

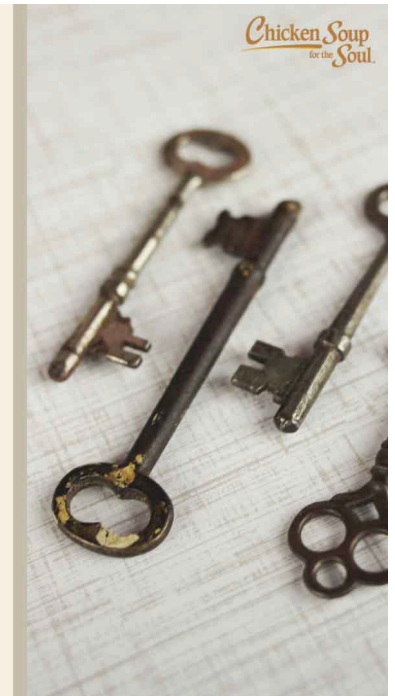
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"YOU'VE DONE IT BEFORE AND YOU CAN DO IT NOW... REDIRECT THE SUBSTANTIAL ENERGY OF YOUR FRUSTRATION AND TURN IT INTO POSITIVE, EFFECTIVE, UNSTOPPABLE DETERMINATION."

-RALPH MARSTON



YOU'RE INVITED TO A DRIVE BY BRIDAL SHOWER HONORING

Taylor Hanson

BRIDE TO BE OF BRANDON STANLEY
MAY 27 | 5-7PM | HOME OF SUE STANLEY
403 E 6TH AVE - GROTON

SOCIAL DISTANCING WILL BE PRESERVED.
PLEASE DRIVE BY TO SHOWER TAYLOR WITH WELL WISHES OR A GIFT.

Gov. Noem to Hold Media Availability Today Regarding Coronavirus in South Dakota 2:45 p.m.

Moving forward, the Governor's press briefings will not necessarily be daily and will be announced via media advisory

OPEN: Recycling Trailer in Groton

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

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Vold Auctioneers & Realty

Lenling Inventory Liquidation Sale, Claremont, SD

ONLINE ONLY SALE

May 22-27, 2020



Trailers, Vehicle, Lawn Mower, Scooter

Enclosed 8'x20' Roadmaster Specialty Trailer (Has lighting and outlets inside)
18' Dressen Custom Trailer with ramps • John Deere 116 lawn mower • Honda Express Scooter
1981 Mercury cougar XR-7 • C1500 truck for parts only

Plumbing Supplies

Plastic sump pump hose • PVC pipe of many sizes and lengths • Urinal (NEW)
3 toilets (2 new, 1 used) • 3 toilet seats • Pipe insulation • Flexible tubing
Many various PVC connectors (too many to count) • Porcelain sink
Misc. fittings and shut off valves • 3 hydrants (1 new, 2 used) • Many faucets and drains
Homeguard sump pump • Many brass fittings of various sizes • Hose clamps (too many to count)
Ritchie waterer parts

Electrical and Heating Supplies

Thermador wall heater (NEW) • Energy-Mate wood burner for boiler
Various types and sizes of electrical wire (several partial roles and several new roles)
Homemade wire unwinders • Approximately 30 to 40 breaker boxes (some used, some new)
Glass insulators • Gear for climbing electrical poles • Fuses (too many to count)
Outlets (too many to count) • Light switches (too many to count) • Electrical boxes (too many to count)
• Light bulbs • Electric motors • Duct work and stove pipe (many pieces)

Tools, Garage and Shop supplies

Milwaukee right angle drill • Black and Decker cordless drill • Black and Decker bench grinder
5 ton hydraulic bottle jack • Makita grinder • 2 Milwaukee heavy duty rotary hammer drills
Black and Decker electric drill • Watsco vacuum pump • Drill bits • 40 pc tap and die set
Circular saw • Pipe threaders • Cable crimper • Acetylene tank and torch
Rockwell Jawhorse (new) • Echo Chainsaw • 2 wooden saw horses • 8' wooden A frame ladder
2 wheel dolly cart • Appliance cart • 2 wood storage bins • Red Devil Paint shaker
Plastic tub • Wood carts with wheels • Small chain bind • Ball hitches
Hard hats and welding mask • Portable air compressor • Metal storage bin
Empty oil barrel with hand pump • Insulation blower with hose • Many yard tools
Arrow wood burning stove • Metal shelving • Wood tool box • Many wood storage bins
Several metal work benches with top half shelving

Collectibles, Neon Beer Signs, Pepsi Cola Pop Machine

3 large wooden crates • Wood crate with dividers • 2 copper wash tubs
Fuller-Warren wood burning stove • Vintage scale • 2 collectible hardware scales
Singer sewing machine (treadle machine) • 4 neon beer signs • 7up light up sign
Zima electric reflective display • Water filter crock • Window shade cutter and shades
Many collectible tins • 2 wooden barrels • Vintage folding chairs
Pepsi Cola Pop Machine for glass bottles • National Cash Register

Boat, Outdoors and Sporting/Fishing

Slick Craft Boat and Shoreland'r trailer • 3 sets of cross country skis • Earthquake garden tiller
Go cart (needs work, comes with many spare parts) • 3 bikes • Brinkman Propane Grill
Coleman folding table • Tent (3 room, believe all poles and stakes are there)
Coleman air mattress • Fishing reels • Fish cleaning board • Fishing net
Several fishing rods and reels • Tackle boxes • Ice fishing poles • Minnow buckets

Store Displays and Office Equipment

2 glass display cases • Several display/work benches • 2 office desks
Several metal filing cabinets • Maytag dryer • Microwave • Hot dog cooker



Register and Bid
at HiBid.com



Auctioneer's Note:

Gary Lenling has passed away and Marian is selling the business inventory. Take advantage of this opportunity to stock up on plumbing and electrical supplies for your business, home, office, or farm!
Call for viewing. Pick up dates are Friday, May 29th and Saturday, May 30th, 2020 from 1-4 p.m. both days.

TERMS: Payment of cash, check, or CC must be made before removal of items. Nothing removed before settlement.

Statements made sale day take precedence over all advertising. Printed material was taken from sources believed to be correct but is not warranted. Any warranties are between seller and buyer. Sellers or Vold Auctioneers are not responsible for accidents. Subject to additions and deletions.

Vold Auctioneers & Realty, Inc.

Bill Jensen, Auctioneer
PO Box 31 – Britton, SD 57430
605-448-0048

www.voldrealty.com – www.ag4bid.com



Jean Walter's Birthday

Please join with Jean's family in celebrating her 90th birthday on May 18. Greetings may be sent to Jean Walter at 705 N 6th St, Groton, SD



Bahrs celebrate 50th Anniversary

Alvin and Donna Bahr are celebrating 50 years of marriage on June 15 and Alvin will also turn 85 on June 5th please help them celebrate with cards being sent to 40814 165th street, turton, sd 57477.

Helmer graveside service

Richard E. Helmer: December 16, 1926 – March 26, 2020

Private family graveside services will be held for Richard E. Helmer, on Saturday, May 23, 1:30 p.m. at the Andover Cemetery. Pastor Gary Compton, First Baptist Church of Aberdeen will officiate.

No Spring Soccer

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, unfortunately Groton Soccer will not be having a Spring/Summer 2020 season. If you had previously registered and paid, you will be contacted for refund. See you all next Fall! Thanks, GSA Board.

GFP Offers Free Park Entrance and Free Fishing To Celebrate The Upcoming Summer

The South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks (GFP) is holding one of the traditional rites of spring, the Open House and Free Fishing Weekend, May 15-17.

The promotion grants free park entrance and free fishing statewide for both residents and nonresidents. Fishing regulations and limits as well as camping fees still apply.

While the customary park programming is still on hold due to the Covid-19 pandemic, parks will still be offering online fun through the Department and specific park social media channels.

"Open House and Free Fishing Weekend is a time-honored tradition in South Dakota," said State Parks Director Scott Simpson. "It's a great opportunity for folks to shake off the cobwebs, check out the parks, and participate in their favorite outdoor activity. Our parks are a great place to social distance, and we all deserve some quality time in the outdoors."

Simpson also stated that visitors will start seeing some normalcy in available amenities such as showers, bathrooms and fish cleaning stations.

"Comfort stations will be cleaned thoroughly each day and inspected often. However, taking responsibility for your own health is imperative during this time," Simpson said.

To be as self-sufficient as possible, plan to:

- * Get your park entrance license online before your visit by calling or going online
 - * Use the restroom facility in your camper rather than public facilities
 - * Bring a personal supply of hand sanitizer, disinfectant and soap to decontaminate shared spaces before you use them
 - * Wear masks when you interact with others
- When you do use a shared facility, adhere to the following guidelines:
- * To limit exposure, use your own facilities whenever possible (camper, tables, etc.)
 - * Limit contact with frequently-touched surfaces
 - * Practice social distancing at all times; stay six feet away from others
 - * Follow CDC personal hygiene guidelines
 - * Leave the facility clean
 - * Wash hands or use hand sanitizer after use

"Parks' staff have done an incredible job of working to get our parks in good condition for this weekend and beyond," Simpson said. "We will be taking all the recommended CDC precautions as well as extra cleaning to ensure our visitors comfort and safety."

Camping reservations are still available for Open House Weekend in many parks. Make reservations online at campsd.com or by calling 1.800.710.CAMP.

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Covid-19 Update: by Marie Miller

We're holding steady today across the board.

We're at 1,392,500 cases in the US. We're holding steady for a second day after four consecutive days of decline. NY leads with 345,828 cases, holding steady after a decrease in new cases for the fifth consecutive day. NJ has 141,560 cases, which is holding steady after declining for the four days and staying under 1000 new cases. Remaining top-10 states are as follows: IL – 84,821, MA – 80,497, CA – 71,585, PA – 62,194, MI – 48,307, TX – 42,438, FL – 42,394, and MD – 34,927. These ten states account for 69% of US cases. 3 more states have over 30,000 cases, 4 more states have over 20,000 cases, 11 more have over 10,000, 8 more + DC over 5000, 9 more + PR and GU over 1000, 5 more over 100, and VI + MP under 100.

Here's the latest on movement in new case reports. Those with substantial numbers of cases which are not showing much change include IL, FL, CA, MD, PA, CT, TX, and VA. States where new case reports are increasing include WA, AR, MN, SD, AL, ME, and DE. States where new case reports are decreasing include NY, GA, NJ, LA, MA, TN, MI, and IA. We'll watch the states showing increases and hope those with decreases continue the decline.

There have been 83,818 deaths in the US. Today the number of new deaths held steady for the second day. NY has 27,450, NJ has 9702, MA has 5315, MI has 4714, PA has 4104, IL has 3800, CT has 3120, CA has 2948, and LA has 2315. There are 7 more states over 1000 deaths, 6 more over 500, 16 more + DC and PR over 100, and 12 + GU, VI, and MP under 100.

There's news on the weather. No, I don't know whether it's going to rain tomorrow; but it's looking fairly sure, whatever it does, it won't have much effect on Covid-19 cases. Sorry, but indications are this thing is not seasonal. Analysis of patterns of the outbreak in various locations around the world with widely varying temperature and humidity profiles over the past couple of months indicate any effect of seasonal changes will be modest, at best. There were hopes that, as the weather warms up in the Northern Hemisphere, we would see declining case numbers as we do for some other respiratory infections; but it appears outdoor temperatures have almost zero effect on transmission for this one. There may be some decreases in transmission simply because, as the weather warms, people will spend less time crammed together indoors and more spread apart outside; but don't expect the heat to help. It is possible that direct sun on, say, playground equipment and car door handles, which can get very hot indeed, might inactivate some viruses, but that's about all we can hope for.

The sun's ultraviolet rays probably aren't going to make much difference either. We've known all along that intense UV light does inactivate coronaviruses, including this one; but the sun, which is not nearly as intense as the UV lamps used to sterilize items, while it may have some modest effect on transmission, will likely not have a large one. It will also help to note that the sun doesn't reach inside our buildings where much of the transmission will still occur.

Humidity has, if any, a very weak effect. Transmission patterns studied in Australia and Iran, where the weather has been hot and, in the case of Australia, humid, were little different from those in countries who are coming out of winter. Countries near the equator are experiencing the same sort of transmission. If the warm, humid weather that typifies much of North America in summer curbed transmission, we'd have seen it by now in other warm, humid places.

We talked a while back about the fact that heated air is dry and cold air can't hold much moisture means you're breathing a lot of dry air in the winter; that has a tendency to dry out the mucous membranes in

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your upper respiratory tract. This may be the main source of whatever small seasonal effect we might see with this coronavirus.

An important factor here is that pandemic viruses are new ones, ones we haven't encountered before; that's why they're so problematic: We have a population which is what immunologists call naïve, that is, it has no immunological past experience with this particular pathogen. As a result, we're all susceptible, so the virus can maraud through a population, fairly unhindered. One effect of this is that even a virus which might otherwise have a tendency toward seasonality is not seasonal while it's new. Seasonality does not constrain pandemic viruses the way it might constrain older ones like influenza virus.

I ran across a list of myths which are circulating online about SARS-CoV-2, and I think it may be helpful to share parts of that with you. Here we go:

(1) Applying alcohol or chlorine to your skin will kill viruses inside your body: Nope. It helps to remember that your skin is waterproof. (This is a good thing, or you'd gain weight in the bathtub and shrivel up in the sun. You are not a slug, so that's not actually a thing). That waterproof skin doesn't let solutions of alcohol or chlorine through to your insides. Alcohol in hand sanitizer can be helpful to disinfect your skin, but it won't do a thing for your insides; and both of these are irritating to the skin. Hand sanitizers contain alcohol with emollients, which counteract the effects of the alcohol; but bleach, the usual household source of chlorine, is really rough on skin. Additionally, putting chlorine on your skin raises the risk you'll get some in your eyes or mouth; it's really harmful there. You really don't want to go there.

(2) Ingesting alcohol or chlorine will kill viruses: Likewise, while that does get them inside of you where a virus might be, is not protective against any virus. Enough alcohol to kill viruses would kill you too, and ingesting more than a minute quantity of chlorine is not safe.

(3) Children cannot get Covid-19: We've seen from prior updates that this is false. Children generally have no symptoms at all or a very mild infection; but they can become very ill, and some have died. This new shock syndrome I reported on a couple of days ago is certainly no joke. While I wouldn't freak out if my child were exposed, I would also not be cavalier about it.

(4) Covid-19 is just like the flu: Also nope. We explored the numbers and talked about how they're reported for influenza (more specifically, pneumonia and influenza) and Covid-19 a week or so ago, and we now know better, right? Don't fall for this one.

(5) Cats and dogs can spread coronavirus: We don't think so. According to Professor Jonathan Ball, a professor of molecular virology at the University of Nottingham in the UK, "We need to find out more, but we don't need to panic—I doubt it could spread to another dog or a human because of the low levels of the virus. The real driver of the outbreak is humans."

(6) Hand dryers inactivate coronavirus: Nope again. They don't get hot enough. It's the handwashing with soap and water that comes before the hand dryer that's getting the job done. Do that.

(7) SARS-CoV-2 is just a mutated form of the common cold virus: There are coronaviruses that cause the common cold; but they're not this one. This is not just a mutated cold virus. This one's a big deal.

(8) You have to be with someone ten minutes to catch the virus: It doesn't take ten minutes; it takes until you score yourself some virus. The longer you're with someone, the greater the chance of transmission becomes; but there's no magic safe time. Keep your precautions going whenever you're with someone who lives outside your home.

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(9) Rinsing the nose with saline protects against the coronavirus: There is no evidence whatsoever that this reduces your chance of infection. It might provide some comfort if you are infected because moistening those mucous membranes feels good; but that's it.

(10) Home remedies can cure and protect against Covid-19: Another big nope. This goes for vitamin C, essential oils, colloidal silver, sesame oil, garlic, fish tank cleaner, burning sage, zinc, and sipping water every 15 minutes. There is no evidence at all that any of these makes the slightest difference. There is, however, some chance vitamin D can help; we discussed this a couple of days ago.

(11) You can catch the coronavirus from urine or feces: Jury's still out, but highly unlikely. The virus has occasionally been detected in feces, but we think that's simply a function of swallowing mucus from your upper respiratory tract and the virus then traveling through your digestive tract. It seems likely the virus is inactivated by stomach acid and poses no threat, but there is some evidence it may persist in active form in feces. That said, we have no evidence at all that there has been any case of transmission in this manner. We do have some evidence we can track outbreaks in sewage though.

(12) 5G helps SARS-CoV-2 spread: Still nope. Those stories you've been hearing about how viruses (and bacteria) use 5G networks to communicate via electromagnetic signals gives them a lot of credit, credit they do not deserve. This one probably started because Wuhan was one of the first cities in China to try 5G; but Beijing, Shanghai, and Guangzhou also rolled out 5G at the same time, and they didn't have outbreaks of Covid-19 until it spread to them from Wuhan. I'm not sure how 5G became the whipping boy for all of the evil in the world, but this is simply not supported by any facts now in evidence or likely to turn up.

Children keep coming up in conversations about this virus, and reasonably so. We all want to know whether kids are at risk, what activities are safe for them, and how they figure into transmission. Although symptoms are not that common and more serious disease is rare in children, there have been very severe illness and deaths reported in children. We don't want to be careless about exposures for them. Additionally, we need to figure out their role in transmission chains. We know children can be infected, and there is evidence they can shed virus at the same rate as adults, so now we need to gather information about whether this means they can transmit the virus as readily as adults do. Chances are good it does, but we have no data on this point at present.

There is some interesting news in potential prophylactic treatment; this would be something we'd give someone to prevent them from developing an infection. It involves, strangely enough, llamas, who along with camels and some sharks, make unusual antibodies. We've talked about antibodies a lot over the past several weeks; remember these are proteins (sometimes called immunoglobulins) produced by your immune system in response to an antigen (some part of a pathogen). They're generally specific for that antigen, and their function is to label the antigen for destruction and disposal by immune system cells. Antibodies are fairly large molecules with a basic framework composed of two bent molecules bound together. Picture the longer piece of one bent molecule attached to the longer piece of the other bent molecule with the bent shorter ends splayed out, giving the whole thing a Y-shape—"stem" of the Y is the doubled portion; the "branches" are single. These two pieces are called heavy chains. Then there are two so-called light chains, little short pieces which attach to those two branches of the Y. The "stem" part is called the Fc region (c is for crystallizable, and we don't have to care what that's all about). The "branch" part is called the Fab region (ab is for antigen-binding), and that's the business end of an antibody, the part that attaches to the pathogen, marking it for disposal.

Now, the camelids and sharks make some antibodies like these, but they also produce some different,

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smaller versions. These small antibodies lack the light chains; they have just the heavy ones. People sometimes make antibodies like that, but when we do, they're nonfunctional; it is generally believed this results simply from a mistake in production. It makes sense these don't work if you consider the specificity of antigen-binding happens right out there in the Fab where the light chains are supposed to be; those missing parts are important ones. But when these animals make these stripped-down versions, they work great, in fact, in some ways better than the big guys work; they bind more tightly and with greater specificity to antigen, and even fragments of them can be functional. Additionally, they can work their way into deeper tissues and inside cells, both of which are very difficult for the standard, large-sized antibody. They are also more durable inside cells; the large ones, when they do manage to get inside a cell, tend to disintegrate in there.

Turns out, if we expose llamas to SARS-CoV-2, they make these small antibodies with specificity for the S protein in the viral spikes. You may recall, the S protein is the stuff that binds to your cells to enter and infect them, so messing with that is a great way to neutralize the virus. You can see where this is going, right? It appears we're going to be able to take these antibodies, inject them into a person, and expect them to be protective against Covid-19. There's been kind of a head-start on this because the method was developed for the SARS epidemic that happened a number of years ago. That virus wasn't highly transmissible as is the current one, so the epidemic died down fairly quickly before much testing occurred. It happens, though, that those antibodies bind to the same S protein in this virus as in the SARS virus. The hope would be that we can administer these antibodies to protect people who are at risk of developing serious disease. Because the antibodies are foreign, they wouldn't persist a long time (remember your immune system's job is to destroy foreign proteins), probably a month or two; but this could be valuable for those recipients. With some of the preliminary work now done, animal and toxicity testing are underway; researchers hope to have clinical trials going by the end of the year. More tools are always better.

We're ending another day with hopeful news. If we don't lose our heads and mess this up, we can limit our losses instead of feeding another surge in cases. Those losses have been mind-bogglingly large, but I see no reason to follow those up with worse just because we're getting impatient. Don't misunderstand me: I get the impatience you're feeling. My life, too, feels small, much diminished by the places I can't go, the people I can't see, and the things I can't do; and that doesn't sit well with me. But causing death for others wouldn't sit well either, so I am doing my best not to kill anyone.

While I busy myself not killing people, I am also getting ready to plant my garden. And something that strikes me every year as we get this underway is the way you take a tiny seed (tomato seeds come in at about 10,000 per ounce), plant it, and then later pick maybe 30 or 40 pounds of fruit containing tens of thousands of seeds of their own. Now, I've been gardening pretty much all my life and I know how the science works, so it shouldn't impress me that much; but I still cannot get over how miraculous this seems.

So I've been thinking these days about seeds and about the way we're living right now: In both cases, we are starting very small, but with great potential to produce something big and important. And this is what I've been urging us all to do: Take the tiny life you have right this minute, fertilize it with kindness, don't overwater it with too many tears of self-pity or underwater it with too little compassion, nurture and grow it, and see whether we can merge our efforts to create a big, bounteous, flourishing society with enough fruit and seeds to go around. That's the goal.

Keep yourself well. I'll see you later.

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Area COVID-19 Cases

	May 5	May 6	May 7	May 8	May 9	May 10	May 11
Minnesota	7,851	8,579	9,365	10,088	10,790	11,271	11,799
Nebraska	6,438	6,771	7,190	7,831	8,234	8,315	8,572
Montana	456	456	456	458	458	458	459
Colorado	17,364	17,830	18,371	18,827	19,375	19,375	19,879
Wyoming	452	479	483	490	495	504	510
North Dakota	1266	1,323	1,371	1,425	1,464	1,491	1,518
South Dakota	2,721	2,779	2,905	3,144	3,393	3,517	3,614
United States	1,204,475	1,228,609	1,256,972	1,286,833	1,309,541	1,329,225	1,347,388
US Deaths	71,078	73,431	75,670	77,280	78,794	79,525	80,397
Minnesota	+617	+728	+786	+723	+702	+481	+528
Nebraska	+355	+333	+419	+741	+403	+81	+257
Montana	+8	0	0	+2	0	0	+1
Colorado	+457	+466	+541	+456	+548	----	+504
Wyoming	+8	+27	+4	+7	+5	+9	+6
North Dakota	+41	+57	+48	+54	+39	+27	+27
South Dakota	+53	+58	+126	+239	+249	+124	+97
United States	+23,841	+24,134	+28,363	+29,861	+22,708	+19,684	+18,163
US Deaths	+2,144	+2,353	+2,239	+1,610	1,514	+731	+872
	May 12	May 13					
Minnesota	12,494	12,917					
Nebraska	8,692	9,075					
Montana	461	462					
Colorado	20,157	20,475					
Wyoming	513	523					
North Dakota	1,571	1,647					
South Dakota	3,663	3,732					
United States	1,370,016	1,390,764					
US Deaths	82,389	84,136					
Minnesota	+695	+423					
Nebraska	+120	+383					
Montana	+2	+1					
Colorado	+278	+318					
Wyoming	+3	+10					
North Dakota	+53	+76					
South Dakota	+49	+69					
United States	+22,628	+20,748					
US Deaths	+1,992	+1,747					

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May 13th COVID-19 UPDATE

Charles Mix, Codington and Oglala Lakota counties have reported positive cases, moving them out of the fully recovered category. Brown County reported 11 more positive cases with 5 being reported from the DemKota facility and only 4 more recovered.

Beadle and Todd counties have been bumped up to the next category of the community spread map.

Beadle County has transitioned from None to minimal to moderate (When there are 1-4 cases of community-acquired COVID-19 in a county)

Todd County has transitioned from minimal to moderate to Substantial (There are 5+ cases of community-acquired COVID-19 in a county or a distinct group of cases in a single area (e.g., city or county)

North Dakota has reported two more deaths, bringing that state's total to 40. There were no new deaths in South Dakota with the total being 39.

It is interesting to note that 64 percent of the positive cases in South Dakota are fully recovered and 59 percent of North Dakotans are fully recovered.

Brown County: Active Cases: +6 (75) Recovered: +4 (68) Total Positive: +11 (143)

Ever Hospitalized: 5 (No Change) Deaths: 0 Negative Tests: +32 (826)

South Dakota:

Positive: +69 (3,732 total) (11 more than yesterday)

Negative: +578 (22,112 total)

Hospitalized: +10 (281 total) - 79 currently hospitalized (5 more than yesterday)

Deaths: 0 (39 total)

Recovered: +58 (2367 total)

Active Cases: 1326 (11 more than yesterday)

Counties with no positive cases report the following negative tests: Bennett 18, Brule +8 (79), Butte +1 (88), Campbell 14, Custer +2 (67), Dewey +13 (88), Edmunds +1 (32), Gregory +2 (39), Haakon 19, Hanson +1 (37), Harding 1, Jackson +2 (15), Jones 6, Kingsbury +1 (93), Mellette +2 (25), Perkins -1 (8), Potter 38, Tripp +7 (78), unassigned +27 (957).

Brown: +11 positive (5 more from DemKota bringing that facility total to 82), +5 recovered (68 of 132 recovered)

Charles Mix: +1 positive (5 of 6 recovered)

Clay: +1 positive, +1 recovered (7 of 11 recovered)

Codington: +1 positive (15 of 16 recovered)

Grant: +1 positive, +2 recovered (2 of 4 recovered)

Lincoln: +3 positive, +3 recovered (139 of 193 recovered)

Meade: +1 positive (1 of 5 recovered)

Minnehaha: +39 positive, +41 recovered (1892 of 3017 recovered)

Moody: +2 positive, +1 recovered (8 of 17 recovered)

Oglala Lakota: +2 positive (1 of 3 recovered)

Pennington: +4 positive, +4 recovered (14 of 36 recovered)

Roberts: +1 positive, +1 recovered)

Todd: +1 positive (5 of 14 recovered)

Union: +2 recovered (34 of 56 recovered)

Yankton: +2 positive (25 of 33 recovered)

Fully recovered from positive cases (lost Charles Mix, Codington, Oglala Lakota): Bon Homme, Brookings, Buffalo, Deuel, Douglas, Fall River, Faulk, Hamlin, Hand, Hutchinson, Hyde, Lawrence, Lyman, Marshall, McPherson, Miner, Sanborn, Sully, Walworth.

The N.D. DoH & private labs report 1,113 completed tests today for COVID-19 with 76 new positive cases, bringing the statewide total to 1,645. NDDoH reports two new deaths.

