs, Executive Director, Arts SD

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Inform. Enlighten. Illuminate.

Weekly newspapers in S.D. in peril amid COVID-19 pandemic Bart Pfankuch, South Dakota News Watch

As the COVID-19 pandemic upends the South Dakota economy, leading to temporary business closures and skyrocketing unemployment, one of the state's most venerable, trusted and beloved institutions is falling victim to the financial free fall: the small-town weekly newspaper.

The recent reductions in circulation and advertising caused by the deadly virus and fear of spreading it have added a new layer of economic hardship to weekly newspaper publishers who were already seeing significant and historic declines in business revenues, staffing, news pages and personal incomes.

The level of risk and potential for finality were borne out on April 1, when the owner of two weekly newspapers in northeastern South Dakota — The De Smet News and the Lake Preston Times — made the painful decision to cease publication of the papers that had been printed for nearly 140 years.

All newspapers, including dailies and weeklies, have suffered in recent years from loss of readership and advertising resulting from fundamental changes in how people consume and pay for news.

The emergence of mostly free news on the internet, the shift of classified advertising to websites, and a reduction of readership of printed newspapers by young people have all led to reduced circulation and declining interest among businesses to advertise in newspapers.

Papers like the Rapid City Journal, Pierre Capital Journal and The Huron Daily Plainsman have reduced the number of days they publish each week. Employees at the daily papers in Rapid City, Aberdeen and Sioux Falls have undergone mandatory unpaid work furloughs. And many weekly papers have been forced to cut back on pages per issue, end publication of special sections or keep open positions unfilled.

Dale Blegen, owner and publisher of The De Smet News for the past 43 years and of the Lake Preston Times for the past 36, said the loss of revenues tied to the COVID-19 pandemic was the last financial straw that led him to shutter his newspapers. With a stark, perhaps slightly bitter headline declaring, "THIS IS IT! FINAL EDITION," Blegen informed his readers on April 1 that the end of the two papers was nigh, including in De Smet, a popular tourism town of about 1,100 people that is famous as the home of author Laura Ingalls Wilder.

"With the internet, Facebook, Craigslist, the local development agency running job ads, and then the COVID-19 shutdown, all of it just added up," Blegen said. "When I really got to looking at where we were at



Dale Blegen peruses the final edition of The De Smet News, a paper that published for nearly 140 years before being reluctantly shut down by Blegen in April due to financial pressures long faced by newspapers and recently worsened by the COVID-19 pandemic. Photo: Courtesy Dale Blegen

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financially, I said, 'Boy, we're in dire straits,' and at age 76, I didn't want to retire and go into debt."

Papers play a big role in small communities

Like any business in a small town, where services are few and options limited, newspapers play a key, singular role in a community. In burgs with only one grocery store, one hardware store and one gas station, weekly newspapers are typically the only source for information on what to buy and where to buy it, on actions (or inactions) of town councils and school boards, on crimes and resulting punishments, on youth sports, on agriculture and industry, on the lives and deaths of community members.

To a great degree, weekly newspapers tie the residents of a small town together and also provide a traceable history of life in the communities they serve. It is a role no other institution can fully replicate.

They also provide the critical role of overseeing government agencies and institutions and watching out for how taxpayer money is spent. Losing a newspaper eliminates in what in many small towns is the only check on government operations and the actions of elected officials.

"A newspaper is as important to a community as a school or bank or any other institution people look at as 'ours,'" Blegen said. "It's part of a community's identity, and to lose the identity, to lose the history that's recorded in no other way, is a real loss. I feel badly about that, and I don't think it's healthy, but I don't have a solution to it either."

The pandemic has forced difficult choices among those who have devoted their careers, and their lives, to community journalism, a vocation that is both a business and a calling. Weekly reporters, editors and publishers often work late into the evenings and on weekends to cover government meetings, shoot photos of high school sports, or just to get the paper written, edited and off to the printer.

Jeremy Waltner is the second-generation publisher of the Freeman Courier, following in his father Tim's footsteps in running a weekly paper with strong community ties and a reputation for journalistic excellence.

Waltner said he has awoken on recent nights and can't get back to sleep owing to financial stress, but also the unease of the pandemic. Waltner worries over the safety of himself and his family of four, over the well-being of his community, and over what he fears is an uncertain future for a newspaper he has grown up with and has grown to love.

"It's an incredible paradox, because right now newspapers are needed more than they've ever been, and are also fighting for their survival in a way they have never fought before," Waltner said. "It seems backwards, but this is our reality."

Waltner said his "heart sank" when he heard of the closures in De Smet and Lake Preston, and said he felt terrible for Blegen and the residents of those two communities.

"From April 1, 2020, and possibly to infinity, there will not be a record of what happens in De Smet and Lake Preston," he said. "That's the loss, and it's frightening to think about."

The closures left Waltner wondering about the stability and future of his own newspaper and what its loss would mean to the Hutchinson County community of 1,300 people.

"A newspaper is permanency; it is the unabashed extensive record of a community," he said. "If you wipe

"I'm afraid we're going to see more closures to come; I just think it's inevitable. Publishers of small-town weeklies say that in the short-term, they will be able to ride it out, but if this economic downturn goes on longer, some newspapers will not be able to survive."

-- Dave Bordewyk, executive director of the South Dakota Newspaper Association



Dave Bordewyk

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Jeremy Waltner is a second-generation South Dakota newspaper owner and publisher who takes immense pride in the quality of the Freeman Courier and its deep ties to the community it serves. But like other weekly newspaper publishers, Waltner is worried that the COVID-19 pandemic will exacerbate the financial challenges already faced by many small-town newspapers. Photo: Courtesy Jeremy Waltner

he and his small crew of committed journalists will continue to fight to keep the paper alive and operating. "Things are tough with no paper sales or advertising, but we are prepared for the long haul," Giago said in an email.

New 'news deserts' created by closures

The recent closure of the two weekly papers roughly midway between Brookings and Huron has created what researchers at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill have deemed "news deserts," or areas with no newspaper to cover local issues, businesses, schools and government and community events.

The number of news deserts has been on the rise as newspaper financial fortunes have fallen. More than one in five newspapers in America have closed in the past 15 years, and half of all journalism jobs have disappeared during that time. In the U.S., 200 counties now have no local paper, and more than 7,000 newspapers are labeled as "ghosts" of their former products due to cutbacks.

The lack of newspapers creates fundamental problems for communities because, as the university reports, "the fate of communities and the vitality of local news ... are intrinsically linked."

South Dakota is home to 11 daily newspapers, and that number has held steady over the past 40 or so years, said Dave Bordewyk, executive director of the South Dakota Newspaper Association. At the weekly level, a few new papers have launched here and there, but overall the number of papers has dipped from 128 in 1995 to 111 now, said Bordewyk, who also serves as CEO of South Dakota News Watch.

Circulation data is more revealing of the steady demise of the newspaper industry, however. Total daily South Dakota newspaper subscriptions have fallen by more than half over the past 25 years, from about 171,250 in 1995 to 83,700 this year, Bordewyk said. Weekly subscriber numbers have dipped by 38%

clean the record of the last 25 or 50 years in Freeman, what does that mean? You can't even comprehend what that means."

Newspapers face fixed costs in regard to buildings, personnel, paper and ink, and postage expenses that have been climbing steadily. Meanwhile, revenues are restricted to circulation, advertising, legal notices and small printing and publishing jobs outside the newspaper.

Advertising has long been the most substantial revenue stream, so losses occurring at other businesses because of the pandemic have been particularly painful for newspapers.

The stalled economy is threatening the stability of the Native Sun News Today, among the few South Dakota newspapers that focus almost exclusively on coverage of the state's large Native American population.

Publisher Tim Giago told News Watch that he had to suspend publication of the printed edition for two consecutive weeks in March for financial reasons, and may publish only sporadically as the pandemic continues.

But Giago, who has more than 40 years' experience in publishing newspapers, said

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in the past 40 years, from a high of 201,500 in 1980 to 124,950 in 2020, he said. Consolidation of ownership — which can lead to employee reductions — has also taken place in recent years, with only 70 owners controlling the state's 122 papers now compared with 110 owners of the 139 papers in 1995.

Bordewyk said he is saddened but not surprised that weekly newspaper publishers are feeling increased financial pressures during the COVID-19 pandemic.

"Newspapers need advertising revenue to survive, and if the businesses in their communities that advertise regularly are closed or scaled back for a longer period of time because of COVID-19, then there's no question newspapers will suffer," he said. "It's sad because I think this crisis clearly demonstrates how critical a newspaper is to keeping their local community informed with vitally important news related to the pandemic."

Bordewyk said he is concerned that some may not survive the slowdown if it lingers much longer.

"I'm afraid we're going to see more closures to come; I just think it's inevitable," Bordewyk said. "Publishers of small-town weeklies say that in the short-term, they will be able to ride it out, but if this economic downturn goes on longer, some newspapers will not be able to survive."

Bordewyk said he remains optimistic that readers and businesses have come to understand the value of community newspapers and that they will support them.

Lucy Halverson, who now serves as the owner, publisher, editor and reporter among other various positions at two central South Dakota weekly papers, has seen a significant recent drop in advertising support for her papers.

Without a turnaround soon, Halverson is worried whether she and other publishers, and other local small businesses, can survive much longer.

"I really don't know how we're all going to hang onto this, and it's not just newspapers, it's all our businesses," said Halverson, owner of The Chamberlain/Oacoma Sun and Lyman County Herald.

Halverson said many businesses in the Missouri River twin cities of Chamberlain and Oacoma are closed and that tourist traffic is down on Interstate 90.

Halverson said she and other publishers were hoping 2020 would be a bounce-back year after poor weather hurt tourism and agriculture in 2019. That anticipation has been doused by the pandemic, Halverson said.

Halverson is concerned that the pandemic will further widen the gap between readership of printed newspapers and online news sources. She noted that most government updates on the pandemic are taking place on Facebook, and that many news outlets are seeing increased traffic on their websites and offering coverage of the pandemic for free.

"My biggest worry is that this situation is going to change our whole platform of the newspaper business because this has pushed everybody to Facebook," she said.

That could reduce print readership, she said, but it may also open the door to less accountability for



Lucy Halverson is the owner, publisher and editor of two weekly newspapers in South Dakota -- the Chamberlain/Oacoma Sun and the Lyman County Herald. Halverson said she and other business owners are fighting to survive now that the COVID-19 pandemic has led to widespread temporary business closures and a loss of tourism and agricultural revenue. Photo:

Courtesy Lucy Halverson

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the journalism found online and exacerbate expression of “the meanness” often present on social media. Halverson remains cautiously optimistic that she and other publishers will weather the pandemic. She said she is looking for positives in this dark time, and is excited that in June she will publish a special section on area high school graduates that may feature unique photos of graduates who are attending school remotely.

Sadness as an era comes to an end

Blegen said he understands why businesses that are closed due to the pandemic cannot afford to advertise in their local newspaper. But that realization doesn't make the closure of his newspapers any less painful.

“I'm only the fifth publisher in the past 140 years, and I've been at it for 43 and my predecessor was at it for 57, so what bothers me is that I'm the guy who shut down a 140-year-old historical newspaper,” said Blegen, a member of the South Dakota Newspaper Association Hall of Fame.

Blegen said he bought the De Smet paper only after numerous visits with former owner and editor Aubrey Sherwood, who knew the Ingalls Wilder family personally, and who treated Blegen to frequent accounts of his memories of the famous local family. After several months, Blegen said Sherwood's wife convinced her husband that Blegen was worthy of owning The News.

As he approached retirement, Blegen said he tried to sell his paper through a national broker for about a decade ago, and couldn't get a buyer “at any price.” He said that in the weeks before closing, he was operating at a net loss of about \$2,000 a week. Upon deciding to close up shop, and after calculating how to pay his employees and refund subscribers and advertisers who paid in advance, he had only about a month of reserve funding left. Luckily, he said, after realizing that the idea of selling his papers to fund his retirement was folly, he had made investments in retirement accounts in recent years.

Some people, both locally and from outside South Dakota, showed interest at one time or another in buying the papers, but ultimately none would pull the trigger. Near the end, he offered to give the paper to his handful of employees, but none was willing to take the risk. Blegen said he would have sold both operations for the value of the two brick buildings where they were produced — a total of only about \$75,000.

Blegen said he has heard from a few locals who are disappointed the papers have died, but he hasn't experienced any great outpouring of remorse from the community.

“It's a little like dying; you never knew people thought so much of you,” he said. “Not that I'm not pleased by what some people have had to say, but there's really been very little reader response that I'm aware of. I guess it's a little disappointing, for sure, but I'm not surprised by it.”



Dale Blegen said he has felt a mix of sadness and disappointment in the days since financial pressures led him to close The De Smet News and the Lake Preston Times, two northeastern South Dakota weekly newspapers that faced strong market headwinds even before the COVID-19 pandemic arrived. Photo: Courtesy of Dale Blegen

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Lana's Annals-Veto Day Bill Report (continued)

Hello to all. Two weeks ago I reported the 2 emergency bills we passed regarding schools which waved state testing and reducing the number of hours required this school year. I also discussed the emergency extension given to those who need to do drivers' license renewals and purchase and payment of vehicle stickers. This week I want to mention the upcoming primary election and the procedure which is going to veer from the norm this year. Within the next week, registered voters should receive by mail an absentee voter application. It is to be filled out and sent into the auditor ALONG WITH a copy of your driver's license, photo or tribal ID, or a picture passport. This is to properly identify you and attest that you are who you claim to be. In doing so, you do not need a notary signature or stamp. When you mail the application in, it will be verified, and an official ballot will then be sent your way. You will be instructed to properly fill it out and return no later than June 2. Now all of that said, there are a select group of people out there hissing maledictions that this is not constitutional as we are to go to vote at the polls. To that I say, this is a time for common sense. When we voters go to cast a ballot, we find ourselves at a school, a courthouse, or city hall. Now there's the wrinkle. Due to the virus, these places are not accessible to large groups. Therefore flexibility is needed. If you do not receive a ballot application by the end of April, you can contact the auditor or download the application from the secretary of state's website. The main reason for not getting one may be that you had a change of address.

SB191 was voted down on Veto Day, and it is my opinion that this was a mistake. It would have provided emergency authority to counties in the event of public health crisis. We spent a long time on this one, and it became truly something it was never meant to be. The easiest way to explain it is this way: municipalities have had authority to require social distancing and limiting people(less than 10) into public places at one time. Some of our counties also have bars/eating places, but the county has no guidelines in place to monitor them. This creates confusion; in fact, this causes increased possible health dangers. The same people who were turned away from a municipal establishment may now drive a hypothetical mile down the road where large groups of people are now gathered in a county tavern. Some of us tried and tried to get this passed, but others kept saying that the counties are not equipped with hospitals or masses of emergency workers to prevent a health crisis. It just got stretched so out of proportion that the simple logic behind the bill became unrecognizable. Thus, it fell to defeat.

Another bill, HB1297, requested that the secretary of health be given authority to restrict or close public or private locations such as schools, businesses, etc. in case of a health crisis. It was thought that the secretary of health is an appointed position and should not be given so much authority. I regret to say that I did not vote for this bill and neither did 49 others so was largely defeated. Looking back, it would only stand to reason that the Governor would have to rely on this expert in the health department to deem what is or is not a health crisis. This is why it was a mistake to not vote in favor. It would have saved a lot of confusion. If you look at the website of the duties of the Governor of our state, there is no power extended to the executive branch on this subject.

With that, I would like to thank all of you for your support during session. Sometimes we have challenges that we never dreamed possible. And yet, we solve our problems as they come along. We may become frustrated at times, but we need to keep things in proper perspective. I am proud of the people in this district for your sacrifices to keep our families safe and well. As problem solvers, we will get through this challenge...and then be on to the next one! God bless you!

Rep. Lana Greenfield

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Covid-19 Update: by Marie Miller

Today's a new day. News and numbers updates are slower on a weekend, so these figures may be a bit behind the times, but we'll run with what we have. While there are spots where things aren't quite as rosy as yesterday, overall, we're still making progress.

We have reached that three-quarter million cases we approached last night with 752,960. This represents a 3.6% increase, with both raw number and percentage increases showing declines for the third consecutive day. This is starting to look like a sustained trend; we'll see what tomorrow brings. NY continues to lead with 242,817 cases, a 2.6% increase. Both percentage and raw number increases declined for a fifth consecutive day. NJ, on the other hand, shows an uptick in rate of increase with 85,301 cases. Together, these two states are still at 44% of US cases. Following are MA – 38,077, PA – 32,992, CA – 31,531, MI – 31,348, IL – 30,357, F– 26, 306, LA – 23, 928, and TX - 19,426. Another 6 states are over 10,000 cases, another 5 are over 5000, another 21 + DC and PR are over 1000, another 5 + GU are over 500, and another 3 are over 100. Just VI and MP are under 100 cases.

There is a new largest case cluster: Marion Correctional Institution in Marion, OH, has 1150 cases. Smithfield Foods in Sioux Falls, SD, holds at 733 cases. Next is the USS Theodore Roosevelt, currently on Guam, with 669. The next two are both prisons, Pickaway Correctional Institution in Scioto Township, OH, with 266 cases and Parnall Correctional Facility in Jackson, MI, with 225. We talked a week or two ago about the risks inherent in being in prison, and we're seeing that play out in the numbers today. I read a sad story today about a man who, after 44 years in prison, was scheduled for release, but died from Covid-19 before that could happen. Many other prisoners are sitting ducks in institutions which do not have sufficient space for either isolation of known cases or social distancing; while some states are moving nonviolent offenders out, many are not yet doing so.

I am aware many people who have been following these updates are from South Dakota. A friend has taken the trouble to chart South Dakota figures over nearly a month and shared these with me, inviting me to share them. What I am seeing may be encouraging. While the total cases continue to rise at a rate faster than we would like, the fact that we may have a handle on the Smithfield Foods situation has led to what might be a leveling off in new cases; both new case reports and 3-day averages. Let's hope that holds. And a big thanks to Gordon.

There have been 36,096 deaths in the US. The leading states are as follows: NY – 13,869, NJ – 4202, MI -2389, MA – 1706, IL – 1302, LA – 1296, PA – 1285, CA – 1176, and CT – 1127. There are 5 more states over 500, 17 more over 100, 5 more + DC over 50, 11 + PR at or over 10, and 3 + GU, VI, and MP under 10. This also represents a decline in raw numbers for the second consecutive day and in percentage increase for a fifth consecutive day.

I am hearing that perhaps the federal government is finally moving on the testing situation; I will add that it's high time. There is currently capacity to run around 146,000 tests daily in the US; with experts telling us we need to run several hundred thousand to a few million per day, this is woefully deficient. States report that, even when lab capacity exists to test, testing supplies for everything from specimen collection to lab work are in desperately short supply. That issue simply must be remedied.

Additionally, before any economic start-up happens, we must have antibody tests too. These are the tests that tell us who has had an immune response to SARS-CoV-2, which would indicate prior infection, whether symptomatic or asymptomatic, and will give us an idea how many and who are immune and could, presumably, go back to work without risk to either themselves or their friends and family, co-workers and neighbors. This is vitally important information.

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Everyone pretty much agrees in the future we need to focus aggressively on outbreaks with diagnosis and contact tracing for exposed individuals. The only way to prevent a resurgence of cases that would rival—or surpass—what we've seen already is to know who is infected and shedding virus and who is susceptible or immune. For that, we need testing to establish baselines that will indicate where a new outbreak is occurring, or we're going to see a second wave that could be bigger and hit harder than the first wave. Given what we've see so far, I think we can all agree no one wants that.

What needs to happen is that we jump all over any new spike in cases and surround it with a ring of testing and isolation for contacts. This is how you break the chain of transmission when you don't have antiviral treatments or an effective preventive like a vaccine. And until there is a vaccine, this is the world we're living in. Everything we do to provide solid surveillance and widely available tests should be supported. This stuff is going to cost money, but it will cost nothing like what shutting down our economy has cost. Let's not be penny-wise and pound-foolish at this late date.

And so that's it for this Sunday. We're starting a new week with a somewhat brighter outlook, but we're not out of the woods yet. So it is up to us to do simple things: Practice the precautions we've been talking and talking about. Wash your hands. Regular cleaning. Hand hygiene. Stay home as much as possible and practice heightened precautions when you leave home. Wear a mask when you're out and about. Avoid crowds—in fact, yell at the dummies in the crowds. (Not really: I don't want you to get assaulted.) Isolate. And with all of that, it's easy to get down and sad and feel put-upon. I don't blame you for this; I've felt that way myself. On the other hand, it is also easy to survey the territory and recognize how lucky you are if you have enough to eat, can pay the rent, and have people who love you, even if you don't get to see them for a while. If you are lacking one of these things, please reach out for emotional support, even if no one you know can afford to help with the financial stuff. There are people who care what happens to you and who want you to be OK. None of that solves the essential problem, but it helps, nonetheless. If you have all of these things, first, quit your bitching; you don't know how well-off you are, and it's time you acknowledged that. Secondly, if you can afford to lend a hand to someone who's struggling, do that. Don't do it with a parade and a "Look at me being benevolent" banner; just do it. Let the feeling you're a good person wash over you, and let that be enough. If you can't afford to give financial support, reach out and show your caring. When someone's down and out, knowing someone gives a damn can make a huge difference. And while you're walking around your curiously circumscribed new life, choose just one opportunity to smooth the path for a fellow human being. Even if no one pins a medal on you for that, you'll know. And you're the one who needs to.

Stay well. Be safe. Try to be content with what you have. And we'll talk again.

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Area COVID-19 Cases

	Apr. 8	Apr. 9	Apr. 10	Apr. 11	Apr. 12	Apr. 13	Apr. 14	Apr. 15	Apr. 16	Apr. 17
Minnesota	1,154	1,242	1,336	1,427	1,621	1,650	1,695	1,809	1,912	2,071
Nebraska	523	577	648	704	814	871	901	952	1,066	1,138
Montana	332	354	377	---	387	394	399	404	415	422
Colorado	5,655	6,202	6,510	6,893	7,303	7,691	7,941	8,280	8,675	
Wyoming	230	239	253	261	270	275	282	288	296	
North Dakota	251	269	278	293	308	331	341	365	393	439
South Dakota	393	447	536	626	730	868	988	1,168	1,311	1,411
United States	431,838	466,396	501,701	530,006	557,590	582,619	609,685	639,664	671,425	706,779
US Deaths	14,768	16,703	18,781	20,608	22,109	23,529	26,059	30,985	33,286	37,079

Minnesota	+85	+88	+94	+91	+194	+29	+45	+114	+103	+159
Nebraska	+45	+54	+71	+56	+110	+57	+30	+51	+114	+72
Montana	+13	+22	+23	---	+10	+7	+5	+5	+11	+7
Colorado	+226	+547	+308	+383	+410	+388	+250	+339	+395	
Wyoming	+9	+9	+14	+8	+9	+5	+7	+6	+8	
North Dakota	+14	+18	+9	+15	+15	+23	+10	+24	+28	+46
South Dakota	+73	+54	+89	+90	+104	+138	+120	+180	+143	+100
United States	+31,909	+34,558	+35,305	+28,305	+27,584	+25,029	+27,066	+29,979	+31,761	+35,354
US Deaths	+1,857	+1,935	+2,078	1,827	+1,501	+1,420	+2,530	+4,926	+2,301	+3,793

	Apr. 19	Apr. 20
Minnesota	2,213	2,356
Nebraska	1,287	1,474
Montana	426	433
Colorado	9,433	9,730
Wyoming	309	313
North Dakota	528	585
South Dakota	1542	1635
United States	735,287	758,720
US Deaths	39,090	40,666

Minnesota	+142	+143
Nebraska	+149	+187
Montana	+4	+7
Colorado	+379	+297
Wyoming	+7	+4
North Dakota	+89	+57
South Dakota	+131	+93
United States	+28,508	+23,433
US Deaths	+2,011	+1,576

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Day County DOES NOT register first COVID-19 Positive Case

The state reversed a positive case in Day County, so at this time, there are no positive cases in Day County. Day County has 42 negative tests (up from 41 yesterday).