State & private labs have reported 48,945 total tests & 47,298 negatives.

969 (59%) ND patients are recovered. Two cases were moved out of jurisdiction.

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County	Positive Cases	Recovered Cases	Negative Cases
Aurora	2	1	50
Beadle	22	19	221
Bennett	0	0	18
Bon Homme	4	4	131
Brookings	14	14	440
Brown	143	68	826
Brule	0	0	79
Buffalo	1	1	23
Butte	0	0	88
Campbell	0	0	14
Charles Mix	6	5	132
Clark	3	1	70
Clay	11	7	204
Codington	16	15	587
Corson	2	1	29
Custer	0	0	67
Davison	8	6	375
Day	10	9	80
Deuel	1	1	92
Dewey	0	0	88
Douglas	1	1	39
Edmunds	0	0	32
Fall River	2	2	81
Faulk	1	1	25
Grant	4	2	67
Gregory	0	0	39
Haakon	0	0	19
Hamlin	2	2	87
Hand	1	1	30
Hanson	0	0	37
Harding	0	0	1
Hughes	15	11	308
Hutchinson	3	3	124

Hyde	1	1	21
Jackson	0	0	15
Jerauld	6	5	44
Jones	0	0	6
Kingsbury	0	0	93
Lake	5	4	175
Lawrence	9	9	241
Lincoln	193	139	1863
Lyman	3	3	67
Marshall	1	1	61
McCook	5	3	132
McPherson	1	1	26
Meade	5	1	350
Mellette	0	0	25
Miner	1	1	23
Minnehaha	3017	1892	10238
Moody	17	8	128
Oglala Lakota	3	1	59
Pennington	36	14	1209
Perkins	0	0	8
Potter	0	0	38
Roberts	14	10	188
Sanborn	3	3	43
Spink	4	3	152
Stanley	8	7	51
Sully	1	1	16
Todd	14	5	159
Tripp	0	0	78
Turner	18	16	176
Union	56	34	306
Walworth	5	5	73
Yankton	33	25	571
Ziebach	1	0	17

AGE GROUP OF SOUTH DAKOTA COVID-19 CASES

Age Range	# of Cases	# of Deaths
0-19 years	338	0
20-29 years	642	0
30-39 years	861	1
40-49 years	686	1
50-59 years	619	5
60-69 years	335	6
70-79 years	86	5
80+ years	96	21

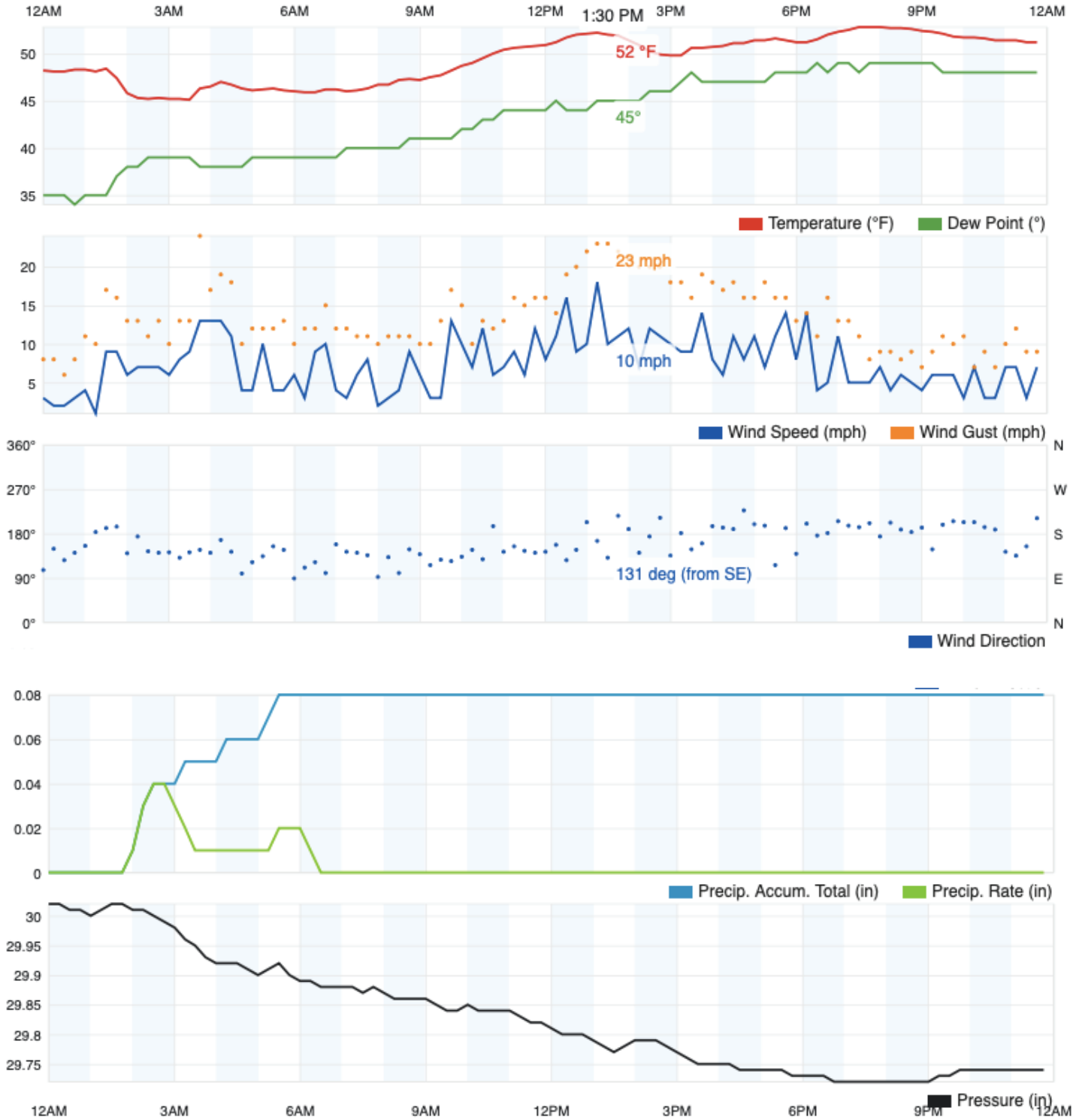
SEX OF SOUTH DAKOTA COVID-19 CASES

Sex	# of Cases	# of Deaths
Female	1658	21
Male	2005	18

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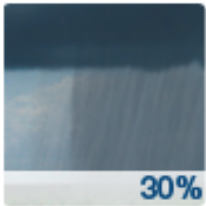
Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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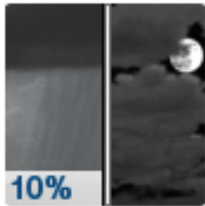
Today



Chance Showers

High: 58 °F

Tonight



Slight Chance Showers then Mostly Cloudy

Low: 43 °F

Thursday



Mostly Sunny

High: 67 °F

Thursday Night



Mostly Clear

Low: 43 °F

Friday



Partly Sunny then Chance Showers

High: 64 °F

Today
65 to 70°
Near Normal Temps for mid-May
Increasing northwesterly winds gusting between 20-25 mph during the afternoon

Friday
63 to 68°
Increasing Clouds-Showers Developing

NATIONAL WEATHER SERVICE
OCEANIC AND ATMOSPHERIC ADMINISTRATION
Aberdeen, SD 5/14/2020 6:00 AM

Warmer temps should be reached today underneath a mix of sun and clouds. Breezy northwesterly winds will gust up to 25 mph this afternoon in spots. Clear and cool tonight as high pressure builds in. Clouds will be on the increase through the day on Friday with showers developing in the south and west and moving north and east through the afternoon and evening.

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Today in Weather History

May 14, 1982: Torrential rains pushed the Bad River over the banks at Fort Pierre. One house four miles outside of Fort Pierre had to sandbag. Rainfall amount of 3.83 inches was recorded in Pierre.

1896 - The mercury plunged to 10 degrees below zero at Climax, CO. It was the lowest reading of record for the U.S. during the month of May. (David Ludlum)

1898 - A severe thunderstorm, with some hailstones up to 9.5 inches in circumference, pounded a four mile wide path across Kansas City MO. South-facing windows were broken in nearly every house in central and eastern parts of the city, and several persons were injured. An even larger hailstone was thought to have been found, but it turned out to be a chunk of ice tossed out the window of a building by a prankster. (The Kansas City Weather Almanac) (The Weather Channel)

1923: An early morning violent estimated F5 tornado cut a 45-mile path of destruction through Howard and Mitchell counties in Texas. 23 people lost their lives and 250 sustained injuries. The path width of the tornado reached 1.5 miles at one point, and entire farms were "wiped off the face of the earth." The First Baptist Church in Colorado City, Texas became an emergency hospital for tornado victims.

1987 - Seven cities across the western U.S. reported record high temperatures for the date as unseasonably hot weather made a comeback. The record high of 103 degrees at Sacramento CA was their ninth in eleven days, and also marked a record seven days of 100 degree heat for the month. Their previous record was two days of 100 degree heat in May. (The National Weather Summary)

1988 - Sunny and dry weather prevailed across the nation. Temperatures warmed into the 80s and lower 90s in the Great Plains Region and the Mississippi Valley. (The National Weather Summary)

1989 - Thunderstorms developing along a stationary front produced severe weather in south central Texas and the Southern High Plains Region during the afternoon and evening hours. Thunderstorms produced softball size hail at Spearman and Hitchcock, TX. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1990 - Thunderstorms developing ahead of a cold front produced severe weather from northwest Texas to western Missouri. Severe thunderstorms spawned seventeen tornadoes, including nine in Texas. Four tornadoes in Texas injured a total of nine persons. Thunderstorms in Texas also produced hail four inches in diameter at Shamrock, and hail four and a half inches in diameter near Guthrie. Thunderstorms over northeastern Kansas produced more than seven inches of rain in Chautauqua County between 9 PM and midnight. (Storm Data) (The National Weather Summary)

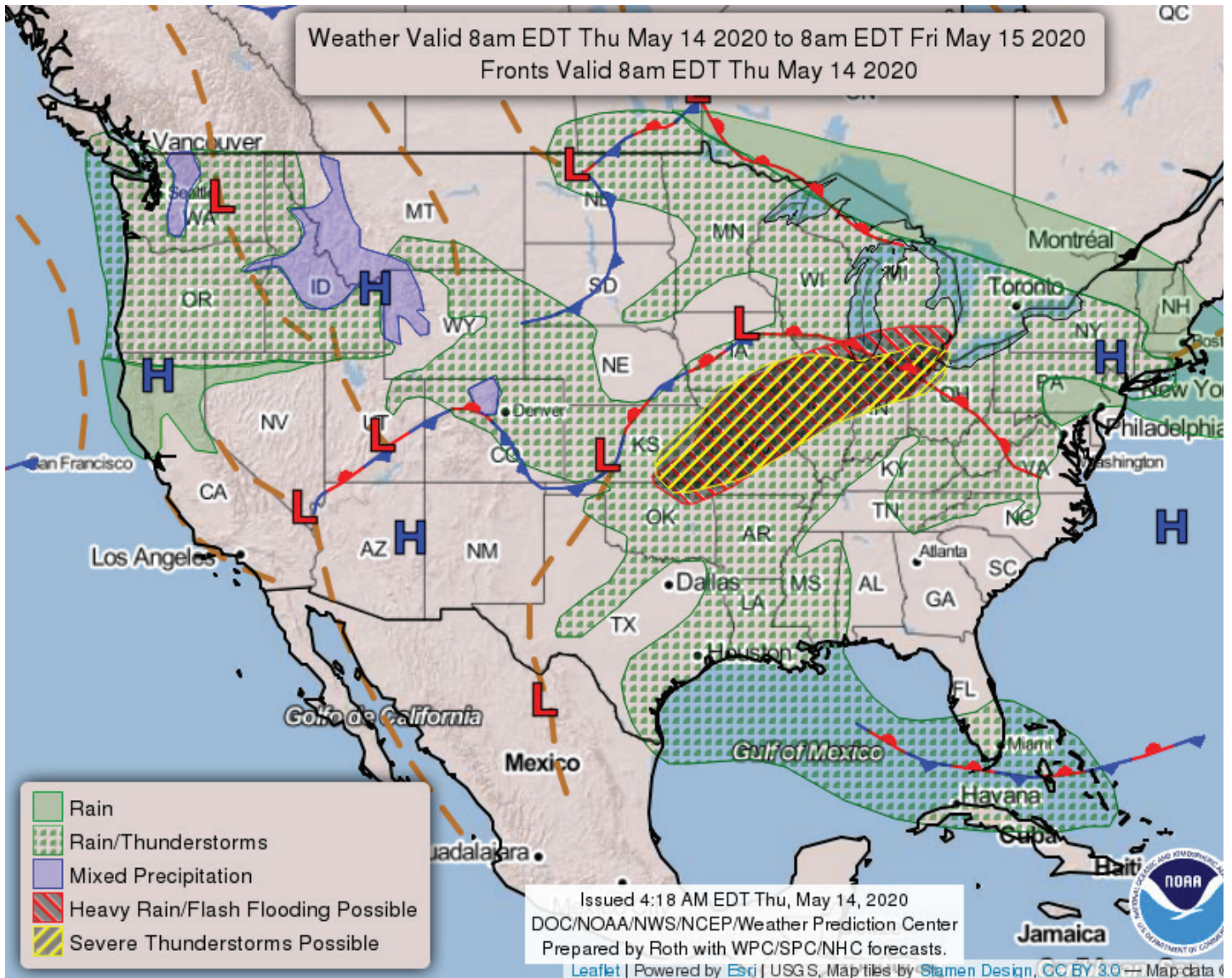
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Yesterday's Groton Weather Today's Info

High Temp: 52.8 °F
Low Temp: 45.1 °F
Wind: 24 mph
Precip: .08

Record High: 94° in 2001, 1932
Record Low: 24° in 2004
Average High: 68°F
Average Low: 44°F
Average Precip in May.: 1.33
Precip to date in May.: 2.38
Average Precip to date: 5.36
Precip Year to Date: 4.28
Sunset Tonight: 8:57 p.m.
Sunrise Tomorrow: 6:03 a.m.



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THE GREATEST OFFERING

It was the final night of the annual missionary conference. There were missionaries from many nations gathered to tell of the work of God all around the world. Hearts were deeply touched, and many lives were changed.

The pastor concluded the final service with an offering that was to be shared among the speakers. The plates were filled with money and checks. But on one plate was a note that simply read, "Myself." Underneath the word "Myself" was the name and phone number of the person who signed it.

The next day the pastor called the young man who signed it and asked, "What do you mean, James?" "I'm giving myself to become a missionary," he said. And then he added, "I'm willing to go anywhere and do anything at any cost to serve the Lord."

James made an important gift to God: his body. Unfortunately, many Christians believe that God is only concerned about our souls. Not so! We need to realize that our bodies belong to God just as much as our souls. When we give Him our souls, He expects our bodies as well.

The body is the temple of the Holy Spirit and is the only instrument through which the Holy Spirit works. So, Paul says, "Take your body and think of all that it does each day - the skills and the abilities it performs, and with training, can perform - and offer your body and its potential - to God. And when you do, follow Him where He leads You."

Prayer: May we realize, Father, that You expect us to give our bodies to You just as Your only Son did. May we not limit what You can do because we fail to give our bodies. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: Romans 12:1 And so, dear brothers and sisters, I plead with you to give your bodies to God because of all he has done for you. Let them be a living and holy sacrifice—the kind he will find acceptable. This is truly the way to worship him.

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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
 - **CANCELLED** 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

SD Lottery

By The Associated Press undefined

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

Dakota Cash

06-09-15-21-26

(six, nine, fifteen, twenty-one, twenty-six)

Estimated jackpot: \$65,000

Lotto America

06-19-20-35-50, Star Ball: 5, ASB: 3

(six, nineteen, twenty, thirty-five, fifty; Star Ball: five; ASB: three)

Estimated jackpot: \$2.55 million

Mega Millions

Estimated jackpot: \$266 million

Powerball

39-53-54-56-57, Powerball: 20, Power Play: 3

(thirty-nine, fifty-three, fifty-four, fifty-six, fifty-seven; Powerball: twenty; Power Play: three)

Estimated jackpot: \$77 million

Native American tribe says sovereignty allows checkpoints

By STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press

SIoux FALLS, S.D. (AP) — The head of a Native American tribe said Wednesday it won't comply with South Dakota Gov. Kristi Noem's demand to remove coronavirus checkpoints it set up on federal and state highways that run through its reservation.

Harold Frazier, the chairman of the Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe, told Noem in a short letter that the tribe would consider her request to restrict checkpoints to tribal roads. But he made it clear to The Associated Press that he believes the tribe's sovereignty allows it to operate checkpoints anywhere on the Cheyenne River Indian Reservation, which is in northern South Dakota. The checkpoints are essential to protecting the health of the people on the reservation, he said.

"This is our home and this is our land," Frazier said. "One does not come into somebody's house and tell them how to live."

The Republican governor demanded that the Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe and the Oglala Sioux Tribe remove the checkpoints from federal and state highways, calling them illegal. The tribes began monitoring their borders last month in an effort to stop unnecessary visitors who could be carrying the coronavirus.

Noem on Friday threatened to sue the tribes if they didn't disassemble the road checks. But this week, she tried a different tack, offering to meet if they would consider limiting the checkpoints only to tribal roads.

She is also appealing to the federal government to back her up, telling the South Dakota Broadcasters Association, "The authority on U.S. highways and state highways lies with the federal government and that they need to take enforcement actions in those cases if the law's not being upheld."

Noem's spokesman, Ian Fury, said Wednesday that her office would respond to Frazier's letter "at the appropriate time."

The governor said Tuesday that she planned to send a similar letter to the Oglala Sioux Tribe. The tribe did not immediately respond to a request for comment on Noem's actions. The governor said her administration has received complaints about the checkpoints and they have caused problems for people who are trying to access the reservation for reasons such as ranching or store deliveries.

Frazier asked the governor to forward any complaints her office receives to the tribe, but he said she

is exaggerating the problem. He said he has visited some of the nine checkpoints the tribe set up and it takes less than two minutes for drivers to pass through them. Ambulances would also be allowed through without having to stop, he said.

The tribes have criticized the governor for not issuing sweeping stay-at-home orders to prevent the spread of the coronavirus. Amid concerns that Native Americans could be particularly vulnerable to the disease, tribes across the country have monitored their borders and mandated testing for all members.

Frazier said mass-testing is the kind of help he would welcome from the state, but right now the tribe only has 18 test kits, sparking concerns that the virus could already be spreading undetected on the reservation.

Check out more of the AP's coronavirus coverage at <https://apnews.com/VirusOutbreak> and <https://apnews.com/UnderstandingtheOutbreak>

South Dakota officials report 69 new coronavirus cases

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — South Dakota health officials reported an increase of 69 confirmed cases on COVID-19 on Wednesday, bringing the state's tally to 3,732.

Officials reported no new deaths, but 39 people have died in the state so far. Over 80% of the confirmed cases have come from Minnehaha County, which is the state's most populated area. The actual number of infections is thought to be far higher than the number of confirmed because many people have not been tested and people can be infected without feeling sick.

About two-thirds of people who have tested positive in the state have recovered, while 1,326 people have active cases. There are currently 79 people hospitalized, according to the South Dakota Department of Health.

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.

US meat exports surge as industry struggles to meet demand

By JOSH FUNK Associated Press

OMAHA, Neb. (AP) — U.S. meat exports are surging even as the industry is struggling to meet domestic demand because of coronavirus outbreaks at processing plants that have sickened hundreds of workers and caused companies to scramble to improve conditions.

Although the situation could cause concern that American workers are risking their health to meet foreign demand, experts say it shouldn't because much of the meat sold to other countries is cuts that Americans generally don't eat. And at least one of the four major processors says it has reduced exports during the pandemic.

If companies manage to keep their workers healthy and plants operating, there should be plenty of supply to satisfy domestic and foreign markets, according to industry officials.

"I really feel like the industry is well positioned to serve all of its customers both here and abroad," said Joe Schuele, a spokesman for the industry trade group U.S. Meat Export Federation.

Meat exports, particularly pork exports to China, grew significantly throughout the first three months of the year. This was partly due to several new trade agreements that were completed before the coronavirus outbreak led to the temporary closure of dozens of U.S. meatpacking plants in April and May and to increased absenteeism at many plants that reduced their output.

The Meat Export Federation said pork exports jumped 40% and beef exports grew 9% during the first three months of the year. Chicken exports, meanwhile, grew by 8% in the first quarter. Complete figures weren't yet available for April, but Agriculture Department figures for the last week of April show that pork exports jumped by 40% as shipments to China and Japan surged and exports to Mexico and Canada remained strong. Beef exports declined by 22% in that last week of April.

China's demand for imported pork has risen over the past year because its own pig herds were decimated

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by an outbreak of African swine fever, and China pledged to buy \$40 billion in U.S. agricultural products per year under a trade pact signed in January. China also became the fourth-largest market for American poultry in the first quarter after it lifted a five-year ban on those products. A trade agreement with Japan and a new North American free trade agreement also helped boost exports.

Part of the reason why exports have continued to be so strong this spring is that much of the meat headed overseas was bought up to six months ahead of time — before the virus outbreak took hold in the U.S.

"A lot of these sales were made before COVID-19 hit. China had already made these purchases and then COVID-19 hit. They had actually pre-purchased a lot of this before the plant problems hit," said Chad Hart, an agricultural economist at Iowa State University.

It's also worth noting that meat exports to China and other Asian markets include cuts such as pig feet, snouts and internal organs that have little value in the United States. The most popular cuts in the U.S., including bacon and pork chops, largely stay in the domestic market. More than half of the chicken exports to China were chicken feet. And the Meat Export Federation says demand from the export market helps boost meat production in the U.S. because more animals are slaughtered to help meet all the demand.

Iowa Agriculture Secretary Mike Naig said he doesn't think it makes sense to restrict exports because so much of the meat sold internationally isn't popular in the U.S.

"I think it's important to prioritize," said Naig, whose state leads the nation in pork production. "I think companies should meet the domestic market first and then be free to sell the things that the American consumer doesn't purchase and the types of things that we don't normally consume. That's economically important."

Meat production in the United States is dominated by a few huge companies — JBS, Smithfield, Tyson Foods and Cargill. Cameron Bruett, a spokesman for JBS, said that Brazilian-owned company has reduced exports to help ensure it can satisfy U.S. demand for its products. Tyson Foods and Cargill didn't respond to questions about their exports.

Smithfield Foods, which is owned by a Chinese company, said in a statement that it isn't controlled by any government and that the free market determines what products it exports. JBS declined to respond to questions about its foreign ownership. Purdue University agricultural economist Jayson Lusk said it's not clear what role the foreign owners play in deciding how much meat is exported.

The industry has been dealing with a number of production challenges caused by the coronavirus, and several large plants had to close temporarily because of outbreaks of COVID-19, the disease it causes. At least 30 U.S. meatpacking workers have died of COVID-19 and another 10,000 have been infected or exposed to the virus, according to the United Food and Commercial Workers union, which represents roughly 80% of the country's beef and pork workers and 33% of its poultry workers.

Kansas State agricultural economist Glynn Tonsor said he thinks the industry will get past the shortage concerns within the next several weeks.

"I think it's important that we note that the U.S. hog industry is large enough to sufficiently supply our domestic market and export. We've done that for some time. We've been growing volumes in both places for some time," Tonsor said.

Tyson and Smithfield have both been able to reopen huge pork processing plants that were temporarily closed in Iowa and South Dakota, which should help the industry keep up with demand even if some plants aren't running at full capacity, said David Herring, of the National Pork Producers Council.

"I really don't think we'll see a big problem with meat shortages," said Herring, who raises hogs near Lillington, North Carolina. "As long as the plants are able to come back up and operate maybe not at 100% but at 80% or 90%, I think we should be good."

Check out more of the AP's coronavirus coverage at <https://apnews.com/VirusOutbreak> and <https://apnews.com/UnderstandingtheOutbreak>

Aberdeen's 3M plant adds space, workers for mask production

ABERDEEN, S.D. (AP) — Aberdeen's 3M plant is expanding and adding more employees as it ramps up production of N95 masks for the coronavirus pandemic.

3M was recently awarded two U.S. Department of Defense contracts to make more N95 masks. That means 3M will add 120,000 square feet (11,148 square meters) to the Aberdeen facility.

Plant manager Andy Rehder tells Aberdeen America News 100 additional workers will be needed for the expanded production with hiring taking place over the next two or three months.

"We're extremely grateful for the hard work of our employees here in Aberdeen as they've helped produce critical supplies for healthcare workers and first responders fighting against COVID-19," Rehder said. "The expansion of our Aberdeen plant will help 3M do even more to support public health needs during these challenging times."

3M says that beginning in January, it ramped up production of N95 masks and doubled its global output to about 1 billion per year, including 35 million N95 masks per month in the U.S.

Lives Lost: Brothers who survived Holocaust die weeks apart

By VANESSA GERA and RANDY HERSCHAFT Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — The brothers didn't have a chance to say goodbye.

As young Polish Jews, each came out of World War II with scars that forever shaped how they viewed the world, and each other.

One survived Auschwitz, a death march and starvation. The other endured cold and hunger in a Siberian labor camp, then nearly died in a pogrom back in Poland.

Alexander and Joseph Feingold chose New York City as the place to start over. It is where they became architects, lived blocks from each other and lost their wives days apart. It was there that they died four weeks apart, each alone, as the coronavirus pandemic gripped the city.

Joe, 97, died April 15 of complications of COVID-19 at the same hospital where Alex, 95, succumbed to pneumonia on March 17.

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

Joseph Feingold never escaped the guilt of leaving his mother and two younger brothers to escape the Nazis.

When Alexander fell ill, Joseph called his stepdaughter from his assisted living facility and asked her to take him to his brother.

"Joe was wanting to go sit with Alex, to say goodbye and I think, too, to make amends," Ame Gilbert recalled. "It broke me up having to say no, and having to explain to him that no one could visit because of the virus."

The siblings were childhood rivals, separated in age by only 18 months. As little boys playing in Warsaw, they pretended to be Native Americans. Firstborn Joe always got to be chief, he recalled in a memoir.

Their youth was shattered when Nazi Germany invaded Poland in 1939 and the Soviet Union seized Poland's eastern half two weeks later. World War II had started. Joe was 16 and Alex not yet 15.

By the time they were in their early 20s, both brothers had witnessed the horrors of war. But only one bore a concentration camp tattoo on his arm. Joe had been the luckier of the two. Both brothers knew it.

Joe and their father, Aron, who was threatened with arrest by the Gestapo, fled to the Soviet-occupied part of Poland. They were eventually arrested and sent to separate labor camps in Siberia. Conditions were harsh but improved later in the war and father and son were reunited.

Back in German-occupied Poland, Alex was forced into the Kielce ghetto with his mother, Ruchele, and youngest brother, Henryk. One night, Nazi SS officers forced him and other male Jews into a field with shovels.