Brown County has two additional positive cases.

South Dakota:

Positive: +93 (1635 total)

Negative: +309 (10,427 total)

Hospitalized: +6 (74 total)

Deaths: No Change (7 total)

Recovered: +94 (646 total)

Counties with no positive cases report the following negative tests: Bennett 10, Brule 35, Buffalo 7, Butte +1 (13), Campbell 7, Custer 13, Day 42, Dewey 19, Douglas 21, Edmunds 18, Grant 30, Gregory +1 (28), Haakon 10, Hand 18, Hanson +1 (18), Harding 1, Jackson 3, Jones 4, Kingsburg 53, McPherson 11, Mellette +1 (10), Perkins 0, Potter +1 (27), Stanley 29, Tripp +2 (49), Ziebach 3, unassigned +34 (1004).

Brown +2 positive, +1 recovered (11 of 20 recovered)

Codington: +1 recovered (12 of 13 recovered)

Hyde: +1 recovered (1 of 1 recovered)

Lincoln: +4 positive, +6 recovered (47 of 90 recovered)

Minnehaha: +86 positive, +81 recovered (455 of 1362 recovered)

Sully: +1 recovered (1 of 1 recovered)

Turner: +1 positive (6 total)

Union: +1 positive (6 total)

Walworth: +3 recovered (3 of 5 recovered)

The NDDoH & private labs are reporting 667 completed tests today for COVID-19, with 57 new positive cases, bringing the statewide total to 585. NDDoH reports 1 new death. (10 total)

State & private labs have reported 13,630 total tests with 13,045 negatives.

189 ND patients are recovered.

SOUTH DAKOTA CASE COUNTS	
Test Results	# of Cases
Positive*	1635
Negative**	10427
Ever Hospitalized*	74
Deaths**	7
Recovered	646

AGE GROUP OF SOUTH DAKOTA COVID-19 CASES		
Age Range	# of Cases	# of Deaths
0 to 19 years	94	0
20 to 29 years	312	0
30 to 39 years	382	0
40 to 49 years	336	0
50 to 59 years	300	2
60 to 69 years	155	2
70 to 79 years	26	1
80+ years	30	2

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County	Total Positive Cases	Total Negative Cases	Total Cases Recovered
Aurora	1	33	1
Beadle	21	159	19
Bennett	0	10	0
Bon Homme	4	86	3
Brookings	9	269	9
Brown	20	396	11
Brule	0	35	0
Buffalo	0	7	0
Butte	0	13	0
Campbell	0	7	0
Charles Mix	4	62	3
Clark	1	44	1
Clay	5	100	4
Codington	13	362	12
Corson	1	7	1
Custer	0	13	0
Davison	3	241	3
Day	0	42	0
Deuel	1	57	1
Dewey	0	19	0
Douglas	0	21	0
Edmunds	0	18	0
Fall River	1	9	1
Faulk	1	14	1
Grant	0	30	0
Gregory	0	28	0
Hakon	0	10	0
Hamlin	2	46	1
Hand	0	18	0
Hanson	0	18	0
Harding	0	1	0
Hughes	5	198	4
Hutchinson	2	69	2
Hyde	1	7	1

Jackson	0	3	0
Jerauld	4	24	4
Jones	0	4	0
Kingsbury	0	53	0
Lake	3	84	2
Lawrence	9	57	9
Lincoln	90	982	47
Lyman	2	15	2
Marshall	1	33	1
McCook	3	74	2
McPherson	0	11	0
Meade	1	50	1
Mellette	0	10	0
Miner	1	16	0
Minnehaha	1362	4236	455
Moody	1	68	0
Oglala Lakota	1	21	1
Pennington	10	318	6
Perkins	0	0	0
Potter	0	27	0
Roberts	4	71	4
Sanborn	3	31	1
Spink	3	77	2
Stanley	0	29	0
Sully	1	12	1
Todd	1	32	1
Tripp	0	49	0
Turner	6	109	3
Union	6	99	3
Walworth	5	23	3
Yankton	23	353	20
Ziebach	0	3	0
Unassigned*	0	1004	0

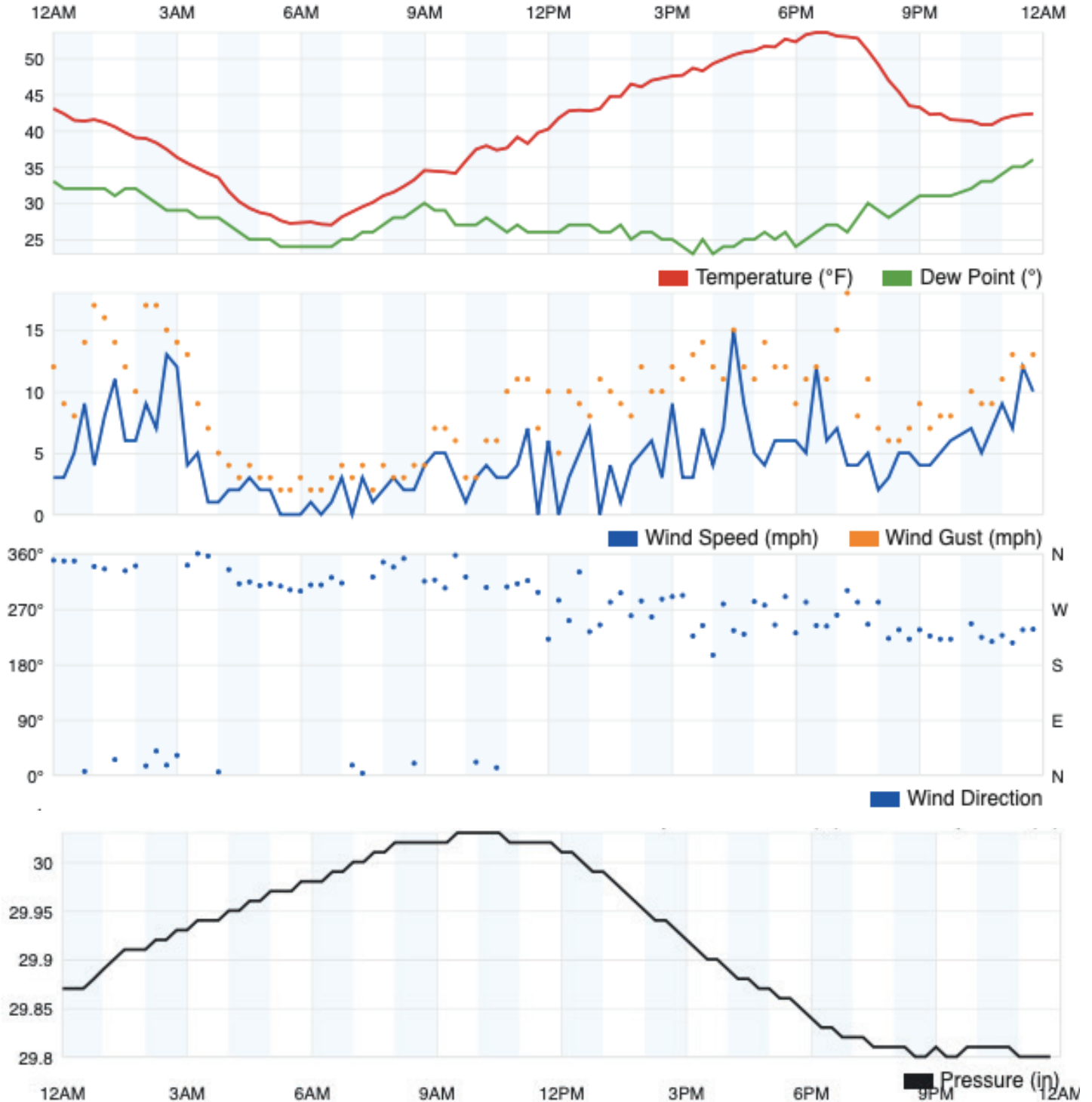
SEX OF SOUTH DAKOTA COVID-19 CASES		
Sex	# of Cases	# of Deaths
Male	892	5
Female	743	2

COVID-19 DEATHS IN SOUTH DAKOTA BY COUNTY	
County of Residence	# of Deaths
Beadle	2
McCook	1
Minnehaha	3
Pennington	1

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Today



Partly Sunny
then Sunny
and Breezy

High: 60 °F

Tonight



Mostly Clear
and Blustery
then Clear

Low: 25 °F

Tuesday



Sunny

High: 68 °F

Tuesday
Night



Mostly Clear

Low: 44 °F

Wednesday



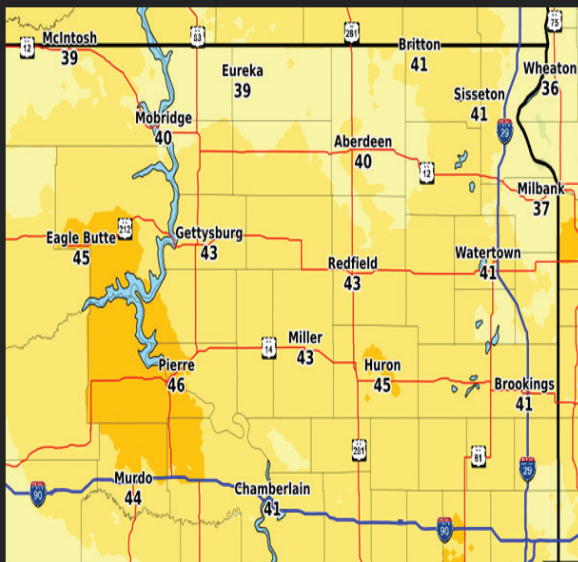
Sunny

High: 71 °F

Wind Advisory and Red Flag Warning In Effect

Monday's highs 55-65° with strong winds gusting out of the northwest

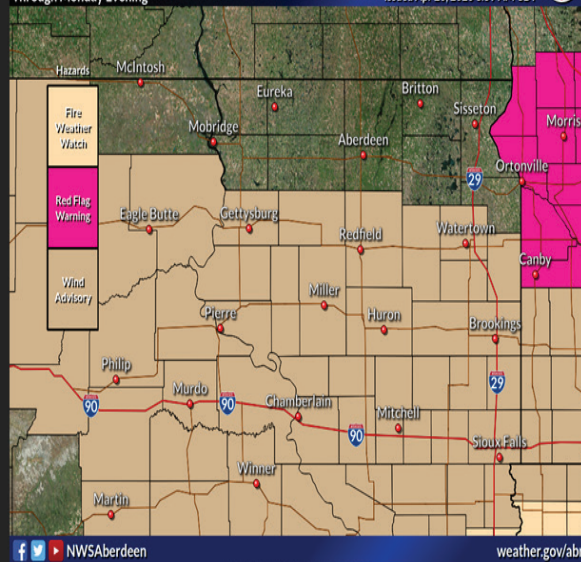
Max Wind Gusts Expected



Wind Advisory and Red Flag Warning In Effect

Through Monday Evening

Weather Forecast Office
Aberdeen, SD
Issued Apr 20, 2020 3:59 AM CDT



National Weather Service Aberdeen, South Dakota

Updated: 4/20/2020 4:17 AM Central

There is currently a wind advisory in effect for much of South Dakota as well as a red flag warning for increased fire danger in western MN, valid through Monday afternoon. Gusts up to 40-50 mph are possible today.

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Today in Weather History

April 20, 1966: Canadian high pressure brought frigid air to the Rockies and northern Plains. Record lows included: 3 below in Scottsbluff, Nebraska, two below in Cheyenne and Casper, Wyoming, two above in Rapid City, 11 above in Fargo, Williston, and Aberdeen, and 15 in Huron.

April 20, 2007: Severe thunderstorms moved through parts of central and northeast South Dakota during the afternoon and evening hours, producing large hail. The most significant hail measured 1.75 inches in diameter and fell 3 miles east of Westport, in Brown County.

1912: A tornado moved north-northeast from 5 miles southeast of Rush Center, KS across the east half of Bison, KS. Farms were wiped out near Rush Center. The loss at Bison was \$70,000 as half of the town, about 50 homes, were damaged or destroyed. There were 15 injuries in town. A dozen farms were nearly wiped out. Debris from the farmhouses was carried for 8 miles. A senior man who made light of the storm was killed with his granddaughter on a farm 2 miles southwest of Bison.

1920: Tornadoes in Mississippi and Alabama killed 219 persons. Six tornadoes of F4 intensity were reported. Aberdeen, Mississippi was hard hit by an F4 tornado that killed 22 people. This same tornado killed 20 in Marion County, Alabama. Nine people in one family died in Winston County, Alabama.

1984: A temperature of 106 degrees at Del Rio, Texas set a new record high for April.

2004: A strong F3 tornado moved across the town of Utica, near LaSalle-Peru in north-central Illinois. This tornado destroyed several homes, a machinery building, and a tavern. The roof of the tavern collapsed, killing eight people inside; many of these people had come into town from nearby mobile homes, seeking sturdier shelter. The tornado dissipated on a steep bluff on the northeast side of the city. Another tornado developed shortly afterward, crossing I-80 near Ottawa. Several other tornadoes developed across north central and northeast Illinois, affecting areas around Joliet and Kankakee.

1901 - A spring storm produced unusually heavy snow in northeast Ohio. Warren received 35.5 inches in thirty-six hours, and 28 inches fell at Green Hill. Akron OH established April records of 15.6 inches in 24 hours, and 26.6 inches for the month. Pittsburgh PA established April records of 12.7 inches in 24 hours, and 13.5 inches for the month. (David Ludlum) (The Weather Channel)

1952 - The tankers Esso Suez and Esso Greensboro crashed in a thick fog off the coast of Morgan City LA. Only five of the Greensboro's crew survived after the ship bursts into flame. (David Ludlum)

1987 - Fifty-two cities in the central and eastern U.S. reported new record high temperatures for the date. The high of 92 degrees at Memphis TN was a record for April, and the high of 94 at Little Rock AR equalled their April record. (The National Weather Summary)

1988 - A storm in the western U.S. brought heavy rain to parts of California. Mount Wilson was soaked with 4.15 inches of rain in 24 hours. The heavy rain caused some flooding and mudslides in the Los Angeles area, and a chain reaction collision of vehicles along the Pomona Freeway which resulted in 26 injuries. (Storm Data) (The National Weather Summary)

1989 - Hot weather spread from the southwestern U.S. into the Great Plains Region. Twenty-three cities reported new record high temperatures for the date. The afternoon high of 104 degrees at Tucson AZ was an April record, and highs of 87 at Provo UT, 90 at Pueblo CO, and 85 at Salt Lake City UT, equalled April records. (The National Weather Summary)

1990 - A fast moving Pacific storm produced heavy snow in the central mountains and the Upper Arkansas Valley of Colorado, with a foot of snow reported at Leadville. Thunderstorms in the south central U.S. produced wind gusts to 76 mph at Tulsa OK, and heavy rain which caused flooding of Cat Claw Creek in the Abilene TX area. Lightning struck the building housing a fish farm in Scott AR killing 10,000 pounds of fish. Many of the fish died from the heat of the fire. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

2006 - Up to five feet of snow falls in the Dakotas. I-94 and other highways were closed, power was out for thousands and caused at least four deaths.

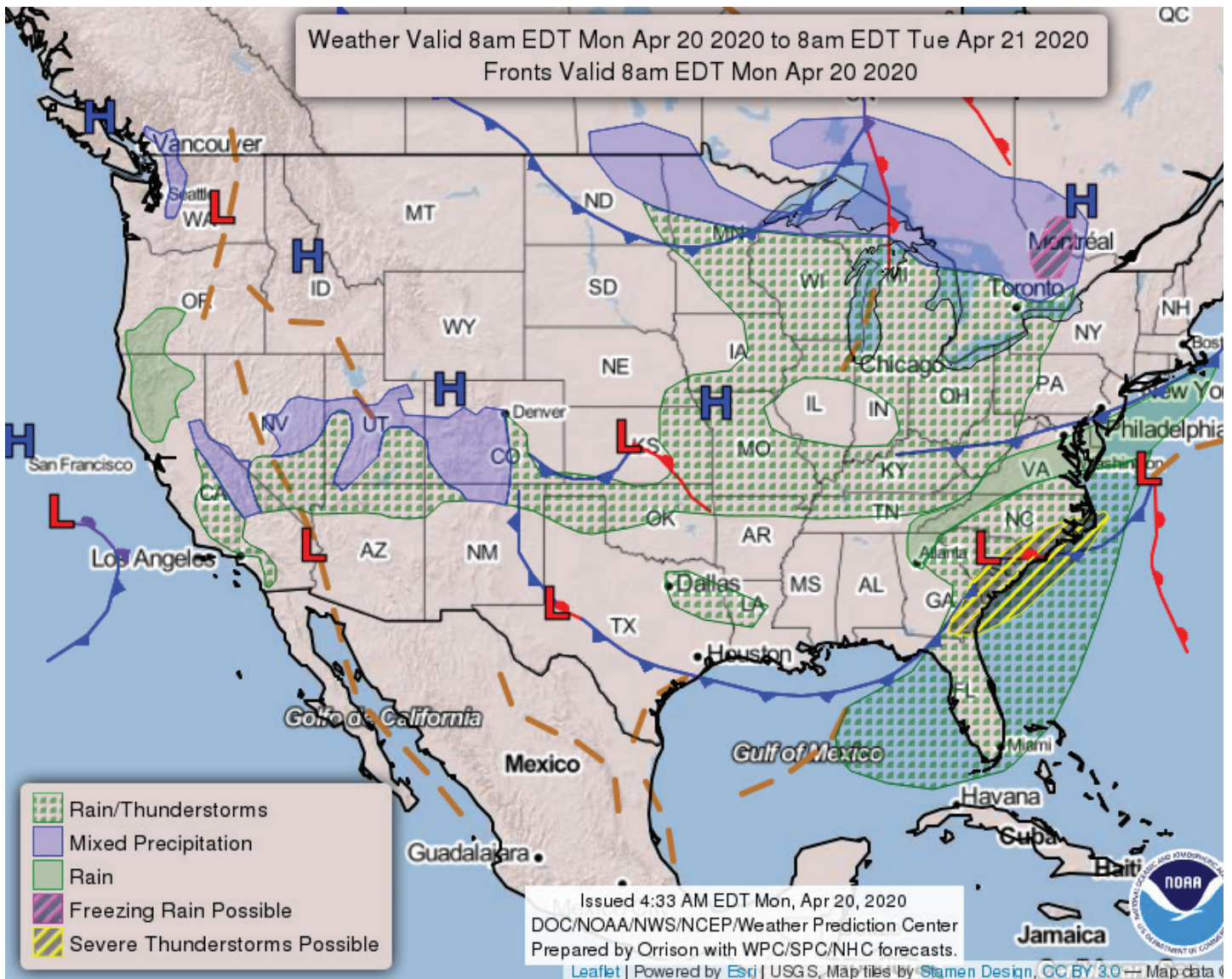
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Yesterday's Groton Weather Today's Info

High Temp: 54 °F at 6:26 PM
Low Temp: 27 °F at 6:33 AM
Wind: 18 mph at 7:09 PM
Precip:

Record High: 93° in 1980
Record Low: 11° in 1966, 2013
Average High: 60°F
Average Low: 34°F
Average Precip in April.: 0.98
Precip to date in April.: 0.94
Average Precip to date: 3.16
Precip Year to Date: 1.29
Sunset Tonight: 8:27 p.m.
Sunrise Tomorrow: 6:37 a.m.



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FAILING IS NOT FATAL

For years Thomas Edison tried to perfect a long-lasting storage battery. During this time he conducted thousands of experiments that were unsuccessful. One day one of his employees came to him and said, "Isn't it a shame that you have wasted all of this time? All of the tremendous labor and time that you have spent on this project has not achieved any results that are worthwhile or will work."

"I've got plenty of results," said Edison. "You see, I've discovered several thousand results that won't work!"

To his credit, Edison was able to look at what he was doing as a way of learning and solving problems. When he failed, he did not look at it as final. He looked at it as a stepping stone to success. How fortunate is that person who can see beyond the moment of defeat to the joy of victory! Failing at something does not make you or mean that you are a failure!

Often we fail to see God at work in what we are doing. We look for the approval of others believing that our rewards come from them. Scripture reminds us, however, to define success in terms of being faithful to God and what He has called us to do. God rewards us for what we accomplish in His name as well as being faithful to Him, for doing what He calls us to do even when we fail in the eyes of the world.

Struggling through difficult days and trying times proves that our trust is in God and that we look to Him for our rewards. "Fear not, I will strengthen and help you."

Prayer: It's natural, Lord, to want the approval of those around us. Often we think that they are the final authority. Remind us that they are not and that we labor for You. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: Don't be afraid, for I am with you. Don't be discouraged, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you. I will hold you up with my victorious right hand. Isaiah 41:10

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2020 Groton SD Community Events

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

News from the Associated Press

Sioux Falls family hosts themed dinners during quarantine

By **MAKENZIE HUBER** Argus Leader

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — Bringing a pool floaty to the dinner table is unsurprising at the Weber household. In fact, it's encouraged — if it fits the theme.

The Sioux Falls family has turned supper into an escape and distraction from the COVID-19 outbreak by hosting themed dinner nights every day through the pandemic.

Themes so far have ranged from a pool party (cue the floaties) to a funeral and a hunting party — complete with a hunting dog and stuffed pheasant. And the family has plenty more ideas, said Betsy Weber, 41.

The theme started after her 14-year-old daughter, Halle, saw a themed dinner night on the TikTok app. She and her 10-year-old sister, Hayden, wanted to start their own theme. They dressed in the family's matching Christmas pajamas and encouraged Betsy and their father, Joe, to put on their own matching set, the Argus Leader reported.

"Halle kept asking to go somewhere with friends, and our answer kept being no. She had the idea, and so we thought, 'Whatever we can do to follow the rules and make her happy, let's do it,'" Weber joked.

The Weber family usually transports their kids to and from sports practices and extracurricular activities during weeknights, so they rarely spend time around the dinner table together. Now, they're together every night.

Weber thought the themed nights would be an opportunity to have fun in an otherwise stressful time.

"Any time we can add humor in a time of stress it helps alleviate a lot of those negative feelings, uncertainties and pressure," she said. "It's just us hanging out together and feeling like everything will be OK."

The family plans to continue the theme nights until they run out of ideas or quarantine ends. Although they try to keep it to costumes and props they already own, Weber said she would consider ordering props like a tiger, if they planned to have a "Tiger King" theme night, after the popular Netflix series.

"I have a whole list of different ideas that we're going to do," Weber said. "As long as our creativity lasts, we're going to try it."

In addition to the theme nights, the Webers have started having a question of the day, where they each ponder and share their answer at the dinner table. Sometimes the question helps them understand how they're each feeling during quarantine, like what they miss or wish they were doing; but sometimes they're light, like if the family dog could talk what would she say?

"The silver lining for us is that it's been a time to slow down and enjoy time with each other," Weber said.

Farmers face impacts of Smithfield plant closure

By **PATRICK ANDERSON** Argus Leader

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — Mike Ver Steeg grew up on the family farm where his dad raised pigs and sold them to the John Morrell & Co. plant in Sioux Falls.

Ver Steeg, 47, now runs Prestige Pork in Inwood, Iowa, with the help of his own son.

Like his dad did, Ver Steeg sells his hogs to the plant in Sioux Falls, now owned by the Virginia-based processing company Smithfield Foods.

Smithfield's indefinite closure of its Sioux Falls plant forced Ver Steeg to start looking for alternatives and to consider the future of his farm. The shutdown removes an important link in the supply chain that connects farmers and consumers. It raises questions about the long-term future of the pork industry and local farms and food security, but it also raises an immediate, more pressing need: What to do with all the pigs?

Ver Steeg has another processor he sells to, but he is still relying on Smithfield for answers.

"Hopefully they can get a few loads here and there to some of their other plants is what I was told," Ver Steeg told the Argus Leader. "But that's not a guaranteed thing."

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Losing Smithfield means losing a major buyer of hogs.

The company's Sioux Falls campus processes as many as 20,000 pigs a day, about 5 million a year. Smithfield announced the facilities would close indefinitely, and as of April 14 more than 400 people who worked at the plant had tested positive for the coronavirus.