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Alex thought he was digging his own grave. Instead, wagons unloaded hundreds of bodies, and the Germans ordered the terrified group with the shovels to search the dead for valuables. Alex used a bottle to knock gold fillings from teeth and buried bodies, going numb as the awful ritual repeated.

Ruchele and 13-year-old Henryk were deported to the Treblinka death camp. Alex ended up at Auschwitz-Birkenau, where he saw corpses burned outside the gas chambers. He helped dismantle Allied bombs at the Buna subcamp in exchange for tobacco and extra food.

In January 1945, as the Soviets moved west, Alex was evacuated in a death march to the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp, where he was liberated on April 15. He was sick with dysentery and weighed just 88 pounds (40 kilos).

After the war, Joe and his father returned to Poland, where 90 percent of the country's 3.3 million Jews perished in the Holocaust. Seeking information about the family's fate, Joe returned to Kielce and was beaten unconscious and left for dead in the most deadly attack on Jews in postwar Poland.

Joseph Feingold was believed to be the last living survivor of that 1946 massacre, according to historian Joanna Tokarska-Bakir, author of "Cursed: A Social Portrait of the Kielce Pogrom."

Joe and his father finally saw Alex again at a displaced person's camp in Germany 19 months after the war ended. In an oral history with the USC Shoah Foundation, Alex recalled the reunion as a "sad moment."

"I was so cold, unemotional — very, very cold and unemotional," he recalled. Fearing a breakdown, he couldn't bring himself to speak about seeing his mother and Henryk for the last time — not then, not ever.

Even without hearing it from his brother, Joe knew the shape of the horror.

"The feelings of guilt that I have, which I cannot overcome, are still with me," he wrote in a memoir. "Alex never reproached me for being abandoned by his father, or by his older brother, or for anything else that he had to live through and survive. He didn't reproach me, but he didn't have to."

Alex's trauma, according to Mark Feingold, the second of his own three sons, caused indelible injury and "made him less capable of being involved and recognized in society" than Joe.

Joe gained public recognition with the donation of a violin to a girls' school in the Bronx, featured in an Oscar-nominated 2016 documentary, "Joe's Violin." In the key scene, the 12-year-old girl who receives the instrument, Brianna Perez, plays Joseph a Yiddish song his mother loved.

His stepdaughter says that while warm and generous, Joe had his own reservoirs of unfathomable pain that revealed themselves as anger and impatience, and he was haunted by frequent nightmares.

When Mark Feingold took his father to Mt. Sinai West Hospital in March, doctors assumed Alex had COVID-19. He tested negative, but the pandemic overshadowed his last days. A visit from Joe might have brought some comfort.

Shortly before his own death, Joseph dreamed he was in the gas chamber with his mother and Henryk, according to Gilbert, his stepdaughter.

"When Alex died and he didn't have a chance to make peace with him, I thought 'Oh, Joe's going to die soon.'"

Joe's eyes were closed as Gilbert said goodbye in a video call.

"I am choosing to believe that he heard that I loved him. I went through the list of all of those who loved him," Gilbert said. "Hopefully, that gave him comfort."

Vanessa Gera reported from Warsaw, Poland.

Follow Vanessa Gera at <https://twitter.com/VanessaGera> and Randy Herschaft at <https://www.twitter.com/HerschaftAP>

The Latest: Japan lifts state of emergency in most regions

By The Associated Press undefined

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

TOP OF THE HOUR:

— Japan lifts state of emergency ahead of schedule in most regions, but restrictions are kept in place in Tokyo and seven other high-risk areas.

— WHO official says reopening must be done cautiously and debate between ensuring health and reviving the economy is a “false dichotomy”

— The leaders of South Africa and Pakistan and dozens of former world leaders call for a “people’s vaccine” against the coronavirus that will be made available for everyone, everywhere, and for free.

—Typhoon Vongfong slams into eastern Philippines during lockdown for coronavirus.

TOKYO — Japan’s prime minister has announced the end of the state of emergency for most regions of the country, but restrictions are being kept in place in Tokyo and seven other high-risk areas, including Osaka, Kyoto and Hokkaido.

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe on Thursday lifted the measure ahead of schedule in 39 of the country’s 47 prefectures, effective immediately.

Abe declared a month-long state of emergency on April 7 in Tokyo and six other urban prefectures, later expanding it to the whole country through May 31.

With signs of the infections slowing, Abe is seeking to relax restrictions while balancing disease prevention and the state of the economy.

Abe said: “Today is the new beginning for our daily lives, a new normal.” He warned of a likely resurgence of the infections, urging people to keep their guards up.

He said experts will meet again next week to decide if the measure in the remaining areas can be lifted, pledging to bring the coronavirus outbreak under control by the end of May.

Japan now has more than 16,000 confirmed cases, with about 680 deaths. The number of new cases has significantly decreased nationwide.

JOHANNESBURG — The leaders of South Africa and Pakistan, along with dozens of former world leaders, are calling for a “people’s vaccine” against the coronavirus that should be made available for everyone, everywhere, and for free.

South African President Cyril Ramaphosa and Prime Minister Imran Khan of Pakistan signed the letter dated Thursday and coordinated by UNAIDS, an advocate for global action on the HIV/AIDS pandemic, and Oxfam, an anti-poverty charity, amid growing fears that richer countries will get first access to any vaccine.

The letter, also signed, among others, by former British Prime Minister Gordon Brown and Helen Clark, a former prime minister of New Zealand, also urges equitable access to COVID-19 testing materials and treatments as countries around the world compete for scarce supplies, saying that “now is not the time to allow the interests of the wealthiest corporations and governments to be placed before the universal need to save lives.”

The World Health Organization and a number of countries, but not the United States, have also called for equitable access to a vaccine.

LONDON — British health authorities have for the first time approved an antibody test that shows whether people have previously been exposed to the new coronavirus.

The test, manufactured by Swiss pharmaceutical firm Roche, has already been approved for use in the United States and the European Union.

Public Health England says government scientists found the test to be 100% accurate. It shows whether

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people have been exposed to the virus that causes COVID-19 and have developed antibodies against it, which may provide some immunity.

The British government says it is working on plans to offer antibody tests to health care workers and the public.

Prime Minister Boris Johnson has said an antibody test could be a "game changer" in allowing the U.K. to end its national lockdown. But attempts to find a reliable test have been troubled. Some 17.5 million tests ordered from various suppliers all failed to meet U.K. standards.

HĒLSINKI — Finland has reopened elementary and secondary schools after a two-month hiatus amid the government's strict distancing and hygiene guidelines for students and teachers in efforts to avoid a rise in COVID-19 infections.

The Nordic country introduced a lockdown in mid-March, including the mandatory closure of schools for all children older than 10 and a recommendation for younger children to stay home.

After weeks of remote classes and distance learning, schools reopened Thursday for two weeks before the summer break starts in early June.

Students are being kept at a safe distance from each other in classrooms, frequent hand-washing is required and only one class at a time is allowed to stay outside during breaks.

Principal Jorma Kauppila from the Katariina school in the southern city of Turku told Finnish news agency STT that "kids and youngsters have been happy to return here. Arrangements have worked out as planned."

MĀDRID — Spanish authorities are calling for people to respect social distancing after a dozen protesters against the central government's handling of the coronavirus pandemic refused to disband late on Wednesday.

Clad in Spanish flags and banging pots, a few hundred protesters took to the streets shouting "Freedom! Freedom!" and demanding the resignation of Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez.

Videos of the gathering in an upscale Madrid neighborhood showed protesters demanding the end of lockdown measures.

Spain's far-right political party, Vox, has been calling for pot-banging protests against Spain's left-wing government's response to the new virus, which has claimed at least 27,000 lives since early March.

The Spanish government's top security official in Madrid, José Manuel Franco told Cadena SER radio, that the crackdown was against illegal gatherings during the pandemic, not to repress criticism against officials.

Spain's daily coronavirus death toll rose above 200 for the first time in five days, with 217 fatalities reported Thursday. It brings the outbreak death toll to 27,321, with nearly 230,000 total cases.

KUALA LUMPUR, Malaysia — A World Health Organization official says the debate between ensuring health and reviving the economy is a "false dichotomy" and that countries must remain vigilant even as they move to lift restrictions.

The WHO Western Pacific director Takeshi Kasai says the reopening of the economy shouldn't be rushed and must be done cautiously. He says the world must "create a new normal in which we don't have to choose between health and livelihood."

Kasai said Thursday that countries must strengthen their health system and have measures in place for early detection, isolation and contact tracing, and ensure they are ready for the possibility of large-scale community outbreak.

If a resurgence occurs, Kasai said governments must also be prepared to reinstate strict health measures as everybody remains at risk until a vaccine is developed.

BRŪSSELS — The European Union's top rule of law official says the bloc is monitoring whether governments remove emergency powers enacted to combat the coronavirus, amid deep concern about measures in Hungary.

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EU Values and Transparency Commissioner Vera Jourova said Thursday that as countries ease confinement, "the general states of emergency with exceptional powers granted to governments should gradually be removed or replaced by more targeted and less intrusive measures."

Jourova told EU lawmakers that "the case of Hungary raises particular concerns" and that "on a daily basis, we are assessing whether we can take legal action."

In late March, Hungary's parliament endorsed a bill giving Prime Minister Viktor Orban's government extraordinary powers during the pandemic, including a measure against the spread of false information about the virus, and setting no end date for them.

Orban was invited to take part in Thursday's debate but declined. The assembly rejected an offer to hear Hungary's justice minister instead.

ATHENS, Greece — Greece's center-right government says it will install cameras in high school classrooms when schools reopen next week to provide live-streaming to allow for reduced classroom attendance. The move comes despite strong opposition from teaching unions and opposition parties on privacy grounds.

A powerful privacy watchdog says live-streaming is legal under special circumstances but that the material cannot be recorded or stored.

The online coverage will allow schools to rotate classroom attendance and allow distancing between students. But Greece's main left-wing opposition party described putting cameras in schools as posing "a serious risk" to attending students and promised to raise the issue in the European Parliament.

Parents have until later Thursday to decide whether to let their children attend classes or rely only on online teaching material.

Schools have been closed since March 11.

MANILA, Philippines — A strong typhoon slammed into the eastern Philippines on Thursday after authorities evacuated tens of thousands of people while trying to avoid the virus risks of overcrowding emergency shelters.

The first typhoon to hit the country this year rapidly gained force as it blew from the Pacific then barged ashore in San Policarpio town in Eastern Samar province around noon. Video showed fierce rain and wind swaying coconut trees, rattling tin roofs and obscuring visibility. Some towns lost power.

Typhoon Vongfong was packing maximum sustained winds of 150 kilometers per hour (93 miles per hour) and was forecast to blow northwestward and barrel across densely populated eastern provinces and cities before exiting in the north Sunday.

The Philippines remains under a lockdown to fight the coronavirus.

Governors say social distancing will be nearly impossible in emergency shelters. Some shelters are now serving as quarantine facilities, and they may have to be turned back into emergency storm shelters.

The typhoon is forecast to largely bypass Manila, but authorities say tents being used as temporarily medical facilities in the capital might be damaged in strong winds.

COPENHAGEN, Denmark — Commuters in Denmark must practice social distancing in trains, subways and buses and sit at least one meter (3.3 feet) apart when on the same bench and avoid face-to-face seating.

Transportation Minister Benny Engelbrecht said Friday he expects the capacity in public transportation to reach up to 70% of normal capacity.

"Traffic companies, customers and workplaces share the responsibility for making public transport work efficiently and health-wise correctly now that we again expect more passengers," he said.

Engelbrecht urged, among others, people that when possible to avoid rush hour, walk or bicycle "to give other travellers, who do not have the same opportunity, better space in public transport."

Public transportation in Denmark has functioned during the lockdown that started March 11 but trains, subway and buses have been almost empty. In recent weeks, the Scandinavian country has slowed re-opened.

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UNITED NATIONS — United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres is urging governments, civil society and health authorities to urgently address mental health needs arising from the coronavirus pandemic, warning that psychological suffering is increasing.

He pointed to “grief at the loss of loved ones, shock at the loss of jobs, isolation and restrictions on movement, difficult family dynamics, and uncertainty and fear for the future.”

The U.N. chief said in a video message late Wednesday launching a policy briefing that “after decades of neglect and under-investment in mental health services, the COVID-19 pandemic is now hitting families and communities with additional mental stress.”

Guterres said those most at risk and in need of help are front-line health care workers, older people, adolescents, young people, those with pre-existing mental health conditions, and those caught up in conflict and crisis.

He said “mental health services are an essential part of all government responses to COVID-19” and must be expanded and fully funded.

CANBERRA, Australia — Australia says it will continue to push for an inquiry into the origins of the coronavirus, even if it hurts trade relations with China.

Prime Minister Scott Morrison had been accused of playing “deputy sheriff” to the United States after calling for the inquiry. On Thursday, he brushed off the criticism.

“We have always been independent, we have always pursued our national interests, and we always will,” he told reporters. “We will always be Australians in how we engage with the rest of the world, and we will always stand our ground when it comes to the things that we believe in and the values that we uphold.”

China has suspended beef imports from four abattoirs and plans to impose tariffs on Australian barley, after warning the inquiry could harm two-way trade ties.

BEIJING — China reported three new coronavirus cases Thursday while moving to reopen for business and schools.

The National Health Commission said 101 people remain in treatment for COVID-19, while 716 are isolated and being monitored for being suspected cases or for having tested positive for the virus without showing symptoms.

China plans to restart classes for most students on June 1, with other grades to resume at a later date, depending on conditions. No announcement has been made on when university classes will resume.

China has reported a total of 4,633 deaths among 82,929 cases of the virus.

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

Dubai airport CEO: Global travel still up in air over virus

By JON GAMBRELL Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — The CEO of the world’s busiest airport for international travel wants to get the globe flying again, but even he acknowledges everything remains up in the air during the coronavirus pandemic.

Paul Griffiths oversees what now is a much quieter Dubai International Airport, home to the long-haul carrier Emirates and crucial to East-West travel. The millions that once poured through the airport’s concourses are no longer flying as countries around the world enforce lockdowns and travel bans to fight the virus and the COVID-19 illness it causes.

Though government-owned Emirates plans to restart some flights next week, Griffiths told The Associated Press that the airport has yet to find a workable coronavirus or antibody test to administer on a massive scale to passengers. Until a vaccine or a permanent solution to the virus exists, there could be “quite a

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low level of activity for quite some time," he said.

"I think the thing is there are a lot of people that are offering conjecture, whether it's 18 months or two years or less or more," Griffiths said in an interview Wednesday. "But the problem is it's all conjecture. The honest answer is no one really knows."

The airport known as DXB saw 86.4 million passengers in 2019, 6 million more than second-place Heathrow Airport in London. That's down 3% from 2018 when Dubai had 89.1 million passengers.

But air travel this year has been disrupted by the virus. In the first quarter, Dubai International Airport's passenger numbers dropped by nearly a fifth to 17.8 million compared to last year. Cargo and repatriation flights have been flying, however.

Beginning May 21, Emirates plans to operate flights to nine cities, including Chicago; Frankfurt, Germany; London; Madrid; Milan; Paris; Toronto; and Sydney and Melbourne in Australia. Already, attendants on Emirates flights wear gloves, masks and other protective gear.

In the airport, customers and staff alike wear masks and disposable gloves. Thermal heat scanners look over passengers and they have experimented with both coronavirus and antibody tests, Griffiths said. However, the airport has no immediate strategy to test all passengers, like Iceland plans to do at its airport in Reykjavík. That leaves open the possibility of an asymptomatic coronavirus carrier making it onto a flight.

"I believe we're doing everything we can to make sure that we are maintaining the integrity of the health and security and safety of our customers and staff," Griffiths said. "And as new methods become available, we will, of course, trial and adopt them if they're effective and scalable."

The virus has taken a hard toll in Dubai and the wider United Arab Emirates, a federation that includes six other sheikhdoms on the Arabian Peninsula, among them Abu Dhabi. Emirati officials said Thursday they've detected over 21,000 cases of the virus, with 208 deaths and more than 6,900 recoveries. Particularly hard-hit is the Emirates' vast population of foreign laborers.

Ramping up activity at both Emirates and Dubai International Airport is crucial for Dubai, which created itself as a vital hub for the free movement of trade, people and money worldwide — all things that have been disrupted by the pandemic. The airport-based firm Dubai Duty Free, whose vast shelves of alcohol, electronics, perfumes and playthings greet bleary-eyed travelers from the world over, had sales of just over \$2 billion last year alone.

The airport itself has been able to hold on to its 2,650 direct employees, while having to "suspend, reduce or terminate" the contracts of an additional 2,450 third-party contractors, Griffiths said. Generating revenue and reducing expenses is a priority at a time of uncertainty over how long the disruption global travel will continue, he said.

What that future looks like remains in question.

Griffiths suggested that one way forward could be digital passports with health information — a replacement for the low-tech yellow vaccination books travelers sometimes need. Given the pandemic's uneven effects worldwide, bilateral deals may need to be struck country to country, further complicating global travel but slowing the virus' spread.

But Griffiths believes the world eventually will return to the airport and that the pandemic is another disruption in a long line of major events like the 1991 Gulf War, the Sept. 11 terror attacks and SARS outbreak.

"I feel we're all standing on the start line of a sprint race and we're looking at the starter and waiting for that pistol to be fired," Griffiths said. "As soon as that finger tightens around the trigger, we'll be ready to spring into action."

Associated Press writer Fay Abuelgasim in Dubai, United Arab Emirates, contributed to this report.

Follow Jon Gambrell on Twitter at www.twitter.com/jongambrellAP.

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

By The Associated Press undefined

Your daily look at nonvirus stories in the news:

1. **OBAMA EMERGES AS CENTRAL FIGURE IN 2020 RACE** Democrats are embracing him as a political wingman for Joe Biden, while President Trump gets to train the spotlight on one of his favorite political foils.
2. **STRONG TYPHOON SLAMS INTO PHILIPPINES** The storm, packing maximum sustained winds of more than 90 miles per hour, forces the evacuation of tens of thousands of people.
3. **SENATE WEIGHS RENEWAL OF SURVEILLANCE LAWS** Compromise legislation the House passed would impose new restrictions to try and appease civil liberties advocates in both parties.
4. **US MILITARY OFFERS CONDOLENCES OVER IRAN NAVY ACCIDENT** The friendly fire incident killed 19 of Iran's troops, leading the U.S. to also criticize the training for taking place so close to the strategic Strait of Hormuz.
5. **'MY HEART IS BROKEN'** Singer Melissa Etheridge is blaming opioid addiction for the death of her 21-year-old son, Beckett Cypher.

As coronavirus rolls on, Republicans hit 'pause' on new aid

By ANDREW TAYLOR Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Businesses are going belly up, tens of millions have been laid off and, by some measures, the U.S. seems headed for another Great Depression. But Republicans surveying the wreckage aren't ready for another round of coronavirus aid, instead urging a "pause."

It's a position based on a confluence of factors. Polls show GOP voters think the government is already doing enough. Republicans on Capitol Hill are divided over the best approach. Billions approved by Congress have yet to be spent. And it's also unclear what President Donald Trump wants to do next, if anything, to juice the economy — his payroll tax cut idea hasn't gained any traction on Capitol Hill.

For these and other reasons, GOP leaders see an unfolding crisis that does not yet cry out for further action.

"There's just a pragmatic piece to this, which is, if we're going to do another bill, let's get into June and July so we know how people are re-emerging," said Rep. Patrick McHenry, R-N.C., who gave up his leadership post last year to take the top GOP job on the Financial Services Committee.

The political balancing act comes as the long-dormant deficit-hawk wing of the GOP lumbers back to life, recoiling from the House Democratic proposal to spend another \$3 trillion in taxpayer money. Yet many Republicans concede there is risk to standing pat at a time of massive unemployment, financial struggles for local governments and growing COVID-19 caseloads, particularly with the November election fast approaching.

Despite their distaste for further negotiations with Democrats, many Republicans privately see passage of another coronavirus measure as inevitable.

Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, a proponent of the "pause," said Tuesday that Republicans are "taking a look at what we've already done. And we've added about \$3 trillion to the national debt, and assessing the effectiveness of that before deciding to go forward."

Yet McConnell also cracked open the door, cautiously, to more legislation, provided that it is "narrowly targeted."

"I'm in discussion, we all are, with the administration. If we reach a decision along with the administration to move to another phase, that'll be the time to interact with the Democrats," he said.

Still, recent polls show GOP voters are far more likely to be satisfied with the government's virus response than Democrats. They are less fearful of a second wave of cases as states loosen stay-at-home orders, and they are not clamoring for more aid.

"We're starting to hear grumbling against spending that I haven't heard for a while," said Adam Brandon, president of FreedomWorks, a conservative group that has helped promote demonstrations around the

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country demanding a relaxation of state lockdown orders.

On Capitol Hill, the question of what to do next is sowing GOP division.

Conservative senators from solidly red states argue that Washington has done enough, and they have been squaring off in meetings with GOP moderates and pragmatists siding with Democrats. The moderates are supportive of fiscal relief for states and local governments, help for the Postal Service, additional jobless aid, and further provisions on testing and tracing for the virus, which has already claimed more than 80,000 lives in the U.S.

The conservative senators have influence with Trump, but he doesn't share their fiscal instincts.

The president and deputies like Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin have signaled a willingness to deliver aid to state and local governments — funding that is a core demand of House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif. And Trump at one point even floated a massive debt-financed effort on infrastructure, leaving many conservatives aghast.

Trump himself has cautioned Republicans against drawing a red line against state and local aid. The president is talking to governors, noted a top House GOP leadership aide who requested anonymity to describe private conversations. The aide emphasized that the president remains extremely popular in most Republican congressional districts and still gives members a lot of cover by going along with him.

"As states begin to reopen we need to wait and see where and what the need is, but the policy process is ongoing at the White House," said a White House aide, requesting anonymity to describe internal dynamics. "The president has said more help is coming."

Many think the next coronavirus bill, when it passes, will be the last one for a while, with Congress likely to maintain an intermittent schedule as the election nears.

"I don't see us coming back before the election so I'd rather us get this smart and right rather than shoveling more coal into the fire, and people saying we'll come back and do more," McHenry said.

But it's clear that Republicans are dreading another round of negotiations with Democrats.

While each of the four prior COVID-19 response measures passed by almost unanimous votes, the outcome required GOP leaders to accept significant legislative victories for Pelosi and Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y. They fear another episode in which Mnuchin, a former Democrat, gives them even more.

For now, negotiations are in neutral. The Senate is poised to push off the legislative debate until after the Memorial Day break, when Republicans hope the virus will finally begin to ease.

"We will be working in a bipartisan way and with the White House to make sure ... we're addressing the very serious needs of the American people when it becomes both to the health emergency and the economic emergency that they're experiencing right now," said No. 2 Senate Republican John Thune of South Dakota.

Associated Press writers Jill Colvin and Alan Fram contributed to this report.

Obama emerges as central figure in 2020 presidential race

By JULIE PACE AP Washington Bureau Chief

WASHINGTON (AP) — Nearly eight years after he was last on the ballot, Barack Obama is emerging as a central figure in the 2020 presidential election.

Democrats are eagerly embracing Obama as a political wingman for Joe Biden, who spent two terms by his side as vice president. Obama remains the party's most popular figure, particularly with black voters and younger Democrats, and Biden's presidential campaign is planning for him to have a highly visible role in the months to come.

For President Donald Trump, that means an opportunity to focus the spotlight on one of his favorite political foils. In recent days, Trump and his allies have aggressively pushed conspiracy theories about Obama designed to fire up the president's conservative base, taint Biden by association and distract from the glut of grim health and economic news from the coronavirus pandemic.

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"Partisans on both sides want to make this about Obama," said Ned Price, who served as spokesperson for Obama's White House National Security Council.

The renewed political focus on Obama sets the stage for an election about the nation's future that will also be about its past. As Biden looks to Obama for personal validation, he's also running to restore some of the former president's legacy, which has been systematically dismantled by Trump. The current president is running in part to finish that job.

Yet Trump's anti-Obama push also frequently takes on a darker, more conspiratorial tone that goes far beyond differences in health care policy and America's role in the world. His current focus is on the actions Obama, Biden and their national security advisers took in the closing days of their administration, as they viewed intelligence reports about Michael Flynn. Flynn had a short-lived stint as Trump's national security adviser before being fired for lying to Vice President Mike Pence about his interactions with Russia's ambassador to the U.S.

Trump's own administration acknowledged on Wednesday that Obama advisers followed proper procedures in privately "unmasking" Flynn's name, which was redacted in the intelligence reports for privacy reasons. Flynn ultimately pleaded guilty to lying to the FBI, though Trump's Justice Department moved last week to drop the case against him.

Despite there being no evidence of wrongdoing by Obama, Biden or other administration officials, Trump is eagerly pushing the notion of an unspecified crime against the former president, branding it "Obamagate." He's being backed up by Republican allies, including Iowa Sen. Chuck Grassley who took to the Senate floor this week to ask of the Flynn matter: "What did Obama and Biden know, and when did they know it?"

Trump's zeal has sparked fears among some former Obama and Biden advisers about how far he may be willing to go in using the levers of government to push his case against them in an election year. The Justice Department is conducting an investigation into the origins of the Russia probe that ensnared Flynn and other Trump associates.

Trump's renewed focus on Obama comes as Republicans grow increasingly anxious that the rising coronavirus death toll and cratering economy will damage the president's reelection prospects in November. More than 84,000 Americans have died from the virus, and more than 30 million have claimed unemployment.

Biden's campaign drew a direct connection between the president's attacks on Obama and the twin crises battering his administration.

"It's no surprise that the president is erratically lashing out at President Obama, desperate to distract from his own failures as commander in chief that have cost thousands of Americans their lives during this crisis," said TJ Ducklo, a Biden campaign spokesman.

Trump's emphasis on Obama also comes as the former president begins to emerge from a three-year period of political restraint as he prepares to embrace his role as leading surrogate for Biden. Last week, Obama told a large gathering of alumni from his administration that DOJ's decision to drop the Flynn case put the "rule of law at risk." He also criticized the Trump White House's handling of the coronavirus pandemic.

Biden's campaign has been eager to get Obama involved in the election, though his exact role is still forming, particularly given that the pandemic has upended the campaign's plans for rallies and other in-person events in battleground states. The former president is also expected to campaign for Democratic House and Senate candidates across the country.

Though Obama campaigned for Democratic candidates in the 2018 midterms, he has mostly tried to avoid overt politics since leaving the White House. He's spoken out publicly against Trump on rare occasions, frustrating many Democrats who have wanted him to be more aggressive in calling out his successor.

But the 2020 election has always loomed as the moment when Obama would step off the sidelines, and he's told advisers he's eager to do so. Despite his strident public neutrality during the Democratic primary, he spoke to Biden regularly and has continued to do so as the campaign moves into the general election, according to aides.