The demand created by Smithfield's plant was important to area hog farmers who need to sell their herd within a specific weight range and also need to make room for the next group of feeder pigs.

"For every pig harvested, there's one born," said Shane Odegaard, a hog farmer near Lake Preston. "There's pigs in the pipeline that are being harvested continuously that are ready to be marketed."

Odegaard and his family met for three hours, discussing options for their pigs during breakfast. They have 900 market ready, with no place to go and 1,300 more about to reach market weight later this month.

Other farms in South Dakota and the region will likely face more serious decisions in the weeks and months to come.

"The repercussions of this will be long-term, just to rebound," Odegaard said. "I'm afraid there will be family operations that may not be able to survive through this financially."

Farm closures are a real possibility, with the Smithfield closure capping a difficult series of weeks for hog farmers in the region, said Glenn Muller, executive director of South Dakota Pork Producers. His group represents hundreds of pork producers across the state. About 550 independent operations depend on Smithfield to harvest their livestock, Muller said.

Hog futures have plummeted

The onset of the coronavirus pandemic and resulting state of emergency had already left a mark on the industry, with hog futures initially climbing to as high as \$75.80 on March 12, then plummeting by more than \$30, according to NASDAQ.

Restaurants, normally a key buyer of bacon and other pork cuts, are closed across the country, resulting in an abundance of supply of pork in cold storage and hogs waiting to be harvested by processors. The pipeline is already so tight that it's hard for farmers affected by Smithfield's closure to find another processor, Muller said.

"We've totally disrupted our food chain," he said.

The closure will have potentially devastating consequences for family farms in South Dakota in the short term, including euthanizing pigs. Re-opening Smithfield as soon as possible will be an important part of any solution intended to help farmers, Muller said.

"Anybody in business that has to take their end product and destroy it for no value, you can't sustain that for a period of time," Muller said.

Long-term, not only are farm closures possible, the viability of the United States' pork supply is in danger.

The events at Smithfield are enough to show how fragile food security has become during decades of centralization of food processors, said Doug Sombke, president of the South Dakota Farmers Union.

While there might be an abundance of pork now, disruption caused by Smithfield closure will continue to ripple throughout the industry, Sombke said.

"The amount of food we have in reserve is not good enough," Sombke said.

South Dakota reports 93 new coronavirus cases

SIoux FALLS, S.D. (AP) — South Dakota health officials said Sunday the number of confirmed coronavirus cases in the state has jumped by 93.

According to the state Department of Health, the number of confirmed cases has risen to 1,635, compared with 1,542 the day before.

Of the new cases, Minnehaha County accounts for 86. Minnehaha County is the location of a large outbreak at a Sioux Falls pork processing plant.

The Argus Leader reports the number of Smithfield employees who have tested positive for the coronavirus increased by 18 to 725 on Sunday. The Department of Health said 143 non-employees who had close contact with Smithfield workers tested positive as of Sunday.

No new deaths from the coronavirus were reported in South Dakota, but the state has recorded seven deaths from COVID-19, the disease caused by the coronavirus.

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.

For meat plant workers, virus makes a hard job perilous

By **STEPHEN GROVES** Associated Press

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — Kulule Amosa's husband earns \$17.70 an hour at a South Dakota pork plant doing a job so physically demanding it can only be performed in 30-minute increments. After each shift last week, he left exhausted as usual — but he didn't want to go home.

He was scared he would infect his pregnant wife with the coronavirus — so much so that when he pulled into the parking lot of their apartment building, he would call Amosa to tell her he wasn't coming inside. When he eventually did, he would sleep separately from her in their two-bedroom apartment.

"I'm really, really scared and worried," Amosa said Monday.

This was no abstract worry: At the Smithfield Foods plant, the locker rooms were so tightly packed Amosa's husband told her he sometimes had to push his way through a crowd. Coughs echoed through the bathrooms. The plant in Sioux Falls clocked so many cases that it was forced to close this week. It has reported 518 infections in employees and another 126 in people connected to them as of Wednesday, making it among the largest known clusters in the United States. A 64-year-old employee who contracted COVID-19 died Tuesday, according to his pastor.

The concentration of cases has highlighted the particular susceptibility of meat processing workers, who stand shoulder-to-shoulder on the line and congregate in crowded locker rooms and cafeterias. As many as half a dozen plants have shut because of outbreaks. Because the workers who slaughter and pack the nation's meat are vulnerable, so, too, is the supply of that meat. Smithfield CEO Kenneth Sullivan said the closure of the plant, which produces roughly 5% of the U.S. pork supply each day, was "pushing our country perilously close to the edge in terms of our meat supply."

Amosa and her husband, who are originally from Ethiopia, once saw working at the plant, where she also had a job until she became pregnant, as key to building their new life in the United States: It was well paid, union employment that gave them a community. But amid the coronavirus pandemic, the couple found themselves — like many workers whose jobs cannot be done remotely — exposed on two fronts: Both their health and their livelihoods were at risk. The couple agreed to speak to The Associated Press on the condition that Amosa's husband not be named because he feared losing his job.

The plant is vital to a burgeoning immigrant community in Sioux Falls, offering opportunities for even those without a college degree or fluent English. Smithfield offers pay starting at over \$15 an hour, health insurance and plenty of overtime.

The plant has attracted a diversifying workforce to the city, where Somali and Vietnamese restaurants have joined diners and craft breweries. But the city remains fairly divided, with many immigrants living in neighborhoods near the plant, which employs 3,700 people in a city of about 180,000.

The outbreak at the plant has also presented a significant test to a governor who has resisted issuing sweeping stay-at-home orders. As Republican Gov. Kristi Noem was pressed again this week to impose tighter restrictions on Sioux Falls, her response instead was to announce that the state would give wide access to an anti-malarial drug championed by President Donald Trump as a promising treatment for COVID-19, but that has yet to be proven effective.

Noem has fired back, arguing that plant workers were deemed essential and would have been reporting for duty regardless.

For most people, the new coronavirus causes mild or moderate symptoms, but, for some, especially the elderly or infirm, it can cause severe illness and lead to death.

Even before the coronavirus began sickening workers, jobs in the meatpacking industry have been

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considered among the most dangerous in the U.S. Workers are exposed to a long list of dangers from hazardous chemicals to sharp knives. Just last month, a maintenance worker at a Tyson Fresh Meats plant in Kansas died after investigators say he got caught up in the assembly line belt.

The work is physical, starting with butchering hogs that weigh nearly 300 pounds (135 kilograms). On the processing line, repetitive-motion injuries are common. One worker at Smithfield described often waking up with his right hand so swollen he couldn't make a fist.

Union leaders and immigrant advocates cheered the decision to close the plant indefinitely but wish more had been done sooner.

Smithfield spokeswoman Keira Lombardo said difficulty in getting masks and thermal scanners led to delays in implementing some safety measures when the plant was open. But she said last week the plant was adding extra hand-sanitizing stations, scanning employees' temperatures before they entered and installing Plexiglas barriers in some areas.

Six current employees interviewed by the AP who, like Amosa's husband, insisted on anonymity because they feared they would be fired described far more haphazard measures. They said they were given flimsy masks made of hairnet-like material, hand-washing stations were in disrepair, and there was pressure to keep working even if they felt sick.

One employee told his supervisor on March 30 that he had a fever the previous day, but he was told to report to work and not to tell anyone about the fever. He worked that day, missed the next two and returned when the fever broke, he said.

"No one asked if I went to the doctor, if I was tested," the employee said.

Lombardo said Smithfield "fully rejects any claims that employees were pressured to report to work," calling it "completely counterproductive" to do so.

Smithfield has said it plans to clean the plant and implement more protections in the hopes of reopening. The Centers for Disease Prevention and Control sent a team to the plant this week to examine how it can be safely restarted.

But that may be difficult. Workers say they cannot fathom how butchering lines could be reconfigured to accommodate social distancing.

Meanwhile, Amosa and her husband are both home now — nervously awaiting their first child. But they also have a new worry: His coronavirus test came back positive Tuesday.

Associated Press writer Amy Forliti in Minneapolis, Minnesota, contributed to this report.

5 things to know today - that aren't about the virus

By The Associated Press

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

1. SHOOTING RAMPAGE IN CANADA KILLS 16 A gunman disguised as a police officer shot people in their homes in a rampage across the Canadian province of Nova Scotia, the deadliest such attack in the country's history.

2. EFFECTS OF GULF OIL SPILL STILL FELT A DECADE LATER Scientists who spent the last 10 years studying the Deepwater Horizon spill still worry about its effects on dolphins, whales, sea turtles, small fish vital to the food chain, and ancient corals in the cold, dark depths.

3. AUSTRALIA TO CHARGE GOOGLE, FACEBOOK FOR NEWS CONTENT The Australian Competition and Consumer Commission will release draft rules in late July for the platforms to pay fair compensation for the journalistic content siphoned from news media.

4. ISRAELIS RALLY AGAINST NETANYAHU More than 2,000 people took to the streets of Tel Aviv to demonstrate against the prime minister's attempts to form an "emergency" government with his chief rival.

5. 'WE DON'T EVEN KNOW WHAT WE'RE BREATHING' Communities of color say they are living on the front line of the Trump administration's public health and environment rollbacks.

Nations seek to ease nursing home loneliness yet keep safe

By RAF CASERT and ANGELA CHARLTON Associated Press

HALLE, Belgium (AP) — Belgian Prime Minister Sophie Wilmes just wanted to do the humane thing. After so many frail and elderly nursing home residents had been held in seclusion from their loved ones in the first weeks of the lockdown to contain the coronavirus pandemic, Wilmes said her government decided to allow one visitor — in good health — per person.

“People can die of loneliness,” Wilmes told parliament on Thursday. “Sustained isolation has consequences.”

She soon reaped a whirlwind of criticism amid cries it would endanger lives, overburden the staff and use already short supplies of protective equipment for visitors instead of health care workers.

“Literally opening the doors also means leaving them wide open for the virus. It means there will be more infections and that more vulnerable elderly will die,” according to the Icaro care organization.

Her initiative has been repealed in most of the country and new meetings have been called on the issue.

Belgium is hardly alone in struggling with the emotional and ethical issue of whether to soften rigorous rules amid the overwhelming chaos in hospitals and nursing homes.

In the Netherlands, Dutch Health Minister Hugo de Jonge called it a “devil’s dilemma.”

As the virus raced through Europe, the hardest-hit countries — Italy, Spain, Britain, France — banned all nursing home visits to protect the vulnerable elderly, who were dying by the thousands from the coronavirus. From Belgium to Turkey, several other countries did the same.

But as the confinement drags on, some are rethinking that. In recent days, France, Britain and Belgium have proposed relaxing the rules to ease the pain of families, and their locked-away loved ones.

In the U.S., federal government guidelines recommend halting all visits except during end-of-life and other extraordinary situations, when visitors should be equipped with personal protective gear. The federal agency that regulates nursing homes urges them to designate separate facilities to keep COVID-19 residents away from those who have tested negative.

Berlin allows nursing home patients to receive one visitor for up to one hour a day, and doesn’t restrict visits to palliative care facilities for those nearing the end. South Africa has begun to take precautionary measures at nursing homes, but in most of Africa — the world’s youngest continent, with a median age of just 19.7 years — concerns about aging populations have not loomed as large as they have in Europe, the world’s oldest continent.

Yet the question of dying alone doesn’t only affect the elderly.

“Ismael, dying aged 13 without a parent at his bedside, made me weep,” U.K. Health Secretary Matt Hancock said in describing the death of one of the country’s youngest COVID-19 victims last month.

The issue has struck a chord, since few fears in life are more universal than being alone as one dies.

Often, it is not just the lack of a hug or a smile from a grandchild; it’s knowing that a spouse or parent may be dying without anyone at their bedside.

Pope Francis last week called on the world to pray “for those who are isolated in care homes for the elderly. They are afraid, afraid of dying alone.”

The isolation might last through 2020, said EU Commission President Ursula von der Leyen.

“Without a vaccine, contacts with the elderly must be restricted as much as possible. I realize it is difficult and that loneliness weighs heavy. But it’s about survival,” she said.

France is trying to find a middle ground.

Last week French President Emmanuel Macron ordered an exception to one of the world’s strictest lockdowns to allow families “to see the sick at the end of their lives, to be able to bid them adieu.” And on Monday, France will start allowing two family members to visit any loved ones in nursing homes, if adequate protection is ensured.

Sophie Santandrea of private French nursing home group Synerpa was cautious about allowing visits, saying “it will depend on the protocols that are put in place, and whether they are very clear and sufficient” to protect everyone from exposure to the virus from visitors.

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Marc Bourquin of the Hospital Federation of France, which oversees public nursing homes, said there needed to be a way for all elderly to have a visitor, especially if the situation lasts for months.

"When workers see that a person is losing the taste for life because they can't see their families, we have to find a way to progressively be able to allow a minimum of contact," Bourquin said. "The risk of virus will not disappear as long as there is no vaccine. We cannot condemn these people to never see their loved ones again."

Staff safety also was raised in Britain amid shortages of personal protective equipment, or PPE.

"As of this moment, I am very worried that we don't have enough PPE for staff to protect themselves, let alone facilitate giving it to relatives to be able to see their loved ones during the end-of-life care," said Donna Kinnair, chief executive of the Royal College of Nursing.

It leaves governments, as well as families, in a bind.

"Everybody saw how inhuman the current situation is," said Wilmes, the Belgian leader. "We have to do something about it."

Charlton reported from Paris. Contributors include Jill Lawless in London, Mike Corder in The Hague, Matthew Perrone in Washington and Cara Anna in Johannesburg.

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

Lockdown tensions grow as people seek to resume work or play

By NICK PERRY and WILL WEISSERT Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The coronavirus is touching all levels of society and increasing tensions as governments start to ease restrictions that health experts warn should be done gradually to avoid a resurgence of the illness that has killed more than 165,000 people.

The mounting pressure was evident in the United States. The Trump administration says parts of the nation are ready to begin a gradual return to normalcy. Yet some state leaders say woefully inadequate federal action, like a lack of testing supplies, is hindering their response to the illness.

After insisting the country's virus testing system was without fault, President Donald Trump said Sunday evening he would be using the Defense Production Act to compel increased manufacturing of testing swabs. He also remained defensive, however, vowing that there were enough swabs to go around. "Swabs are easy," the president said, bringing one to his news briefing and waving it in front of reporters.

Trump also defended protests by his supporters, who have been gathered to demand state governors lift controls on public activity that were meant to stop the spread of the virus. The president has invoked their rallying cry and said Sunday night, "these people love our country. They want to go back to work."

Shutdowns have disrupted economic, social, cultural and religious life and plunged the world into an economic slump unseen since the Great Depression in the 1930s.

The International Monetary Fund expects the global economy to contract 3% this year. Tens of millions of workers have lost their jobs and millions more fear they'll be next.

A few countries are acting to ease restrictions and resume economic activity, but most of the world agrees the steps must be gradual.

China, where the pandemic began, has lifted travel and other restrictions, but customer traffic has been slow to return. And masks and temperature checks are routine.

India eased the world's largest lockdown to allow some manufacturing and agricultural activity to resume — if employers can meet social distancing and hygiene standards. Companies are required to transport and shelter their workers, which few of them are able to do. India also recorded its biggest single-day spike in cases, adding more than 1,500 as it works to increase testing, stock up equipment and prepare hospital beds for more patients.

Germany intends to begin allowing some small stores, like those selling furniture and baby goods, to

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reopen. Albania plans to let its mining and oil industries reopen, along with hundreds of businesses. New Zealand extended its lockdown another week, but workers at some businesses such as construction and manufacturing will be able to resume their jobs soon.

The number of confirmed infections with the new coronavirus has surpassed 2.4 million, according to a tally by Johns Hopkins University. The true figures are likely significantly higher since mild infections can be missed, testing is limited and some countries tried to underplay their outbreaks or were too overwhelmed to effectively count them.

The death toll in the U.S., the worst-hit country by far, was more than 40,000 with over 750,000 confirmed infections.

The virus has reached all levels of society. At least 20 employees at Afghanistan's presidential palace have tested positive, said a senior government official who asked to remain anonymous because he was not authorized to comment on the subject.

It wasn't clear whether President Ashraf Ghani had been in contact with any of the employees or whether he had been tested himself. Ghani has reportedly been self-quarantining. At 70 and a cancer survivor, Ghani is at a high risk for serious illness.

The virus claimed an unlikely victim, as well: tens of thousands of tulips in full bloom in Japan. They were a centerpiece of an annual festival near Tokyo that was canceled this year. But people were still gathering to admire the flowers, so the decision was made to raze them. All that remains are red and yellow petals lying smashed on the ground.

"This situation is now about human life," said Takahiro Kogo, a city official overseeing the park. "It was a heart-wrenching decision, but we had to do it."

Perry reported from Wellington, New Zealand. AP journalist Rahim Faiez in Kabul, Afghanistan, contributed to this report as did AP writers worldwide.

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

Losing face: The rise of the mask, and what's lost behind it

By TED ANTHONY AP National Writer

PITTSBURGH (AP) — On Saturday afternoons, the Strip District neighborhood of Pittsburgh becomes a jam-packed hub of old-fashioned shopping. People stride along Penn Avenue, hopping from greengrocer to butcher to fishmonger to Italian market, smiling and gesturing and jabbering as they go.

Not this weekend. As strange, spaced-out lines formed outside favorite establishments, the chatting was muted, the sidewalk sidesteps were awkward and tentative, and the facial expressions were, well, not really facial expressions at all. Just like much of the planet during these jumbled coronavirus days.

Smile, they say, and the world smiles with you. Unless you're wearing a mask. Then the world can't see your smile, much less smile back.

The rise of the protective face mask — first in China (where smog and SARS gave rise to its use years ago), then elsewhere in Asia, into Europe and now marching across North America — has abruptly excised half of the face from our moment-to-moment human interactions.

With it has come a removal of crucial visual cues that people have used for millennia to communicate, understand each other and negotiate space in the public arena — to find common ground.

"Our minds light on the face like butterflies on a flower, for it gives us a priceless flow of information," Daniel McNeill wrote in "The Face," his 1998 book on its significance throughout human history.

A partial inventory of the information that's lost when the mask goes up: Smiles. Frowns. Lip movements. Crinkle lines at the mouth's edge. Cheek twitches that indicate approval or disapproval. Reflexive gestures that collaborate with the eyes to say: Hey, I mean no harm. Or: Hey — back off.

"It's not just covering us up. It's blocking something. It's a barrier to communication. Is she smiling?"

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Sarcastic? Is she happy to see me? I can't figure it out," says Christie Cawley, a Pittsburgh business adviser whose consultancy, tHRive, helps nonprofits with business skills.

"With the masks, when people are making eye contact, you don't know if they're friendly or not," Cawley says. "It's a whole communications channel that we naturally have as humans, and it's kind of dulled — turned off a little bit."

On Sunday night, new regulations from Pennsylvania's governor took effect saying that most businesses still open in the state must bar anyone without a mask from entering. Other governments — states and nations — have imposed similar restrictions, which sit atop people's already palpable desire to shield their mouths and noses from taking in the insidious virus that causes COVID-19.

However legitimate, that still creates a potentially disorienting situation: Instead of a fellow human coming openly toward you, we're encountering each other with visual cues removed, like astronauts or deep-sea divers or hazmat-removal teams.

"Different levels of smiles lead to perceptions of warmth, competence, trustworthiness, attractiveness, etc.," says Fan Liu, an assistant professor of decision sciences and marketing at Adelphi University whose research focuses on nonverbal communication. "These perceptions and characteristics significantly influence our daily social lives."

Nonverbal cues, she says, play a central role in communication that we don't always realize. "When these cues are cut off, people are more likely to focus on outcome rather than process," Liu says, and some nuances of human interaction may be lost.

No wonder. There's a reason why history's greatest artists didn't make their names painting shins or elbows or thumbs.

The face is the gateway to who we are, the front door to our humanity and individuality. We mouth off. We have face time (and FaceTime). We pay lip service and give each other lip. We grin and bear it. Are all these going by the wayside ... at least for now?

There's a reason, too, why masks suggest something surreptitious and nefarious. Covering pieces of the face is often presented as shorthand for mistrust or menace across modern culture, from historical literature ("The Man in the Iron Mask") to comic books ("Batman"), from TV ("The Lone Ranger") to movies ("The Mask") to music ("The Stranger").

Such potent cultural cues can be activated, however subconsciously, when we cover our faces — even for the most legitimate (and protective) of reasons. A mask, in short, can be alienating no matter who is behind it — and particularly when there's a power imbalance in the conversation.

Leah Lizarondo, co-founder and CEO of Pittsburgh's 412 Food Rescue, says her team's ability to show empathy has been impeded by its new contactless, mask-forward methods of dropping off food. She recalls meal distributions at Pittsburgh school-bus stops over the past month — done with masks and, she laments, less humanity because of it.

"There's something extremely surreal about dealing with someone when you can't really smile. It's exactly the opposite of what you want this exchange to be. You don't want it to be a transactional exchange. You want it to be a relationship," Lizarondo says. "We're trying so much to create analogues to that empathy. I'm not sure we're there yet."

Which raises the question: If this endures for weeks and months, what would those analogues be? If half of the facial radio signal is obscured by face-mask static, how do the messages punch through? Will new methods of socially distanced nonverbal communication emerge?

"The important point is not to rely on any one visual cue. Furrowed eyebrows could mean that a person's angry, someone's confused, someone doesn't have glasses on and they're squinting," says Mary Inman, a psychology professor at Hope College in Michigan.

"So we need to take time and ask people for clarification," says Inman, who studies people's perceptions of discrimination. "It'll slow down communications a little bit, which could be a good thing. ... If we go to (wearing) full masks continually, then we will be needing to slow down and clarify."

You can bet on one thing: Until that happens, things may be awkward. For now, though, we still have the eyes. Have you heard? They're windows to the soul. But, alas, only to a point.

"The face is the focal point. Now we've lost the focal point of that kind of communication. It is going to add a layer of distance between us," says Dan Everett, a linguist and sociology professor at Bentley College in Massachusetts. "It's sort of like we're dogs without tails now."

Ted Anthony, director of digital innovation for The Associated Press, has been writing about American culture since 1990. Follow him on Twitter [here](#).

Syria's divisions damage efforts to mobilize against virus

By SARAH EL DEEB Associated Press

BEIRUT (AP) — After nine years of war, Syria is broken into three rival parts unable to work together and ill-prepared to cope with the coronavirus, an enemy that knows no conflict lines.

Medical personnel in Kurdish-run northeastern Syria have resorted to making protective gear out of garbage bags. The territory has been cut off from outside aid, including U.N. shipments that used to arrive from Iraq but were vetoed by Syrian government ally Russia.

In the last opposition-held enclave in Syria's northwest, health officials are cobbling together what little they have to protect 4 million people crammed into a territory buckling under repeated government offensives. Promises by the World Health Organization to deliver ventilators, protection equipment and other supplies have mostly not materialized.

President Bashar Assad controls the rest of the country, including the main cities. WHO has steered most of its anti-coronavirus help through his government, forcing the U.N. agency to work with an opaque system that hasn't extended help to non-government areas.

Hardin Lang, a former U.N. official and vice president of Refugee International, said the more vulnerable territories should be the priority. He said that working with a government that often distributes aid based on political considerations "could be questionable when you have a population that is completely dependent on you and cross-border assistance."

Syrian authorities have conducted coronavirus tests only in Damascus' central lab, making it hard to track infections. The Kurdish-run northeast, also home to 4 million people, has had to send its samples by plane to the capital.

The flaws of the system emerged last week when Kurdish officials found out two weeks after the fact that a death in their area was from COVID-19, the illness caused by the virus. The Damascus government did not officially announce it or inform local authorities — nor did WHO, prompting accusations by Kurdish authorities of a cover-up.

WHO says it is dealing with a global shortage and is working to raise resources for Syria, which it calls a priority area.

So far, Syria's official count is 39 infections and two deaths, all in or around Damascus.

The civil war has devastated Syria's health system. "Advanced countries were unable to isolate such a virus. So imagine a region that has faced a destructive war for nine years," said Ciwan Mustafa, northeast's health director.