Biden's campaign sees Obama as a clear asset as they seek to not only energize Democrats, but to also

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appeal to independents and more moderate Republicans who may be wary of four more years of Trump in the White House.

A recent Monmouth University poll found 57% of Americans say they have a favorable opinion of Obama. That includes 92% of Democrats and 19% of Republicans.

Obama's favorable ratings are higher than either of the men who will be on the ballot in November. The same poll showed 41% of Americans had a favorable opinion of Biden, and 40% viewed Trump in a favorable light.

Associated Press writers Mary Clare Jalonick and Emily Swanson in Washington contributed to this report.

Follow Julie Pace at <https://twitter.com/jpaceDC>.

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

UN health agency chief unbowed amid attacks, Trump criticism

By JAMEY KEATEN Associated Press

GENEVA (AP) — The World Health Organization's director-general has faced many challenges during the coronavirus pandemic: racial slurs, death threats, social media caricatures — he was once depicted as a ventriloquist's dummy in the hands of Chinese President Xi Jinping — and U.S. funding cuts.

Through it all, Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus has endeavored to rise above the troubles with a focus on one main task: Building international "solidarity" against an outbreak whose confirmed death toll is nearly 300,000 and that quelled economic activity in countries rich and poor. Many health policy experts have praised his handling of the outbreak overall, despite criticism of the U.N. health agency by the Trump administration.

Next week, Tedros' track record and background will come under intensified scrutiny as WHO holds its biggest annual event — the World Health Assembly — in a "virtual" and abbreviated version that focuses on COVID-19.

Critics and some analysts cite his background as a government minister in Ethiopia, with its history of authoritarian regimes. Not long after taking office in 2017, Tedros appointed Zimbabwe's then president, Robert Mugabe, who often traveled abroad to receive health care, as a WHO "goodwill ambassador," only to revoke the appointment after a wave of outrage erupted.

Most recently, Trump has faulted WHO for being too accepting and praising of China's handling of the early outbreak, wedging Tedros personally in the tense political standoff between the U.S. and China. He has shied away from criticizing the two powerful U.N. members, and has praised both President Donald Trump and Xi — even while leaving hints seemingly directed at Beijing and Washington.

"Don't use this virus as an opportunity to fight against each other or score political points. It's dangerous," he said recently, appealing to the world. "It's the political problem that may fuel further this pandemic."

Tedros, 55, knows about the punishing sides to both politics and pandemics: A malaria expert with a doctorate in microbiology from the University of Nottingham in Britain, he served as health minister and foreign minister in Ethiopia before his election in 2017 in one of WHO's most competitive races.

He's the first WHO chief from Africa, and the first who doesn't have a medical degree — seen as a hole in his resume by some critics.

Tedros was born in the city of Asmara, before it and the rest of Eritrea split from Ethiopia. Like many Ethiopians, he goes by his first name. A father of five, he has tweeted about riding bikes with his daughter. A few years ago, he tried out the saxophone, but gave it up because of a heavy workload.

Years ago, Tedros was spotted as a rising star of health policy by Melinda Gates, whose charitable foundation has become WHO's No. 2 donor. He has been credited for helping expand Ethiopia's health care workforce as health minister from 2005 to 2012.

Tedros often uses wit, feigned ignorance and charm to disarm or sidestep critics. He has drawn on the

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star power of Lady Gaga and garnered support from European leaders, and called Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez "mi hermano": my brother. He bills himself "Dr. Tedros," leaning on his doctorate, and actively tweets to a million followers.

No stranger to the personal anecdote, Tedros once said it was "pure luck" for him to aspire to the top WHO job, noting that when he was 7, his younger brother died from a childhood disease — and it could just as easily have been him.

Dr. Lia Tadesse, Ethiopia's current health minister, who worked with Tedros when he had her job, said he was known for showing calm, patience and a good ear.

"While he was a minister, he was known to really care for people who are considered at the lowest level of the strata, like the cleaner, the security guard and so on," she said by phone. "He takes time to listen to their problems, and really recognize their efforts."

Tedros has played down death threats against him, but has stood up to defend Africa. He has blasted the government of Taiwan, which isn't a U.N. member state, for allegedly condoning "racial slurs" against him. Taiwan's current government has faced intense political pressure from rival China, and has been appealing for admission as an observer to the World Health Assembly on Monday and Tuesday.

Political sniping between the U.S. and China, and Tedros' own political baggage, can make it tough to cut through the noise during a global health emergency.

"If you criticize the WHO and Tedros, you're somehow seen as a supporter of the Trump administration and their clearly self-serving attacks to shift blame from their own failure," said Jeffrey Smith, director of Washington-based Vanguard Africa, a promoter of democracy. "On the other hand, if you defend Dr. Tedros and the WHO, you're seen as somehow endorsing his comfort level with the world's despots and dictators."

"Yes, Dr. Tedros is the product of a deeply authoritarian regime. And he has long displayed an affinity for dictators," Smith said. "The WHO does critical work and deserves support. And yes, the WHO also needs reform. All of these things can be true."

David Shinn, a U.S. ambassador to Ethiopia in the 1990s, said Tedros had a good relationship with both Beijing and Washington while Ethiopia's foreign minister. Shinn cited a "cautionary note:" Tedros had the job when Ethiopia relied heavily on China for economic and political support, as it does today.

"As a result, he probably was willing to accept at face value what he was being told by China with perhaps not questioning as strongly as he might have what the situation really was," said Shinn, an adjunct professor at George Washington University's Elliott School of International Affairs.

Tedros appears to have learned one key thing from his predecessor, Dr. Margaret Chan of China: Be reactive to outbreaks. Amid the Ebola outbreak in eastern Congo that's now seemingly on its last legs, Tedros traveled over a dozen times to the region. With COVID-19, he has been omnipresent.

"Dr. Tedros has been very much at the helm in terms of being in almost every single press conference, communicating directly with the public, tweeting — really speaking directly to people," said Suerie Moon, co-director of the Global Health Center at Geneva's Graduate Institute.

"He's able to really humanize a situation that's quite frightening for most people and be a reassuring presence," she said.

Uplifting idea: Cranes reunite families in corona crisis

By RAF CASERT and VIRGINIA MAYO Associated Press

WATERMAEL-BOITSFORT, Belgium (AP) — Something he saw as he drove to work one morning gave Tristan Van den Bosch an uplifting idea.

"I saw a man shouting at his mother," said Van den Bosch.

Not unusual — except that the man was on the ground and his mother was three stories up. She was, like many seniors, locked down in a care home to avoid the COVID-19 virus. But as days have turned to weeks and months, families like this one have struggled.

"We can help this man!" Van den Bosch thought.

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As operations manager at Group-f, a cleaning and maintenance company, Van der Bosch had a problem. The pandemic had reduced business to a trickle, leaving many of his cranes standing idle in the depot.

Why not use those cranes to lift people, so they can see relatives on the upper floors of homes for the aged?

Since then, Van den Bosch has been driving his cranes to homes in several towns across Belgium. A platform carries families to their relatives' windows. A daughter or grandson waves, and worries vanish from faces creased by age. No internet connection does as well.

Eve Putseys didn't quite know what to expect as she was lifted up to see her 88-year-old aunt, Suzanne, at the La Cambre care home on the outskirts of Brussels.

"It's been seven long weeks since I haven't been able to see her," she said. "It's all quite emotional." Afterward, Putseys was all smiles.

"I got to see her -- and that was great," she said. And on top of that "she looked very happy to see me."

The anxiety of families with relatives in nursing homes is well placed; of the 8,843 confirmed and suspected cases who had died of the virus in Belgium as of Tuesday, 4,538 were in such facilities. Their families are left feeling helpless, fearing they will not see each other again.

Little wonder Van den Bosch had little trouble filling his platforms for this special kind of joyride.

The La Cambre home prepared the facility, the families and the elderly to make sure everything went smoothly.

"It has been hard work but quite rewarding," said La Cambre director Thibaut Chevrier. "We only saw emotions through the eyes of the residents and the families."

Soon, Group-f officials expect, the platforms will again be used to clean up facades and office fronts. But in the meantime, they have been put to good use.

"Yes, OK, it costs money, the operators cost money but the machines are all used," Van den Bosch said. And in the end, "we're happy that we have been able to help people."

While nonstop global news about the effects of the coronavirus have become commonplace, so, too, are the stories about the kindness of strangers and individuals who have sacrificed for others. "One Good Thing" is an AP continuing series reflecting these acts of kindness.

Among the mainstays of 2020 claimed by the pandemic: Spring

By MALLIKA SEN Associated Press

By the time spring arrived in the Northern Hemisphere, the pandemic had the world firmly in its grip.

The vernal equinox arrived March 19, the day California handed down the first statewide stay-at-home order in the United States. Most of the country would soon follow suit. In the coming weeks, vast swaths of humanity would be largely confined to their homes.

Now, midway through spring, people are already fretting about summer. The spring of 2020 — for human beings, at least — has become the season that isn't.

Long considered a time of renewal and rebirth, spring is ever more precious in a world beset by climate change. After dark winters, spring arrives and the earth turns green again. The word itself is shorthand for revolutionary movements — the Springtime of Nations (1848), the Prague Spring (1968), the Arab Spring (2010-2012). Igor Stravinsky chose "The Rite of Spring" in 1913 to chart new musical frontiers.

April lies at the heart of the poetic spring. Shakespeare takes a jaunty view of it in his "Sonnet 98," personifying it as a month that "hath put a spirit of youth in everything." In "The Waste Land," when T.S. Eliot famously castigates "the cruellest month" of April as a time of "mixing memory and desire," he might as well have described the entire season in the strange days of 2020.

"Right now, when we're cooped up in our apartments ... we kind of get a glimpse of how we experienced spring last year, when we experienced all the people coming out into the streets and the rebirth of life," says Matthew Mersky, who teaches a course on modern literature and the environment at Boston College.

"And we experience it now negatively," he says, "through memory or its absence."

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May isn't looking that great, either. As the weather warms, sort of, many public pools and beaches are still inaccessible. Baseball stadiums remain empty; schoolchildren remain home. College students still shuffling from class to class in parkas were sent home before spring semesters could really live up to their name.

Spring's gifts aren't completely out of reach, particularly as stay-at-home orders expire. But in hard-hit New York City, densely populated with millions who often have no backyards, residents are left to catch spring's sunshine by awkwardly angling from fire escapes and small balconies — or risk walks.

Samali Nangalama, 23, has lived in New York for six years and recently moved within walking distance of Harlem Hospital, where she awakens and falls asleep to the sound of sirens. As the virus ravages vulnerable black and brown communities, she describes a "paralyzing fear" that has kept her in her apartment this spring, a stark adjustment for a season she usually views as "a time ripe with opportunity and optimism."

"I know it is assumed that Generation Z spends their life glued to screens, but there is no replacement for face-to-face contact," says Nangalama, a junior studying global public health at New York University. "I miss this precious contact and this spring, I will feel more alone than ever."

Beyond sunshine and milestones missed, spring is intertwined with culture and religion. Easter is quite literally about renewal. Sikhs commemorate the formalization of the faith on Vaisakhi, a holiday that shares its name with Punjab's spring harvest festival. May 1 marked Beltane, a fire festival of Celtic origin and a mid-spring sabbath celebrated by witches and pagans.

Haley Murphy, 32, the owner and operator of ATL Craft in Atlanta, has been working in occult practices for 14 years. For her, Beltane is a significant rite in which communing with the Earth through planting is a centerpiece. She says it's about "what needs to be planted, but also looking at each other and seeing us come out of our hermit shells of winter, watching each other bloom and get the sun on our faces and the freckles on our faces."

But with social distancing mandates, her coven couldn't come together for Beltane, which she conducted in solitude this year. Amid the pandemic, she's taken to sending members packages for other rituals, which are then conducted over FaceTime.

"We have to change with the times," she says, "and we have to adapt."

Spring is also a time to sow what can't be reaped for months. But uncertainty is all that's taken root for others whose future livelihoods depend on the metaphorical seeds typically planted during this time.

Katie Lloyd doesn't even like spring. She thrives in winter, growing up in Buffalo, New York, and spending years partaking in mountain sports in Colorado. She now lives in Alaska, where she and her husband co-own the Alaska Dogstead Mushing Company with Iditarod musher Nicolas Petit.

Fresh off her own rookie season as a dogsledding musher, Lloyd says Alaskans call spring "breakup season" — not for relationships, but for the melting ice that creates "one big sloppy mess for a month or so" as snow becomes rain. It's an important time, an opportunity to prepare for the summer tourist season that's vital to Alaska's economy.

"It's normally the excitement for the summer adventures and the excitement for the tourists coming here," she says. "Now everything is either paused indefinitely or a giant question mark."

That sense of uncertainty is pervasive, with so much unclear. Some countries and U.S. states have loosened restrictions, but experts fear that might cause a resurgence of infections that could, as the season progresses, produce months even crueler than April.

Absence is inherently intangible. That can make losses harder to measure. But many people will be delivered straight into the furnace of summer, emerging from the coronavirus months with losses that fundamentally alter their lives. Those voids are there to ponder while running down the clock on the spring that never was.

Mallika Sen is an editor on the East regional desk of The Associated Press. Follow her on Twitter at <http://twitter.com/mallikavsen>.

Strong typhoon slams into pandemic-hit Philippines

By JIM GOMEZ Associated Press

MANILA, Philippines (AP) — A strong typhoon slammed into the eastern Philippines on Thursday after authorities evacuated tens of thousands of people while trying to avoid the virus risks of overcrowding emergency shelters.

The first typhoon to hit the country this year rapidly gained force as it blew from the Pacific then barged ashore in San Policarpio town in Eastern Samar province around noon, weather agency administrator Vicente Malano said.

The typhoon came as the Philippines is trying to fight COVID-19 outbreaks largely by locking Filipinos in their homes and prohibiting gatherings that can set off infections. More than 11,600 infections, including 772 deaths, have been reported in the country.

Typhoon Vongfong, which was packing maximum sustained winds of 150 kilometers per hour (93 miles per hour) and gusts of up to 185 kph (115 mph), was forecast to blow northwestward and barrel across densely populated eastern provinces and cities before exiting in the north Sunday.

Overcrowding in emergency shelters is a common scene in the archipelago hit by about 20 typhoons and storms annually and regularly experiencing volcanic eruptions and earthquakes.

Many officials faced a difficult dilemma on how to shield villagers from the double threats. Video showed fierce rain and wind swaying coconut trees, rattling tin roofs and obscuring visibility in Eastern Samar, where some towns lost power.

"This is very complicated," Mayor Benjamin Ver of a town in the typhoon's path told The Associated Press by telephone.

Far-flung Jipapad is prone to landslides and flooding. The town in Eastern Samar province is surrounded by mountains and planked by two rivers that often swell in storms. The only evacuation centers for its 8,000 villagers are a gymnasium and the town hall where residents could be sheltered from the typhoon. Ver, who also is the town's only doctor, said he has secured enough face masks to protect his villagers from the virus in the town hall when the typhoon hits.

Observing social distancing "is almost impossible" if all the villagers are cramped in the town hall, but Ver said he would see what else can be done.

Jipapad and the entire Eastern Samar, a province of half a million people, fortunately remain free of coronavirus infections unlike neighboring regions, provincial Gov. Ben Evardone said. All emergency shelters have been turned into quarantine facilities with medical equipment in case of outbreaks but may have to be rearranged back into evacuation centers if large numbers of people need shelter, Evardone told The AP.

Northern Samar provincial Gov. Edwin Ongchuan said he has asked for twice the usual number of school buildings to be turned into typhoon shelters to accommodate about 80,000 residents who were being forcibly evacuated from high-risk coastal villages.

"If we used 10 school buildings before, we now need 20 to accommodate the evacuees with social distancing," Ongchuan said by telephone.

The government weather agency warned that "along with large swells, this storm surge may cause potentially life-threatening coastal inundation" and added that sea travel would be dangerous in regions expected to be battered by Vongfong, a Vietnamese word for wasp.

Metropolitan Manila will not be hit directly by the storm but may be lashed by strong winds. Officials were advised to remove many medical quarantine tents set up outside hospitals that could be blown away, Malano said.

The impoverished eastern region initially hit by Vongfong was devastated in 2013 by Typhoon Haiyan, which left more than 7,300 people dead or missing, flattened entire villages, swept ships inland and displaced more than 5 million.

Dentists re-open in France after two-month lockdown

By THOMAS ADAMSON and NICOLAS GARRIGA Associated Press

PARIS (AP) — Anyone who suffered through France's two-month lockdown with a toothache or other oral affliction of a non-emergency nature has a hope of licking the pain.

Dental practices around the country are cautiously reopening and accepting appointments after the French government eased restrictions on some businesses, services and public activity.

Yet getting back to work in the age of coronavirus requires caution, especially for over 40,000 dentists in France who are among the health professionals at highest risk of becoming infected.

Because respiratory droplets are a way the virus spreads among people, dentistry demands protecting patients and especially practitioners. That means not only disinfecting tools and surfaces, but layer upon layer of extra screens, wraps, gloves and masks.

The World Health Organization has recommended specialized face masks for health care providers performing medical procedures such as ventilation and intubation that produce fine, airborne particles, which might transmit the coronavirus. Drilling teeth for fillings is also known to generate aerosolized viral particles.

Paris dentist Sabine Jendoubi said the trade-off for safety is the discomfort of additional head and body wear.

"A surgical suit is something that we wear in the operating theater. Today, we wear it for everything," Jendoubi said. Of the various filtering face masks certified to protect against viruses in the air, she finds the FFP2-rated model "the most complicated, as it's really tight."

"It filters out every virus and bacteria, so it's quite heavy to wear but it protects us and the patients," Jendoubi said.

The additional precautions are also an added expense. An operator of medical clinics and offices in France, Doctocare, told the AP it is costing 50,000 euros (\$54,000) to supply each of the company's centers with the hygiene and protective equipment recommended by the French government.

"We will communicate to the government these difficult adjustments in terms of profitability, but for now we're focused on this public health issue," Carine Benharrous, director of dental operations at Doctocare, said.

The limited distance between the faces of dentists and their patients also is a potential concern, as some experts have theorized that people who get a bigger infectious dose of the coronavirus may become more seriously ill with COVID-19.

In Britain, all routine dental care has been suspended except for telephone consultations and prescriptions.

While dentists in Denmark are returning to their offices, they are wearing protective suits and plastic face shields while tending to patients lying with their mouths wide open. Cleaning teeth to remove plaque is being done by hand instead of with ultrasonic devices that would increase the risk of producing spit.

Yet in some European countries, dental practices never closed because of the virus. Dentists in Italy, one of the nations hit hardest by infections and virus-related deaths, reduced their services to take only urgent cases in person, managing other patients by telephone.

Proof that a pandemic wasn't an excuse to avoid an Italian dentist chair was an April 23 photo on Twitter of U.S. Ambassador to the Holy See Callista Gingrich wearing a protective hairnet and paper drape.

"A trip to the dentist in Italy during the COVID-19 pandemic," Gingrich tweeted with emoji of an Italian flag and smiley face in sunglasses.

Adamson reported from Leeds, England. Jan Olsen in Copenhagen, Nicole Winfield in Rome and Maria Cheng in London contributed.

Trump gets ally as ex-Navy pilot wins California House seat

By MICHAEL R. BLOOD AP Political Writer

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Mike Garcia grew up a single-minded kid from Southern California: He just wanted to fly fighter jets. His decision to enter national politics wouldn't come until decades later, after he had seen one California election too many.

A career as a Navy aviator would lead to a decade in the defense industry. But it was the 2018 elections that prompted the Republican to enter public life, as his home state moved deeper into Democratic-dominated government that he faults for job-crushing regulation and climbing taxes.

"I don't want my country to turn into what my state has become," says Garcia, who claimed a vacant U.S. House seat Tuesday north of Los Angeles.

The political newcomer's win over Democrat Christy Smith marked the first time in over two decades that a Republican captured a Democratic-held congressional district in California.

What was supposed to be a tossup election ended up with Garcia holding a comfortable 12-point edge in an incomplete tally Wednesday.

Garcia appeared to benefit from enthusiasm among conservatives who saw a rare opportunity to seize a Democratic-held seat in California, while the electorate that turned out in the unusual May special election skewed toward reliable, older Republican voters, even though the district has a Democratic registration edge.

His Hispanic surname was likely a benefit in a district with a significant Latino population. His military service would play well in a district known as popular with veterans and Los Angeles police officers.

The son of a Mexican immigrant father, Garcia will go to Congress as a fresh face who campaigned as a supporter of President Donald Trump and railed against "socialist-style" policies coming from the Sacramento statehouse.

Smith delivered her congratulations but said she expected their roles to be reversed in November, when the two meet in a rematch for the full, two-year House term that begins in January.

"This is only one step in the process," she said in a statement.

The race in the 25th District was being watched nationally as a proxy vote on Trump's leadership during the coronavirus crisis, as well as for hints about the political climate heading toward the November elections.

Coupled with another GOP special election victory Tuesday in a heavily Republican Wisconsin district, Garcia's win would leave Democrats with a 233-198 House majority, plus an independent and three vacancies.

Democrats are heavily favored to retain House control in November's elections.

Republicans said Garcia's victory showed the GOP can win in suburban districts, where moderate voters deserted the party in droves in 2018. Republicans lost 40 seats that year, enough for Democrats to take hold of the chamber. Seven of those seats were in California, including the 25th District.

But Democrats said there would be a different result when Garcia and Smith face off again in November, when far more Democratic voters will be drawn to the polls with Trump's name on the ballot.

"Democrats will retake this seat in November," said Rep. Cheri Bustos, an Illinois Democrat who leads her party's House political organization.

Garcia, a 44-year-old father of two boys whose wife is an interior designer, grew up in the same area he will represent, a district that cuts through suburbs and small ranches in northern Los Angeles and eastern Ventura counties.

"I didn't grow up wanting to be a politician," he told supporters at a Simi Valley tavern in January, before statewide stay-at-home orders took effect. "I literally just saw the last elections and I said, 'Hey, if I'm not going to do it, who is going to do it?'"

A top graduate at the United States Naval Academy, he went on to fly over 30 combat missions in Operation Iraqi Freedom. After 20 years in the military, he would spend a decade at defense contractor Raytheon.

Garcia and Smith each raised over \$2 million, a rare instance in a year when Democrats in key races have usually far outgunned Republicans in contributions. Outside Democratic and GOP political organizations also poured more than \$2 million apiece into the contest.

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The seat became vacant last year after then Rep. Katie Hill acknowledged an affair with a campaign worker and the House opened an ethics probe into an allegation that she was involved with a member of her congressional staff, which Hill denied.

Smith and Garcia topped a crowded field of candidates in the March 3 primary.

Not long ago the district was reliable conservative terrain. but like much of California it has grown gradually more Democratic. Hillary Clinton carried the district by nearly 7 points in the 2016 presidential election, and two years later Hill claimed what was the last Republican-held House seat anchored in Los Angeles County with a 9-point win.

The election took place under unusual circumstances, which might make it difficult to draw broad lessons from the contest. Most residents are under stay-at-home orders, traditional campaigning was halted in March and mail-in ballots were sent to every voter.

But in heavily Democratic California, "It does indicate Republicans are not doomed everywhere," Claremont McKenna College political scientist Jack Pitney said.

The GOP now holds just seven of California's 53 House seats.

Associated Press writer Alan Fram in Washington contributed.

US immunologist warns of 'darkest winter' if virus rebounds

By RICARDO ALONSO-ZALDIVAR Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — America faces the "darkest winter in modern history" unless leaders act decisively to prevent a rebound of the coronavirus, says a government whistleblower who alleges he was ousted from his job after warning the Trump administration to prepare for the pandemic.

Immunologist Dr. Rick Bright makes his sobering prediction in testimony prepared for his appearance Thursday before the House Energy and Commerce Committee. Aspects of his complaint about early administration handling of the crisis are expected to be backed up by testimony from an executive of a company that manufactures, respirator masks.

A federal watchdog agency has found "reasonable grounds" that Bright was removed from his post as head of the Biomedical Advanced Research and Development Authority after sounding the alarm at the Department of Health and Human Services. Bright alleged he became a target of criticism when he urged early efforts to invest in vaccine development and stock up on supplies.

"Our window of opportunity is closing," Bright says in his prepared testimony posted on the House committee website. "If we fail to develop a national coordinated response, based in science, I fear the pandemic will get far worse and be prolonged, causing unprecedented illness and fatalities."

Bright's testimony follows this week's warning by Dr. Anthony Fauci, the government's top infectious disease expert, that a rushed lifting of store-closing and stay-at-home restrictions could "turn back the clock," seeding more suffering and death and complicating efforts to get the economy rolling again.

President Donald Trump has dismissed Bright as "a disgruntled guy," and some of the president's political allies have urged that Fauci be fired, although that seems unlikely.

More than 83,000 people have died in the U.S., representing more than one-fourth of global deaths and the world's highest toll. On the planet more than 4.3 million have been infected and about 295,000 have died.

Eager to restart the economy, Trump has been urging states to lift restrictions, and many governors are doing so gradually, though consumers remain leery of going back to restaurants, social events and sporting competitions.

In his prepared testimony, Bright said, "The undeniable fact is there will be a resurgence of (COVID-19) this fall, greatly compounding the challenges of seasonal influenza and putting an unprecedented strain on our health care system."

"Without clear planning and implementation of the steps that I and other experts have outlined, 2020 will be darkest winter in modern history," Bright wrote.

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Bright, who has a doctoral degree in immunology, outlined a path forward that would be based on science, even as researchers work to develop better treatments and an effective vaccine. The steps include:

— Establishing a national testing strategy. The White House has urged states to take the lead on testing, even as the federal government pushes to make more tests and better ones widely available. Trump says the U.S. has “prevailed” on testing through this strategy, but in Congress Democrats are demanding a federal framework to encompass the whole nation.

— Doubling down on educating the public about basic safety measures such as frequent hand-washing and wearing masks in public places as guidelines indicate. “Frankly, our leaders must lead by modeling the behavior,” said Bright, in a not-too-subtle reference to a president who conspicuously goes maskless.

— Ramping up production of essential equipment and supplies, from cotton swabs for testing to protective gear for health care workers and essential workers.

— Setting up a system to fairly distribute equipment and supplies that are scarce and highly sought. Eliminating state vs. state competition would increase efficiency and reduce costs, he wrote.

As part of his whistleblower complaint, Bright is seeking to be reinstated in his old job. HHS, his employer, says it strongly disagrees with his allegations and that it reassigned him to a high-profile position helping to lead the development of new coronavirus tests at the National Institutes of Health.

BARDA, the agency Bright worked at for 10 years, was created to help the government respond to bio-terrorism, infectious diseases, and radiological attacks. It focuses on developing and procuring counter-measures such as vaccines and treatments. Prior to his reassignment Bright had received an “outstanding” performance review.