Hundreds of medical facilities have been bombed, mostly in government airstrikes; half the hospitals and health centers are functioning only partially or not at all, while 70% of the medical personnel have fled the country. More than 80% of the population live in poverty, millions have been displaced and hundreds of thousands are crammed into overcrowded camps.

For weeks, government officials denied the danger. Shiite pilgrims from Iran and Iraq continued to visit shrines near Damascus. Fighters, allied with the Syrian military, traveled back and forth from those countries.

By early March, restrictions began with a partial closure of borders and shrines. When the first case was announced on March 22, the government enforced a curfew and suspended military conscription. Several towns were isolated and over a dozen quarantine centers set up.

WHO is providing the Health Ministry with medical and lab equipment, testing kits, protective gear and

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training workshops, said Dr. Nima Abid, the agency's acting representative in Damascus. It is setting up testing labs in the regions of Aleppo, Homs and Latakia.

Abid cited global shortages when asked about the obstacles to aid reaching non-governmental areas, adding that such deliveries require government permission.

Elizabeth Tsurkov, a Syria researcher, said that since the uprising began in 2011, Damascus has had a policy of denying aid to rebel-held areas and to the Kurdish-run northeast, in hopes of weakening the population there.

A 2013 polio outbreak was partially blamed on the government denying vaccinations to areas outside its control.

So far, WHO airlifted from Damascus 20 tons of supplies, including ventilators and protective gear, mostly to a hospital in a government-controlled pocket in the northeastern city of Qamishli. Those trying to reach the hospital risk arrest as they cross military checkpoints, Tsurkov said.

The northeast's medical sector was further crippled by the war against the Islamic State group and Turkey's military campaign, which restricted water supply. Tens of thousands of IS supporters and members are crammed in camps and detention facilities in the area.

U.N. aid deliveries from Iraq were halted in early 2020 after Russia vetoed a resolution allowing continued shipments across that border. The pandemic then forced the closure of the Iraqi border to almost everyone. Many aid workers left. Those remaining have negotiated only sporadic border openings with Iraq's northern Kurdish semi-autonomous region, bringing in some supplies, including finally two testing machines.

In Syria's rebel-held northwest, authorities have closed schools and mosques and urged people to stay home. That's a challenge, when nearly 1 million people displaced in the latest government offensive now live in tents or temporary shelters without water or electricity.

WHO, consulting with Idlib authorities, drew up a \$30 million plan to create 28 isolation units and prepare three new facilities for coronavirus patients. But the agency has yet to bring the supplies. Thirty ventilators are sitting in Turkey, awaiting budget approval. WHO sent Idlib 5,900 test kits, and they are being closely rationed, used only in very suspect cases — 197 so far, all negative.

The WHO plan "is still mere words on paper," the top health official in Idlib, Munzer al-Khalil, wrote in an open letter, accusing the U.N. of discrimination. "Even if northwest Syria is not an official state, its citizens are Syrians, first and foremost they are human beings and deserve an adequate response."

He said WHO now wants to refit existing hospitals for COVID-19 cases instead of setting up new facilities, a change he feared would strain overstretched resources. Adding to the concerns, the U.N. resolution that allows cross-border aid from Turkey expires in June.

Al-Khalil used available resources to set up the only ward in the territory for suspected virus cases. The ward in an Idlib city hospital has only two doctors, four nurses, 32 beds and four ventilators, said hospital director, Dr. Khaled al-Yassin.

As al-Yassin spoke to The Associated Press, a father tried to bring in his 10-year-old son, feverish with a chest infection suspected of being coronavirus.

Al-Yassin had to turn him away.

"We don't have isolation wards for children," he told the distraught parent.

Al-Khalil said that over the course of the war, he has treated victims of chemical attacks and made life-or-death decisions about evacuating hospitals before a government attack.

The virus has brought new levels of stress, he said. "This time I feel it is much bigger than us."

4/20 fizzle: Pot industry tested as virus slams economy

By MICHAEL R. BLOOD Associated Press

LOS ANGELES (AP) — The unofficial holiday celebrating all things cannabis arrives Monday as the nation's emerging legal marijuana market braces for an economic blow from the coronavirus crisis, with many consumers reducing spending or going underground for deals.

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It was supposed to be a long weekend of festivals and music culminating on April 20, or 4/20, the code for marijuana's high holiday. Instead, it has been reduced to an online replica because of stay-at-home orders to curb the pandemic.

Virtual parties and video chats are replacing vast outdoor smoking sessions to mark the rise of legalization and celebrate cannabis culture. The origins of the annual celebration are believed tied to a group of Northern California high school friends, who used the code as slang for smoking pot in the early 1970s.

"Stay home," the National Organization for the Reform of Marijuana Laws, or NORML, said bluntly. San Francisco Mayor London Breed threatened arrests: "We will not tolerate anyone coming to San Francisco for 4/20 this year."

For businesses, 4/20 is usually their once-a-year Black Friday, when sales soar. Instead, they are reporting up-and-down buying and pondering an uncertain future.

The pandemic means the world economy could face its worst year since the Great Depression in the 1930s. In a sign of what's to come, U.S. retail sales overall dropped nearly 9% in March — a record. Millions are out of work.

As for the holiday, "there's a somber feeling to this one," said Jordan Lams, CEO of Pure CA, which specializes in marijuana extracts and does business as Moxie brand products. Before the outbreak, "it was going to be the biggest 4/20 in history," Lams said.

Steve White, CEO of Arizona-based Harvest Health & Recreation, said he's watching to see if consumers treat marijuana more like beer or toilet paper when money runs short.

When the economy tumbles, beer sales traditionally spike. With toilet paper, panic-buying might empty shelves but people do not use more of it. They just buy less later.

It will be a telling year, because no one in the relatively new industry knows if sales will plunge, stay flat or even rise.

"Do people buy less cannabis, or does it become more ingrained as part of their daily life?" White said.

The uncertainty in the market poses the latest challenge for an industry that's expanded in some form to all but a handful of states.

The risks are spotlighted in California, where businesses contend with hefty taxes, an illicit market that still dwarfs the legal one and a tourism-reliant economy that's crippled by virus restrictions.

Because cannabis remains illegal at the federal level, most banks don't want to do business with pot companies and they aren't included in the coronavirus rescue package that will help other businesses.

Before the virus, "we were already teetering on ... an edge of a cannabis collapse," said Los Angeles dispensary owner Jerred Kiloh, who heads the United Cannabis Business Association. "It's going to be very difficult for cannabis businesses to make it through this pandemic."

That's despite the onset of stay-at-home orders in March that sent marijuana sales rocketing; some businesses reported single-day records as customers stocked up. New York, San Francisco and Los Angeles were among the cities that labeled dispensaries essential businesses that could remain open.

But since then, business generally has flattened or tapered off, even with deliveries and curbside pickups growing to reduce health risks. Marijuana data trackers BDS Analytics documented sales surges through much of March, but then consumers pulled back in late March and early April, with sales mostly below average.

In Oregon, cannabis retailers saw a huge spike last month — a 30% increase in average sales per retailer compared with March 2019. Sales increases mid-month were even larger.

However, the peak has leveled off and customers are coming in less frequently but buying more, said David Alport, who owns two Bridge City Collective stores in Portland. He's hired three more employees to handle home deliveries.

In Illinois, marijuana businesses can keep operating under Gov. J.B. Pritzker's stay-at-home order. Companies made sweeping changes that included appointment-only sales and online ordering.

The Mission dispensary on Chicago's South Side saw an initial spike in purchases before the lockdown took effect, but that's leveled off.

"We've never faced an economic downturn when cannabis was legal," said Kris Krane, president of Mission dispensaries. "This is completely unprecedented."

Some customers could be especially vulnerable during an economic downturn. Among cannabis users in states where its legal, 32% have incomes below \$35,000 and only 54% have full-time employment, according to BDS Analytics. Anyone on a tight budget might be more apt to avoid taxes that go with legal purchases and buy from illicit market dealers.

Steve DeAngelo, co-founder of Harborside dispensaries in California, said it's difficult to predict what's next, with no template for how cannabis consumers will react in a deep economic downturn.

Still, he notes that the industry has endured for years through times good and bad, even when consumers had only one option — illegal purchases. Consumers who see marijuana as part of their daily routine will keep coming back, he predicted.

But, for businesses, there will be a "sorting out," DeAngelo said. Companies with strong brands and cash reserves are likely to fare better in a poor economy; those saddled with heavy debt who made too-rosy promises to investors will face challenges.

"There is not going to be an extinction moment," DeAngelo said. "It's going to prove more resilient than many, many other industries."

Associated Press writers Gillian Flaccus in Portland, Oregon, and Kathleen Foody in Chicago contributed. Blood, Flaccus and Foody are members of AP's marijuana beat team. Find complete AP marijuana coverage here: <https://apnews.com/Marijuana>. Follow Blood on Twitter at <http://twitter.com/MichaelRBloodAP>.

Sparkling waters hide some lasting harm from 2010 oil spill

By JANET McCONNAUGHEY and REBECCA SANTANA Associated Press

NEW ORLEANS (AP) — Ten years after a well blew wild under a BP platform in the Gulf of Mexico, killing 11 men and touching off the nation's worst offshore oil spill, gulf waters sparkle in the sunlight, its fish are safe to eat, and thick, black oil no longer visibly stains the beaches and estuaries. Brown pelicans, a symbol of the spill's ecological damage because so many dived after fish and came up coated with oil, are doing well.

But scientists who spent the decade studying the Deepwater Horizon spill still worry about its effects on dolphins, whales, sea turtles, small fish vital to the food chain, and ancient corals in the cold, dark depths.

The gulf's ecosystem is so complex and interconnected that it's impossible to take any single part as a measure of its overall health, said Rita Colwell, who has led the Gulf of Mexico Research Initiative.

BP put up \$500 million for the independent GoMRI program soon after the spill, part of more than \$69 billion it says it has spent overall, including spill response, cleanup, settlements, restoration and other costs.

Some scientists say the recovery has been remarkable since those dark spring days in 2010, when oil billowing from the sea floor began killing wildlife and blackening marshes and beaches from Texas to Florida.

Ed Overton, a Louisiana State University chemist who has studied oil dispersal since the 1970s, said today's visitors to Louisiana's marshes would have to know just where to look to find damage: "So there's still oil there 10 years later. Is it significant compared to what we saw in 2010? And the answer is not only no, but hell no."

But major concerns remain. Steven A. Murawski, chief scientist of the National Marine Fisheries Service when the well blew, said, "We will see environmental impacts from this for the rest of our lifetimes."

Here's a look at how some key aspects of the ecosystem are doing.

DOLPHINS AND WHALES

"Initially, industry experts were saying, 'The dolphins and the whales, they're smart. They're not going to swim into oiled areas,'" recalled Nancy Kinner, co-director of the Coastal Response Research Center and Center for Spills and Environmental Hazards at the University of New Hampshire.

But cetaceans must surface to breathe, rising through oil that spread across more than 15,300 square miles (40,000 square kilometers) - nearly as big as Switzerland. Each exhalation vaporized oil and gas into

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minuscule droplets, which they then inhaled, Kinner said.

Lung disease and other ailments caused by the spill killed more than 1,000 bottlenose dolphins over several years, many of them in Louisiana's hard-hit Barataria Bay, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration reported. More than one-fifth were aborted, stillborn or died soon after birth. Pregnant Barataria and Mississippi Sound dolphins still give birth far more rarely than in healthy populations. Health checks of Barataria Bay dolphins in 2018 found that lung problems "in some cases ... may be even getting worse," said Lori Schwacke of the National Marine Mammal Foundation.

Whales almost certainly suffered similar oil-caused ailments but can't be safely examined, Schwacke said. NOAA estimated the spill killed 17 percent of the gulf's Bryde's whales, declared endangered in 2019 after their population dwindled to fewer than 100. Other whales are suffering, too.

"The toothed whales, sperm whales, Bryde's whales, right whales ... these populations which were somewhat in jeopardy prior to the oil spill have been declining 5 or 10% a year ever since the oil spill," said Ian MacDonald of Florida State University.

Going forward, some BP money will go toward improving conditions for dolphins and whales. These include studies on reducing effects of human-produced noise, such as seismic airguns and ship propellers, on whales and dolphins, which communicate and navigate by sound.

FISH

How fisheries would survive was hard to fathom while slicks fouled estuaries where many fish spawn, but scientists haven't found any widespread species die-offs, said Chuck Wilson, chief science officer for GoMRI.

"Fisheries in the marshes where the oil came on shore have continued to flourish. Recreational fishing continues to be productive and a very popular activity even in Barataria Bay, Louisiana, where the highest oil impact was," he said.

It's a different story farther out and deeper down, where small fish feed top food and sport fish such as tuna or grouper, as well as whales. Murawski, now a professor at the University of South Florida and director of a GoMRI consortium, said small fish that live about 660 to 3,300 feet (200 to 1,000 meters) deep seemed to be doing well a year after the spill, but then their numbers plummeted by 60 to 80 percent, and haven't returned. Because they hadn't been surveyed before the spill, there's no way to say whether the drop was caused by the spill or 2011 was an exceptional year and numbers are back to normal, he said.

Laboratory research has found that oil damaged fish larvae's developing hearts and bones, MacDonald said.

Future restoration projects include plans to get anglers to use equipment that would slowly lower reef fish they don't keep, rather than simply tossing them back. Another project aims to find the best escape hatches for "bycatch" hauled up in shrimp nets, and persuade shrimpers to use them.

MARSHES

The oil turned tall marsh grass as black as cinders and sank into the muck across Louisiana's coastal marshes, a nursery for an array of birds and fish.

"Once all the roots and so on disintegrate, the whole marsh surface, all the soil, is lost. Given the fact that there is rapid sea-level rise and the land is sinking, it's almost impossible to recover," said marine scientist Boesch. Oiled marsh shorelines that weren't lost immediately were more likely to wash away later.

GoMRI surveys found birds, snails and crabs back at pre-spill densities, Wilson said.

But the insects worry Louisiana State University researcher Linda Hooper-Bui. She found that most insect and spider species were back to 68% to 72% of pre-spill populations by 2016, and she was expecting to tell a story of insect recovery on the 10th anniversary.

Then her funding dried up, but in August 2019, she collected one last round of samples and found surprisingly few insects. "Something is going on right now, and it's deeply affected," she said, but she can't tell what caused it.

The vast majority of oiled wetlands were in Louisiana, where officials expect to use more than \$7 billion in oil spill money to restore the coast, including marshes and barrier islands.

DEEP CORAL AND SEA BOTTOM

Far below the surface, deep-sea corals can live hundreds of years, creating habitats for multitudes of creatures near the bottom of the food web. Because of the BP spill, we also know how they can die.

Swaths of such coral were killed, and they grow so slowly — only a few millimeters a year — that it's hard to imagine how they could be replaced, Boesch said. Researchers found that seven years later, affected but surviving coral were less healthy than unoiled reefs.

Before the spill, scientists didn't know that deep-sea corals were severely hurt by oil dispersing in a plume far below the surface. They discovered that rising oil interacts with plankton and then "snows down from the surface and eventually lands," changing the chemical biology of the sea bed, MacDonald said.

"So these are things we've learned. And none of these are good things," MacDonald said.

Scientists plan to study these deep habitats more extensively, including mapping the gulf's seafloor. To protect the fragile corals, money is being spent to develop techniques for growing and transplanting corals and installing buoys in some places to alert trawlers to the corals' underwater presence.

Young climate activists slowed by pandemic, but not defeated

By **MARTHA IRVINE and CHRISTINA LARSON Associated Press**

Jamie Margolin had not expected to be sitting in her bedroom right now.

The high school senior had prom and graduation coming up, but so much more: A multi-state bus campaign with fellow climate activists. A tour for her new book. Attendance at one of the massive marches that had been planned this week for the 50th anniversary of Earth Day.

Then the pandemic arrived in Seattle, her hometown, and her plans went out the window.

"But still so much to do," Margolin said, perched in front of her computer for a video interview from that bedroom.

Like many other young activists who've helped galvanize what's become a global climate movement, Margolin is not letting a spreading virus stop her. They are organizing in place, from the United States to Ecuador, Uganda, India and beyond.

And while some fear they've lost some momentum in the pandemic, they are determined to keep pushing — and for now, to use technology to their advantage.

Unable to gather en masse as they'd planned this Earth Day, these activists are planning livestreams and webinars to keep the issue of climate front and center on the world stage and in the U.S. presidential race.

One event, Earth Day Live, is being organized by a coalition of youth-led climate groups, including Zero Hour, of which Margolin is a leader (her Twitter profile includes the tag #futurepotus). As is the case with many other young climate activists, she got involved in the movement taking aim at the fossil fuel industry well before Sweden's Greta Thunberg became a global household name.

Online organizing is not as easy in some countries. In Uganda, activist Mulindwa Moses says only about a third of the population has Wi-Fi. Also under lockdown, the 23-year-old graduate student is waiting for his chance to return to planting trees and speaking to his nation's youth in person.

Like the original founders of Earth Day, he is among those who were first inspired by local issues — which they came to connect with global climate change.

While traveling in eastern Uganda, Moses met with families who had lost their homes in mudslides caused by torrential rainfall.

"I remember a girl I had a conversation with — she lost her parents and had to take care of her siblings. She was suffering so much," he said.

So, last year, he began a campaign to encourage citizens to plant "two trees a week" and regrow their forests to combat deforestation and mudslides exacerbated by changing weather patterns.

In Ecuador, 18-year-old Helena Gualinga also has had to pause her world travels.

Born in Ecuador's indigenous Kichwa-speaking Sarayaku community — home to about 1,200 people in the Amazon — she says she learned from the example of her parents and her elders how to speak up for the rights of her people. Their fight has been against a government that they believe has given their land

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too freely to mining and oil companies.

"The energy I remember from my elders growing up" — at community meetings she attended with her parents when she was small — "was that my community was always very worried," she said.

Now, she added, "I know I have a voice."

Moses plans to run for his country's parliament next year. "I want to fight to change the system from the inside," he said.

So does Max Prestigiaco, a freshman at the University of Wisconsin, who is set to take his seat on the city council of Madison, Wisconsin. While fighting the coronavirus has used up much of local government's bandwidth, he still plans this fall to push the platform on which he ran — for his city to become fully sustainable by 2030. It is a lofty and some would say unattainable goal, but he is looking for "the impossible yes."

"Obviously, I wanted the alarm sounded decades ago before I was even born," the 18-year-old said. "But it's too late for incremental change."

Tia Nelson, daughter of the late Sen. Gaylord Nelson of Wisconsin, founder of Earth Day, said her father would appreciate the determination of this generation, as he did the young people who made the first Earth Day in 1970 a great success.

Though the senator went to Washington in 1963, and won support from President Kennedy, his daughter said it took several years to find backing for many of his environmental causes. He came up with the idea of Earth Day, first envisioned as a nationwide "teach-in," after reading a magazine article about college students' impact on U.S. involvement in Vietnam.

Later that same year, the Environmental Protection Agency was born.

"The climate youth movement today is having a significant and important impact in doing exactly what my father had hoped on the first Earth Day — that he would get a public demonstration sufficiently robust to shake the political establishment out of their lethargy," Tia Nelson said. "The youth movement 50 years ago did that. The youth movement today around climate change is doing the same thing."

Nelson, who is climate director at the Wisconsin-based Outrider Foundation, said she's particularly excited at polls showing that many young Republicans care just as much about climate change as Democrats.

Peter Nicholson, who helps lead Foresight Prep, a summer environmental justice program at Chicago's Loyola University, said the coronavirus crisis only highlights the message that "we are all connected."

"Climate change is no less real," he said. "The feedback loop is just much longer."

So for now, Margolin and her peers will use their devices to help foster those connections — something their predecessors could not do remotely.

"Everyone is online anyway," she said. "Maybe they start on Earth Day. But then with online resources, you click one link that leads you to another, leads to another that leads you to contact info."

"And then you just start getting involved."

Other online Earth Day resources:

Smithsonian Earth Summit: <https://earthoptimism.si.edu/2020-summit/>

Earth Day 50: <http://www.earthdayinitiative.org/>

Earth Day for Earthrise: <https://earthrise2020.org/>

Citizens Climate Lobby virtual Earth Day: <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/uniting-from-home-registration-101119077884>

Martha Irvine is an AP national writer and visual journalist. Christina Larson is an AP global science and environment writer.

Storms rake Deep South, 1 week after deadly tornado outbreak

MONTGOMERY, Ala. (AP) — Severe thunderstorms pounded parts of the Deep South with hail, high winds and drenching rains on Sunday as forecasters warned residents to brace for possible overnight tornadoes and flooding across a region reeling from a deadly twister outbreak one week ago.

Tornado watches ranged across parts of Louisiana and Mississippi into Alabama and Georgia on Sunday night. It was the second Sunday in a row that the South was hit with severe weather.

Flash flood warnings were in effect around the region, the National Weather Service said. Its Jackson, Mississippi, office, tweeted video of a roadway awash in rainwater in the city of Hattiesburg, Mississippi, saying some streets there were inundated by heavy rains from a severe storm late Sunday.

The city of Hattiesburg's online site tweeted for people to stay off several roads made impassible by the storms: "We're already flooded out, and we have hours of rain ahead."

The weather service's Storm Prediction Center said it also received reports of telephone poles snapped by a potent storm along a highway near Marion, Mississippi.

High winds also uprooted trees and left blankets of hail on the ground in some areas in Alabama earlier in the day during a first round of severe weather, the National Weather Service reported.

The severe weather threat was expected to continue over parts of the South through the night and carried the risk of strong tornadoes into the early hours Monday, according to the weather service. Tornadoes were a possible threat across parts of Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama Georgia and South Carolina.

A zone extending across the southern parts of Mississippi, Alabama and Georgia was at greatest risk of severe weather and tornadoes, the national Storm Prediction Center projected. The area is home to more than 5 million people and includes cities such as Jackson, Mississippi; Montgomery, Alabama; and Macon, Georgia.

The storm threat comes a week after deadly Easter storms pounded the Deep South. The National Weather Service said more than 100 tornadoes struck the South that Sunday and Monday. Officials said at least 36 people were killed in the two-day outbreak of storms.

As mail voting pushed, some fear loss of in-person option

By CHRISTINA A. CASSIDY and NICHOLAS RICCARDI Associated Press

ATLANTA (AP) — Scrambling to address voting concerns during a pandemic, election officials across the country are eliminating polling places or scaling back opportunities for people to cast ballots in person — a move raising concerns among voting rights groups and some Democrats who say some voters could be disenfranchised.

In Nevada, election officials will open only one polling place per county for its June primary. In Florida, county officials warn they may have to consolidate polling places across the state. In Ohio's primary next week, only the disabled and the homeless will be allowed to vote in person.

The closures come as many state officials are encouraging voters to vote by mail — and expanding opportunities to do so. Many election officials and health experts see mail-in and absentee voting as the best way to keep voters from spreading the coronavirus and to address a shortage of poll workers who are able to work without risking their health.

But advocates say some states are moving so quickly to embrace the shift to mail that they are not doing enough to accommodate certain voters, including the disabled, people who lack regular mail service, groups with little history of absentee voting or those who are simply unable to keep up with last-minute election changes and mail-in deadlines.

"Not everyone can or should vote by mail," said Stacey Abrams, a former Democratic candidate for Georgia governor who now runs Fair Fight Action, a voting rights group.

The concerns over polling places largely have been overlooked in the fight over voting rights during the outbreak, which has so far centered on partisan disputes over mail-in and absentee voting.

Democrats and voting rights groups have filed lawsuits seeking to expand mail and absentee voting options and pushed for an extra \$2 billion to help states adjust their election systems. National Republicans

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are fighting those efforts, while President Donald Trump claims without evidence that mail-in voting is vulnerable to fraud.

But the challenge of securing in-person voting may prove just as contentious and just as likely to curb voter participation in the upcoming primaries, which are largely viewed as a dry run for November. In the chaotic recent Wisconsin election, where voters waited for hours to cast ballots, one expert estimated that the closure of polling sites in Milwaukee and other cities may have kept as many as 100,000 people from casting ballots.