He says friction with HHS leaders escalated after he opposed widespread use of hydroxychloroquine, a malaria drug that Trump touted without proof as a “game-changer” for treating COVID-19 patients. Subsequent studies have indicated the drug may do more harm than good. Bright was summarily removed in late April.

One aspect of Bright’s complaint is expected to get backing at Thursday’s hearing from an executive of a Texas company that manufactures N95 respirator masks. Michael Bowen, executive vice president of Prestige Ameritech, emailed with Bright repeatedly starting in late January. Bowen offered to crank up production lines that were sitting idle, while warning that the world supply of masks was being snapped up by other countries. Bright said in his complaint that it took five weeks to move the federal bureaucracy.

In written testimony to the committee, Bowen said Bright and other BARDA directors he’d worked with previously all wanted to address a chronic problem of not enough masks in the government stockpile, “but in my opinion didn’t have enough authority.”

After the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, America was told that restrictive “governmental ‘silos’ had been torn down ... so that different federal agencies could work together for national security,” Bowen added. “But I didn’t see evidence of that.”

Q&A: What does ‘unmasking’ someone in an intel report mean?

By DEB RIECHMANN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — In 2016, Obama administration officials received intelligence reports that were concerning, but incomplete.

Surveillance of Russia’s ambassador to the U.S. revealed he had interacted with an unnamed American who may have been undercutting efforts to pressure Vladimir Putin’s government.

Using a common process known as “unmasking,” they asked intelligence agencies to reveal the American’s name. It was Michael Flynn, an adviser to President-elect Donald Trump.

The unmasking of Flynn has become Exhibit A in Trump’s unsubstantiated claim that he and his aides were the targets of a scandalous Obama administration “witch hunt.”

The top intelligence official, Richard Grenell, now has stepped into the unmasking issue, declassifying the names of the Obama administration officials who may have requested the unmasking. Those names, disclosed Wednesday by two Republican senators, included Trump’s Democratic presidential rival Joe Biden.

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There is nothing illegal about unmasking and the declassified document states that proper procedures were followed. While Trump casts unmasking as sinister, his administration has used the process more frequently than Obama's.

Questions and answers about "unmasking" Americans' names in intelligence briefs:

WHAT IS UNMASKING?

During routine, legal surveillance of foreign targets, names of Americans occasionally come up in conversations. Foreigners could be talking about a U.S. citizen or U.S. permanent resident by name, or a foreigner could be speaking directly to an American. When an American's name is swept up in surveillance of foreigners, it is called "incidental collection." In these cases, the name of the American is masked before the intelligence is distributed to administration officials to avoid invading that person's privacy.

Unless there is a clear intelligence value to knowing the American's name, it is not revealed in the reports. The intelligence report would refer to the person only as "U.S. Person 1" or U.S. Person 2." If U.S. officials with proper clearance to review the report want to know the identity, they can ask the agency that collected the information — perhaps the FBI, CIA or National Security Agency — to "unmask" the name.

Unmasking requests are common, according to Michael Morell, former CIA deputy director and host of "Intelligence Matters" podcast.

"Literally hundreds of times a year across multiple administrations. In general, senior officials make the requests when necessary to understand the underlying intelligence. I myself did it several times a month and NSA adjudicates the request. You can't do your job without it," he said.

Morell emphasized that unmasking is not the same as declassification. "When a name is unmasked, the underlying intelligence to include the name remains classified so leaking it would be a crime."

WHEN WOULD AN INTELLIGENCE AGENCY UNMASK A NAME?

The request is not automatically granted. The person asking has to have a good reason. Typically, the reason is that not knowing the name makes it impossible to fully understand the intelligence provided.

The name is released only if the official requesting it has a need to know and the "identity is necessary to understand foreign intelligence information or assess its importance," according to the Office of the Director of National Intelligence's latest report, which includes statistics on unmasking. "Additional approval by a designated NSA official is also required."

Former NSA Director Mike Rogers has said that only 20 of his employees could approve an unmasking. The names are shared only with the specific official who asked. They are not released publicly. Leaking a name, or any classified information, is illegal.

HOW OFTEN ARE NAMES UNMASKED?

The number of unmasking requests began being released to the public in response to recommendations in 2014 from the Privacy and Civil Liberties Oversight Board.

There were 9,217 unmasking requests in the 12-month period between September 2015 and August 2016, the first period in which numbers are publicly available. The period was during the latter years of the Obama administration.

The number rose during the Trump administration. The 9,529 requests in 2017 grew to 16,721 in 2018 and 10,012 last year.

WHY WOULD OBAMA OFFICIALS BE LOOKING AT THE AMBASSADOR'S CONVERSATIONS?

It's not unusual for the U.S. government to use intelligence collected from foreigners to get a sense of how other countries view the administration.

Also, at the end of the Obama administration, the FBI and the NSA were looking into Russian meddling in the 2016 presidential election. One aim of the probe was to find out whether any Trump associates had colluded with Russia to help Trump get elected.

Because of that review, intelligence agencies were generating more reports that were shared with senior

Obama officials.

WHY IS THIS ISSUE BEING DISCUSSED IN THE NEWS NOW?

Trump and his supporters have made the unmasking of Flynn one of their major talking points and discussions of it have become a fixture on conservative media. They claim it proves that Obama administration unfairly — and maybe illegally — targeted Flynn and other Trump associates.

But there's no evidence the unmasking of Flynn was illegal. The memo released by the Republican senators notes that it was approved through the NSA's "standard process."

Democrats see the unmasking issue as aimed at energizing Trump's base at a time when the president's response to COVID-19 has been called into question and he faces the prospect of running for reelection with the worst economy since the Great Depression.

The role of Grenell, the acting director of national intelligence and a Trump loyalist, in declassifying the names of Obama officials who had unmasked Flynn, will likely add to criticism that Trump has bent non-partisan national security agencies to serve him politically. The decision follows the Justice Department's move to drop charges against Flynn, who had pleaded guilty to lying to the FBI about his contact with the Russian ambassador.

Ahead of election, Trump attacks Russia probe and Democrats

By ERIC TUCKER and JONATHAN LEMIRE Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump and Republicans are launching a broad election-year attack on the foundation of the Russia investigation, including declassifying intelligence information to try to place senior Obama administration officials under scrutiny for routine actions.

The effort has been aided by a Justice Department decision to dismiss its prosecution of former Trump administration national security adviser Michael Flynn, an action that rewrites the narrative of the case in a way that former federal law enforcement officials say downplays the legitimate national security concerns they believe Flynn's actions raised and the consequences of the lies he pleaded guilty to telling.

The dismissal decision comes as Trump and his Republican allies push to reframe the Russia investigation as a "deep state" plot to sabotage his administration, setting the stage for a fresh onslaught of attacks on past and present Democratic officials and law enforcement leaders.

"His goal is that by the end of this, you're just not really sure what happened and at some gut level enough Americans say, 'It's kind of messy,'" said Princeton University historian Julian Zelizer.

The latest indication of that came Wednesday when two Republican critics of the Russia investigation, Sens. Chuck Grassley of Iowa and Ron Johnson of Wisconsin, disclosed a list of names of Obama administration officials who they say may have received Flynn's identity from intelligence reports in 2016 and 2017. Among the names is Trump's Democratic opponent, Joe Biden, who was vice president when the Russia probe began.

Names of Americans are routinely hidden, or minimized, in intelligence reports that describe routine, legal surveillance of foreign targets. U.S. officials must make a specific request if they want to know the person's identity, or "unmask" them.

Biden and the other officials had full authority to seek the name of the unidentified American in the reports — it turned out to be Flynn — and did so through proper channels, according to Trump administration documents. Rather than reveal any actual wrongdoing, the release of the information by the president's allies seems designed to create suspicion around Biden and other senior Democrats as the November election approaches.

Trump hyped the disclosure of the list with Biden's name as a "massive thing." But the Biden campaign dismissed the revelation, with spokesman Andrew Bates saying it simply indicates "the breadth and depth of concern across the American government" at the time about Flynn's conversations with foreign representatives. None of the officials could have known beforehand that the unidentified person in the reports was Flynn, Bates said.

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The requests for the information came as U.S. officials were scrutinizing Russian election interference on Trump's behalf and trying to determine whether Trump associates were involved in that effort.

The issue has been politically charged since early 2017, when it was revealed that Flynn had discussed sanctions during the presidential transition period with Russia's then-U.S. ambassador, Sergey Kislyak. Flynn later pleaded guilty to lying to the FBI about those talks with Kislyak.

U.S. officials may ask the National Security Agency to disclose to them the names of Americans who are swept up in the surveillance of foreigners and whose identities are concealed in intelligence reports if they believe the identity is essential in understanding the intelligence — and they do so thousands of times a year.

In fact, unmasking requests increased in the first years of the Trump administration from 2015-2016 totals during the latter years of the Obama administration, according to a government transparency report issued last month.

The list declassified by Richard Grenell, a Trump loyalist and acting national intelligence director, shows a broad range of U.S. officials submitted requests to the NSA between Nov. 8, 2016, and Jan. 31, 2017, to unmask the identity of an American who was revealed to be Flynn, according to a cover letter accompanying the release.

It is unclear if they actually viewed the unmasked information.

Flynn's call with Russian Ambassador Sergey Kislyak occurred in late December 2016. Many of the requests to unmask his identity took place before then, as well as in the weeks that followed. The content of the intelligence reports was not disclosed.

The highly unusual disclosure comes as Trump, scrambling to manage the coronavirus crisis, has been eager to shift the focus elsewhere. He has repeatedly pronounced Flynn "exonerated" and pushed a loosely defined "Obamagate" allegation that the previous administration tried to undermine him during the presidential transition.

Trump has tried to rally his supporters around the claim to revive enthusiasm among voters disappointed by his handling of the pandemic. He used the first 20 minutes of a recent Fox News interview to attack the Obama administration rather than offer updates on the pandemic.

He has increasingly lashed out in the year since Mueller's report, which identified substantial contacts between Trump associates and Russia but did not accuse him of a crime or allege a criminal conspiracy between his campaign and the Kremlin. Revelations since then have exposed problems in the early days of the FBI's probe, including errors and omissions in applications to surveil an ex-Trump campaign adviser.

Attorney General William Barr has said dropping the case against Flynn was in the interests of justice. The department says the FBI had insufficient grounds for interviewing Flynn about his "entirely appropriate" calls with the ambassador and that any imperfect statements he made during the interview weren't material to the broader counterintelligence investigation into the Trump campaign.

But the decision stunned former law enforcement officials involved in the case, including some who say the Justice Department is rewriting history and omitting key context.

Former FBI Deputy Director Andrew McCabe said the FBI was obligated to interview Flynn about his conversations with Kislyak, and that Flynn's lies compounded the bureau's concerns.

And because White House officials were inaccurately asserting that Flynn had never discussed sanctions with Kislyak, U.S. officials were concerned Flynn could be vulnerable to blackmail since Russia also knew what was discussed.

"Mr. Flynn was set to become the national security adviser, and it was untenable that Russia — which the intelligence community had just assessed had sought to interfere in the U.S. presidential election — might have leverage over him," Mary McCord, the Justice Department's top national security official at the time, wrote in a New York Times opinion piece in which she accused Barr of misrepresenting her viewpoints.

U.S. District Judge Emmet Sullivan has yet to rule on the Justice Department's dismissal request and has indicated he is not inclined to do so swiftly.

Why open a store? Chinese merchants go livestreaming instead

By ZEN SOO AP Business Writer

HONG KONG (AP) — At the height of China's coronavirus outbreak, the skincare-products maker Forest Cabin closed more than half of its 300 stores across the nation as shoppers stayed home. With sales plunging, founder Sun Laichun decided it was time to reach his customers more directly.

"We knew it was time for us to focus on an online strategy to survive," Sun said. But the company didn't launch an online ad blitz or announce big giveaways. Instead, it trained hundreds of its salespeople to begin hosting live video streams where viewers could get skincare tips and buy products without ever cutting away from the online patter. Within just a month, Sun said, Forest Cabin's February sales were up by 20% compared to a year earlier, despite a plunge in store sales.

These days, shoppers are making their way back to once deserted malls and shops as China emerges from its long winter of coronavirus shutdowns. But so many of the region's retailers ended up embracing livestreaming that they've kicked off a new boom in Chinese "shoppertainment" that lets retailers interact with distant customers in real time.

Some of China's largest e-commerce companies are betting big on livestreaming. Alibaba's Taobao Live platform saw more than a sevenfold increase in first-time business customers in February, while Pinduoduo's livestreaming sessions grew fivefold from February to March. Overall, livestreaming e-commerce revenue will likely double this year to 961 billion yuan (\$136 billion), according to Chinese market intelligence firm iiMedia Research.

Livestreaming has also created a profitable new niche for existing livestream stars who are now reaping hefty commissions as their shows draw millions of viewers. The trend might even suggest alternatives for battered retailers in the U.S. and Europe as those regions cope with stay-at-home orders and customers remain wary of crowds.

Commercial Chinese livestreaming goes well beyond the American formula pioneered by the Home Shopping Network and QVC, which play infomercials around the clock, said Michael Norris, research and strategy manager at the marketing firm AgencyChina.

In China, "there's actually education about products and how to use them, and elements of entertainment wrapped up in the livestreaming," he said. That plus instant sales makes livestreaming an excellent marketing tool, he added.

Some Chinese retailers host their own streams. Others hire livestreaming celebrities with large followings. Viya Huang and Li Jiaqi, for instance, are full-time livestreamers with tens of millions of followers who boast hundreds of millions of dollars in sales via livestreaming each year.

Both go live on the platform for about four hours, five to six nights each week. Millions of viewers tune in to catch their suggestions on skincare, snacks and household products.

On a recent evening, Huang's live online audience had reached nearly 20 million people when she lifted a box of spicy duck necks — a specialty of Wuhan, the Chinese city where the coronavirus was first reported. "These will be prepared fresh and shipped to you, it's the most popular flavor," Huang said, holding up a piece to the camera before biting into one.

Within seconds, viewers snatched up 70,000 boxes, their purchases benefiting a Wuhan recovery charity initiative. By the end of her four-hour stint, Huang had hawked everything from sugar-free cookies and Hello Kitty-branded mints to sanitary napkins and pairs of white Skechers sneakers, almost all of which sold out their limited inventories.

For viewers, the fast pace of celebrity livestreams provide a constant sense of urgency that they'd be missing out on great deals if they don't act quickly.

"It's really exciting to watch," said Coco Lu, a civil servant in Chongqing, a city roughly 400 miles (643.74 kilometers) west of Wuhan, who is still avoiding stores. "The hosts are very persuasive and there are giveaways, plus deals are only available for a very short period of time."

Adam An, who works in marketing in Hangzhou, finds them a relaxing form of retail therapy. Watching a Li livestream "feels almost as if a friend is chatting with me, recommending me great products to buy,"

he said.

Livestream sales are a godsend for small entrepreneurs like Dou Ma, who sells discount clothing, mostly costing less than 50 yuan (\$8), from the comfort of her home in the southwestern city of Kunming. After putting her two young children to bed, she hops online and streams from her living room for about three hours.

All Dou needed to get started was her mobile phone. Her earliest streams in late March drew fewer than 20 viewers a night, but recently, they've begun drawing more than 100. Dou streams at a leisurely pace, warmly welcoming every viewer who joins and thanking them for their support.

"It's okay if you don't buy anything from me today, you're welcome to just chat with me if you want," Dou told nearly 100 viewers in a recent stream, as she held up a winter coat priced at just 59.90 yuan (about \$8.50) with shipping.

When a viewer asks about the sizing of a dress via the comments section, Dou whips out her measuring tape, rattling off measurements. During her streams, she chats with her viewers, talking about everything from parenting tips to previous vacations she's taken.

"Because of this pandemic, livestreaming has become a good option," she said. "It's no longer practical for newcomers like me to open an offline store anymore."

Asian shares fall as hopes fade for quick economic rebound

By YURI KAGEYAMA AP Business Writer

Asian shares declined Thursday on pessimism about life getting back to normal soon amid the coronavirus pandemic, even as Japan prepared to let businesses reopen in some regions.

Japan's Nikkei 225 slipped nearly 0.8% in morning trading to 20,112.00. Australia's S&P/ASX 200 lost 0.9% to 5,370.80. South Korea's Kospi dropped 1.1% to 1,919.48. Hong Kong's Hang Seng dipped 1.4% to 23,831.06, while the Shanghai Composite was down 0.7% at 2,877.53.

Stephen Innes, chief global strategist at AxiCorp, said markets were jittery after comments from the U.S. Federal Reserve, which set off worries about the risks of corporate failure in the U.S. and job losses.

"The roller coaster recovery continues to be the theme of the week," Innes said, noting a second wave of COVID-19 infections could be ahead if lockdowns in any part of the world are eased too quickly.

Weighing on investor sentiments was a warning from Federal Reserve Chair Jerome Powell about the threat of a prolonged recession. Powell said the U.S. government may need to pump even more aid into the economy, which is bleeding millions of jobs every week.

Japanese government officials were preparing to announce an easing of the nationwide "state of emergency," which has strongly requested non-essential workers to stay home.

Some regions, where infections aren't spreading too much, may get further reopened, although with some social distancing measures in place.

Japan has so far has reported 678 COVID-19 deaths, but has had no lockdown. Public discontent is brewing, but people are also worried about health risks and whether infections could start rising exponentially, as they did in New York, Brazil and elsewhere.

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe is expected to make an announcement on the changes later in the day, after markets close.

Major Japanese companies, such as Toyota Motor Corp. and Sony Corp., have announced sharp drops in profits as the pandemic took hold, and have not given profit projections, or only gave partial forecasts, for the year through March 2021.

Wall Street indexes suffered after players saw a quick rebound as less likely, with the S&P 500 falling 1.7% Wednesday, to 2,820.00 for its second straight loss. The biggest hits targeted companies that most need a healthy economy for their profits to grow.

"At this stage now, we think there are more risks to the downside than the upside," said Liz Ann Sonders, chief investment strategist at Charles Schwab.

"Consumers in general are going to be more wary and more interested in boosting savings rates and

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are unlikely to come back to a world of consumption anywhere near what it looked like before," she said.

The Dow Jones Industrial Average dropped 2.2%, to 23,247.97, and the Nasdaq composite lost 1.5%, to 8,863.17. The Russell 2000 index of small-cap stocks dropped 3.3%.

It's the latest wobble for a market that has been wavering in recent weeks after coming off its best month in a generation. The S&P 500's 26% rally got going in late March following promises of massive aid from the Federal Reserve and Capitol Hill. It then accelerated on optimism as several countries and U.S. states began relaxing restrictions on businesses that were meant to slow the spread of the coronavirus but also caused a severe recession.

Many professional investors have been skeptical of the rally, though, saying it was overdone given how much uncertainty exists about how long the recession will last.

Analysts say they expect the market to remain in a wait-and-see approach for weeks as investors gauge how economic reopenings underway are going. Investors want to see if second waves of coronavirus infections occur if governments lift their restrictions on businesses too soon. Another possible flare-up in trade tensions between the United States and China has also recently weighed on markets around the world.

The yield on the 10-year Treasury fell to 0.64% from 0.65% late Wednesday.

U.S. benchmark crude gained 13 cents to \$25.81 a barrel in electronic trading on the New York Mercantile Exchange. It fell 65 cents to \$25.68 on Wednesday. Brent crude, the international standard, lost 5 cents to \$29.14 a barrel.

The dollar fell to 106.87 Japanese yen from 107.03 yen. The euro inched down to \$1.0813 from \$1.0818.

AP Business Writers Stan Choe, Damian J. Troise and Alex Veiga contributed.

New Zealand barber snips away at midnight as nation reopens

By NICK PERRY Associated Press

WELLINGTON, New Zealand (AP) — The raggedy hairstyles and scruffy beards have been there for all to see on video calls, so barber Conrad Fitz-Gerald decided to reopen his shop at midnight Wednesday — the moment New Zealand dropped most of its lockdown restrictions as the nation prepared itself for a new normal.

Malls, retail stores and restaurants are all reopening Thursday in the South Pacific nation of 5 million, and many people are returning to their workplaces. But most gatherings will be limited to 10 people and social distancing guidelines will remain in place.

The reopening reflects the success New Zealand has experienced in its bold goal of eliminating the virus. The country reported no new cases of the virus for a third straight day on Thursday. More than 1,400 of the nearly 1,500 people who contracted the virus that causes COVID-19 have recovered, while 21 have died.

Fitz-Gerald said he'd had about 50 inquiries for midnight haircuts, but limited the initial customers to a dozen, starting with his 18-year-old son. He planned to then go home and return at 6 a.m. for another round of cuts.

"People are saying their hair is out-of-control, they can't handle it anymore," he said. "Lots of parents of teenage kids have been calling up, too, thinking a haircut at midnight would be a great novelty. Unfortunately, we are full up."

Fitz-Gerald said he was trying to make sure the virus couldn't spread in his shop, Cathedral Junction Barbers in Christchurch. He said he'd made his own "supercharged" hand sanitizer from isopropyl alcohol and also had masks available for himself and his customers on request.

Health authorities in New Zealand have recommended that barbers wear masks but haven't made it mandatory.

Most New Zealand schools will reopen Monday but bars won't reopen until May 21, a decision that was prompted in part by the experience in South Korea, which has seen a spike in coronavirus cases linked to nightclubs in Seoul.

The nation's reopening coincides with the release of the government's annual budget on Thursday af-

ternoon.

Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern said the Southern Hemisphere nation faces the most challenging economic conditions since the Great Depression.

"New Zealand is about to enter a very tough winter," she said. "But every winter eventually is followed by spring, and if we make the right choices we can get New Zealanders back to work and our economy moving quickly again."

Trump, GOP launch broad attack on Russia probe foundations

By ERIC TUCKER and JONATHAN LEMIRE Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump and Republicans are launching a broad election-year attack on the foundation of the Russia investigation, including declassifying intelligence information to try to place senior Obama administration officials under scrutiny for routine actions.

The effort has been aided by a Justice Department decision to dismiss its prosecution of former Trump administration national security adviser Michael Flynn, an action that rewrites the narrative of the case in a way that former federal law enforcement officials say downplays the legitimate national security concerns they believe Flynn's actions raised and the consequences of the lies he pleaded guilty to telling.

The dismissal decision comes as Trump and his Republican allies push to reframe the Russia investigation as a "deep state" plot to sabotage his administration, setting the stage for a fresh onslaught of attacks on past and present Democratic officials and law enforcement leaders.

"His goal is that by the end of this, you're just not really sure what happened and at some gut level enough Americans say, 'It's kind of messy,'" said Princeton University historian Julian Zelizer.

The latest indication of that came Wednesday when two Republican critics of the Russia investigation, Sens. Chuck Grassley of Iowa and Ron Johnson of Wisconsin, disclosed a list of names of Obama administration officials who they say may have received Flynn's identity from intelligence reports in 2016 and 2017. Among the names is Trump's Democratic opponent, Joe Biden, who was vice president when the Russia probe began.

Names of Americans are routinely hidden, or minimized, in intelligence reports that describe routine, legal surveillance of foreign targets. U.S. officials may make a specific request if they want to know the person's identity, or "unmask" them.

Biden and the other officials had full authority to seek the name of the unidentified American in the reports — it turned out to be Flynn — and did so through proper channels, according to Trump administration documents. Rather than reveal any actual wrongdoing, the release of the information by the president's allies seems designed to create suspicion around Biden and other senior Democrats as the November election approaches.

Trump hyped the disclosure of the list with Biden's name as a "massive thing." But the Biden campaign dismissed the revelation, with spokesman Andrew Bates saying it simply indicates "the breadth and depth of concern across the American government" at the time about Flynn's conversations with foreign representatives. None of the officials could have known beforehand that the unidentified person in the reports was Flynn, Bates said.

The requests for the information came as U.S. officials were scrutinizing Russian election interference on Trump's behalf and trying to determine whether Trump associates were involved in that effort.

The issue has been politically charged since early 2017, when it was revealed that Flynn had discussed sanctions during the presidential transition period with Russia's then-U.S. ambassador, Sergey Kislyak. Flynn later pleaded guilty to lying to the FBI about those talks with Kislyak.

U.S. officials may ask the National Security Agency to disclose to them the names of Americans who are swept up in the surveillance of foreigners and whose identities are concealed in intelligence reports if they believe the identity is essential in understanding the intelligence — and they do so thousands of times a year.

In fact, unmasking requests increased in the first years of the Trump administration from 2015-2016

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totals during the latter years of the Obama administration, according to a government transparency report issued last month.

The information declassified by Richard Grenell, a Trump loyalist and acting national intelligence director, shows a broad range of U.S. officials submitted requests to the NSA between Nov. 8, 2016, and Jan. 31, 2017, to unmask the identity of an American who was revealed to be Flynn, according to a cover letter accompanying the release.

It is unclear if they actually viewed the unmasked information.

Flynn's call with Kislyak occurred in late December 2016. Many of the requests to unmask his identity took place before then, as well as in the weeks that followed. The content of the intelligence reports that U.S. officials were reviewing was not disclosed.

The highly unusual disclosure comes as Trump, scrambling to manage the coronavirus crisis, has been eager to shift the focus elsewhere. He has repeatedly pronounced Flynn "exonerated" and pushed a loosely defined "Obamagate" allegation that the previous administration tried to undermine him during the presidential transition.

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Virus spikes could emerge weeks after US economic reopenings

By CARLA K. JOHNSON, MICHELLE R. SMITH and TIM SULLIVAN Associated Press

U.S. states are beginning to restart their economies after months of paralyzing coronavirus lockdowns, but it could take weeks until it becomes clear whether those reopenings will cause a spike in COVID-19 cases, experts said Wednesday.

The outbreak's trajectory varies wildly across the country, with steep increases in cases in some places, decreases in others and infection rates that can shift dramatically from neighborhood to neighborhood.

"Part of the challenge is although we are focused on the top-line national numbers in terms of our attention, what we are seeing is 50 different curves and 50 different stories playing out," said Thomas Tsai, assistant professor at the Harvard Global Health Institute. "And what we have seen about COVID-19 is

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that the story and the effect is often very local.”

A handful of states started easing their lockdowns about two weeks ago, allowing reopenings by establishments ranging from shopping malls in Texas to beach hotels in South Carolina to gyms in Wyoming. Sparsely populated Wyoming, which has some of the lowest infection numbers in the United States, plans to reopen bars and restaurants Friday. Georgia was one of the first states where some businesses were allowed to open their doors again, starting April 24 with barber shops, hair salons, gyms, bowling alleys and tattoo parlors.

But it may be five to six weeks from then before the effects are known, said Crystal Watson of the Johns Hopkins Center for Health Security.

“As we saw early in the year, epidemics of COVID-19 start slow and take some time to build and become evident,” Watson said in an email.

The outbreak’s trajectory can vary greatly around the country, according to an Associated Press analysis of confirmed cases. For instance, steep increases in daily new cases are occurring in Hennepin County in Minnesota and Fairfax County in Virginia, while in others, such as Bergen County, New Jersey, and Wayne County, Michigan, there’s been a steady decline.

The AP analyzed case counts compiled by Johns Hopkins University, using a rolling seven-day average to account for day-to-day variability in test reporting.

In Geneva, meanwhile, a top World Health Organization official warned that it’s possible the new coronavirus may be here to stay.

“This virus may never go away,” Dr. Michael Ryan said at a press briefing. Without a vaccine, he said, it could take years for the global population to build up sufficient levels of immunity.

“I think it’s important to put this on the table,” he said. “This virus may become just another endemic virus in our communities” like other previously novel diseases, such as HIV, which have never disappeared, but for which effective treatments have been developed.

It can take three to five days for someone newly infected with the coronavirus to feel sick, and some infected people won’t even have symptoms. Since testing is mostly reserved in the U.S. for those with symptoms, it can take two weeks or so — the time for one group of people to spread the virus to another — to have enough testing data to reflect a surge in cases.

“If you are doing adequate testing, it will take two to three weeks” to spot an increase, Dr. Ashish Jha, director of Harvard’s Global Health Institute, said Wednesday as he prepared to speak to a congressional subcommittee on the crisis.

He urged a dramatic increase in testing.

“It was the failure of testing that caused our country to shut down,” Jha said. “We need federal leadership on the level of testing, guidance on whom to test and federal help on the sheer capacity, the number of tests that can be done. We still do not have the testing capacity we need to open up safely.”

New coronavirus clusters have surfaced around the world as nations struggle to balance restarting their economies and preventing a second wave of infections.

Authorities in the Chinese city of Wuhan, where the pandemic first began late last year, reportedly are pressing ahead to test all 11 million residents for the virus within 10 days after a handful of new infections were found.

South Korea confirmed 29 more coronavirus cases over the past 24 hours as it battles a spike in infections linked to nightlife spots in Seoul, threatening the country’s hard-won progress in the fight against pandemic.

And Lebanese authorities reinstated a nationwide lockdown for four days beginning Wednesday night after a spike in reported infections and complaints that social distancing rules were being ignored.

In the U.S., as in many countries, the lockdowns have resulted in catastrophic levels of job losses. The U.S. unemployment rate soared to 14.7% in April, the highest rate since the Great Depression. There are roughly 30 million Americans out of work.

In Washington, U.S. Federal Reserve Chair Jerome Powell warned Wednesday that a prolonged recession

could cause extensive damage to the economy and urged Congress and the White House to act further to prevent long-lasting harm.

The Fed and Congress have already taken immense steps, but Powell warned that numerous bankruptcies among small businesses and extended unemployment for many people remain a serious risk.

While costly, more assistance in government spending or tax policies would be "worth it if it helps avoid long-term economic damage and leaves us with a stronger recovery," he said.

Powell spoke a day after Democratic leaders proposed a \$3 trillion aid package that would direct money to state and local governments, households, and health-care workers. That would come on top of roughly \$3 trillion in earlier financial assistance. The Fed, for its part, has cut interest rates to near zero and created numerous emergency lending programs.

But Trump administration officials have said they want to first see how previous aid packages affect the economy, and were skeptical about allowing more spending right now.

The tension in balancing people's safety against severe economic fallout is playing out across the world. Italy partially lifted lockdown restrictions last week only to see a big jump in confirmed coronavirus cases in its hardest-hit region. Pakistan reported 2,000 new infections in a single day after crowds of people crammed into markets as restrictions were eased.

The U.S. has the largest coronavirus outbreak in the world by far: 1.39 million infections and over 84,000 deaths, according to a tally by Johns Hopkins University. Worldwide, the virus has infected more than 4.3 million people and killed some 297,000, according to the Johns Hopkins tally. Experts say the actual numbers are likely far higher.

Johnson reported from Washington state; Smith reported from Providence, Rhode Island, and Sullivan reported from Minneapolis. AP data journalist Nicky Forster in Berkley, Massachusetts, and Associated Press journalists around the world contributed to this report.

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

Pandemic wrecks many state budgets, could trigger deep cuts

By GEOFF MULVIHILL Associated Press

As the nation enters a third month of economic devastation, the coronavirus is proving ruinous to state budgets, forcing many governments to consider deep cuts to schools, universities, health care and other basic functions that would have been unthinkable just a few months ago.

Many states expect their revenue to plunge by 15% to 20% because government-ordered lockdowns have wiped out much of the economy and caused tax collections to evaporate. That puts statehouses billions of dollars in the red for the fiscal year that usually begins in July, with no end to the crisis in sight.

Colorado faces a gap of nearly a quarter of the state's general budget. The projected gap in California is more than a fifth of its spending plan and in Oklahoma, a sixth. The governor of Oregon is preparing to cut 17% of her budget. Michigan may have to slash up to a quarter of the money it sends to schools.

"There's no crisis we've had that even comes close to this," said Greg Albrecht, chief economist for the Louisiana Legislature. "This is a (Hurricane) Katrina-sized downgrade in the forecast." A forecasting panel slashed the state's income projections by \$1 billion because of the virus.

The drumbeat of bad news continued Wednesday as Washington's governor froze most state hiring and called for 15% cuts to many parts of the budget. New Jersey announced that tax revenue for April was down 60% compared with the year before — and that it will look worse next month.

The dire projections are coming out as Congress gets ready to debate whether and how to help.

Before the pandemic, most states had generally healthy budget situations and were working on adding to their reserves, which had been built over the decade since the Great Recession. Now state finances are in peril regardless of the actual number of infections. In nearly every state that has estimates, the

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projected budget gaps are bigger than the emergency savings.

Governors and lawmakers hope for at least a partial bailout from Congress, which is considering a relief package that could provide money to keep teachers in classrooms, parks open and police on the streets. How much Congress and President Donald Trump agree to send is primed to be the next big battle in Washington.

New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo said his state needs \$61 billion in federal support "or we will wind up aggravating the situation" by forcing cuts to local governments.

"You know who local governments are? That's police, firefighters. You want me to cut hospitals? Hospitals are the nurses and the doctors who just got us through this and everyone celebrates as heroes. If you don't fund the state, that's who you're cutting in terms of finances."

One state that stands to survive with minimal cutbacks is South Carolina, where revenue in the \$10 billion budget that starts July 1 is expected to be down by perhaps \$1 billion — but all of that shortfall was in extra money the state expected to collect in taxes and fees before the pandemic crash. Utah officials said they may be in a similar situation, with enough reserves to weather the pandemic. And Montana Gov. Steve Bullock, a Democrat, said Wednesday his state is still projecting a surplus a year from now, although smaller than originally planned, and does not anticipate budget cuts. Montana has the second lowest number of confirmed COVID-19 cases, behind Alaska.

Texas, the nation's second-most populous state, expects revenue to plummet by billions of dollars over the next 14 months. House Speaker Dennis Bonnen has called on state agencies to reduce spending by 5%, but the idea has not picked up momentum.

The Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, a nonpartisan but generally left-leaning think tank, projects a cumulative budget gap of \$650 billion for state governments through the next two fiscal years. That would more than gobble up most states' reserves as well as the federal aid they have received so far.

The National Governors Association, National League of Cities and bipartisan groups representing local officials also are pressing for federal help.

House Democrats included nearly a third of a \$3 trillion aid bill for state and local governments. The plan is scheduled to get its first vote on Friday. A bipartisan version expected to be introduced in the Senate calls for \$500 billion for governments.

"We have to address it in a big way," House Speaker Nancy Pelosi told The Associated Press in an interview. "The American people are worth it."

But some lawmakers are reluctant to offer any such general aid.

"We believe additional money sent to the states for 'lost revenue' or without appropriate safeguards will be used to bail out unfunded pensions, reward decades of state mismanagement and incentivize states to become more reliant on federal taxpayers," five GOP senators wrote in a letter to Trump, who has also been wary of what he calls a "bailout" for states.

Advocates for aid point out that the federal government, unlike states, is not required to have a balanced budget. For states, budget cuts or tax increases are the two main options for addressing huge drops in revenue, and so far there has been little appetite to increase taxes with nearly one-fifth of the workforce filing for unemployment benefits.

In March, lawmakers in Florida, one of the biggest GOP-run states, adopted a budget that came with the expectation that it would be cut later. But they have not yet formally sent the budget to Republican Gov. Ron DeSantis, giving him more time to make cuts with line-item vetoes.

The governor said it's become clear that the economic fallout from the virus has worsened.

"Now, remember, we started doing 15 days to stop the spread," he said at a news conference this week. "Then it went into another 30, and so I think that that's caused a lot of problems throughout the country."

Lawmakers in Missouri, where Republicans control the Legislature and the governor's office, last week adopted a budget that counts on more federal aid. If it fails to come through, aid to state universities would be cut 10%.

In New York, which has seen by far the nation's highest number of virus cases and deaths, lawmakers

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will plug a gap for this year estimated at more than \$13 billion, or about a seventh of the budget, by borrowing up to \$3 billion and cutting more than \$10 billion that was supposed to go to local governments.

Sarah Brancatella, the legislative director and counsel for the New York Association of Towns, said that could translate into aid cuts of more than 40% for some communities.

"We understand that we're all in this together and everyone is hurting and will have to tighten their belts," Brancatella said in an email. "Our hope is that the federal government will not force the state into making these difficult decisions."

Mulvihill reported from Cherry Hill, New Jersey. Follow him on Twitter at <http://www.twitter.com/geoffmulvihill>.

Contributing to this report were Associated Press writers James Anderson in Denver; Summer Ballentine in Jefferson City, Missouri; Adam Beam in Sacramento, California; Jeffrey Collins in Columbia, South Carolina; Melinda Deslatte in Baton Rouge, Louisiana; David Eggert in Lansing, Michigan; Brendan Farrington in Tallahassee, Florida; Amy Beth Hanson in Helena, Montana; Rachel La Corte in Olympia, Washington; Sean Murphy in Oklahoma City; Andrew Selsky in Salem, Oregon; Paul Weber in Austin, Texas; and Lindsay Whitehurst in Salt Lake City.

Wisconsin high court tosses out governor's stay-home order

By **TODD RICHMOND** Associated Press

MADISON, Wis. (AP) — The Wisconsin Supreme Court struck down Gov. Tony Evers' coronavirus stay-at-home order Wednesday, ruling that his administration overstepped its authority when it extended it for another month without consulting legislators.

The 4-3 ruling essentially reopens the state, lifting caps on the size of gatherings, allowing people to travel as they please and allowing shuttered businesses to reopen, including bars and restaurants. The Tavern League of Wisconsin swiftly posted the news on its website, telling members, "You can OPEN IMMEDIATELY!"

The decision let stand language that had closed schools, however, and local governments can still impose their own health restrictions. In Dane County, home to the capital of Madison, officials quickly imposed a mandate incorporating most of the statewide order. City health officials in Milwaukee said a stay-at-home order they enacted in late March remains in effect.

Evers reacted angrily in a conference call Wednesday night, saying the state has been doing well in the fight against the coronavirus. He predicted the court ruling will lead more counties to adopt their own restrictions, leading to a confusing patchwork of ordinances that will allow infection to spread.

"Today, Republican legislators convinced four members of the state Supreme Court to throw the state into chaos," Evers said. "They have provided no plan. There's no question among anybody that people are going to get sick. Republicans own that chaos."

Chief Justice Patience Roggensack wrote for the majority that health secretary Andrea Palm's order amounted to an emergency rule that she doesn't have the power to create on her own.

"Rule-making exists precisely to ensure that kind of controlling, subjective judgement asserted by one unelected official, Palm, is not imposed in Wisconsin," Roggensack, part of the court's 5-2 conservative majority, wrote.

Rebecca Dallet, one of the court's liberal justices, dissented, saying the decision will "undoubtedly go down as one of the most blatant examples of judicial activism in this court's history. And it will be Wisconsinites who pay the price."

Dallet also took aim at the potential delay of a rule-making process: "A review of the tedious multi-step process required to enact an emergency rule illustrates why the Legislature authorized DHS to issue statewide orders to control contagion."

State Assembly Speaker Robin Vos and Senate Majority Leader Scott Fitzgerald, both Republicans, said

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they're confident businesses can safely reopen by following guidelines calling for letting workers stay home if they're sick, making workers wash their hands and implementing telework and social distancing and postponing travel and events.

"This (court decision) does not promote people to act in a way that they believe endangers their health," they said.

Evers first issued a stay-at-home order in March that closed schools and nonessential businesses. The order was supposed to lift April 24, but Palm, an Evers appointee, extended it to May 26.

Republicans asked the Supreme Court to block the extension, arguing that Palm exceeded her authority because the extension amounted to an administrative rule that required legislative approval. Evers countered that state law clearly gives the executive branch broad authority to quickly enact emergency measures to control communicable diseases.

Nearly seven of 10 Wisconsin residents back Evers' "safer at home" order, based on a Marquette University Law School poll released Tuesday, though that support was down from 86% in March.

Evers' administration faced an uphill battle in convincing the conservative court to keep the order in place. Three of the conservatives joined Roggensack; the remaining conservative, Brian Hagedorn, joined Dallet and fellow liberal justice Ann Walsh Bradley in dissent.

The Republican legislators had asked the court to let the rule remain in place for six days to give them time to work with Evers' administration on an alternative plan. The court refused to grant the stay, saying the two sides have had weeks to come up with something.

The GOP so far has not offered any alternative plans. The state's chamber of commerce has suggested allowing all businesses to open at once while compelling higher-risk establishments and operations to take increasingly strict mitigation measures such as requiring employees to use protective gear.

Evers said there's no avenue to appeal the decision. His administration plans to put together an emergency rule addressing the virus, he said, but the process is so complex that it could be at least two weeks before state health officials can start drafting it. And the final product could be blocked by legislators.

"In the meantime, we're going to have 72 counties doing their own thing," Evers said. "I can't believe there's a state in the nation with this type of chaos."

Vos and Fitzgerald said in their statement that they want to work with the administration on rules that would provide clear guidance in case COVID-19 "reoccurs in a more aggressive way."

The GOP move against Evers mirrors actions taken by Republican-controlled legislatures in other states, most notably against the Democratic governors in nearby "blue wall" states Michigan and Pennsylvania. All three are critical presidential battlegrounds in November.

The GOP has been working to weaken Evers' powers since he ousted incumbent Republican Gov. Scott Walker in 2018.

During Walker's final weeks in office, Republicans adopted a set of laws that prohibited Evers from ordering the attorney general to withdraw from lawsuits, a move designed to prevent the governor from pulling Wisconsin out of a multistate lawsuit challenging the Affordable Care Act. The state Supreme Court has upheld those laws.

The high court also backed Republicans over Evers in the GOP's insistence on holding in-person voting for April's presidential primary despite the health risks of the coronavirus.

911 call, text hint at confrontation days before Arbery shot

By **RUSS BYNUM** and **KATE BRUMBACK** Associated Press

SAVANNAH, Ga. (AP) — Days before Ahmaud Arbery was pursued by two white men and fatally shot after being spotted inside a home under construction, neighbors — including one of the suspects — reported an earlier encounter with a person wandering through the open-framed structure.

Owner Larry English found nothing stolen from the site where he's building a home in the Satilla Shores subdivision where 25-year-old Arbery was slain Feb. 23, English's attorney said Wednesday. But she said there had been "four or five" instances in which unauthorized people entered the property before Arbery

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was shot.

"Nothing was ever taken from the English property," attorney J. Elizabeth Graddy said in a statement Wednesday. She added that "Mr. English is deeply distressed by Mr. Arbery's death."

Graddy also shared security camera video from the home site taken Feb. 11, less than two weeks before the shooting, that briefly shows a man walking inside the structure. She said English has been unable to find security video from the prior instances.

Attorneys for Arbery's family have said a man caught on security video from English's home immediately before the shooting Feb. 23 was Arbery and the footage shows he committed no crime. It's unknown whether it's also Arbery in the newly released video taken 11 days earlier.

Travis McMichael, one of the two men charged in Arbery's death, called 911 on Feb. 11 to report what he considered to be a suspicious man at the construction site, according to audio obtained by The Atlanta Journal-Constitution.

"I was leaving the neighborhood and I just caught a guy running into a house being built," McMichael said during the 911 call, according to the newspaper. "When I turned around, he took off running into the house."

"We've been having a lot of burglaries and break-ins around here lately," McMichael told the operator.

English lives far from where the home is being built just outside the port city of Brunswick, 70 miles (110 kilometers) south of Savannah. Graddy said the night of Feb. 11 he received an alert when motion inside the construction site triggered a security camera. English sent a text message to a neighbor, Diego Perez, asking him to check on the house.

According to Graddy, the neighbor soon sent English a text: "The police showed up and we all searched for a good while. I think he got spooked and ran after Travis confronted him. Travis says the guy ran into the house. Let me know if he shows up or if they find him."

Travis McMichael lives near the home English is building. He is charged with felony murder and aggravated assault, accused of firing the three shotgun blasts that struck Arbery at close range. His father, former police officer and district attorney's investigator Gregory McMichael, also has been jailed on the same charges. As of Wednesday afternoon, no attorneys had filed notice with Glynn County Magistrate Court that they were representing the McMichaels.

English declined to comment to The AP when reached by phone Wednesday, instead referring a reporter to his attorney.

Arbery's mother, Wanda Cooper-Jones, has said her son was merely jogging through the subdivision at the time. He lived with his mother roughly 2 miles (3.2 kilometers) from the subdivision where he was shot.

More than two months passed before the McMichaels were charged in the case. They were arrested last week soon after the Georgia Bureau of Investigation began looking into the case and cellphone video of Arbery's killing leaked online, causing a national outcry.

According to an incident report by Glynn County police, Gregory McMichael, 64, said he and his son armed themselves and chased Arbery in a pickup truck after seeing him run down their street. Gregory McMichael told police he suspected Arbery was a burglar, and said he attacked McMichael's 34-year-old son before the younger McMichael shot him.

"Even if something had have got stolen from my property and it had been Ahmaud, I wouldn't have wanted him to have lost his life for it," English told CBS This Morning.

Brumback reported from Atlanta.

Locked down neighbors let loose at 'Quaranchella' concerts

By ANDREW DALTON AP Entertainment Writer

LOS ANGELES (AP) — For 15 years, Adam Chester has subbed for Elton John, performing John's parts in rehearsals with the rocker's band. But with John sitting out the pandemic, Chester had to find another gig. And he did: weekly, socially distant concerts in his suburban Los Angeles cul-de-sac.

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Which is how Chester has come to serenade a few dozen of his face-masked neighbors from inside a broad rectangle of rainbow chalk with "Social distance" and a heart written at its edge. They dance to John's "Crocodile Rock" and sing along to the Beatles' "Hey Jude."

They call this "Quaranchella," and it has become a source of community and connection at a time when they're sorely lacking.

"It's been an incredible experience," said Chester's wife, Maria, who serves as his road crew along with their two teenage sons. "It kind of organically happened because he needed to play, and it's been evolving."

Chester jokes about his role as John's substitute -- "He's Sir Elton and I'm 'Sur' Elton, with a 'u,' the surrogate Elton John" -- but his career has not been spent entirely in the superstar's shadow.

He played a major role in the 2018 Grammy salute to Elton John at New York's Madison Square Garden. And he also played his own club and party gigs, but the lockdown put a halt to that.

"I was going out of my mind inside the house here as a lot of musicians are," Chester said. "I thought, 'Why don't we take this outside once a week?'"

The most recent show, on Mother's Day eve, had a maternal theme. Chester's own mother, who raised him alone after his father died when he was 11, sat behind him in his front yard.

Chester sat at his keyboard, a small amp alongside, and opened the show with his friend, saxophonist Katja Rieckermann, standing at a safe distance for a ripping rendition of Little Richard's "Long Tall Sally" on the day the rock legend died.

He played "That's the Way of the World," recounting how his mother took him to an Earth, Wind & Fire concert when he was a child: "We had to leave after 10 minutes because she said it was too loud."

He played Elton John's "Mama Can't Buy You Love." Joined by singer Jenny Karr, he played "Stacy's Mom" by Fountains of Wayne -- a jokey song, but one that shows that the cul-de-sac concerts are not entirely light-hearted. Its co-writer, Adam Schlesinger, died last month of COVID-19. He was joined on the song, as he was on several others, by singer Jenny Karr, a friend of Schlesinger.

Chester said "there wasn't a dry eye on the block" one recent evening when he played Simon & Garfunkel's "The Boxer," the favorite song of one neighbor's dying father.

Each show also raises money for charity. This week it was Single Mothers Outreach.

The response from neighbors has been overwhelmingly positive.

"All week I look forward to that Saturday show," said neighbor Lisa Silver, who along with others pitched in to buy a tripod to hold Chester's phone so the shows can be streamed on Facebook.

Exhilarated after the concert, Chester said these Saturday night shows may outlast the quarantine era.

"I can't imagine going back to anything normal after this," he said.

While nonstop global news about the effects of the coronavirus have become commonplace, so, too, are the stories about the kindness of strangers and individuals who have sacrificed for others. "One Good Thing" is an AP continuing series reflecting these acts of kindness.

Emails: Trump nominee involved in shelving CDC virus guide

By JASON DEAREN and MICHAEL BIESECKER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — A former chemical industry executive nominated to be the nation's top consumer safety watchdog was involved in sidelining detailed guidelines to help communities reopen during the coronavirus pandemic, internal government emails show.

Now the ranking Democrat on the Senate Commerce, Science and Transportation Committee is questioning the role played by nominee Nancy Beck in the decision to shelve the guidelines. Beck is not a medical doctor and has no background in virology.

President Donald Trump has nominated Beck to be chairwoman and commissioner of the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission, a position that requires Senate confirmation. Beck is scheduled to appear before the Senate committee later this month.

Emails obtained by The Associated Press show that Beck was the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's main point of contact in the White House about the proposed recommendations. At issue

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was a 63-page guide created by the CDC that would give community leaders step-by-step instructions for reopening schools, day care centers, restaurants and other facilities.

Beck is currently on detail for the White House with the Office of Management and Budget, where she is coordinating review of pandemic-related stimulus measures, and of the CDC guidance. She has a doctorate in environmental health and has worked as a toxicologist, specializing in the study of the health risks from chemical substances to the human body.

"I am deeply concerned by the nominee's involvement in advocating for the deregulation of toxic chemicals known as PFAS and I also have questions about her potential involvement with the CDC coronavirus guidance," said Sen. Maria Cantwell, the top Democrat on the committee, in a statement to AP.

Cantwell sent a letter of inquiry on Wednesday to Beck, asking for more information. Beck did not immediately respond to questions from AP sent to her via email.

Beck's role in the coronavirus guidance document was revealed in a series of emails from late April obtained by the AP.

On April 10, CDC Director Robert Redfield emailed the guidance to a group that included some of the president's closest White House advisers, including Trump son-in-law Jared Kushner, and counselor Kellyanne Conway, and Dr. Anthony Fauci, the government's top infectious disease expert. Redfield wrote that he wanted White House review and clearance to post the documents on the CDC website.

By the time the administration had released its "Opening Up America Again" plan on April 17, the process had stalled.

The emails show that the CDC's chief of staff, Robert "Kyle" McGowan, emailed Beck on April 26 seeking an update. "We need them as soon as possible so that we can get them posted," McGowan wrote.

Beck responded that they still needed approval. "WH principals are in touch with the task force so the task force should be aware of status."

The next day McGowan checked with Beck again. "I have no word on revisions yet for the rest of the package. My understanding is it is still being reviewed," she responded.

One of Beck's colleagues, Satya P. Thallam, followed up saying the White House Principal's Committee had not yet responded. "However, I am passing along their message: they have given strict and explicit direction that these documents are not yet cleared and cannot go out as of right now — this includes related press statements or other communications that may preview content or timing of guidances."

McGowan responded that White House changes would cause further delay.

"The comments and edits we get back will have to be reviewed at the CDC for scientific accuracy," McGowan responded to Thallam and Beck. "We will not be able to post the document we get back from the WH quickly if there are a substantial number of edits."

On April 30, one day before Trump's May 1 reopening goal, McGowan was told guidelines will "never see the light of day," according to three sources inside CDC who were not authorized to publicly discuss the matter and spoke on condition of anonymity.

In her letter, Cantwell said the emails raise "serious questions about whether you believe in preserving and respecting the scientific and professional integrity of scientists and health professionals that work at agencies like the CDC and the CPSC."

An OMB spokesperson said the initial submission to the office was the "start of the deliberative process, not the end, and everyone knows that," and added the White House appreciated that Beck continued "serving her country by helping the government respond to this pandemic while her nomination was pending."

Before joining the Trump administration, Beck was a senior director for policy at the American Chemistry Council, the primary lobbying arm for U.S. chemical manufacturers. In that role, she frequently testified on Capitol Hill against stricter safeguards to protect human health and the environment from toxins.

In 2017, she joined the Environmental Protection Agency as a top official in the Office of Chemical Safety and Pollution Prevention. She oversaw efforts to block or weaken Obama-era regulations on harmful substances including asbestos, and at the White House was involved in a rewrite of limits on PFAS. Those are class of chemicals used in making nonstick cooking pans and raincoats, and the chemicals have been

linked to birth defects.

Democrats and environmentalists have opposed her nomination to lead the consumer agency. While she awaits Senate confirmation, Beck has been assigned to the White House Council of Economic Advisers, which consults with the president on matters of economic policy.

On May 7, the day AP ran a story about the administration shelving the guidance, McGowan emailed Beck and copied Redfield.

"When can we expect OMB comments on the rest of the guidance? We would really like to get these moving," he wrote.

Late that afternoon, the White House called the CDC and told the agency to resend a series of detailed "decision trees" that had been shelved. Emails showed staff working on the guidance said they would "stand down."

At a Senate hearing Tuesday on the coronavirus, Sen. Chris Murphy, D-Conn., asked Redfield about the status of that guidance. Redfield replied: "Soon."

Dearen reported from Gainesville, Florida. Associated Press writer Zeke Miller contributed to this report.

Follow AP investigative reporters Jason Dearen at <http://twitter.com/JHDearen> and Michael Biesecker at <http://twitter.com/mbieseck>

AP Interview: Pelosi: Americans 'worth it' on \$3T virus aid

By LISA MASCARO and PADMANANDA RAMA Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — House Speaker Nancy Pelosi on Wednesday defended the stunning \$3 trillion price tag on Democrats' pandemic relief package as what is needed to confront the "villainous virus" and economic collapse.

"The American people are worth it," Pelosi told The Associated Press.

In an interview with the AP, Pelosi acknowledged that the proposal is a starting point in negotiations with President Donald Trump and Republicans, who have flatly rejected the coronavirus relief bill headed for a House vote Friday.

"DOA," Trump said during an event at the White House. "Dead on arrival."