Last week, Democrats sued Nevada's top election official, a Republican, for limiting each county to a single polling location during the state's June 9 primary, alleging that will channel 87% of the state's voters into only two locations. Democrats, who count on big turnout at the polls in the populous county that contains Las Vegas, also sought changes to make mail voting simpler in a state where the overwhelming majority normally vote in person.

A conflict is also brewing in swing state Florida, where the nonpartisan county election coordinators have asked Republican Gov. Ron DeSantis to loosen rules on early voting and allow the consolidation of precinct polling stations for elections in August and November.

Democrats fear that polling places may close in Palm Beach and Broward counties, two dense areas that are their bases in the state. "Any diminution of access by reducing precincts or whatever should be avoided as much as possible," said Terrie Rizzo, the chair of the Florida Democratic Party.

But the rush to eliminate in-person voting can be bipartisan. Democrats' party-run primary in Wyoming was conducted exclusively by mail, as was its one in Alaska. Party officials said they took steps like allowing same-day registration that help compensate for lack of in-person options. Kansas Democrats agreed to eliminate polling places for their May primary. Party chairwoman Vicki Hiatt said in-person voting sites were "going to be too risky."

Ohio, Hawaii, Idaho and New Jersey are also sharply limiting or abolishing in-person voting in coming elections.

Advocates acknowledge election officials are in a difficult position and support an increase in vote by mail for those who want it. But in-person voting, they say, provides an important "fail-safe" in the event of errors or mail delivery issues.

"I really don't buy the argument that it can't be done safely because grocery stores are open now, essential businesses are open right now," said Sylvia Albert of Common Cause. "The businesses that are open now are considered essential and voting is essential."

According to a new report from the liberal Center for American Progress and the NAACP, African-Americans are particularly reliant on in-person voting. In 2018, only 11% cast a ballot by mail — less than half the rate of whites and Latinos.

"There are going to be people who are going to be disenfranchised by moving entirely to a vote-by-mail system," warned Center for American Progress' Danielle Root.

Ohio's April 28 primary eliminates in-person voting for all but those with disabilities or those without a home address. Anyone who fails to request an absentee ballot before the deadline or whose absentee ballot doesn't arrive in time would not be able to vote in person.

That may include Katie Brickner, 39, who lives in a Cleveland suburb. Her absentee ballot application was returned to her last week as undeliverable after water somehow damaged the front of the envelope after she dropped it off with the post office. She immediately mailed another but is worried about getting her ballot back after hearing reports that it's taking a few weeks for applications to be processed.

"I will have no voice in the election and it's really important to me this year," she said.

In Maryland, state election officials were poised to cancel in-person voting but decided to keep at least one polling place open in each of the state's 24 counties after voting rights groups raised concerns.

In Idaho, state election officials said it "simply was not safe for voters, election workers or the larger community" to hold in-person voting for the May 19 primary. The state is mailing absentee ballot applications to voters who haven't requested one and has partnered with local grocery stores who will be providing stamps for those who need them to return their completed ballots.

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Still, the decision to eliminate in-person voting could still pose a barrier for some tribal members in the state. One county has reported the number of absentee ballot requests coming from the Shoshone-Bannock Tribes in southeastern Idaho as "critically low," according to Randy L Teton, tribal spokeswoman.

Teton worries the process for requesting an absentee ballot may pose a challenge for those used to voting in person.

"We're going to need to explain this or delegate a family member that can help their grandma or grandpa on how to get through this," Teton said.

Associated Press writer Bobby Caina Calvin in Tallahassee, Florida, contributed to this report.

Follow Christina Almeida Cassidy on Twitter at https://twitter.com/AP_Christina

Trump, Congress near deal on small business, hospital aid

By HOPE YEN and LISA MASCARO Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Trump administration and Congress expect an agreement Monday on an aid package of up to \$450 billion to boost a small-business loan program that has run out of money and add funds for hospitals and COVID-19 testing.

As talks continued, President Donald Trump said there's a "good chance" of reaching a bipartisan agreement with Democrats.

"We are very close to a deal," Trump said Sunday at the White House.

Along with the small business boost, Trump said the negotiators were looking at "helping our hospitals," particularly hard-hit rural health care providers.

The Senate is scheduled for a pro forma session Monday, but no vote has been set.

The House announced it could meet as soon as Wednesday for a vote on the pending package, according to a schedule update from Majority Leader Steny Hoyer, D-Md.

With small-business owners reeling during a coronavirus outbreak that has shuttered much economic activity, Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin said he was hopeful of a deal that could pass Congress quickly and get the Small Business Administration program back up by midweek.

"I'm hopeful that we can get that done," Mnuchin said Sunday.

Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., also said he believed a deal could be reached. "We still have a few more details to deal with," he said.

The emerging accord links the administration's effort to replenish a small-business with Democrats' demands for more money for hospitals and virus testing. It would provide \$300 billion for small-business payroll program, and \$50 billion would be available for small business disaster fund. Additionally, it would bring \$75 billion for hospitals and \$25 billion for testing, according to those involved in the talks.

On a conference call Sunday afternoon that included Trump, Mnuchin and Republican senators, Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., indicated the only remaining item for discussion involved the money for testing, according to a Senate GOP leadership aide who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss a private call.

But Democrats have been insisting on boosting funding to cash-strapped states and local governments whose revenues have cratered. In weekend talks, they had proposed \$150 billion for the effort.

"We are pushing hard," Schumer said.

But Mnuchin and McConnell reiterated on the call with senators that money for state and local governments as well as food stamps would not be included in the package, according to the GOP aide.

"The president is willing to consider that in the next bill, but wants to get this over the finish line with a focus on small businesses, hospitals and testing," Mnuchin said.

He said he's been in touch with GOP leaders including House Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy, R-Calif., and all are "on board with the same plan."

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., predicted an agreement would be reached "soon."

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Under the emerging deal, the government's Paycheck Protection Program for small businesses would get roughly \$300 billion, according to Mnuchin. The Small Business Administration program has been swamped by companies applying for loans and reached its appropriations limit last Thursday after approving nearly 1.7 million loans. That left thousands of small businesses in limbo as they sought help. An additional \$50 billion in the evolving deal would go for disaster loans.

About \$75 billion would go to U.S. hospitals, for those straining under a ballooning coronavirus caseload as well as those struggling to stay financially afloat after suspending elective surgeries during the pandemic. About \$25 billion would be added for COVID-19 testing, something states have said was urgently needed.

Republican Maryland Gov. Larry Hogan, who leads the National Governors' Association, said he and other governors believe that aid for state and local government is "desperately needed," but that it may not be an issue worth fighting over for now.

Democratic New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo said states needed money from the federal government to ramp up testing, and he blasted legislation that wouldn't provide it.

"You have the president saying 15 times, 'It's up to the governors, it's up to the governors, it's up to the governors,'" he said. "And then they're going to pass a piece of legislation that gives you know what to states: zero, zilch, nada, niente. Whatever language you want to say it, nothing."

The SBA loans, based on a company's payroll costs, offer owners forgiveness if they retain workers or rehire those who have been laid off. The law provides for forgiveness for companies in any industry — even businesses like hedge funds and law firms. There's a limit of \$100,000 on the amount of employees' compensation that can be considered when loan forgiveness is calculated.

Mnuchin, Schumer and Hogan appeared on CNN's "State of the Union," and Clark spoke on CBS' "Face the Nation."

Associated Press writer Andrew Taylor contributed to this report.

Reports suggest many have had coronavirus with no symptoms

By **MARILYNN MARCHIONE AP Chief Medical Writer**

A flood of new research suggests that far more people have had the coronavirus without any symptoms, fueling hope that it will turn out to be much less lethal than originally feared.

While that's clearly good news, it also means it's impossible to know who around you may be contagious. That complicates decisions about returning to work, school and normal life.

In the last week, reports of silent infections have come from a homeless shelter in Boston, a U.S. Navy aircraft carrier, pregnant women at a New York hospital, several European countries and California.

The head of the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention says 25% of infected people might not have symptoms. The vice chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Gen. John Hyten, thinks it may be as high as 60% to 70% among military personnel.

None of these numbers can be fully trusted because they're based on flawed and inadequate testing, said Dr. Michael Mina of Harvard's School of Public Health.

Collectively, though, they suggest "we have just been off the mark by huge, huge numbers" for estimating total infections, he said.

Worldwide, more than 2.3 million infections and more than 160,000 deaths have been confirmed. The virus has caused nearly unprecedented economic and social harm since its existence was reported in early January.

STEALTH CASES

Based on known cases, health officials have said the virus usually causes mild or moderate flu-like illness. Now evidence is growing that a substantial number of people may have no symptoms at all.

Scientists in Iceland screened 6% of its population to see how many had previously undetected infections and found that about 0.7% tested positive. So did 13% of a group at higher risk because of recent travel or exposure to someone sick.

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Aboard the aircraft carrier USS Theodore Roosevelt, where one crew member died from the virus, "the rough numbers are that 40 percent are symptomatic," said Vice Adm. Phillip Sawyer, deputy commander of naval operations. The ratio may change if more develop symptoms later, he warned.

In New York, a hospital tested all pregnant women coming in to deliver over a two-week period. Nearly 14% of those who arrived with no symptoms of coronavirus turned out to have it. Of the 33 positive cases, 29 had no symptoms when tested, although some developed them later.

Previously, tests on passengers and crew from the Diamond Princess cruise ship found nearly half who tested positive had no symptoms at the time. Researchers estimate that 18% of infected people never developed any.

FLAWED METHODS

These studies used tests that look for bits of the virus from throat and nose swabs, which can miss cases. Someone can test negative one day if there's not much virus to detect and then positive the next.

Symptoms also may not appear when someone is tested but turn up later. One Japanese study found more than half of those who had no symptoms when they tested positive later felt sick.

Better answers may come from newer tests that check blood for antibodies, substances the immune system makes to fight the virus. But the accuracy of these, too, is still to be determined.

On Friday, researchers reported results from antibody tests on 3,300 people in California's Santa Clara county: Between 1.5% and 2.8% have been infected, they claimed. That would mean 48,000 to 81,000 cases in the county — more than 50 times the number that have been confirmed.

The work has not been formally published or reviewed, but some scientists were quick to question it. Participants were recruited through Facebook ads, which would attract many people likely to be positive who have had symptoms and want to know if the coronavirus was the reason. Some neighborhoods also had way more participants than others, and "hot spots" within the county might have made infections seem more common than they are elsewhere.

Ships, maternity wards and single counties also don't provide data that can be used to generalize about what's happening elsewhere. And many of the figures have come from snapshots, not research on wide populations over time.

NEXT STEPS

Antibody testing in particular needs to be done "in an unbiased approach" on groups of people that are representative of the geographic, social, racial and other conditions, Mina said.

The CDC and other groups plan such studies, and they could guide public health advice on returning to normal life for people in certain areas.

If infections are more widespread than previously understood, it's possible that more people have developed some level of immunity to the virus. That could stifle the spread through what's called herd immunity, but scientists caution that there is still much to learn about whether mild illnesses confer immunity and how long it might last.

It will probably be months before enough reliable testing has been done to answer those questions and others, including how widespread infections have been and the virus's true mortality rate, which has only been estimated so far.

"If they've all seen the virus before, then maybe you can relax in that neighborhood" and ease social distancing, Mina said. "We're not anywhere close where we need to be" on antibody testing to do that yet, he said.

AP writers Mike Stobbe in New York and Robert Burns and Lolita Baldor in Washington contributed to this report.

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

Lives Lost: New Jersey mom, son together in life and death

By DEEPTI HAJELA Associated Press

For almost 30 years, they were inseparable — the devoted mom and the son whose world revolved around her.

Death, it turned out, would be no different. Carolyn Martins-Reitz died of the coronavirus last month, and just over a week later, so did Thomas Martins.

"I find some peace knowing that he's with her," said Joni Lewin, who's Martins-Reitz's lifelong best friend and Martins' godmother.

Martins-Reitz, 55, of Kearny, New Jersey, was the primary caretaker for her nearly 30-year-old son, who had Down syndrome. They both started struggling with symptoms of the virus toward the end of March, said Rudolph Reitz, Martins-Reitz's husband and Martins' stepfather.

He believes Martins-Reitz being taken to the hospital may have worsened his stepson's condition.

"What we believe accelerated his illness to the point of pneumonia was the unannounced departure of his mother with the house full of paramedics," Reitz said. "That was pretty traumatic for him to watch his mother be taken away."

Martins-Reitz — who had underlying health issues, according to her husband — died at a hospital on March 28; Martins followed on April 6, his 30th birthday.

EDITOR'S NOTE: This is part of an ongoing series of stories remembering people around the world who have died during the coronavirus pandemic.

Martins-Reitz, a talented artist who worked part time for the Archdiocese of Newark, was "one of the smartest, kindest, gentlest" people, said Reitz, her husband of 22 years. She was dedicated to her children — Thomas and his younger sister, Sharon Reitz — and to ensuring her son had every opportunity to thrive.

Lewin recalled how she and Martins-Reitz became instant friends when they met as young girls.

"We were inseparable for many, many years," she said.

She was there as Martins-Reitz advocated for her son to get into the learning program where she felt he would be happiest.

"When you have a child with Down syndrome, you always want to make sure your child gets every opportunity that they possibly can — she was a force in that area," Lewin said. "She just loved him dearly."

Martins was like his mother, Lewin said, "he developed her persona of being so kind and welcoming."

He "just loved life, he loved people," Reitz said, adding that his stepson loved "telling everyone about movies."

Lewin said her godson was "just a lovely light to be around, he had a very positive energy."

"Whenever he entered the room, it was like, 'Thomas is here!'" she said.

The whole family was active in their church, St. Casimir in Newark, where Martins had been an altar server along with his sister, Reitz said.

Martins was already on a ventilator by the time his mother died, so he never knew she was gone, Reitz said.

Reitz and Lewin wonder if Martins made it to April to reach his 30th birthday.

"He was extremely excited for his upcoming birthday, making sure that we were going to be able to get him a party," Reitz recalled.

Despite his illness, Martins still received a celebration, with hospital staff getting deliveries of pizza and cake from the Felician School in Lodi, New Jersey, where he attended a program for adults with developmental disabilities.

"It's almost like his subconscious must have heard or sensed that, that night he passed," Reitz said. "He

waited for his birthday.”

Any memorial or Mass for mother and son will have to wait until social distancing restrictions have been lifted.

Then, Reitz said, their remains are likely to be interred in a vault or mausoleum — together, of course.

Hajela reported from Essex County, New Jersey.

‘Under siege’: Overwhelmed Brooklyn care home tolls 55 dead

By BERNARD CONDON, MATT SEDENSKY and JENNIFER PELTZ Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — As residents at a nursing home in Kirkland, Washington, began dying in late February from a coronavirus outbreak that would eventually take 43 lives, there was little sign of trouble at the Cobble Hill Health Center, a 360-bed facility in an upscale section of Brooklyn.

Its Facebook page posted a cheerful story encouraging relatives to quiz their aging loved ones about their lives, and photos of smiling third graders at a nearby school making flower arrangements for residents.

That quickly changed. By the middle of March, the CEO began sending increasingly alarmed emails about banning visitors, screening staff, confining residents, wiping down all surfaces, and having all-hands-on-deck meetings to prepare everyone for the coming coronavirus “freight train.”

“I’ll be darned if I’m not going to do everything in my power to protect them,” Donny Tuchman wrote before things got worse. More than 100 staffers, nearly a third of the workforce, went out sick. Those left began wearing garbage bags because of a shortage of protective gear. Not a single resident has been able to get tested for the virus to this day.

Now listed with 55 deaths it can only assume were caused by COVID-19, among the most of any such facility in the country, Cobble Hill Health Center has become yet another glaring example of the nation’s struggle to control the rapid spread of the coronavirus in nursing homes that care for the most frail and vulnerable.

Cobble Hill’s grim toll surpasses not only Kirkland’s but the 49 deaths at a home outside of Richmond, Virginia, 48 dead at a veteran’s home in Holyoke, Mass., and five other homes in outer boroughs of New York City that have at least 40 deaths each.

Out of an Associated Press tally of 8,003 nursing home deaths nationwide, a third of them are in New York state.

AP interviews with friends and relatives who have visited the Cobble Hill Health Center in recent weeks, as well as the home’s own statements, paint a picture of a facility overwhelmed and unequipped to deal with its coronavirus outbreak, with shortages of staff, personal protective equipment and the availability of reliable testing.

“They were under siege,” said Daniel Arbeeney, who brought his ailing 88-year-old father from a hospital to the home in late March. “They were doing the best they could, as far as we could tell at arm’s length, under siege.”

Tuchman told the AP on Sunday that he believes many other homes have more deaths than Cobble Hill but his has been singled out for its honesty. He said it responded to the state’s voluntary survey with cases in which it was “possible” COVID-19 could be a factor, since his home wasn’t able to test any due to the lack of available kits. He also said he reported 50 deaths, not 55, though the state repeated that tally Sunday.

“There’s been a lot of lip service about how vulnerable nursing homes have been, and everyone has the best intentions, but it didn’t materialize,” Tuchman said. “The PPE didn’t materialize, the staffing surge didn’t materialize, the testing didn’t materialize. ... How did we expect this not to spread?”

Though Tuchman doesn’t know for sure how the virus got into Cobble Hill, he noted there has been a parade of paramedics and staffers allowed into the building each day who were screened with health questions and temperature checks, not enough to keep out those who are sick but not showing symptoms.

Soon after news broke of Cobble Hill’s death toll, Steven Vince went there to talk to administrators about

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his recently passed uncle, whose death certificate listed him possibly having COVID. An administrator told him they were confident his uncle did not have the virus.

"It's very surprising because I don't think anyone from the facility contacted us to tell us anything like this or basically bring this to our attention in any way," he said.

Eva Buchmuller, a New York City artist whose best friend has lived in Cobble Hill with Alzheimer's for three years, said she wasn't that surprised the virus spread in the nursing home's cramped quarters, with small rooms tightly packed along narrow corridors and residents not allowed to open windows. She believes it's highly likely her friend is infected.

"How could you avoid not getting the virus?" she said, adding that it's not overcrowded but "always, always filled up."

Built in a stately brick building that once was a 19th-century hospital, Cobble Hill was most recently rated three out of five stars by the federal government for overall quality and the facility has a complaint rate that's half that of the statewide average for nursing homes.

Its beds are in high demand — it has 98 percent occupancy, according to the state — in a city that has seen closures in nursing homes that developers have eyed for apartments.

Over the years, it's shown signs of innovation. It has, at various points, taught massage therapy to nursing assistants, housed a small alternative public high school, brought local artists in to teach residents dance, offered music therapy and was at the forefront of nursing homes setting up Alzheimer's units and cutting reliance on antipsychotics that can leave residents with dementia.

In early 2018, Cobble Hill boasted on its website that it was hosting a delegation of 18 physicians and hospital administrators from Hubei Province, China — which would become the global epicenter of the coronavirus outbreak — "to see best practices first hand."

Earlier this month, Daniel Arbeeney and his family decided to move his elderly father — who was not believed to have COVID-19 — from the Cobble Hill facility to the family's home on a nearby block. After he left, the family helped coordinate a donation of face shields and doesn't blame the nursing home for the outbreak or its outcome.

"To me, it's just a bad situation," he said. "They were dealt a bad set of cards."

AP reporters Candice Choi, Jim Mustian, David R. Martin, Anthony Izaguirre and investigative news researcher Randy R. Herschaft contributed to this report.

What you need to know today about the virus pandemic

By The Associated Press *undefined*

The global lockdown put in place to stem the spread of the coronavirus is hurting the illegal drug trade. Pressure continues to grow on governments to loosen restrictions ease the economic pain of lockdowns. In Germany, breweries are threatened with permanent closure. In the U.S., the coronavirus is accelerating the decline in the coal industry.

Still, there were occasional signs of hope: South Korea reported just eight more cases of the coronavirus on Sunday, the first time a daily increase has dropped to single digits in about two months. And in New York, the daily toll of coronavirus deaths has hit its lowest point in more than two weeks.

Here are some of The Associated Press' top stories Sunday on the 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:

- Experts have deep skepticism over North Korea's claim to have zero infections.
- California corrections officials announced the first prison inmate death from complications related to COVID-19.
- Orthodox Christian churches, including those in Russia, remain closed to worshipers on their holiest day of the year, Easter.

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— The Trump administration and Congress are negotiating an aid package to replenish a loan program for small businesses that ran out of money.

— For-profit colleges are ramping up advertising amid that the coronavirus pandemic will push unemployed workers back to school, helping revive the industry.

— A Broadway star must have his leg amputated following coronavirus complications.

AP FACT CHECK:

President Donald Trump is wrongly casting blame on governors and the Obama administration for shortages in coronavirus testing. He has also suggested that the U.S. response to the virus is better than many other countries', but it's too soon to tell.

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. 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 the spread of the virus is through frequent hand-washing with soap and water. The 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.

Phones should also be washed. Here's how.

TRACKING THE VIRUS: Drill down and zoom in at the individual county level and you can access numbers that will show you the situation where you are, and where loved ones or people you're worried about live.

ONE NUMBER:

— 1,000,000: Europe logs more than 1 million confirmed cases of the coronavirus.

IN OTHER NEWS:

— **MAKING GOOGLE, FACEBOOK PAY:** Global digital platforms Google and Facebook will be forced to pay for news content in Australia, the government said as the coronavirus pandemic causes a collapse in advertising revenue.

— **LIFE-CHANGING:** Idris Elba says he and his wife had their lives "turned around" after contracting the coronavirus.

— **LUCKY CRUISE:** Travelers on a virus-free around-the-world cruise say they enjoyed "a stroke of good luck."

— **RESPIRE FOR THE LONELY:** Nursing home in France tests everyone in hopes of identifying those who must be isolated so that others can leave their rooms and participate in activities.

— **HE TRAINED THEM WELL:** Ex-medical students — now professionals — help treat a former professor suffering from COVID-19.

— **LOCKDOWN FREEBIES:** Companies offer free books, dance lessons and movies as a way to ease the lockdown pain.

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

North Korean defectors, experts question zero virus claim

By **HYUNG-JIN KIM** Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — As a doctor in North Korea during the SARS outbreak and flu pandemic, Choi Jung Hun didn't have much more than a thermometer to decide who should be quarantined.

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Barely paid, with no test kits and working with antiquated equipment, if anything, he and his fellow doctors in the northeastern city of Chongjin were often unable to determine who had the disease, even after patients died, said Choi, who fled to South Korea in 2012.

Local health officials weren't asked to confirm cases or submit them to the central government in Pyongyang, Choi said in an interview with The Associated Press.

Experts say North Korea's reluctance to admit major outbreaks of disease, its wrecked medical infrastructure and its extreme sensitivity to any potential threat to Kim Jong Un's authoritarian rule means that Pyongyang is likely handling the current coronavirus pandemic in the same manner.

This has led to widespread skepticism over the nation's claim to have zero infections.

"It's a lie," Choi, 45, said. "Year after year, and in every season, diverse infectious diseases repeatedly occur but North Korea says there isn't any outbreak."

Outsiders strongly suspect that coronavirus, which has infected more than 2.4 million people, has already spread to North Korea because it shares a long, porous border with China, its most important trading partner and biggest aid benefactor. China is where the first known coronavirus cases were reported in December.

North Korea, which has quarantined tens of thousands and delayed the school year as precautionary steps, officially sealed its border with China in January, but smuggling across the frontier still likely happens. Activist groups in Seoul said they've been told by contacts in North Korea that people had died of the virus. Those claims cannot be independently verified.

While there have been no reliable outside reports of mass infections in North Korea yet, the country's tight control on information allows few foreign experts to assert with an authority that the North's quarantine regime has been successful. As seen in Singapore, the coronavirus can surge again, and North Korea's powerful Politburo said last week it would further bolster anti-epidemic steps.

"I think a considerable number of people could die. But that won't be disclosed to the outside world because the North is not even able to diagnose patients with (the coronavirus)," said Kim Sin-gon, a professor at Korea University College of Medicine in Seoul. He said North Korea is struggling to treat seriously ill patients, and noted U.N. reports that about 40% of its 24 million people are undernourished.

Russia's foreign ministry said in February it donated 1,500 coronavirus test kits to North Korea, and observers say similar kits have also been shipped there from China. Some relief agencies, including UNICEF and Doctors Without Borders, said they sent gloves, masks, goggles and hand hygiene products to North Korea.

North Korea's main newspaper recently called its public health system "the most superior in the world" and said that Kim Jong Un's devotion to improving it is the reason why there are no infections.

North Korea's socialist free medical service collapsed in the mid-1990s amid economic chaos and a famine that killed an estimated hundreds of thousands. In recent years, Kim Jong Un has built new hospitals and modernized some medical facilities as the economy improved, but most of the medical benefits still largely go to his ruling elite, experts say.

Dozens of refugees interviewed in a recent study said they felt the North's health care system has become poorer under Kim Jong Un, according to Min Ha-ju, a North Korean refugee-turned-researcher. She said the gap between the haves and the havenots in terms of medical service is deepening because a crumbled state rationing system has led to a burgeoning private economy.

Choi, the doctor who worked in North Korea, said his monthly salary was the equivalent of about 2 kilograms (4.4 pounds) of rice and that he received cigarettes from patients in return for telling them what medicine they should buy at markets.

Cho Chung-hui, a former local North Korean official who is now with the Seoul-based NGO Good Farmers, said he gave cash to doctors to cure gastritis and enteritis.

Choi and Cho said measles, chickenpox, cholera, typhoid, paratyphoid, hepatitis and tuberculosis repeatedly swept through North Korea when they were there. Choi said he wore no masks, gloves or protective gear during outbreaks and used equipment manufactured in the 1960-70s.

During the 2002-2003 SARS outbreak, Choi said hundreds of people in Chongjin died after suffering flu-

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like symptoms during eight months of intense quarantine.

"But no (doctors) can dare to diagnose the dead with SARS. There wasn't an order to confirm the cause of their deaths, and we didn't have diagnostic kits," said Choi, now a researcher at a Korea University-affiliated institute.

During a 2009 flu pandemic, Choi said he didn't have diagnostic kits and asked patients with fevers what antibiotics they had used before placing some under quarantine. After many patients died, he speculated their deaths were likely linked to the flu.

In a highly unusual admission of a disease outbreak apparently aimed at winning outside aid, North Korea's state media said in December 2009 that nine people in Pyongyang and the northwestern border town of Sinuiju had contracted the flu.

Some say North Korea may not have big clusters of infections because it doesn't have densely populated cities and strictly restricts freedom of movement and association. But many others disagree, saying all North Koreans are required to attend diverse state-organized group activities and a lack of adequate sanitation could worsen outbreaks. There are also questions about the workings of North Korea's quarantine campaign.

The North's medical system is like a "a broken rusty pistol which doesn't even have a bullet because it hasn't been maintained for a long time," Choi said.

Lockdown politics increasingly pit economic, health concerns

By **WILL WEISSERT, JILL COLVIN and FRANK JORDANS** Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The global health crisis is taking a nasty political turn with tensions worsening between governments locked down to keep the coronavirus at bay and people yearning to restart stalled economies and forestall fears of a depression.

Protesters worrying about their livelihoods and bucking infringements on their freedom have taken to the streets in some places. A few countries are acting to ease restrictions, but most of the world remains unified in insisting it's much too early to take more aggressive steps.

In the United States, there is clear evidence of the mounting pressure. The Trump administration says parts of the nation are ready to begin a gradual return to normalcy. Yet some state leaders say their response to the pandemic is hindered by a woefully inadequate federal response.

After insisting the country's virus testing system was without fault, President Donald Trump announced Sunday evening that he would be using the Defense Production Act to compel increased manufacturing of testing swabs — one of several products governors have been begging the president to help them acquire. White House officials will also be holding a call Monday with the nation's governors to help walk them through where to find supplies, he said.

Trump also remained defensive, however, vowing that there were enough swabs to go around. "Swabs are easy," the president said, bringing one to his news briefing and waving it in front of reporters.

That came hours after Washington state's Democratic governor, Jay Inslee, accused Trump of encouraging insubordination and "illegal activity" by goading protesters who flouted shelter-in-place rules his own administration has encouraged.

"To have an American president to encourage people to violate the law, I can't remember any time during my time in America where we have seen such a thing," Inslee told ABC's "This Week." He said it was "dangerous because it can inspire people to ignore things that actually can save their lives."

Trump supporters in several states have ignored social distancing and stay-at-home orders, gathering to demand that governors lift controls on public activity. The largest protest drew thousands to Lansing, Mich., on Wednesday, and others have featured hundreds in several states. The president has invoked their rallying cry, calling on some states with Democratic governors to "LIBERATE," and he defended the demonstrations Sunday night, saying "these people love our country. They want to go back to work."

Inslee likened Trump's response to "schizophrenia." Larry Hogan, the Republican governor of Maryland, said it "just doesn't make any sense."

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"We're sending completely conflicting messages out to the governors and to the people, as if we should ignore federal policy and federal recommendations," Hogan said on CNN's "State of the Union."

Shutdowns have disrupted economic, social, cultural and religious life and plunged the world into a deep economic slump unseen since the Great Depression. Tens of millions of workers have lost their jobs and millions more fear they'll be next.

With the arc of infection different in every nation and across U.S. states, proposals have differed for coping with the virus that has killed more than 165,000.

China, where the pandemic began, has lifted travel and other restrictions, but customer traffic has been slow to return.

Germany is enforcing social distancing but on Monday intends to begin allowing some small stores, like those selling furniture and baby goods, to reopen. Spain said children can leave their homes beginning April 27. Albania planned to let its mining and oil industries reopen Monday, along with hundreds of businesses.

The death toll in the U.S. was near 41,000 with more than 758,000 confirmed infections, while the global total has surpassed 2.4 million, according to a tally by Johns Hopkins University. The European Center for Disease Control said the continent now has more than 1 million confirmed cases and almost 100,000 deaths from the coronavirus.

The true figures are likely significantly higher since mild infections can be missed, testing is limited and many countries have been too overwhelmed by illnesses to effectively count them or have tried to underplay the extent of their outbreaks.

The International Monetary Fund expects the global economy to contract 3% this year. That's a far bigger loss than 2009's 0.1% after the global financial crisis. Still, many governments are resisting pressures to abruptly relax lockdowns.

"We must not let down our guard until the last confirmed patient is recovered," said South Korea's President Moon Jae-in.

In Britain, which reported 596 more coronavirus-related hospital deaths on Sunday, officials also said they're not ready to ease efforts to curb the virus's spread. U.K. minister Michael Gove told the BBC that pubs and restaurants "will be among the last" to leave the lockdown, which is now in place until May 7.

France's health agency urged the public to stick to social distancing measures that have been extended until at least May 11 and Prime Minister Edouard Philippe said people could be required to wear masks on public transportation, and suggested no one plan faraway summer vacations even after that.

Trump is pushing to begin easing the U.S. lockdown in some states even before his own May 1 deadline, a plan that health experts and governors from both parties say will require a dramatic increase in testing capacity. But Vice President Mike Pence insisted the country has "sufficient testing today" for states to begin working toward the initial phases of reopening their economies.

California Gov. Gavin Newsom, a Democrat, said his state can't begin lifting restrictions until it is able to test more people daily. "Right now, we're not even close as a nation, let alone as a state, to where we should be on testing," he said.

Economic concerns that have increasingly collided with measures to protect public health are popping up throughout the U.S.

Business leaders in Louisiana have slammed New Orleans Mayor LaToya Cantrell for imposing restrictions they say have unfairly shuttered economic activity outside the city. A full-page ad in The Times-Picayune/The New Orleans Advocate newspaper urged an easing of lockdowns, even as the paper featured nearly nine pages of obituaries in a city hard-hit by the virus.

States including Texas and Indiana have announced plans to allow some retail and other activity to resume. But in New York, where the daily coronavirus death toll hit its lowest point in more than two weeks, officials warn that heavily effected areas aren't ready to ease shutdowns of schools, businesses and gatherings.

Geopolitical and religious tensions stretching back centuries have further complicated the global response to the virus. But Jordan's King Abdullah II said the outbreak has made "partners" out of "our enemies of yesterday, or those that were not friendly countries yesterday — whether we like it or not."

"I think the quicker we as leaders and politicians figure that out, the quicker we can bring this under control," he told CBS' "Face the Nation."

Jordans reported from Berlin. Associated Press writers worldwide contributed to this report.

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

16 killed in shooting rampage, deadliest in Canadian history

By **ROB GILLIES** Associated Press

TORONTO (AP) — A gunman disguised as a police officer shot people in their homes and set fires in a rampage across the Canadian province of Nova Scotia that killed 16 people, the deadliest such attack in the country's history. Officials said Sunday the suspected shooter was also dead.

A police officer was among those killed. Several bodies were found inside and outside one home in the small, rural town of Portapique, about 60 miles (100 kilometers) north of Halifax — what police called the first scene. Bodies were also found at other locations. The assault began late Saturday, and authorities believe the shooter may have targeted his first victims but then began attacking randomly.

Overnight, police began advising residents of the town — already on lockdown because of the coronavirus pandemic — to lock their doors and stay in their basements. Several homes in the area were set on fire as well.

Police identified the man believed to be the shooter as Gabriel Wortman, 51, who was thought to live part-time in Portapique. Authorities said he wore a police uniform at one point and made his car look like a Royal Canadian Mounted Police cruiser.

Police first announced that they had arrested Wortman at a gas station in Enfield, outside Halifax, but later said he had died. It was not clear how, and they did not explain further.

"This is one of the most senseless acts of violence in our province's history," said Nova Scotia Premier Stephen McNeil.

RCMP spokesman Daniel Brien confirmed that 16 people had been killed in addition to the suspect. The dead officer was identified as Constable Heidi Stevenson, a mother of two and a 23-year veteran of the force. Another officer was also injured.

Mass shootings are relatively rare in Canada. The country overhauled its gun-control laws after gunman Marc Lepine killed 14 women and himself at Montreal's Ecole Polytechnique college in 1989. Before this weekend's rampage, that had been the country's worst.

It is now illegal to possess an unregistered handgun or any kind of rapid-fire weapon in Canada. The country also requires training, a personal risk assessment, two references, spousal notification and criminal record checks to purchase a weapon.

"As a country, in moments like these, we come together to support one another. Together we will mourn with the families of the victims, and help them get through this difficult time," Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said in a written news release.

While they believe the attack did not begin as random, police did not say what the initial motive was. RCMP Chief Superintendent Chris Leather said many of the victims did not know the shooter.

"That fact that this individual had a uniform and a police car at his disposal certainly speaks to it not being a random act," Leather said. He added that police believe he acted alone.

Leather said they would investigate whether the attack had anything to do with the coronavirus pandemic but no link has been found thus far.

At one point, there was an exchange of gunfire between the suspect and police, he said.

Late Sunday morning, there were half a dozen police vehicles at the scene of the gas station where the suspect died. Yellow police tape surrounded the gas pumps, and a large silver-colored SUV was being investigated.

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Cpl. Lisa Croteau, a spokeswoman with the provincial force, said police received a call about “a person with firearms” late Saturday night, and the investigation “evolved into an active shooting investigation.”

Christine Mills, a resident of the area, said it had been a frightening night for the small town, with armed officers patrolling the streets. In the morning, helicopters flew overhead searching for the suspect. “It’s nerve-wracking because you don’t know if somebody has lost their mind and is going to beat in your front door,” she said.

Tom Taggart, a lawmaker who represents the Portapique area in the Municipality of Colchester, said the quiet community has been shaken.

“This is just an absolutely wonderful, peaceful quiet community and the idea that this could happen in our community is unbelievable,” Taggart said by phone from his home in nearby Bass River.

A Gabriel Wortman is listed as a denturist — a person who makes dentures — in the city of Dartmouth, near Halifax, according to the Denturist Society of Nova Scotia website. A suspect photo issued by the RCMP appears to be of the same person seen in video footage being interviewed about dentures by CTV Atlantic in 2014.

Mills also said that Wortman was known locally as someone who divided his time between a residence in Halifax and a residence in Portapique.

Taggart said he didn’t know Wortman well, but spoke to him a few times when he telephoned about municipal issues.

Taggart described knowing Wortman’s “lovely big home” on Portapique Beach Road.

Trump says he’s close to a deal with Congress on virus aid

By HOPE YEN and LISA MASCARO Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Trump administration and Congress are nearing an agreement on an aid package of up to \$450 billion to boost a small-business loan program that has run out of money and add funds for hospitals and COVID-19 testing.

President Donald Trump said Sunday, “We’re getting close to a deal.”

Along with the small business boost, Trump said the negotiators were looking at “helping our hospitals,” particularly hard-hit rural health care providers.

A deal could be announced Monday, the president said at a White House briefing.

With small-business owners reeling during a coronavirus outbreak that has shuttered much economic activity, Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin said earlier Sunday he was hopeful of a deal that could pass Congress quickly and get the Small Business Administration program back up by midweek.

“I think we’re very close to a deal today. I’m hopeful that we can get that done,” he said.

Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., said he believed a deal could be reached late Sunday or early Monday. “We still have a few more details to deal with,” he said.

The Senate is scheduled for a pro forma session Monday, but no vote has been set.

The House announced it could meet as soon as Wednesday for a recorded vote on the pending package, according to a schedule update from Majority Leader Steny Hoyer, D-Md.

Under the emerging deal there would be \$300 billion for small-business payroll program, and \$50 billion would be available for small business disaster fund. Additionally, it would bring \$75 billion for hospitals and \$25 billion for testing, according to those involved in the talks

On a conference call Sunday afternoon that included Trump, Mnuchin and Republican senators, Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., indicated the only remaining item for discussion involved the money for testing, according to a Senate GOP leadership aide who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss a private call.

Under the emerging deal, the government’s Paycheck Protection Program for small businesses would get roughly \$300 billion, according to Mnuchin. The program has been swamped by companies applying for loans and reached its appropriations limit last Thursday after approving nearly 1.7 million loans. That left thousands of small businesses in limbo as they sought help. An additional \$50 billion in the evolving

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deal would go for disaster loans.

About \$75 billion would go to U.S. hospitals, for those straining under a ballooning coronavirus caseload as well as those struggling to stay financially afloat after suspending elective surgeries during the pandemic. About \$25 billion would be added for COVID-19 testing, something states have said was urgently needed. The money for hospitals and testing were priorities sought by congressional Democrats.

But additional aid to state and local governments would be left out, Mnuchin said. Democrats have been keen to boost funding to cash-strapped states and local governments whose revenues have cratered, but the issue threatened to provoke fights between large, high-tax states like California and New York and smaller states more typically run by Republicans.

"The president is willing to consider that in the next bill, but wants to get this over the finish line with a focus on small businesses, hospitals and testing," Mnuchin said.

He said he's been in touch with GOP leaders including McConnell and House Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy, R-Calif., and all are "on board with the same plan." On the Sunday call with senators, Mnuchin and McConnell reiterated that money for state and local governments as well as food stamps would not be included in the package, according to the GOP aide.

"I'm hopeful that we can reach an agreement, that the Senate can pass this tomorrow, and that the House can take it up on Tuesday, and, Wednesday, we'd be back up and running," Mnuchin said earlier in his TV interview.

Schumer said Democrats would insist on aid for state and local governments. They had submitted a compromise offer Friday that would provide \$150 billion for states as well as cities, counties and towns based on need. □Key swing states for Trump in the November presidential election — Pennsylvania, Michigan, Ohio and Wisconsin — would receive billions in new aid under the proposal, according to a senior Democratic aide who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss details of private negotiations.

"We are pushing hard," Schumer said. "We don't want our police, our firefighters, our EMTs, our bus drivers — this is not an abstract issue. We don't want them fired."

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., predicted an agreement would be reached "soon."

"I am pleased to report that we have been engaged in bipartisan negotiations on our interim legislation, and our progress is encouraging," she said in a letter late Saturday to Democratic colleagues.

Republican Maryland Gov. Larry Hogan, who leads the National Governors' Association, said he and other governors believe that aid for state and local government is "desperately needed," but that it may not be an issue worth fighting over for now.

"I don't think the deal is finalized yet," he said. "But, look, we do not want to hold up funding to these small businesses. And we hope that the Democrats and the Republicans in the Senate can come together in a bipartisan way and get something moving for the American people."

Democratic New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo said states needed money from the federal government to ramp up testing, and he blasted legislation that wouldn't provide it.

"You have the president saying 15 times, 'It's up to the governors, it's up to the governors, it's up to the governors,'" he said. "And then they're going to pass a piece of legislation that gives you know what to states: zero, zilch, nada, niente. Whatever language you want to say it, nothing. But then how are the states supposed to do this?"

The SBA loans, based on a company's payroll costs, offer owners forgiveness if they retain workers or rehire those who have been laid off. The law provides for forgiveness for companies in any industry — even businesses like hedge funds and law firms. There's a limit of \$100,000 on the amount of employees' compensation that can be considered when loan forgiveness is calculated.

While they wait, owners who are shut down or who've lost revenue have expressed unease about the longer-term impact the virus outbreak will have on their companies.

"There's great pain out there," said Suzanne Clark, president of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce. "Every hour and day that goes by without this assistance is really hurting them."

Mnuchin, Schumer and Hogan appeared on CNN's "State of the Union," and Clark spoke on CBS' "Face

the Nation.”

Associated Press writer Andrew Taylor contributed to this report.

Official: Police kill gunman who hijacked Dallas-area bus

ROWLETT, Texas (AP) — A man opened fire on a Dallas-area public bus on Sunday, hijacking it with two people aboard and leading officers on a chase that ended in a shootout in which the man was killed and three officers were wounded, according to police officials.

A man got on the Dallas Area Rapid Transit bus in Richardson, just north of Dallas, at around 11 a.m. and opened fire, shattering windows, said Gordon Shattles, a DART spokesman.

The man took the driver hostage and fired at DART officers who tried to stop the vehicle while police from other agencies joined the pursuit eastward along the President George Bush Turnpike, said Garland police officer Pedro Barineau.

“During the pursuit shots were continually being fired from the actual gunman inside the bus toward the officers and the officers were returning fire,” Barineau said.

Police eventually used a spike strip to stop the vehicle along the freeway in the suburb of Rowlett, according to Barineau.

The man continued firing as he exited the bus after it stopped, and officers returned fire, killing him, said Barineau, who didn’t release the suspect’s name. A DART public transportation officer and a Garland police officer were shot and wounded, but their injuries weren’t considered life-threatening, he said.

A Rowlett police officer also was injured when the window of his patrol vehicle was shot out, according to Rowlett police spokesman Cruz Hernandez. He said the officer is expected to recover.

Shattles had earlier said two officers, a DART officer and a Garland officer, were wounded.

Another passenger was on the bus during the chase, but was not injured, DART spokesman Gordon Shattles said.

Officers from Richardson, Garland, Dallas, Rowland and DART, which serves Dallas and its suburbs, took part in the chase. No motive for the shooting has been released. An investigation continues.

AP FACT CHECK: Trump falsely blames governors for virus test

By HOPE YEN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump is wrongly casting blame on governors and the Obama administration for shortages in coronavirus testing and declaring victory over what he calls relatively low death rates in the U.S. That’s too soon to tell.

A look at his claims over the weekend, also covering the economy:

TESTING

TRUMP, on governors urging wider availability of virus tests: “They don’t want to use all of the capacity that we’ve created. We have tremendous capacity. ...They know that. The governors know that. The Democrat governors know that; they’re the ones that are complaining.” — news briefing Saturday.

THE FACTS: Trump’s assertion that governors are not using already available testing capacity is contradicted by one of his top health advisers. He’s also wrong that Democrats are the only ones expressing concerns about the adequacy of COVID-19 testing; several Republican governors also point to problems.

Dr. Anthony Fauci, the federal government’s top infectious disease expert, told The Associated Press that the U.S. does not yet have the critical testing and tracing procedures needed to begin reopening the nation’s economy.

“We have to have something in place that is efficient and that we can rely on, and we’re not there yet,” Fauci, a member of the White House’s coronavirus task force, said Tuesday.

Among Fauci’s top concerns: that there will be new outbreaks in locations where social distancing has eased, but public health officials don’t yet have the capabilities to rapidly test for the virus, isolate any

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new cases and track down everyone that an infected person came into contact with.

His concerns are echoed by several Republicans.

Wyoming Gov. Mark Gordon, a Republican, on Friday said his state's testing capacity was inadequate and urged a larger role for the federal government.

He said states have been competing with each other to try to get more testing supplies, a process he described as "a slog."

"It's a perilous set of circumstances trying to figure out how to make this work, and until we've got the testing up to speed — which has got to be part of the federal government stepping in and helping — we're just not going to be there."

Ohio Gov. Mike DeWine, a Republican, plans to keep applying pressure on the Food and Drug Administration to address the rationing of a key component that is necessary to produce tests. He said full testing capacity can't be reached unless it is more widely distributed.

Republican Maryland Gov. Larry Hogan on Sunday called the lack of virus testing "probably the number one problem in America, and has been from the beginning of this crisis."

"And I can tell you, I talk to governors on both sides of the aisle nearly every single day," he said on CNN's "State of the Union." "The administration, I think, is trying to ramp up testing, and trying — they are doing some things with respect to private labs. But to try to push this off to say that the governors have plenty of testing, and they should just get to work on testing, somehow we aren't doing our job, is just absolutely false."

TRUMP: "Some partisan voices are attempting to politicize the issue of testing, which they shouldn't be doing, because I inherited broken junk." — news briefing Saturday.

TRUMP: "We inherited a broken, terrible system." — news briefing Saturday.

THE FACTS: His repeated insistence that the Obama administration is to blame for initial delays in testing is wrong. The novel coronavirus did not exist until late last year, so there was no test to inherit.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention instead struggled to develop its own test for the coronavirus in January, later discovering problems in its kits sent to state and county public health labs in early February.

It took the CDC more than two weeks to come up with a fix to the test kits, leading to delays in diagnoses through February, a critical month when the virus took root in the U.S. Not until Feb. 29 did the FDA decide to allow labs to develop and use their own coronavirus diagnostic tests before the agency reviews them, speeding up the supply. Previously, the FDA had only authorized use of a government test developed by the CDC.

Meantime the U.S. bypassed a test that the World Health Organization quickly made available internationally. Trump has said that test was flawed; it wasn't.

DEATH RATES

TRUMP: "The United States has produced dramatically better health outcomes than any other country. ... On a per capita basis, our mortality rate is far lower than other nations of Western Europe, with the lone exception of possibly Germany. ... You hear we have more death. But we're a much bigger country than any of those countries by far." — news briefing Saturday.

THE FACTS: His suggestion that the U.S. response to the coronavirus has been better than many other countries' because its mortality rate is "far lower" is unsupported and misleading.

In each country, for instance, the age and overall health of the population are important factors. Many countries in western Europe such as Italy have an older population than the U.S., and seniors are at an especially high risk of death from COVID-19.

Beyond age, underlying health conditions increase risk, too. Indeed, an AP analysis of available state and local data found nearly one-third of U.S. deaths are among African Americans, with black people representing about 14% of the population in the areas covered in the analysis. Health conditions such as

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obesity, diabetes and asthma are more common in the black community.

But more broadly, it's too early to know the real death rate from COVID-19 in any country. Look at a count kept by Johns Hopkins University, and you can divide the number of recorded deaths with the number of reported cases. The math nevertheless provides a completely unreliable measurement of death rates, and the Johns Hopkins tally is not intended to be that.

First, the count changes every day as new infections and deaths are recorded.

More important, every country is testing differently. Knowing the real denominator, the true number of people who become infected, is key to determining what portion of them die. Some countries, the U.S. among them, have had trouble making enough tests available. When there's a shortage of tests, the sickest get tested first. Even with a good supply of tests, someone who's otherwise healthy and has mild symptoms may not be tested and thus go uncounted.

The only way to tell how many went uncounted early on is to do a completely different kind of testing — blood tests of the population to find how many people bear immune system antibodies to the virus, something only now starting in selected places.