As wary Americans wait on Washington, the stakes are enormous for all sides. The virus outbreak threatens the health and economic security of Americans, posing a generational test of political leadership on par with the Great Depression. Federal Reserve Chair Jerome Powell warned Wednesday that without intervention, the U.S. risks a prolonged recession.

House lawmakers are set to return to Washington for Friday's vote, but prospects are dim in the Senate, where leaders say they won't consider another relief package until June.

Trump has insisted any future coronavirus aid "must prioritize Americans' health and the nation's economic prosperity," said White House Press Secretary Kayleigh McEnany in a tweet. She called the Democrats' proposal "unserious."

The bill provides nearly \$1 trillion to states and cities to avert layoffs of police, firefighters and other essential workers as tax revenues tank during the shutdown. It boosts another round of \$1,200 direct cash payments to Americans, extends unemployment benefits and launches a rent and mortgage relief fund. It provides \$75 billion for more virus testing.

As the pandemic rages, Pelosi had just one message for Trump: "Tell the truth."

"This is the biggest disaster that our country has ever faced," Pelosi said.

"The president calls it a war — we're all warriors, that people are dying in the war. No, these are family, and people are dying in the family," she said.

"We have to address in a big way," she said. "The American people are worth it."

The speaker and the president don't talk much anymore. But Pelosi remains in contact with Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin, who led negotiations on past virus aid packages, and expects to begin talks

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with him on the next bill from Congress.

With Congress still partly shuttered, lawmakers face life-and-death decisions ahead. They are weighing whether it is safe for communities to reopen during the pandemic, perhaps with new restrictions on businesses and gatherings, or whether it is better to stay hunkered down until the U.S. can ramp up testing and prevent a second wave of COVID-19 cases, with deaths now beyond 83,000.

The president says the country can't stay closed indefinitely. But Pelosi warned that schools, businesses and large gatherings, including the Democrats' presidential nominating convention, will not be business as usual.

"You just can't say because people want to go to work, we should just take every risk," she said. "In order to turn the economy around, we have to get rid of the pandemic."

The virus outbreak is rewriting the rules of the fall elections, and Pelosi acknowledged that voter turnout will be key as Democrats push alternatives to in-person ballots.

As the party's presumptive presidential nominee Joe Biden shelters at home, campaigning via video from his basement, Pelosi said he's doing "just fine" in the new normal of an election year.

"It's not as if he's missing a big crowd someplace," she said.

"We're in a whole new world, and I think he's doing just fine," she said.

She expects Democrats will retain control of the House and flip the Senate — "which I very much think we can do."

Pelosi is often seen as the de facto leader of the Democratic Party, the highest-ranking elected official, setting the agenda and message. But now she says of Biden: "He is the leader of the Democratic Party."

As Republicans on Capitol Hill join the Trump administration to investigate China's role in the virus outbreak, she calls it a "diversion" from the more immediate problems of stemming the health crisis and salvaging the U.S. economy.

"Yes, we want to know the source of this pandemic, but let's focus on why we are not testing, how we can help people," she said.

Pelosi, 80, shows up for work most days, masked in a scarf at the U.S. Capitol, and said she is reminded that "life is fragile."

She repeatedly washes her hands and covers herself to protect others, she said.

"Let's take it one giant step at a time as we go forward because what we've been doing before has been helpful but not enough," she said, noting that some House Democrats wanted an even bigger bill.

She said that she has been "dismayed, frankly," by the way Trump is encouraging people to avoid the stay-home guidelines but that she "can't dwell" on the president's leadership.

"I mean, injecting Lysol, 'magically go away,' 'hoax,'" she said, repeating some of Trump's comments on the coronavirus.

"I believe in miracles. I believe in prayer. But again, we have to pray — and work — for the solutions to it all," she said.

Associated Press writer Kevin Freking in Washington contributed to this report.

Common's #WeMatterToo push urges jail releases amid virus

By AARON MORRISON Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Rapper and activist Common went into quarantine concerned about incarcerated people he has met during visits to jails, prisons and juvenile detention centers around the U.S. and who aren't able to maintain social distance or adopt rigorous hygiene routines to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

"It's a troubling time for them," Common said, "because they are the people who usually are overlooked."

On Wednesday, his criminal justice reform organization Imagine Justice launched a campaign with dozens of advocacy and activist groups calling attention to the threat that the coronavirus pandemic poses on millions of men, women and youths who are incarcerated in the U.S.

The campaign, dubbed #WeMatterToo, is urging authorities to immediately release people who have

served the vast majority of their sentences, especially if they have existing health conditions that put them at greater risk of severe illness or death from COVID-19. Although state and local correctional institutions have already released thousands of people from confinement due to the pandemic, supporters of the campaign also want governments to pay for testing and housing for inmates after they are released.

Common said he also hopes to create greater public awareness about what happens inside the nation's jails and prisons and the impact that has on society.

"We all have unanswered questions about the pandemic," the Grammy and Academy Award winning rapper said. "But being in prison adds new levels to that questioning, because of the way that people have been treated in prison."

A two-minute video for the campaign features the voices of inmates who say jail officials are not providing protective equipment or requiring social distancing and have not regularly sanitized shower facilities. The video, shared with The Associated Press ahead of the campaign's launch, does not identify the inmates or where they are imprisoned.

COVID-19 outbreaks in jails and prisons around the country have caused alarm among advocates, who say inadequate mitigation protocol threatens both the lives of incarcerated people and correctional officers. Last month, the U.S. Bureau of Prisons released data that showed more than 70% of people in federal custody tested for COVID-19 were positive.

Similarly dire outbreaks have been reported in a handful of state-run correctional systems.

In Common's hometown of Chicago, where the Cook County Jail is one of the nation's largest jails, a federal judge last month ordered officials to ensure social distancing among the 4,000 people in custody. As of Tuesday, 161 inmates and 81 correctional officers were positive for COVID-19, according to the sheriff's department. Many more inmates have tested positive but recovered. Seven inmates who have tested positive have died.

Guaranteeing prisoners' safety during the pandemic is an issue of humanity, not politics, said Sam Lewis, executive director of the California-based Anti-Recidivism Coalition, one of nearly 65 partner organizations in the #WeMatterToo campaign.

"People have made mistakes that put them in jail," said Lewis, a former life prisoner. "But that does not mean they should just die in those places. Accountability is not a death sentence."

Before the pandemic, Common's Imagine Justice group organized regular in-person visits to correctional facilities. Since the pandemic, visitation has been cut off or is severely limited at many facilities.

"Some of the strongest people I've ever met are in prison," Common said. "I believe we can come out of this greater than we were before."

Aaron Morrison is a member of The Associated Press' Race and Ethnicity team. Follow him on Twitter at <https://twitter.com/aaronlmorrison>.

Cats with no symptoms spread virus to other cats in lab test

By **MARILYNN MARCHIONE** AP Chief Medical Writer

Cats can spread the new coronavirus to other cats without any of them ever having symptoms, a lab experiment suggests.

Scientists who led the work, reported on Wednesday, say it shows the need for more research into whether the virus can spread from people to cats to people again.

Health experts have downplayed that possibility. The American Veterinary Medical Association said in a new statement that just because an animal can be deliberately infected in a lab "does not mean that it will easily be infected with that same virus under natural conditions."

Anyone concerned about that risk should use "common sense hygiene," said virus expert Peter Halfmann. Don't kiss your pets and keep surfaces clean to cut the chances of picking up any virus an animal might shed, he said.

He and colleagues at the University of Wisconsin School of Veterinary Medicine led the lab experiment

and published results Wednesday in the New England Journal of Medicine. Federal grants paid for the work. Researchers took coronavirus from a human patient and infected three cats with it. Each cat then was housed with another cat that was free of infection. Within five days, coronavirus was found in all three of the newly exposed animals.

None of the six cats ever showed any symptoms.

"There was no sneezing, no coughing, they never had a high body temperature or lost any weight," Halfmann said. "If a pet owner looked at them ... they wouldn't have noticed anything."

Last month, two domestic cats in different parts of New York state tested positive for the coronavirus after mild respiratory illnesses. They were thought to have picked it up from people in their homes or neighborhoods.

Some tigers and lions at the Bronx Zoo also have tested positive for the virus, as have a small number of other animals around the world.

Those cases and the new lab experiment show "there is a public health need to recognize and further investigate the potential chain of human-cat-human transmission," the authors wrote.

Guidelines from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention say that based on the limited information available so far, the risk of pets spreading coronavirus to people "is considered to be low."

The veterinary medicine group says "there is no evidence to suggest that animals, including pets, that may be incidentally infected by humans are playing a role in the spread of COVID-19." It stressed that person-to-person transmission was driving the global pandemic.

However, the group noted that many diseases spread between pets and people, so hygiene is always important: Wash your hands before and after touching pets, and keep your pet and its food and water bowls clean.

Halfmann, whose two cats sleep near him, said the worry may be greater for animal shelters, where one infected animal could pass the virus to many others.

Marilynn Marchione can be followed on Twitter at <http://twitter.com/MMarchioneAP>

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

Study ties 'Obamacare' to fewer cancer deaths in some states

By **MARILYNN MARCHIONE AP Chief Medical Writer**

Cancer deaths have dropped more in states that expanded Medicaid coverage under the Affordable Care Act than in states that did not, new research reveals.

The report Wednesday is the first evidence tying cancer survival to the health care change, which began in 2014 after the law known as "Obamacare" took full effect, said one study leader, Dr. Anna Lee of Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center in New York.

"For a policy to have this amount of impact in a short amount of years" is remarkable, because cancer often takes a long time to develop and prove fatal, she said.

Lee discussed the results in an American Society of Clinical Oncology news conference as part of its annual meeting later this month.

The law let states expand Medicaid eligibility and offer subsidies to help people buy health insurance. Twenty-seven states and Washington, D.C., did that, and 20 million Americans gained coverage that way. The other 23 states did not expand benefits.

Researchers used national health statistics on cancer deaths to track trends before and after the law. They looked only at deaths in people under 65, who stood to benefit from the change because those older already were covered by Medicare. About 30% of U.S. cancer deaths are in people under 65.

The cancer death rate fell throughout the United States from 1999 to 2017 in that age group, but more in states that expanded Medicaid -- 29% versus 25% in states that did not.

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Researchers specifically compared death rates from 2011 to 2013, before the health care change, to 2015 to 2017, after it. In states that expanded coverage, the change meant 785 fewer cancer deaths in 2017. Another 589 deaths could have been prevented that year if all states had expanded Medicaid, researchers estimated.

Having health insurance allows quicker treatment after diagnosis and access to more treatment options so patients can get the best care available, which can improve survival odds, Lee said. Insured people also may have more opportunities for screening to detect cancers at a stage when they're most treatable.

The new work builds on research from last year's conference that suggested more patients, blacks in particular, were able to quickly start on treatment after a diagnosis of advanced cancer in states that expanded Medicaid, said Dr. Howard Burris. He is president of the oncology society and heads the Sarah Cannon Research Institute, a cancer center in Nashville, Tennessee.

"There was so much excitement" when federal statistics showed a big drop in cancer deaths over the last decade, and the new study shows "it was an even better improvement in expansion states," said Burris, who had no role in the study.

The picture is murky for specific racial groups. States that expanded Medicaid generally had fewer blacks and more Hispanics than states that did not expand. Blacks have had worse cancer death rates than other groups, but that also has been improving at a greater rate than for whites. Expansion of Medicaid seemed to make no difference in cancer mortality rates for blacks, but did seem to improve the situation for Hispanics.

To date, 36 states and Washington, D.C., have expanded Medicaid and 14 have not.

Marilynn Marchione can be followed on Twitter: @MMarchioneAP

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Whistleblower: US could face virus rebound 'darkest winter'

By RICARDO ALONSO-ZALDIVAR Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — America faces the "darkest winter in modern history" unless leaders act decisively to prevent a rebound of the coronavirus, says a government whistleblower who alleges he was ousted from his job after warning the Trump administration to prepare for the pandemic.

Immunologist Dr. Rick Bright makes his sobering prediction in testimony prepared for his appearance Thursday before the House Energy and Commerce Committee. Aspects of his complaint about early administration handling of the crisis are expected to be backed up by testimony from an executive of a company that manufactures, respirator masks.

A federal watchdog agency has found "reasonable grounds" that Bright was removed from his post as head of the Biomedical Advanced Research and Development Authority after sounding the alarm at the Department of Health and Human Services. Bright alleged he became a target of criticism when he urged early efforts to invest in vaccine development and stock up on supplies.

"Our window of opportunity is closing," Bright says in his prepared testimony posted on the House committee website. "If we fail to develop a national coordinated response, based in science, I fear the pandemic will get far worse and be prolonged, causing unprecedented illness and fatalities."

Bright's testimony follows this week's warning by Dr. Anthony Fauci, the government's top infectious disease expert, that a rushed lifting of store-closing and stay-at-home restrictions could "turn back the clock," seeding more suffering and death and complicating efforts to get the economy rolling again.

President Donald Trump has dismissed Bright as "a disgruntled guy," and some of the president's political allies have urged that Fauci be fired, although that seems unlikely.

More than 83,000 people have died in the U.S., representing more than one-fourth of global deaths and the world's highest toll. On the planet more than 4.3 million have been infected and about 295,000 have

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died.

Eager to restart the economy, Trump has been urging states to lift restrictions, and many governors are doing so gradually, though consumers remain leery of going back to restaurants, social events and sporting competitions.

In his prepared testimony, Bright said, "The undeniable fact is there will be a resurgence of (COVID-19) this fall, greatly compounding the challenges of seasonal influenza and putting an unprecedented strain on our health care system."

"Without clear planning and implementation of the steps that I and other experts have outlined, 2020 will be darkest winter in modern history," Bright wrote.

Bright, who has a doctoral degree in immunology, outlined a path forward that would be based on science, even as researchers work to develop better treatments and an effective vaccine. The steps include:

- Establishing a national testing strategy. The White House has urged states to take the lead on testing, even as the federal government pushes to make more tests and better ones widely available. Trump says the U.S. has "prevailed" on testing through this strategy, but in Congress Democrats are demanding a federal framework to encompass the whole nation.

- Doubling down on educating the public about basic safety measures such as frequent hand-washing and wearing masks in public places as guidelines indicate. "Frankly, our leaders must lead by modeling the behavior," said Bright, in a not-too-subtle reference to a president who conspicuously goes maskless.

- Ramping up production of essential equipment and supplies, from cotton swabs for testing to protective gear for health care workers and essential workers.

- Setting up a system to fairly distribute equipment and supplies that are scarce and highly sought. Eliminating state vs. state competition would increase efficiency and reduce costs, he wrote.

As part of his whistleblower complaint, Bright is seeking to be reinstated in his old job. HHS, his employer, says it strongly disagrees with his allegations and that it reassigned him to a high-profile position helping to lead the development of new coronavirus tests at the National Institutes of Health.

BARDA, the agency Bright worked at for 10 years, was created to help the government respond to bio-terrorism, infectious diseases, and radiological attacks. It focuses on developing and procuring counter-measures such as vaccines and treatments. Prior to his reassignment Bright had received an "outstanding" performance review.

He says friction with HHS leaders escalated after he opposed widespread use of hydroxychloroquine, a malaria drug that Trump touted without proof as a "game-changer" for treating COVID-19 patients. Subsequent studies have indicated the drug may do more harm than good. Bright was summarily removed in late April.

One aspect of Bright's complaint is expected to get backing at Thursday's hearing from an executive of a Texas company that manufactures N95 respirator masks. Michael Bowen, executive vice president of Prestige Ameritech, emailed with Bright repeatedly starting in late January. Bowen offered to crank up production lines that were sitting idle, while warning that the world supply of masks was being snapped up by other countries. Bright said in his complaint that it took five weeks to move the federal bureaucracy.

In written testimony to the committee, Bowen said Bright and other BARDA directors he'd worked with previously all wanted to address a chronic problem of not enough masks in the government stockpile, "but in my opinion didn't have enough authority."

After the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, America was told that restrictive "governmental 'silos' had been torn down ... so that different federal agencies could work together for national security," Bowen added. "But I didn't see evidence of that."

New refugees struggle to find footing in US during pandemic

By BRADY McCOMBS Associated Press

SALT LAKE CITY (AP) — Afghan refugee Mahmood Amiri arrived in the United States more than a month ago, but his children are still waiting for their first day at school. They have yet to go to a mosque to meet other Muslim families. And Amiri is itching to get a job, but nobody knows how long that will take in a crashing economy.

Starting a new life in America is never easy for refugees, but doing it during a pandemic has created more struggles, especially after the federal government cut off funding to help them resettle and suspended new arrivals indefinitely.

Coronavirus restrictions have affected refugee families in the same ways as anyone else — job losses, child care challenges — but many are navigating the turmoil in a language they don't fully understand and without extended family or close friends to help.

The Amiris arrived in Salt Lake City on March 24, about a week after states began shutting down schools and businesses to try to stop COVID-19 from spreading. After waiting three years for a visa, they ignored warnings from an airplane employee in Kabul that traveling to the U.S. during the pandemic would be dangerous.

Amiri, his wife and their four children were the only ones on their final flight from Seattle to Salt Lake City. For them, it was worth the risk. While waiting for a special visa for Afghans and Iraqis who help the U.S. government, Amiri had feared that the Taliban would find out he worked for the U.S. Army in Afghanistan and kidnap his family.

"I knew the situation was very bad, but I had to decide for the (good) of my family," Amiri, 39, said of the pandemic. "If my visa expired, they would not extend it."

Refugee aid organizations have pivoted from training families for work and school to teaching them how to apply for unemployment benefits and do schoolwork online. They're dipping into emergency funds to pay for rent and food for families after losing federal dollars.

"We're instructing clients on how to navigate a food bank rather than navigating a career path," said Krish O'Mara Vignarajah, CEO of the Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service.

Her organization, one of nine agencies that help refugees resettle in the U.S., has given emergency aid to more than 215 families facing job losses.

Refugee families like the Amiris who arrived early this year or late last year are in particularly difficult situations because many don't have the work history to qualify for unemployment benefits or relief checks from the U.S. government, O'Mara Vignarajah said.

Ana Lucia Ibarguen and her three children arrived as refugees to Claxton, Georgia, in July after fleeing gang violence in Colombia. She and her 20-year-old son began studying English and working at a clothing distribution center before the pandemic abruptly left them without jobs or a school to study the language.

They applied for unemployment benefits but have yet to receive any money. Her son got \$1,200 from the coronavirus relief bill, which helped pay rent in May. But Ibarguen, 39, doesn't know how they'll pay their bills in June if they can't get work.

"It's very hard. Everything changed from one moment to the next," Ibarguen said in Spanish. "This makes me more depressed and sad."

Some refugees who haven't been laid off have jobs that put them at risk of infection, including as ride-hailing drivers, in restaurants and at meatpacking plants like the JBS USA factory in Greeley, Colorado, which has had an outbreak of at least 280 confirmed cases and seven deaths.

In the Denver suburb of Aurora, Dr. P.J. Parmar sees many of those workers outside his practice, where he dons head-to-toe protective gear to care for dozens of refugees worried about the coronavirus.

Parmar, a family physician who solely serves refugees, says 45% of his patients have tested positive for the virus. One has died, and two others are seriously ill.

That high rate is understandable considering that refugees often live in crowded apartments with other families, making social distancing impossible, Parmar said. They also pack vans to carpool to Denver International Airport, where many refugees work, or some 65 miles (105 kilometers) to the meatpacking

plant in Greeley.

"Inside that van, when one coughs, they all cough," Parmar said.

The Amiris said they feel safe and their rent and food is being paid for by Catholic Community Services of Utah. But that doesn't mean it's been easy to be confined to their two-bedroom apartment near a highway in a Salt Lake City suburb.

They don't have a TV or car, and while the parents try to entertain their children — ages 15, 13, 6 and 3 — with games or walks around the complex, they are restless and want to explore their new city.

Utah's public schools were already closed when the family arrived, and the kids keep asking when they can meet their teachers and classmates, Amiri said. The children know very little English and struggle without help from teachers in person.

Amiri's cousin, who lives nearby, and Catholic Community Services are helping him look for a job.

Most refugees find work in three to six months, but the uncertainty of the pandemic makes it harder, said Aden Batar, migration and refugee services director at the Catholic charity.

"The unknown, that's what we're worried about, not knowing how long this pandemic is going to go on," Batar said. "This time is going to be tough because there are so many Americans out of jobs."

Associated Press writer James Anderson contributed to this report from Denver.

Faxes and email: Old technology slows COVID-19 response

By FRANK BAJAK AP Technology Writer

On April 1, a researcher at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention emailed Nevada public health counterparts for lab reports on two travelers who had tested positive for the coronavirus. She asked Nevada to send those records via a secure network or a "password protected encrypted file" to protect the travelers' privacy.

The Nevada response: Can we just fax them over?

You'd hardly know the U.S. invented the internet by the way its public health workers are collecting vital pandemic data. While health-care industry record-keeping is now mostly electronic, cash-strapped state and local health departments still rely heavily on faxes, email and spreadsheets to gather infectious disease data and share it with federal authorities.

This data dysfunction is hamstringing the nation's coronavirus response by, among other things, slowing the tracing of people potentially exposed to the virus. In response, the Trump administration set up a parallel reporting system run by the Silicon Valley data-wrangling firm Palantir. Duplicating many data requests, it has placed new burdens on front-line workers at hospitals, labs and other health care centers who already report case and testing data to public health agencies.

There's little evidence so far that the Palantir system has measurably improved federal or state response to COVID-19.

Emails exchanged between the CDC and Nevada officials in March and early April, obtained by The Associated Press in a public records request, illustrate the scope of the problem. It sometimes takes multiple days to track down such basic information as patient addresses and phone numbers. One disease detective consults Google to fill a gap. Data vital to case investigations such as patient travel and medical histories is missing.

None of this is news to the CDC or other health experts. "We are woefully behind," the CDC's No. 2 official, Anne Schuchat, wrote in a September report on public health data technology. She likened the state of U.S. public health technology to "puttering along the data superhighway in our Model T Ford."

HOLE IN THE DATA

This information technology gap might seem puzzling given that most hospitals and other health care providers have long since ditched paper files for electronic health records. Inside the industry, they're easily shared, often automatically.

But data collection for infectious-disease reports is another story, particularly in comparison to other

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industrialized nations. Countries like Germany, Britain and South Korea — and U.S. states such as New York and Colorado — are able to populate online dashboards far richer in real-time data and analysis. In Germany, a map populated with public data gathered by an emergency-care doctors' association even shows hospital bed availability.

In the U.S., many hospitals and doctors are often failing to report detailed clinical data on coronavirus cases, largely because it would have to be manually extracted from electronic records, then sent by fax or email, said Johns Hopkins epidemiologist Jennifer Nuzzo.

It's not unusual for public health workers to have to track patients down on social media, use the phone book or scavenge through other public-health databases that may have that information, said Rachele Boulton, the Utah health department official responsible for epidemiological reporting. Even when hospitals and labs report that information electronically, it's often incomplete.

Deficiencies in CDC collection have been especially glaring.

In 75% of COVID-19 cases compiled in April, data on the race and ethnicity of victims was missing. A report on children affected by the virus only had symptom data for 9% of laboratory-confirmed cases for which age was known. A study on virus-stricken U.S. health care workers could not tally the number affected because the applicable boxes were only checked on 16% of received case forms. In another study, the CDC only had data on preexisting conditions — risk factors such as diabetes, heart and respiratory disease — for 6% of reported cases.

Missing from daily indicators that CDC makes public is data such as nationwide hospitalizations over the previous 24 hours and numbers of tests ordered and completed — information vital to guiding the federal response, said Dr. Ashish Jha, director of the Harvard Global Health Institute.

"The CDC during this entire pandemic has been two steps behind the disease," Jha said.

REINVENTING THE WHEEL

Instead of accelerating existing efforts to modernize U.S. disease reporting, the White House asked Palantir, whose founder Peter Thiel is a major backer of President Donald Trump, to hastily build out a data collection platform called HHS Protect. It has not gone well.

On March 29, Vice President Mike Pence, who chairs the task force, sent a letter asking 4,700 hospitals to collect daily numbers on virus test results, patient loads and hospital bed and intensive care-unit capacity. That information, the letter said, should be compiled into spreadsheets and emailed to the Federal Emergency Management Agency, which would feed it into the \$25 million Palantir system.

On April 10, Health and Human Services Secretary Alex Azar added more reporting requirements for hospitals.

Those mandates sparked a backlash among stressed hospitals already reporting data to state and local health departments. Producing additional cumbersome spreadsheets for the federal government "is just not sustainable," said Janet Hamilton, executive director of the Council of State and Territorial Epidemiologists.

HHS Protect now comprises more than 200 datasets, including reporting from nearly three-quarters of the roughly 8,000 U.S. hospitals, according to Katie McKeogh, an HHS press officer. It includes supply-chain data from industry, test results from labs and state policy actions.

But due to limited government transparency, it's not clear how accurate or helpful HHS Protect has been. Asked for examples of its usefulness, McKeogh mentioned only one: White House task force coordinator Dr. Deborah Birx receives a nightly report based on what the system gathers that provides "a common (nationwide) operating picture of cases at a county level."

"We will continue to work to improve upon the common operating picture," McKeogh said when asked about holes in HHS data collection. Neither HHS nor the CDC would provide officials to answer questions about HHS Protect; Palantir declined to discuss it on the record.

FIXING THE PROBLEM

Farzad Mostashari, who a decade ago oversaw the federal effort to modernize paper-based medical records, said it would be far more efficient to fix existing public-health data systems than to create a parallel system like HHS Protect.

"We have a lot of the pieces in place," Mostashari said. A public-private partnership called digitalbridge.

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us is central to that effort. Pilot projects that automate infectious disease case reporting were expanded in late January. Overall, 252,000 COVID case reports have been generated so far, said CDC spokesman Benjamin N. Haynes. In December, Congress appropriated \$50 million for grants to expand the effort, which is already active in Utah, New York, California, Texas and Michigan.

Going forward, the CDC is evaluating how to spend \$500 million from March's huge pandemic relief package to upgrade health care information technology.

In the meantime, public-health officers are still doing things the hard way. Up to half the lab reports submitted for public health case investigations lack patient addresses or ZIP codes, according to a May 1 Duke University white paper co-authored by Mostashari.

"We're losing days trying to go back and collect that information," said Hamilton of the epidemiologists' council. "And then we're reaching out to hospitals or physicians' offices that, quite frankly, are saying 'I'm too busy to tell you that.'"

Ramadan Lights to pick Detroit area's best-decorated homes

By MIKE HOUSEHOLDER Associated Press

DEARBORN, Mich. (AP) — Detroit-area Muslims who've had to socially distance themselves from the more communal aspects of Ramadan because of the coronavirus pandemic are instead celebrating the holy month in lights.

During last year's iteration of Ramadan, in which worshippers fast daily from dawn through dusk, pharmacist Hassan Chami organized the Ramadan Suhoor Festival. The middle-of-the-night celebration drew thousands who collectively engaged in suhoor, the meal consumed before Muslims begin their daily fasting.