ECONOMY

TRUMP: "China was supposed to catch us. ... For years, I've heard, 'By 2019, China will catch us.' There's only one problem: Trump got elected in 2016. That was a big difference. And we were going leaps and bounds above China." — news briefing Saturday.

THE FACTS: No matter who got elected in 2016 — Trump or Democrat Hillary Clinton — China's economy could not have caught up to America's.

Even if the U.S. economy had not grown at all since 2016, China's gross domestic product — the broadest measure of economic output — would have had to have surged by 79% in three years to pull even with America's. That comes to growth of more than 21% a year — something even China's super-charged economy has never approached.

Before the coronavirus outbreak, the Chinese economy had been slowly narrowing the gap because every year it grows much faster than America's. In 2019, for example, the International Monetary Fund predicted Chinese GDP to increase 6.2%, more than double the 2.6% growth it expects for the United States. The global pandemic isn't expected to change that trend line: last week, the IMF said the U.S economy will fall 5.9% this year and China's will manage to grow 1.2%.

That means China has got a long way to go to surpass the U.S., whether Trump is president or not.

Associated Press writers Luran Neergaard and Paul Wiseman in Washington, Mead Gruver in Cheyenne, Wyoming, and Julie Carr Smyth in Columbus, Ohio, contributed to this report.

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

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Sports leagues seek return to play but with no guarantees

By EDDIE PELLIS AP National Writer

With no games being played, recent sports headlines have centered around hopes and dreams — namely, the uncharted path leagues and teams must navigate to return to competition in the wake of the pandemic.

Virtually all leagues talk publicly about their desire to return before summer. But behind closed doors, they are hatching different potential plans: all 30 baseball teams playing in Arizona; home run contests to decide tie games; the Stanley Cup being hoisted in an empty arena that neither team calls home; end-of-season soccer standings decided by vote; college football games in spring.

Over the past week, The Associated Press spoke to more than two dozen policymakers, coaches and

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players across the globe to get their candid assessments of plans to return from the stoppages caused by the new coronavirus. The conclusion: While it's critical to put optimistic restart scenarios in place, there is no certainty any of these plans will work without buy-in from politicians and an OK from players and medical experts. Underpinning it all would have to be a drastic ramp-up in testing, a vaccine or treatment breakthrough, or some other solution.

In short, the return of any sports, no matter how innovative the plan, will be risky and uncertain for the rest of this year and into 2021.

"It's not about 22 players walking onto a pitch and throwing a ball out," said FIFA Vice President Victor Montagliani, whose concerns about restarting soccer mirror those of all sports worldwide.

The organizers of the Olympics were among the last to postpone their event, then among the first to set a new date – exactly 52 weeks after the original July 24 cauldron lighting had been scheduled. The decision to reschedule for a date 15 months down the road came just before an unexpected spike in virus cases hit Japan. The worry that followed underscored the many open questions about the arc of the outbreak.

"I think everyone's probably working on multiple options. It's 'If this, then what?'" said Tim Hinchey, the CEO of USA Swimming, the sport's governing body in the United States.

Virtually all the big-time team sports are coming up with scenarios to play games with no fans in the stands.

The Washington Post reported that while the NFL is publicly committed to its usual kickoff date in September, it is looking into contingencies that include shortening the season or playing in front of half-full or empty stadiums.

College athletic directors have come up with a half-dozen or more scenarios for football season, including, according to Oklahoma's Joe Castiglione, a scenario in which part of the season would be played in spring. One theme gaining wide acceptance: If it's not safe enough for students to return to school or attend games, then athletes shouldn't be asked to return either. Without the millions of dollars from football, all college sports are in peril.

NASCAR, which has been holding virtual races, has given teams a tentative schedule under which the season would resume May 24 without fans.

The NHL has drawn up plans that include resuming the season this summer, going directly to the playoffs and/or playing games in empty arenas in neutral-site cities.

The PGA Tour announced a mid-June restart and meshed its schedule with the already reworked majors calendar. In a nod to the precariousness of it all, Andy Pazder, the tour's chief officer of tournaments and competition, said if events cannot be held in compliance with health regulations, then "we will not do anything."

That's also where the NBA appears to be for now. The league that got in front of the coronavirus pandemic first, calling off games on March 11, is in a holding pattern. Most of the league's conversations center on how to resume the season, not whether to cancel it.

In Australia, ambitious plans to resume play in the National Rugby League by the end of May got shot down by Prime Minister Scott Morrison.

England's Premier League also says it wants to finish its season but would do so only "with the full support of the government" and when "medical guidance allows." Meanwhile, in Scotland, a wild round of voting has already taken place to decide whether to lock in standings for leagues there and get ready for next season.

Major League Baseball in the U.S. is talking about bringing all 30 teams to Maricopa County, Arizona, for a regular season at spring training sites.

Dr. Anthony Fauci, the infectious disease expert who has been calling for restraint in resuming any normal activities, offered a glimmer of hope when he suggested sports could conceivably return. He suggested no fans in arenas and constant testing for the players, who would likely need to be quarantined in hotels for weeks or months.

Not all the players are on board.

"I'm going to go four or five months without seeing my kid when it's born? I can tell you right now that's

not going to happen," Ryan Zimmerman of the Nationals wrote in a diary for AP. Zimmerman's third child is due in June.

Whether Zimmerman shows or not, baseball could be a vastly different game if it returns in 2020. Some other ideas floated include wrapping up the season in December, scheduling a multitude of doubleheaders with seven-inning games and quickly deciding ties with home run derbies.

Yet for all those scenarios, nobody's quite sure what will happen if, despite all the precautions, an outbreak hits a team. Could one positive test eviscerate an entire season?

Before setting anything in motion, all the leagues are waiting for a consensus to emerge from government and health experts, to say nothing of players and owners.

Right now, Montagiani said, "the paramount skill set required from us is risk management and nothing else."

Reporting by AP Sports Writers Doug Ferguson, Jenna Fryer, Rob Harris, Stephen Wade, Ronald Blum, Steve Douglas, Ben Walker, Dennis Passa, Stephen Whyno, Tim Reynolds, Brian Mahoney, Howard Fendrich, Rob Maaddi, Ralph D. Russo and Larry Lage.

Video tribute honors Oklahoma bombing victims amid outbreak

By SEAN MURPHY and KEN MILLER Associated Press

OKLAHOMA CITY (AP) — Survivors and loved ones of the 168 people who were killed in the Oklahoma City bombing were not able to gather Sunday to mark the 25th anniversary of the attack, but that did not stop them from remembering.

Because the annual remembrance ceremony was canceled due to coronavirus restrictions, those the victims instead were honored with a video tribute that included the reading of the names of those who died followed by 168 seconds of silence.

Ordinarily, the city would have gathered Sunday at the memorial where the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building stood before it was destroyed by a truck bomb on April 19, 1995. Gates to the memorial mark time, 9:01 and 9:03 a.m., with a reflection pond between them representing 9:02, the minute the explosion permanently altered lives and the nation. Stylized, empty metal chairs represent each person who died, and the "Survivor Tree," a gnarled American elm that withstood the blast, now stands on a small hill and shades the memorial below.

It was "extremely difficult" to not be able to attend in person, said Ryan Whicher, whose father, U.S. Secret Service Agent Alan Whicher, was killed in the bombing. "I'm not with my sisters today, I'm not with my mother today," in Oklahoma City, he said by phone from Baltimore, where he now lives.

"But it's all for the right reasons. ... Everyone is making sacrifices. I don't think it's fair for us in this coronavirus (environment) to feel we should be treated any differently," he said.

The prerecorded video, which included remarks by former President Bill Clinton, who was president at the time of the bombing, U.S. Sen. James Lankford, Oklahoma City Mayor David Holt and Tony award-winning actress and singer Kristin Chenoweth, an Oklahoma native, drew praise from Whicher and state District Judge Cindy Ferrell Ashwood, whose sister, U.S. Housing and Urban Development attorney Susan Ferrell, died in the blast.

"They did just an extraordinary ceremony under extraordinary circumstances, it was just remarkable," Ashwood said of the video put together by the Oklahoma City National Memorial and Museum.

"The main thing I missed today was not being with our family" in Oklahoma City said Ashwood, who lives about 40 miles (64 kilometers) east of the city, in Chandler.

Kari Watkins, the director of the memorial, said this year's social distancing restrictions are necessary but unfortunate, as survivors and victims' family members often only see each other this one time each year.

"It's just a nice time for them to come and be together," she said. "They'll miss that, but they'll have another time when it's safe to gather and we'll come back together and do something, whenever that day is."

The city's mayor, Holt, said in the video that bombing "was, ultimately, an act of extremist political

violence. I ask you to consider this morning that this sacred place is a sober reminder that humanity is capable of such evil things.”

He told The Associated Press in the run-up to Sunday that the 25th anniversary of the attack was particularly notable because it marked a transition of the event from one of personal experience to one of historical significance.

“The march of time is relentless, and every year that passes, fewer and fewer people have a direct connection to it,” Holt said. “The 25th is another time for us here in Oklahoma City to refocus on what makes the event and the site relevant in the decades to come.”

For Holt, that meant spreading the message that political violence is never the answer.

“People in Oklahoma City sort of have a special obligation to stand for the idea that we have much more in common than we have different,” he said.

The attack was carried out by two U.S. citizens — former Army soldier Timothy McVeigh and his co-conspirator, Terry Nichols — who hated the federal government. It occurred two years to the day after the federal raid on the Branch Davidian compound near Waco, Texas, that left at least 76 members of the religious sect, including some children, dead.

McVeigh was ultimately convicted, sentenced to death and executed by lethal injection in 2001. Nichols was sentenced to life in prison for his role in what many experts refer to as the deadliest act of domestic terrorism on U.S. soil.

Follow Sean Murphy on Twitter: <https://twitter.com/apseanmurphy>

Ventilator from old car parts? Afghan girls pursue prototype

By TAMEEM AKHGAR Associated Press

KABUL, Afghanistan (AP) — On most mornings, Somaya Farooqi and four other teen-age girls pile into her dad’s car and head to a mechanic’s workshop. They use back roads to skirt police checkpoints set up to enforce a lockdown in their city of Herat, one of Afghanistan’s hot spots of the coronavirus pandemic.

The members of Afghanistan’s prize-winning girls’ robotics team say they’re on a life-saving mission — to build a ventilator from used car parts and help their war-stricken country battle the virus.

“If we even save one life with our device, we will be proud,” said Farooqi, 17.

Their pursuit of a low-cost breathing machine is particularly remarkable in conservative Afghanistan. Only a generation ago, during the rule of the Islamic fundamentalist Taliban in the late 1990s, girls weren’t allowed to go to school. Farooqi’s mother was pulled from school in third grade.

After the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan in 2001, girls returned to schools, but gaining equal rights remains a struggle. Farooqi is undaunted. “We are the new generation,” she said in a phone interview. “We fight and work for people. Girl and boy, it does not matter anymore.”

Afghanistan faces the pandemic nearly empty-handed. It has only 400 ventilators for a population of more than 36.6 million. So far, it has reported just over 900 coronavirus cases, including 30 deaths, but the actual number is suspected to be much higher since test kits are in short supply.

Herat province in western Afghanistan is one of the nation’s hot spots because of its proximity to Iran, the region’s epicenter of the outbreak.

This has spurred Farooqi and her team members, ages 14 to 17, to help come up with a solution.

On a typical morning, Farooqi’s father collects the girls from their homes and drives them to the team’s office in Herat, zigzagging through side streets to skirt checkpoints. From there, another car takes them to a mechanic’s workshop on the outskirts of the city.

In Herat, residents are only permitted to leave their homes for urgent needs. The robotics team has a limited number of special permits for cars.

So far, Farooqi’s father hasn’t been able to get one, but the girls are in a hurry. “We are concerned about security driving out of the city but there is no other option, we have to try to save people’s lives,” Farooqi said.

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At the workshop, the team is experimenting with two different designs, including an open-source blueprint from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. The parts being used include the motor of a Toyota windshield wiper, batteries and sets of bag valve masks, or manual oxygen pumps. A group of mechanics helps them build the frame of a ventilator.

Daniela Rus, a professor at MIT, welcomed the team's initiative to develop the prototype. "It will be excellent to see it tested and locally produced," she said.

Tech entrepreneur Roya Mahboob, who founded the team and raises funds to empower girls, said she hopes Farooqi's group will finish building a prototype by May or June. In all, the team has 15 members who work on various projects.

The ventilator model, once completed, would then be sent to the Health Ministry for testing, initially on animals, said spokesman Wahid Mayar.

Farooqi, who was just 14 years old when she participated in the first World Robot Olympiad in the U.S., in 2017, said she and her team members hope to make a contribution.

"Afghans should be helping Afghanistan in this pandemic," she said. "We should not wait for others."

Mass virus test in nursing home seeks to combat loneliness

By LORI HINNANT and JEAN-FRANÇOIS BADIAS Associated Press

AMMERSCHWIR, France (AP) — Some were born in this warren of small rooms in what used to be a hospital, dating to the 17th century. Many are likely to die here. And all are currently confined to their rooms, denied the simple comfort of human companionship.

The residents at the Weiss nursing home in eastern France want to chat face to face, to play board games, to share meals. And so each gave a vial of blood to be tested for the coronavirus, as did each staff member — about 580 tests in all. The goal: to identify who must be isolated and who will be allowed the freedom to leave their rooms.

"We spend all our days between those four walls — that's it, we are not allowed to go out. We don't even have the right to go out in the hallway," said Henry Bohn, a 69-year-old who suffered a stroke that has left him in a wheelchair. "They bring us breakfast, lunch and dinner here in the room. Luckily, we have the sun these days and it helps, but we do miss the essential things."

An Associated Press photographer spent two days chronicling the virus testing at three of the 10 nursing homes in France's Haut-Rhin region, where comprehensive testing was ordered by local authorities. The site in Ammerschwir poses particular problems with its small rooms and long corridors, and residents with often-severe cognitive difficulties.

"It is hard for them to remember the rules that we give them. When we put masks on them, they hardly keep them on, and they need to socialize and leave their rooms," said Sylvie Ghiringhelli, the head nurse.

Some patients wander out anyway, clustering in hallways or taking seats in the common room before they can be led gently back.

The elderly make up a disproportional share of coronavirus victims globally, and that is especially true in nursing homes, which have seen a horrific number of deaths around the world.

In France, nursing home deaths account for more than a third of the country's total 17,000 coronavirus victims — figures the government now documents meticulously after weeks of pressure. Infections have swept through the country's 7,000 residences for the elderly, with more than 15,000 confirmed cases among patients and 8,900 among staff between March 1 and April 14.

And nowhere has it been deadlier than in France's east, near the border with Germany, where the outbreak began at an evangelical gathering in the city of Mulhouse. Overall mortality in the Haut-Rhin was up 143% from March 1 to April 6, according to government figures.

Restricting residents to their rooms can take a different kind of toll.

"The confinement stopped all the communal meals in the dining room, stopped every form of social life," Ghiringhelli said. "There are no more activities, no more visits. Our residents bear the consequences."

Marie Louise Kopp's room is filled with souvenirs — photos, china cats, octagonal paintings — to help jog a 79-year-old memory that waxes and wanes.

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"My son was coming to visit me and some family, but now nobody can," she said, an untouched newspaper on her lap. "Everyone stays at home with this crisis."

France's health minister, Olivier Véran, said family visits would again be permitted beginning Monday, at a resident's request and as long as the nursing home staff can organize a system of ensure protection against the virus.

"There will not be physical contact but there can be visual contact, and that can provide solace," Véran said Sunday.

It's not clear how quickly visitors will be allowed again in Ammerschwir, but the nursing home staff hope testing everybody will enable most residents to at least leave their rooms without fear of infection. Results are expected next week and the local administration and nursing home directors will then meet to discuss the next steps.

Elsewhere, France has locked down nursing homes after two positive tests and simply assumed that anyone with symptoms was infected.

"The testing will perhaps allow us to partially resume life, communal meals and activities in small groups," Ghiringhelli said. "And to mend the social ties."

Lori Hinnant reported from Paris.

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

For meat plant workers, virus makes a hard job perilous

By **STEPHEN GROVES** Associated Press

SIoux FALLS, S.D. (AP) — Kulule Amosa's husband earns \$17.70 an hour at a South Dakota pork plant doing a job so physically demanding it can only be performed in 30-minute increments. After each shift last week, he left exhausted as usual — but he didn't want to go home.

He was scared he would infect his pregnant wife with the coronavirus — so much so that when he pulled into the parking lot of their apartment building, he would call Amosa to tell her he wasn't coming inside. When he eventually did, he would sleep separately from her in their two-bedroom apartment.

"I'm really, really scared and worried," Amosa said Monday.

This was no abstract worry: At the Smithfield Foods plant, the locker rooms were so tightly packed Amosa's husband told her he sometimes had to push his way through a crowd. Coughs echoed through the bathrooms. The plant in Sioux Falls clocked so many cases that it was forced to close this week. It has reported 518 infections in employees and another 126 in people connected to them as of Wednesday, making it among the largest known clusters in the United States. A 64-year-old employee who contracted COVID-19 died Tuesday, according to his pastor.

The concentration of cases has highlighted the particular susceptibility of meat processing workers, who stand shoulder-to-shoulder on the line and congregate in crowded locker rooms and cafeterias. As many as half a dozen plants have shut because of outbreaks. Because the workers who slaughter and pack the nation's meat are vulnerable, so, too, is the supply of that meat. Smithfield CEO Kenneth Sullivan said the closure of the plant, which produces roughly 5% of the U.S. pork supply each day, was "pushing our country perilously close to the edge in terms of our meat supply."

Amosa and her husband, who are originally from Ethiopia, once saw working at the plant, where she also had a job until she became pregnant, as key to building their new life in the United States: It was well paid, union employment that gave them a community. But amid the coronavirus pandemic, the couple found themselves — like many workers whose jobs cannot be done remotely — exposed on two fronts: Both their health and their livelihoods were at risk. The couple agreed to speak to The Associated Press on the condition that Amosa's husband not be named because he feared losing his job.

The plant is vital to a burgeoning immigrant community in Sioux Falls, offering opportunities for even

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those without a college degree or fluent English. Smithfield offers pay starting at over \$15 an hour, health insurance and plenty of overtime.

The plant has attracted a diversifying workforce to the city, where Somali and Vietnamese restaurants have joined diners and craft breweries. But the city remains fairly divided, with many immigrants living in neighborhoods near the plant, which employs 3,700 people in a city of about 180,000.

The outbreak at the plant has also presented a significant test to a governor who has resisted issuing sweeping stay-at-home orders. As Republican Gov. Kristi Noem was pressed again this week to impose tighter restrictions on Sioux Falls, her response instead was to announce that the state would give wide access to an anti-malarial drug championed by President Donald Trump as a promising treatment for COVID-19, but that has yet to be proven effective.

Noem has fired back, arguing that plant workers were deemed essential and would have been reporting for duty regardless.

For most people, the new coronavirus causes mild or moderate symptoms, but, for some, especially the elderly or infirm, it can cause severe illness and lead to death.

Even before the coronavirus began sickening workers, jobs in the meatpacking industry have been considered among the most dangerous in the U.S. Workers are exposed to a long list of dangers from hazardous chemicals to sharp knives. Just last month, a maintenance worker at a Tyson Fresh Meats plant in Kansas died after investigators say he got caught up in the assembly line belt.

The work is physical, starting with butchering hogs that weigh nearly 300 pounds (135 kilograms). On the processing line, repetitive-motion injuries are common. One worker at Smithfield described often waking up with his right hand so swollen he couldn't make a fist.

Union leaders and immigrant advocates cheered the decision to close the plant indefinitely but wish more had been done sooner.

Smithfield spokeswoman Keira Lombardo said difficulty in getting masks and thermal scanners led to delays in implementing some safety measures when the plant was open. But she said last week the plant was adding extra hand-sanitizing stations, scanning employees' temperatures before they entered and installing Plexiglas barriers in some areas.

Six current employees interviewed by the AP who, like Amosa's husband, insisted on anonymity because they feared they would be fired described far more haphazard measures. They said they were given flimsy masks made of hairnet-like material, hand-washing stations were in disrepair, and there was pressure to keep working even if they felt sick.

One employee told his supervisor on March 30 that he had a fever the previous day, but he was told to report to work and not to tell anyone about the fever. He worked that day, missed the next two and returned when the fever broke, he said.

"No one asked if I went to the doctor, if I was tested," the employee said.

Lombardo said Smithfield "fully rejects any claims that employees were pressured to report to work," calling it "completely counterproductive" to do so.

Smithfield has said it plans to clean the plant and implement more protections in the hopes of reopening. The Centers for Disease Prevention and Control sent a team to the plant this week to examine how it can be safely restarted.

But that may be difficult. Workers say they cannot fathom how butchering lines could be reconfigured to accommodate social distancing.

Meanwhile, Amosa and her husband are both home now — nervously awaiting their first child. But they also have a new worry: His coronavirus test came back positive Tuesday.

Associated Press writer Amy Forliti in Minneapolis, Minnesota, contributed to this report.

Fast decisions in Bay Area helped slow virus spread

By OLGA R. RODRIGUEZ Associated Press

SAN FRANCISCO (AP) — On the morning of March 15, as Italy became the epicenter of the global coronavirus pandemic, a half dozen high-ranking California health officials held an emergency conference call to discuss efforts to contain the spread of the virus in the San Francisco Bay Area.

The tight-knit group of Bay Area doctors organized the call to discuss a consistent policy on public gatherings for the region's 7 million people, which then had fewer than 280 cases and just three deaths. Soon, though, the conversation focused on the potentially catastrophic emergency on their hands and how stay-at-home orders could slow the advance of the virus.

Many factors have fueled the speed of the disease spread throughout the world. But that three-hour call and the bold decisions to come out of it were central to helping California avoid the kind of devastation the virus wrought in parts of Europe and New York City, experts say.

"It was obviously spreading like wildfire under our noses and literally every minute we did not take aggressive action was going to mean more and more death," said Dr. Scott Morrow, health director for San Mateo County, just south of San Francisco and home to Facebook.

The doctors who met that day are members of the Association of Bay Area Health Officers, a group born out of the AIDS epidemic that ravaged San Francisco in the 1980s. The group usually meets a half-dozen times a year and has tackled other global threats such as Ebola and swine flu.

By mid-March, group members were alarmed by the spread of the virus since an initial case in the state was confirmed Jan. 26. Dr. Sara Cody, the top doctor in Santa Clara County, home to 2 million residents and the headquarters of Apple and Google, told her peers that COVID-19 cases were doubling every three days. In neighboring San Mateo County, every test conducted was coming back positive, shared Morrow. Across the bay in Alameda County, Dr. Erica Pan reported that cases were rising in areas bordering Santa Clara County.

A day later, the San Francisco Bay Area became the first place in the nation to order residents to stay home. At least 20 other California counties adopted the Bay Area order within hours. Two days later, Gov. Gavin Newsom ordered all 40 million Californians to stay home unless they had essential jobs.

It's impossible to quantify how much those orders helped or truly compare states or countries because of other potential factors such as population density, international travel and the number of tests being conducted in each place. However, experts in disease control say the Bay Area's early intervention clearly played a significant role in slowing the speed of infection throughout California.

On March 15, California reported 335 cases and six deaths. As of Sunday morning, the state had confirmed more than 30,800 cases and nearly 1,150 deaths. The slowing rate of infection, at 73 per 100,000 residents as of Friday, and deaths is one of the reasons Newsom says the state can contemplate reopening businesses.

The area is now reaping the benefit of putting stringent recommendations in place "very, very early," said Robyn Gershon, a clinical professor of epidemiology at New York University's School of Global Public Health.

"In New York, by the time social distancing came we already had many, many people sick. Without tests, without a vaccine, your only tool is having people not contact each other," Gershon said.

Just a few days after California's order, with the number of infections above 15,000 in New York state and more than 100 dead, New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo ordered businesses and workplaces to shut down.

Most people recover from the new coronavirus with 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 January, the group in California began holding twice weekly phone calls to prepare for coronavirus, initially discussing how to monitor Americans returning from China, where the virus began, or how to disinfect ambulances that had transported COVID-19 patients.

But on March 15, the call focused on "extreme social distancing." Marin County Public Health Director Dr. Matt Willis wondered whether such a radical measure was needed in his county, which at the time

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had only 10 cases. But with no federal or state guidance, he soon agreed "an aggressive approach to a shelter-in-place policy was really the one lever that we had."

Cody, who has been credited by many for driving the urgency during that call and whose county was the first to declare a state of emergency in California, told colleagues of increasing hospitalization rates there, sharing early data from a Centers for Disease Control and Prevention community survey that found about one in 10 of those seeking medical care for flu-like symptoms at public clinics had coronavirus.

"We realized we were not that far behind what was happening in Italy," the Santa Clara County health director said.

On March 15, Italy's hospitals were already overwhelmed, with more than 1,800 having died. Less than a week earlier, officials had imposed countrywide, strict stay-at-home orders after they failed to contain the outbreak in the hard-hit north. The death toll has now climbed to nearly 23,000. The European country had confirmed its first two cases on Jan. 31.

Officials have contemplated why San Francisco Bay Area residents have largely complied.

Californians were already seeing daily images of a cruise ship off California's coast with at least 21 confirmed coronavirus infections aboard before it docked on March 9, so the virus was front-of-mind. Tech conferences that typically bring international travelers to the Bay Area each spring were being canceled and tech companies from Silicon Valley to San Francisco began telling employees to work from home. It's also the makeup of the Bay Area, officials say, including people with connections around the country and world.

San Francisco residents generally are willing to comply with such things "when shown the science, when shown the data about what can be accomplished," said Dr. Susan Philip, director of disease prevention and control at the San Francisco Department of Public Health.

In the month since, Bay Area residents have largely continued to heed the mandate, quickly understanding the concept of "flattening the curve" to slow the rate of infection and avoid overwhelming hospitals.

"The timing of instituting the stay-at-home order is very, very critical in blunting the epidemic," said Lee Riley, a professor of epidemiology and infectious diseases at the University of California Berkeley. He warned, though, that complacency could ruin any initial success, noting "we need to remain vigilant."

Still, a challenge looms for the Bay Area doctors who continue to talk to each other twice a week: How to lift the shelter-in-place orders without creating a second surge.

"We're going to be relying on the same kind of partnership that we relied upon for the first stage of this to help us through," Willis said.

Associated Press writer Jocelyn Gecker contributed to this report.

North Korea denies that Kim sent Trump 'a nice note'

By **HYUNG-JIN KIM** Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — North Korea on Sunday dismissed as "ungrounded" President Donald Trump's comment that he recently received "a nice note" from the North's leader, Kim Jong Un.

Trump said during a press briefing on the coronavirus pandemic Saturday that "I received a nice note from him recently. It was a nice note. I think we're doing fine." Trump also defended now-stalled nuclear diplomacy with Kim, saying the U.S. would have been at war with North Korea if he had not been elected.

North Korea's Foreign Ministry said in a statement that there was no letter addressed to Trump recently by "the supreme leadership," a reference to Kim.

It said it would examine why the U.S. leadership released "the ungrounded story" to the media.

"The relations between the top leaders of (North Korea) and the U.S. are not an issue to be taken up just for diversion nor it should be misused for meeting selfish purposes," the statement said.

Kim and Trump have met three times and exchanged letters and envoys on many occasions since 2018, when they began talks on North Korea's nuclear weapons program. The two leaders have built some personal relationships, and Trump once said that he and Kim "fell in love."

The nuclear diplomacy has made little headway since the breakdown of their second summit in Viet-

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nam in early 2019, when Trump rebuffed Kim's calls for sweeping sanctions relief in return for a partial denuclearization step.

In March, North Korea said Trump sent a personal letter to Kim, seeking to maintain good relations and offer cooperation in fighting the coronavirus pandemic.

At the time, Kim's sister and senior official, Kim Yo Jong, said that Trump's letter showed how special the relationship between the two leaders was, but that it wasn't a good idea to be optimistic about the prospects for bilateral relations between their countries. A senior Trump administration official confirmed that Trump sent a letter to Kim, saying it was consistent with Trump's efforts to engage world leaders during the pandemic.

Books, dance lessons, 'Sopranos' — freebies abound online

By **MARK KENNEDY AP Entertainment Writer**

NEW YORK (AP) — We might not be totally free these days, but there's a lot out there that is.

Companies like Pure Barre and Peloton are offering free access to fitness classes. Amazon is giving away book classics like "The Call of the Wild" and "Emma," and MasterClass has experts offering their wisdom for nothing.

The coronavirus's shutdown has wreaked havoc on so many lives and also disrupted many company plans. But some are offering their goods for free or dropping their paywalls for a limited time.

It may not make the best financial decision, but marketing experts say it's good public relations and a nice way to hook future customers as long as it doesn't seem like companies are taking advantage of the virus.

"You have to be careful," said Penny Sansevieri, the CEO of Author Marketing Experts. "You don't want someone on social media to all of a sudden say, 'Well, you're just trying to take advantage of the fact that people are stuck at home.'"

Free shows and films from the entertainment world are a warm blanket for the home-bound. HBO is making free streams of "The Sopranos," "Veep," "Succession," "Six Feet Under" and "The Wire" on HBO Now.

Apple TV Plus is allowing free access to some of its original programs, including "Servant" from M. Night Shyamalan. The distributor FilmRise has the campy 1960s series "Batman" with Adam West — "Bam! Pow!" — and Showtime has extended its free trial period to 30 days. PBS is streaming "Nature" episodes and its "Great Performances," from Shakespeare to "Kinky Boots," and YouTube is making many of its original series available to anyone without a subscription.

A nice corporate gesture during dark times can do wonders. Sansevieri points to Hallmark, which had a rough few months with controversies over actress Lori Loughlin and its handling of a gay-themed wedding commercial.

But in the face of the virus, Hallmark mailed out 2 million free greeting cards to anyone who asked — real cards, not e-cards — "to help put more care in the world."

Sansevieri said the gesture had a lot of "feel-good attached to it," adding: "Was it a way for Hallmark to wipe away all the other bad stuff? Probably. But it was very smartly done."

"Tuesdays with Morrie" author Mitch Albom is going past a mere gesture. He's writing a new serialized story "Human Touch," set in Michigan during these coronavirus days, with free chapters available every Friday and suggested donations to his charity SAY Detroit.

"I got the idea of how life would be reflected through this virus on one street corner where there were four homes," he said. "I hope it makes some kind of difference and I hope it provides diversion for people, too." Fans as far away as Iran have thanked him for the effort.

The free gesture works best when it aligns with the company's core mission. The educational platform MasterClass has launched weekly free live streaming seminars with such luminaries as "The Da Vinci Code" author Dan Brown and designer Kelly Wearstler.

"It's not a circumstance we would have wished for but to have an opportunity to do the thing we love at a time when people really need us is very special," said David Schriber, MasterClass' chief marketing officer.

Companies hoping to get us off the couch also have deals: Nike has made online workouts free, Planet

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Fitness is streaming live workouts on Facebook and Gold's Gym is offering free access to its app. The Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater has online classes for the brave — or you can just soak in one of their ballets, all free.

Live theatrical venues like the Metropolitan Opera plans a streaming gala later this month, Cirque du Soleil has put out free 60-minute compilation specials every week and Andrew Lloyd Webber has new streaming broadcasts of his musicals each Friday for 48 hours on a dedicated YouTube channel.

"It's a crazy idea to think this Friday, globally, everyone could be going to the theater together for free. Isn't that amazing?" said Ramin Karimloo who starred as the title character in Webber's "The Phantom of the Opera," filmed in 2011. "I'm not saying it's life-saving but this helps. Even those health care workers who come home, maybe they want to forget what they just went through for 12 hours."

Sansevieri suspects that corporate offers for things requiring us to sweat — gyms, workouts — will retain less new customers than those companies offering pure entertainment.

But the gamble could pay off with new customers staying loyal. "If you become a fan of X, Y or Z show, that will definitely stick with you. So certain things will change us behaviorally," she said.

Some media companies have built good will by seemingly riding to the rescue of anyone with kids, like Audible making free dozens of narrated books, from "Harry Potter" to "Peter Rabbit." Older kids can enjoy Lionsgate films free on its YouTube channel — "The Hunger Games," "La La Land," and "Dirty Dancing."

Apple TV Plus has also made some of its kids' offering free, including the series "Snoopy in Space" featuring everyone's favorite fictional beagle. Peanuts Worldwide is offering free online educational materials to boost the show's learning.

"We're a feel-good property and I think that's why we feel it's really important to make people feel a little bit of comfort during this really awkward time," said Melissa Menta, senior vice president at Peanuts Worldwide.

Mark Kennedy is at <http://twitter.com/KennedyTwits>

Amid virus gloom, glimpses of human decency and good works

By SALLY STAPLETON Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — The idea formed on a day when all the news headlines were dire. The coronavirus was surging worldwide; Nashville had lost lives in a devastating tornado and children had their lives up-ended as they separated from beloved classmates to shelter at home.

But only bad news is never the whole story. Days later, The Associated Press started its daily series "One Good Thing" to reflect the unheralded sacrifices made to benefit others that normally wouldn't make a story, but maybe always deserved one.

Since March 17, when a Norwegian mom tried to soften the blow of birthdays under quarantine for her two teens by asking via social media that people reach out to them, there have been 35 stories about the ways that everyday people have tried to make a positive difference in the lives of others. The gestures have been grand and small, some as simple as chalk-written messages on a sidewalk thanking healthcare workers at a New Orleans hospital for their efforts.

Music has been a central theme. The series has included stories about a Rio firefighter sharing his love of music from a hydraulic ladder 150 feet up as he played the trumpet for cooped-up apartment dwellers; a virtual rendition of "Bolero" from the National Orchestra of France, with each musician playing alone at home; the virtual Corona Community Choir with members around the world, performing on Sundays.

If music soothes the soul, food feeds it. There have been six stories that tell of benefactors feeding health care workers, the poor, the elderly shut ins, even volunteers feeding hungry animals at a revered Hindu temple in Kathmandu, Nepal.

There have been meals from Brooklyn caterer Israel Frischman for Holocaust survivors who are shut in. The day after the story ran, donations poured in and now Frischman has financial backing for the needed meals. And simpler fare from the "Solidarity Menu" started by Emiliano Moscoso, who employed

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his hamburger chain of restaurants in Colombia to feed poor neighborhoods in Bogota.

The delivery of lifesaving supplies has been a storyline as well, from the professional cyclist in Italy who has gone from racing against competitors to racing medicine to those in need, to Yale student Liam Elkind's delivery service. A month after reporting on Elkind's "Invisible Hands" effort which he started with a friend, he reports that it's ballooned. "We're making over 1,000 deliveries a week now, and over 10,000 volunteers have joined our group. I feel like I haven't slept in decades, but, honestly, I've never felt more energized," he said.

Heroes have emerged in youth, from Nova Knight, a 5-year-old firecracker in Alaska imploring her cohorts to wash their hands and postpone playdates, to 16-year-old TJ Kim, who can't drive, but can fly. He uses those skills to deliver much-needed medical supplies across rural Virginia.

The stories have circled the world, from Colombia and Nepal, to Italy, Germany, France, Spain, Brazil, Israel, Indonesia and South Korea where Kim Byung-rok, a shoe cobbler, donated land to help raise money for the fight against the virus.

In the month of stories about the goodness of others, it's no surprise when we doubled back to the previous subjects of the coverage, AP journalists found the obvious: the givers' giving has expanded.

Associated Press writers Leanne Italie and Luis Andres Henao contributed to this report.

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Churches mostly empty for Orthodox Easter due to virus rules

By JIM HEINTZ Associated Press

MOSCOW (AP) — The holiest day of the year for Orthodox Christians was reserved and glum in many countries where churches were closed to worshipers for Easter services because of restrictions aimed at suppressing the spread of the coronavirus.

From Moscow to Addis Ababa, believers were either banned from attending Sunday services or urged to stay home and watch them on national television broadcasts.

In Georgia, where some churches remained open, some worshipers went through a long ordeal to attend services that began late Saturday night in order to conform with a nationwide curfew — arriving at churches before 9 p.m. and required to stay until 6 a.m.

Serbia's curfew was even more strict, lasting 84 hours from Friday afternoon until Tuesday morning. The head of the Serbian Orthodox Church, Patriarch Irinej, held the Easter liturgy at midnight without believers but there were reports that some people entered churches to attend morning services.

Most churches in Russia were closed to the public, including Moscow's Christ the Savior Cathedral, where the leader of the world's largest Orthodox denomination, Patriarch Kirill, conducted the nighttime service in the presence only of other clerics, a choir and some church workers.

In a video Easter message from his residence, President Vladimir Putin called on Russians to bear up during all the new restrictions in the country, where coronavirus infections are rising sharply.

"There is no doubt that we will properly overcome the challenges that have confronted us," he said. "Our people often say: 'God helps those who help themselves.' And that is how we're acting. But on this radiant holiday of Christ's resurrection, I would still like to say: 'All will be well, with God's help.'"

Neighboring Belarus, which has imposed no restrictions on movement, was an exception to the muted Easter celebrations in other Orthodox countries. Hundreds of thousands attended services at churches throughout the country, including authoritarian President Alexander Lukashenko.

"As soon as this psychosis came, not even a disease, everyone rushed not to the church, but away from the church. It's not good," he said Sunday.

Lukashenko has consistently dismissed concerns about the coronavirus pandemic, even though the number of infections reported in his country is not too far below neighboring Ukraine, which has four

times as many people.

In Ukraine, the question of whether to attend services saw a split between the country's two rival Orthodox denominations.

The Orthodox Church of Ukraine, which is recognized by the Patriarch of Constantinople, regarded as authoritative by most Orthodox churches, held closed-door services. But the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, which is still affiliated with the Russian Orthodox Church, allowed believers to attend.

Ukraine's Interior Ministry said about 130,000 people nationwide attended services, although police limited the number of worshipers in a church to 10. Some of those were at the famed Pechersk Monastery in Kyiv, where more than 100 coronavirus infections including three deaths have been reported among the monks.

Services were broadcast live in Ethiopia, which has the largest Orthodox population outside Europe estimated at 46 million. Attendance at services was restricted and security was deployed at churches in the capital, Addis Ababa, to prevent gatherings. However, some churches in outside the capital held services, worrying health officials.

The Orthodox Autocephalous Church of Albania also broadcast midnight Mass from the Resurrection Cathedral in Tirana, the capital.

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Yuras Karmanau in Minsk, Belarus; Jovana Gec in Belgrade, Serbia; Llazar Semini in Tirana, Albania; and Elias Meseret in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, contributed to this story.

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

Tradition-bound Washington adjusts to life in a pandemic

By JULIE PACE AP Washington Bureau Chief

WASHINGTON (AP) — The cherry blossoms were the first to go.

Not the pink flowers themselves; they arrived on schedule in mid-March along Washington's Tidal Basin. But for Washingtonians, the cherry blossoms are more than a tree. They're the kickoff to the capital's prettiest season: yes, clogging downtown streets with tour buses, but also spurring locals to make a predawn detour to the National Mall or providing a good excuse to cut out of work early.

But as the coronavirus began bearing down on the United States, hulking dump trucks and police cars swept into downtown, blocking off the streets around the Tidal Basin and abruptly halting one of Washington's most cherished traditions.

As it turns out, Washington is indeed still a city of traditions, even in the era of Donald Trump, whose presidency seemed to have turned the nation's capital upside down. But the pandemic has wreaked more havoc on Washington than even Trump could, forcing old institutions to draft new playbooks, upending the city's prized social calendar and narrowing the gap between the political elite and the average Americans they're supposed to be serving.

"Washington has never had an experience like this," said George Condon, historian for the Gridiron Club, the capital's oldest social club for journalists, and a reporter for the National Journal. "Right after Pearl Harbor, we canceled dinners but everything else resumed. Things didn't shut down like this for the (1918) flu pandemic."

Even in the anxious and fearful days after 9/11, which initially sent lawmakers and West Wing staffers fleeing the Capitol and the White House, the return to those landmarks was swift. Being physically present in the center of Washington was seen as a sign of American resolve.

Now, the nation's capital, like most of the nation itself, is largely shuttered. Everything from the annual White House Easter Egg Roll — a tradition dating to 1878 — to a lavish state dinner for the Spanish royals has been scrapped (not to mention opening day for baseball's Washington Nationals, fresh off their first World Series title).

Of course, since it's Washington, a see-and-be-seen town where proximity to power is currency and

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actual power brings real responsibilities, the three branches of government and many of the the institutions that have sprung up around them are scrambling for ways to adjust.

The few congressional lawmakers still required to show up to Capitol Hill during spring recess are scouring the internet or turning to family members for help sewing homemade masks. Wealthy political donors are still shelling out money to politicians, but in exchange for a spot in a Zoom meeting instead of the opportunity to mingle over wine and hors d'oeuvres in hotel ballrooms.

Even at the Supreme Court, an institution that has long prided itself on resisting the encroachment of modern technological advances, the justices are making one of their most significant breaks with tradition in decades. Next month, for the first time, the public will be able to listen to live audio of arguments before the high court. The justices themselves will be listening and questioning lawyers over the phone.

"I can't think of anything comparable to the court. They just don't change," said Lucas Powe, a Supreme Court historian and former high court clerk. He expressed surprise at the justices' decision.

At the White House, the pandemic at first revived a tradition that had been dormant through much of the Trump presidency: the daily press briefing. When Trump began adding his evening coronavirus briefings to his schedule, journalists literally cleaned cobwebs and dusted off briefing room chairs that had sat empty for months.

But the briefings, too, have been altered by the pandemic. Entry is no longer conditioned simply on a press pass but a normal body temperature, recorded each day by a staffer from the presidential medical office.

The carefully allocated seating chart in the briefing room — the networks and wire services in the front row, smaller regional outlets in back — has also been upended. Several news organizations have been told to stay away, while those that have retained a seat were asked to spread out to account for social distancing.

"It loses a lot of flavor," Trump said Friday of the more sparsely attended briefings.

On Capitol Hill, breaking with tradition has proved harder to do.

The pandemic and the swift economic collapse that followed have increased pressure on lawmakers to pass a rescue package to help struggling businesses and individuals. The big problem: congressional rule-makers never envisioned lawmakers might need to vote remotely instead of on the crowded House and Senate floors.

So lawmakers stayed in session until they could pass the \$2 trillion rescue package. Some even continued to use the Senate gym, including Kentucky Sen. Rand Paul — despite the fact that he was waiting for the results of a coronavirus test.

He tested positive. So did multiple other lawmakers.

Now Congress is in recess until early May, when another economic relief package is certain to be needed. Congressional leaders, particularly in the 435-member House of Representatives, are scrambling to figure out a way to vote without violating the guidance of public health officials.

Meanwhile, a rotating cast of lawmakers is still showing up to preside over pro forma sessions of the empty chambers. The podium is disinfected before they arrive, a black covering has been placed over the microphone and most of the lawmakers are wearing face coverings. Like many Americans, they're using whatever will do.

That was true for Rep. Brad Sherman, D-Calif. Gesturing to his homemade mask, he told reporters: "I have an 11-year-old daughter. She made this out of an old T-shirt."

Julie Pace, Washington bureau chief for The Associated Press, has covered the White House and politics for the AP since 2007. Follow her on Twitter [here](#).

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Today in History

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Monday, April 20, the 111th day of 2020. There are 255 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On April 20, 1971, the Supreme Court unanimously upheld the use of busing to achieve racial desegregation in schools.

On this date:

In 1836, Congress voted to establish the Wisconsin Territory.

In 1912, Boston's Fenway Park hosted its first professional baseball game while Navin (NAY'-vihn) Field (Tiger Stadium) opened in Detroit. (The Red Sox defeated the New York Highlanders 7-6 in 11 innings; the Tigers beat the Cleveland Naps 6-5 in 11 innings.)

In 1914, the Ludlow Massacre took place when the Colorado National Guard opened fire on a tent colony of striking miners; about 20 (accounts vary) strikers, women and children died.

In 1938, "Olympia," Leni Riefenstahl's documentary about the 1936 Berlin Olympic games, was first shown in Nazi Germany.

In 1972, Apollo 16's lunar module, carrying astronauts John W. Young and Charles M. Duke Jr., landed on the moon.

In 1977, the U.S. Supreme Court, in *Wooley v. Maynard*, ruled 6-3 that car owners could refuse to display state mottoes on license plates, such as New Hampshire's "Live Free or Die."

In 1986, following an absence of six decades, Russian-born pianist Vladimir Horowitz performed in the Soviet Union to a packed audience at the Grand Hall of the Tchaikovsky Conservatory in Moscow.

In 1988, gunmen who had hijacked a Kuwait Airways jumbo jet were allowed safe passage out of Algeria under an agreement that freed the remaining 31 hostages and ended a 15-day siege in which two passengers were slain.

In 1999, the Columbine High School massacre took place in Colorado as two students shot and killed 12 classmates and one teacher before taking their own lives.

In 2003, U.S. Army forces took control of Baghdad from the Marines in a changing of the guard that thinned the military presence in the capital.

In 2005, President George W. Bush signed a bill making it harder for debt-ridden people to wipe clean their financial slates by declaring bankruptcy. In his first Mass as pontiff, Pope Benedict XVI pledged to work for unity among Christians and to seek "an open and sincere dialogue" with other faiths. Ecuador's Congress voted to remove embattled President Lucio Gutierrez from office and swear in Vice President Alfredo Palacio to replace him.

In 2010, an explosion on the Deepwater Horizon oil platform, leased by BP, killed 11 workers and caused a blow-out that began spewing an estimated 200 million gallons of crude into the Gulf of Mexico. (The well was finally capped nearly three months later.)

Ten years ago: Airliners began taking to the skies of Europe again after five days of being grounded by a drifting volcanic ash. The U.S. Supreme Court struck down a federal ban on videos that showed graphic violence against animals. Civil rights activist Dorothy Height died in Washington D.C. at age 98. Keli McGregor, 48, president of baseball's Colorado Rockies, was found dead in a hotel room of natural causes.

Five years ago: The Post and Courier of Charleston, South Carolina, won the Pulitzer Prize for public service for an examination of the deadly toll of domestic violence, while The New York Times collected three awards and the Los Angeles Times two. Lelisa Desisa of Ethiopia won the 119th Boston Marathon, finishing in 2:09:17; Caroline Rotich of Kenya won the women's race in 2:24:55.

One year ago: SpaceX's new capsule for astronauts was destroyed in an explosion during a ground test at Cape Canaveral in Florida; the accident, later blamed on a leaky valve, marked a serious setback in the company's effort to launch NASA astronauts into orbit later in the year. Community members in suburban Denver marked the 20th anniversary of the Columbine High School shooting with a remembrance ceremony and volunteer projects.

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Today's Birthdays: Actor Leslie Phillips is 96. Sen. Pat Roberts, R-Kan., is 84. Actor George Takei is 83. Singer Johnny Tillotson is 82. Actor Ryan O'Neal is 79. Bluegrass singer-musician Doyle Lawson (Quicksilver) is 76. Actress Judith O'Dea is 75. Rock musician Craig Frost (Grand Funk; Bob Seger's Silver Bullet Band) is 72. Actor Gregory Itzin (iht-zihn) is 72. Actress Jessica Lange is 71. Actress Veronica Cartwright is 71. Actor Clint Howard is 61. Actor Crispin Glover is 56. Actor Andy Serkis is 56. Olympic silver medal figure skater Rosalynn Sumners is 56. Actor William deVry is 52. Country singer Wade Hayes is 51. Actor Shemar Moore is 50. Actress Carmen Electra is 48. Reggae singer Stephen Marley is 48. Rock musician Marty Crandall is 45. Actor Joey Lawrence is 44. Country musician Clay Cook (Zac Brown Band) is 42. Actor Clayne Crawford is 42. Actor Tim Jo is 36. Actor Carlos Valdes (TV: "The Flash") is 31.

Thought for Today: "Excellence is not a skill, it is an attitude." — Ralph Marston, American football player (1907-1967).

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