But while Muslims nationwide struggle during the pandemic to celebrate Ramadan — a time when believers commonly gather for late-night meals and nightly prayers — Michigan's stay-home order makes typical celebrations impossible.

So, Chami and some friends have teamed up to host the inaugural Ramadan Lights contest, calling attention to the local house-decorating practices that make the area's Muslim community so visible during the holy season that runs for another week-and-a-half.

A number of homes in Dearborn, Dearborn Heights and other Michigan communities feature light-up crescent moons, lanterns and oversized lawn signs with the holiday greetings "Ramadan Mubarak" and "Ramadan Kareem."

"The short-term goal is to uplift everyone's spirits during this tough time. But there's a long-term goal, and the long-term goal is to create this festive spirit of Ramadan," Chami said.

Residents are invited to nominate their own or their neighbor's houses by sharing the address and a photo of their handiwork. Representatives from the three groups that organized the contest — Ramadan Suhoor Festival, Halal Metropolis and the Michigan Muslim Community Council — and a nominating committee will narrow down the submissions to the top 10 houses from each district. The judges then will visit and evaluate the homes in person. They will pick the most creative and interesting light displays from each district and award them a certificate.

"It's like something that's been in the air anyway, circulating — this idea that there should be some sort of celebration of how many people are decorating their houses and how big a tradition this has become in Dearborn and sort of commemorating this in some way, recognizing it," said Halal Metropolis' Sally Howell, who directs the Center for Arab American Studies at the University of Michigan-Dearborn.

"But the timing of this year when Ramadan is otherwise sort of very muted and quiet. Those two things coincided very, very neatly for us," she said.

Trump ramps up expulsions of migrant youth, citing virus

By NOMAAN MERCHANT and SONIA PÉREZ D. Associated Press

HOUSTON (AP) — The young migrants and asylum seekers swim across the Rio Grande and clamber into the dense brush of Texas. Many are teens who left Central America on their own; others were sent along by parents from refugee camps in Mexico. They are as young as 10.

Under U.S. law they would normally be allowed to live with relatives while their cases wind through immigration courts. Instead the Trump administration is quickly expelling them under an emergency declaration citing the coronavirus pandemic, with 600 minors expelled in April alone.

The expulsions are the latest administration measure aimed at preventing the entry of migrant children, following other programs such as the since-rescinded "zero tolerance" policy that resulted in thousands of family separations.

Border agencies say they have to restrict asylum claims and border crossings during the pandemic to prevent the virus' spread. Migrants' advocates call that a pretext to dispense with federal protections for children.

In interviews with The Associated Press, two recently expelled teens said border agents told them they wouldn't be allowed to request asylum. They were placed in cells, fingerprinted and given a medical exam. Then, after four days, they were flown back to their home country of Guatemala. The AP is withholding the teens' last names to protect their privacy.

Brenda, 16, left Guatemala in hopes of reaching the U.S. to eventually work and help her family. Her father works on a farm, but it's not enough.

"We barely eat," she said.

Her family borrowed \$13,000 to pay a smuggler and months later she crossed illegally. Authorities later took her into custody in April at a Texas stash house, she said.

"I did ask to talk to my brother because he wanted to get a lawyer, because he wanted to fight for my case," she said. "But they told me they were not letting people talk to anyone. No matter how much I fought, they were not letting anyone stay."

She is now under quarantine at her family's home.

Similarly, Osvaldo, 17, said agents wouldn't let him call his father. He was held with other children in a cold room and issued a foil blanket as well as a new mask and pair of gloves each of the four days he was in custody.

Someone took his temperature before he was deported, but he wasn't tested for the coronavirus until he was back in Guatemala. Osvaldo was given no immigration paperwork, just the medical report from his examination.

"I thought they would help me or let me fight my case," Osvaldo said, "but no."

A 10-year-old boy and his mother, whom the AP is not identifying because she fears retribution for speaking publicly, spent months at a squalid camp in Matamoros, Mexico, across from Brownsville, Texas, waiting for their immigration court dates under the Trump administration program known as "Remain in Mexico."

When she lost an initial decision, she decided he would be better off temporarily with her brother in the United States. She watched him swim across the Rio Grande.

The woman expected he would be treated the same as before, when such children were picked up by the U.S. Border Patrol and taken to Department of Health and Human Services facilities for eventual placement with a sponsor, usually a relative.

But the mother heard nothing until six days later, when her family received a call from a shelter in Honduras.

"They had thrown him out to Honduras," she said. "We didn't know anything."

The boy now lives with a family member in the capital, Tegucigalpa. Another relative has agreed to take him back to the family's rural village, if the mother returns to care for him. But she fears her former partner, who abused and threatened both of them.

"He doesn't want to eat. All he does is cry," the woman said. "I never imagined they would send him

back there.”

Their case was first reported by CBS News.

Amy Cohen, a psychiatrist who works with the family and leads the advocacy group Every Last One, criticized the government’s treatment of the boy and other children.

“This boy has gone through multiple traumas, ending with the experience of being placed on a plane by himself and flown to a country where no one knew he was coming,” she said.

Under a 2008 anti-trafficking law and a federal court settlement known as the Flores agreement, children from countries other than Canada and Mexico must have access to legal counsel and cannot be immediately deported. They are also supposed to be released to family in the U.S. or otherwise held in the least restrictive setting possible. The rules are intended to prevent children from being mistreated or falling into the hands of criminals.

U.S. Customs and Border Protection began the expulsions in late March, using the emergency as justification for disregarding the Flores rules. CBP said it processed 166 children last month as “unaccompanied” minors, meaning they would be taken to HHS youth holding facilities and allowed to stay in the U.S. at least temporarily, and the remaining 600 were expelled.

But HHS says it received just 58 unaccompanied minors in April. Spokesmen for both agencies were not immediately able to address the discrepancy.

CBP says it exempts children from expulsion on a “case-by-case basis, such as when return to the home country is not possible or an agent suspects trafficking or sees signs of illness.” An agency spokesman declined to provide more specifics.

CBP acting Commissioner Mark Morgan said last week that the U.S. may keep expelling migrants even as states begin to ease coronavirus restrictions.

Meanwhile, as the virus has spread through immigration detention facilities, the U.S. has deported at least 100 people with COVID-19 to Guatemala, including minors.

Michelle Brané, director of migrant rights at the Women’s Refugee Commission, said the virus is an excuse for expelling children, and the Trump administration could admit them and still counter its spread through measures like temperature checks and quarantines.

“At the very heart of it,” she said, “it has always been about trying to block access to protection for children and families and asylum seekers.”

Pérez D. reported from Guatemala City.

AP Courtside: Supreme Court hangs up on phone arguments

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Supreme Court has held two weeks of arguments by telephone because of the coronavirus pandemic, hearing cases about President Donald Trump’s tax records, contraceptive care mandates and religious education disputes, with audio available live to audiences around the world.

The court heard several days of arguments that had been postponed because of the coronavirus. Wednesday was the sixth and final day. Decisions are expected by early summer.

Some observations, trivia and analysis from our Supreme Court reporters (all times local):

12:20 p.m.

The Supreme Court has hung up the phone. The justices on Wednesday heard their last scheduled cases by phone. The high court heard arguments in 10 cases by telephone over six days as a result of the coronavirus pandemic.

Audio of the arguments was broadcast live, a first for the court. The cases the justices heard had been previously postponed because of the virus. Additional previously scheduled cases have been postponed to the fall.

It’s unclear whether the court’s experience with live audio will change arguments going forward. Before the pandemic, transcripts of the court’s arguments were available on the same day, but audio of arguments was generally provided on the Friday after arguments were held.

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The court traditionally finishes its work by late June and then takes a break from hearing arguments until October. The justices have not said whether they will return to the courtroom in October.

11:55 a.m.

Supreme Court Justice Brett Kavanaugh says he would apply the "avoid chaos principle of judging."

Kavanaugh is asking questions during the Supreme Court's final day of telephone argument. One of Wednesday's cases involves Colorado elector Micheal Baca. In 2016, Baca voted for John Kasich rather than Hillary Clinton, who won the state's popular vote. Baca was removed as an elector as a result. He and two other electors sued.

Lawrence Lessig represented Washington electors. Lessig argued that there have been only a handful of faithless electors in American history, with no bearing on the outcome of an election.

Kavanaugh said: "But we have to look forward and just being realistic, judges are going to worry about chaos."

11:20 a.m.

The Supreme Court justices have invoked fears of bribery and chaos to suggest they think states can require presidential electors to back their states' popular vote winner in the Electoral College.

That's the major takeaway from the first round of arguments by telephone Wednesday, dealing with whether electors are bound to choose the person who won the popular vote. The first case heard involves three Washington state electors who in 2016 voted for Colin Powell for president rather than the state's vote winner, Hillary Clinton. Those electors were fined \$1,000.

After a short break the justices are hearing the second case, which is about the same topic.

The second case involves Colorado elector Micheal Baca. In 2016, he voted for John Kasich rather than Hillary Clinton, who won the state's popular vote. Baca was removed as an elector as a result. He and two other electors sued.

11 a.m.

The attorneys speaking before the Supreme Court on its last scheduled day of phone arguments include a law school professor and a state solicitor general.

The cases Wednesday center on whether an elector must choose the candidate who won the popular vote in a state or can choose another candidate. They involve electors in Washington and Colorado who didn't vote for 2016 vote winner Hillary Clinton.

Harvard Law School professor Lawrence Lessig is representing Washington electors in Wednesday's arguments, taking place by phone because of the coronavirus.

Lessig favors broad reforms to voting, redistricting and the way campaigns are funded. Lessig briefly sought the 2016 Democratic nomination and called for presidential electors to support Clinton because she won the national popular vote four years ago.

Washington state Solicitor General Noah Purcell addressed the court after Lessig. Purcell previously argued against President Donald Trump's travel ban.

10 a.m.

The Supreme Court has started the final day of arguments it has scheduled to hear by telephone because of the coronavirus pandemic. Wednesday's cases are about electors who vote for the president.

Over the past two weeks, the court has heard five other days of telephone arguments. On Tuesday it heard the biggest cases, involving President Donald Trump's tax returns.

The cases Wednesday center on whether an elector must choose the candidate who won the popular vote in a state or can choose another candidate. They involve electors in Washington and Colorado who didn't vote for 2016 vote winner Hillary Clinton.

Arguments are scheduled to last two hours. The court has again urged lawyers to use a landline, not

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a cellphone. The justices ask questions in order of seniority, after Chief Justice John Roberts goes first. The phone arguments have gone smoothly, even when Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg participated from a Baltimore hospital room last week and Justice Stephen Breyer was briefly kicked off the line. The audio has been made available live to audiences around the world.

9 a.m.

The first case before the Supreme Court in Wednesday's phone arguments involves three Washington state electors who in 2016 voted for Colin Powell for president rather than the state's vote winner, Hillary Clinton.

The second case involves Colorado elector Micheal Baca. In 2016, he voted for John Kasich rather than Clinton, who won the state's popular vote. Baca was removed as an elector as a result. He and two other electors sued.

Wednesday is the last day scheduled for arguments to be heard by telephone because of the coronavirus pandemic. The audio has been made available live to audiences around the world.

On Tuesday, the court heard arguments in two cases involving President Donald Trump's bid to keep his tax, bank and other financial records private.

8 a.m.

Wednesday is final day for telephone arguments at the Supreme Court. Two cases center on presidential electors and whether they must support the popular vote winners in their states or can opt for someone else.

The voting issue could have important consequences for the 2020 presidential election in an era of intense political polarization. So-called faithless electors have not been critical to the outcome of a presidential election, but that could change in a contest with a razor-thin margin.

In 1915, Oregon became the first state to require presidential electors to pledge to support the nominee of the electors' party. Today, 32 states and Washington, D.C., have laws restricting electors' votes. But 19 of those states and D.C. don't attach specific consequences to breaking the law.

Follow AP's Supreme Court Twitter feed at https://twitter.com/AP_Courtside. And Supreme Court reporters Mark Sherman at <https://twitter.com/shermancourt> and Jessica Gresko at <https://twitter.com/jessicagresko>.

VIRUS DIARY: On a river, with rod and reel, he finds peace

By ROB JAGODZINSKI Associated Press

ROSCOE, N.Y. (AP) — The Catskills village that calls itself "Trout Town USA" is all but a ghost town this spring.

Fishing shops in Roscoe, New York, that should be overflowing with anglers are empty, due to the coronavirus outbreak. Guide services are idled, since they are nonessential businesses.

Yet the region's famed rivers remain open, mercifully.

Like many who love the outdoors, I've been pinned down lately by stay-at-home guidance along with work, house chores and storms that have struck during days off.

When I finally see a one-day window of clear weather, I leap through it.

I have always found spiritual connections in rivers. As a child in Erie, Pennsylvania, I caught chubs and suckers in a polluted creek down the block. Later there were trips with my older brother for Allegheny Mountain brook trout. During Army tours, I caught golden trout in the Sierra snowmelt, and rainbows in brawling Alaskan waters.

There's a tune by "The Band" entitled "The River Hymn," a gospel reverie:

"The voice of the rapids will echo
And ricochet like an old water well

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Who'd ever want to let go
Once you sit beneath its spell"

It's noon when I park at the trailhead of a hike-in Catskills fishing spot. There's not another soul. Social distancing will be easy. I head down the path under vaulting blue skies, and tranquility enters.

When I arrive at the shore, the river is high, cold and discolored from a storm. Mayflies hatch on the water and drift on the breeze, but no trout rise.

I rig up anyway and cast a dry fly, a bit of fur and feathers resembling natural bugs that trout eat. I cast for hours. Nothing.

Hope springs, so I tie on fly after oddball fly. Beadhead stone nymphs, partridge-and-orange wets, zonker streamers that mimic baitfish. If I had a Rat-Faced McDougal, I would throw it.

Nothing. The fish have lockjaw.

Out here in the woods, there is at least one reminder of the virus: This river is on a local airport's approach path. Normally, commuter planes and military transports sometimes break the spell. Now the skies are still, no contrails, only mare's tails.

It's evening, the breeze has died. Mayflies fill the amber air.

The river has pitched a shutout. The wise angler says catching trout is icing on the cake – the river is joy enough. Fact is, getting skunked hurts.

I break down my rod, kick off my waders.

I hear the sound my ears have been tuned for: a trout sipping mayflies.

I spot the rings of the rise that blossom in the evening current. The fish rises again. Shivering, I pull clammy waders back on, re-string my rod, knot on a fly.

I get into casting position, one suspender trailing, cold water slopping over my waders.

My achy shoulder balks. The line snags a branch and the fly snaps off. I grumble, tie on another.

I get a drift over the rise and this time the trout inhales. My brain catches fire.

The rod comes alive, the reel ratchets and the fish dives. It leaps, droplets spray.

I gain line and the trout tires. I net it.

It's a wild brown, maybe 15 inches, silver sides flecked with black specks and faint red embers. I snap a photo and release it to become part of the river again.

A few more trout rise. I wade to shore and listen as I pack up at dark. All around, day creatures find shelter as night creatures stir. A beaver glides to its lodge. Wood ducks wing to nest. An owl calls, "who-cooks-for-you." The current whispers.

That's the river hymn.

"Virus Diary," an occasional feature, showcases the coronavirus saga through the eyes of Associated Press journalists around the world. Rob Jagodzinski works on the Nerve Center at AP headquarters in New York.

Merkel: evidence of Russian role in German parliament hack

BERLIN (AP) — German Chancellor Angela Merkel said Wednesday there is "hard evidence" of Russian involvement in a cyberattack on the German parliament in 2015 that reportedly also involved the theft of documents from her own parliamentary office.

German daily Sueddeutsche Zeitung reported last week that federal prosecutors have issued an arrest warrant against an alleged officer with Russia's GRU military intelligence agency identified as Dmitriy Bardin, who already is being sought by U.S. authorities. On Friday, news magazine Der Spiegel reported that correspondence from Merkel's parliamentary office was among the documents targeted in the 2015 hack.

Prosecutors haven't confirmed those reports, but Merkel was asked about the theft of data from her

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office in a question-and-answer session with lawmakers in parliament Wednesday. She replied: "I get the impression that they picked up relatively indiscriminately what they could get."

"I am very glad that the investigations have now led to the federal prosecutor putting a concrete person on the wanted list," Merkel said, without elaborating. "I take these things very seriously."

"I can say honestly that this pains me: on the one hand, I work every day for a better relationship with Russia, and when you see on the other hand that there is such hard evidence that Russian forces are involved in acting this way, this is an area of tension," she added.

Russian officials have repeatedly denied any involvement by Moscow in the 2015 hacking attack on the German parliament, calling the German accusations groundless. They have similarly dismissed charges of Russian meddling in the 2016 U.S. presidential election and alleged cyberattacks on other Western nations and institutions.

Merkel indicated that the German investigation doesn't change her assessment of Russia's tactics, pointing to a strategy of "hybrid warfare, which includes warfare in connection with cyber, disorientation and factual distortion."

Merkel said there is every reason to keep up efforts for a good relationship with Russia, "but this naturally doesn't make it easier."

She described such actions as "outrageous" and said that "of course we always reserve the right to take measures, including against Russia."

AP Exclusive: CDC guidance more restrictive than White House

By JASON DEAREN and MIKE STOBBE Associated Press

GAINESVILLE, Fla. (AP) — Advice from the top U.S. disease control experts on how to safely reopen businesses and institutions during the coronavirus pandemic was more detailed and restrictive than the plan released by the White House last month.

The guidance, which was shelved by Trump administration officials, also offered recommendations to help communities decide when to shut facilities down again during future flareups of COVID-19.

The Associated Press obtained a 63-page document that is more detailed than other, previously reported segments of the shelved guidance from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. It shows how the thinking of the CDC infection control experts differs from those in the White House managing the pandemic response.

The White House's "Opening Up America Again" plan that was released April 17 included some of the CDC's approach, but made clear that the onus for reopening decisions was solely on state governors and local officials.

By contrast, the organizational tool created by the CDC advocates for a coordinated national response to give community leaders step-by-step instructions to "help Americans re-enter civic life," with the idea that there would be resurgences of the virus and lots of customization needed. The White House said last week that the document was a draft and not ready for release.

It contains the kinds of specifics that officials need to make informed decisions, some experts said.

"The White House is pushing for reopening but the truth of the matter is the White House has just not had a comprehensive plan where all the pieces fit. They're doing it piecemeal," said Dr. Georges Benjamin, executive director of the American Public Health Association.

Such detailed advice should have been available much earlier, said Stephen Morse, a Columbia University expert on the spread of diseases.

"Many different places are considering how to safely develop return-to-work procedures. Having more guidance on that earlier on might have been more reassuring to people. And it might have prevented some cases," Morse said.

From the start, CDC staffers working on the guidance were uncomfortable tying it specifically to reopening, and voiced their objections to the White House officials tasked with approving the guidance for release, according to a CDC official granted anonymity because they were not cleared to speak with the press.

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The CDC's detailed guidance was eventually shelved by the administration April 30, according to internal government emails and CDC sources who were granted anonymity because they were not cleared to speak to the press. After The AP reported about the burying of the guidance last week, the White House asked the CDC to revive parts of it, which were sent back for approval, according to emails and interviews.

On Tuesday, CDC Director Robert Redfield testified before a U.S. Senate committee that the recommendations would be released "soon." He provided no further details. Internal government emails show that Redfield had repeatedly sought White House approval for CDC's guidance, starting as early as April 10.

Both the CDC document and the White House's published plan recommend communities reopen in phases as local cases of coronavirus subside.

One of many differences, however, is advice for when communities should allow for the resumption of nonessential travel.

The shelved CDC guide advises communities to avoid all nonessential travel in phases of reopening until the last one, when cases are at the lowest levels. Even then, the CDC is cautious and advises only a "consideration" of the resumption of nonessential travel after 42 continuous days of declining cases of COVID-19.

The White House plan, by contrast, recommends that communities "minimize" travel in Phase 1, and that in Phase 2, after 28 consecutive days of decline, "Non-essential travel can resume."

As of Tuesday, CDC's web page on travel guidance during the pandemic still linked to the White House plan. The stricter guidance is not there.

Another stark difference in the final White House plan and that designed by epidemiologists at the CDC is the latter's acknowledgment that COVID-19 cases will likely surge after states reopen, and that local governments need to continuously monitor their communities closely.

The White House's final reopening plan lacks guidance on how local communities can track information beyond positive cases. But the CDC document offers thoughts on how to plan for where case increases might occur more quickly, using demographic information. The CDC says local leaders could take special notice of the number of households with limited English literacy in an area, how many people live in poverty or have no health insurance coverage, and even what it calls areas of "civic strain" caused by the virus, such as places where many workers were sick or lost wages due to shutdowns.

The White House plan offers few such specifics and instead provides broad guidance, such as "Protect the health and safety of workers in critical industries," and advises states to "protect the most vulnerable" by developing "appropriate policies."

On Wednesday, the Senate's top Democrat called for the immediate release of the CDC's guidance. "America needs and must have the candid guidance of our best scientists unfiltered, unedited, uncensored by president Trump or his political minions. The CDC report on reopening the country is an important piece of that guidance," said Sen. Charles Schumer of New York.

Schumer's resolution was quickly defeated when Republican Indiana Sen. Mike Braun blocked it, saying CDC's guide would bog down the economy.

Dr. Anthony Fauci, the nation's top infectious disease expert, warned on Tuesday that lifting stay-at-home orders too quickly could lead to serious consequences, both in deaths and economic hardship. President Donald Trump, meanwhile, has continued to push states to act to right a free-falling economy.

The CDC's guidelines stress the dangers of states and regions going it alone in such perilous times. The agency advises a national approach, rather than a patchwork, because policies in one state will in time affect others.

"Travel patterns within and between jurisdictions will impact efforts to reduce community transmission too. Coordination across state and local jurisdictions is critical -- especially between jurisdictions with different mitigation needs," the report states.

Contact AP's Global Investigative Team at Investigative@AP.org

With No. 1 hit, once-ousted producer Dr. Luke marks comeback

By MESFIN FEKADU AP Music Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — In 2014, songmaster Dr. Luke had logged his 16th No. 1 with Katy Perry's "Dark Horse," solidifying his place as pop music's reigning prince of hits, a throne that could only be challenged by one another person — his mentor Max Martin. He seemed unstoppable.

But the hits came to a halt as Dr. Luke became entangled in a bitter lawsuit with former collaborator Kesha, who accused him of sexual assault during their yearslong partnership, which began when he became her mentor when she was 17. Dr. Luke has vigorously denied the allegations.

His career waned as the case took center stage even before the growing #MeToo movement; female acts stood in solidarity with Kesha, including Kelly Clarkson, Taylor Swift, Adele and Lady Gaga. Feeling the pressure, Perry even released her first major-label album without a Dr. Luke song on it. While Dr. Luke still crafted songs for artists including Ne-Yo, Big Boi, Trey Songz and Tyga, the pop smashes that he had become synonymous with eluded him.

Until now.

Dr. Luke, born Lukasz Gottwald, is marking a comeback with the funky Doja Cat hit "Say So," which topped this week's Billboard Hot 100 chart thanks to its remix featuring Nicki Minaj. The song, produced and co-written by Dr. Luke, is on Doja Cat's sophomore album "Hot Pink," released last November on Dr. Luke's Kemosabe Records.

Instead of using his known stage name, Dr. Luke used the moniker Trevor Trax when credited as the producer of the song, which found major success after TikToker Haley Sharpe performed a dance to the tune on the uber-popular video-sharing platform.

Pitbull, who has collaborated with Dr. Luke on hits like the Kesha-featured "Timber" and "Time of Our Lives," said he didn't even know Dr. Luke produced "Say So."

"No, I didn't. I wouldn't lie to you," the Grammy winner said. "I thought, 'Oh man, that's crazy.' But I love the record. All the kids that I'm around, they love the record."

"It was very clever to put it under another name," Pitbull said. "Let's call it a re-charge, re-boost, restart and refresh. He disconnected, deprogrammed and reprogrammed."

Dr. Luke and Doja Cat declined to be interviewed for this story. Sony's RCA Records, which owns Kemosabe, had no comment.

Doja Cat signed with RCA and Kemosabe in 2014, releasing her debut EP "Purrr!" in August 2014, two months before Kesha filed her lawsuit against Dr. Luke.

Press materials for Doja Cat do not mention that Dr. Luke is the mastermind behind "Say So" or four other songs on her album, including the Tyga-assisted bop "Juicy," which peaked at No. 41 on the Hot 100.

When asked if she was surprised Dr. Luke had a No. 1 hit, music journalist Evelyn McDonnell said: "I guess in the sense that he kind of snuck into No. 1, yes."

"The cynic in me is not that surprised because money talks and he is a hitmaker," added McDonnell, a professor of journalism at Loyola Marymount University. "I think if it had been announced as a Dr. Luke song from the beginning that would have gotten the headlines right away."

McDonnell added that the song's success on TikTok helped Dr. Luke take a backseat: "If it had been taken to radio stations ... in a normal way, radio stations might have been more reluctant."

Dr. Luke broke on the music scene as a student of Max Martin, the pop music maestro behind early hits for Britney Spears, N'Sync and Backstreet Boys. Martin's white-hot streak has continued since: This year he logged his 23rd No. 1 hit on the Hot 100.

Together, the Swedish creatives crafted smash hits like Clarkson's "Since U Been Gone" and Perry's "I Kissed a Girl," among other triumphs. In 2010, Kesha's debut "Animal," executive produced by Dr. Luke, was released on his label and topped the charts, making Kesha the year's breakout star. The drunken party anthem "TiK ToK" held the top spot for a whopping nine weeks and other Top 10 successes followed.

But the former collaborators have been clashing in courts since 2014. Kesha alleges Dr. Luke drugged and raped her in 2005 and emotionally abused her for years. He claims she smeared him with lies in hopes

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of getting out of her record contract.

A New York court dismissed Kesha's sexual abuse-related claims in 2016 because of legal issues, without ruling on whether the allegations were true.

Kesha lost another round this past February, when a New York judge said she made a defamatory statement about Dr. Luke on a different occasion: a 2016 text message telling Gaga the producer had also raped Perry. Both he and Perry have denied it, and the judge said there was "no evidence whatsoever" to support the claim.

Kesha's lawyers have filed notice that they plan to appeal the ruling, which also found she owed Dr. Luke over \$373,000 in interest on royalties she paid him years late.

But it didn't resolve other aspects of his defamation and breach-of-contract suit, including the crucial question of whether Kesha's allegation that he raped her is true. The judge said that's for a jury to decide at an eventual trial.

"Listen, he was involved in a public scandal," said Larry Rudolph, Spears' longtime manager who has worked with Dr. Luke for years. "There's the court of public opinion and then there's the court of real opinion. Public opinion is often based on little-to-no facts, more emotion-driven. Then there's the court system that's based on real facts. If you look at what happened in the court system, I think you'll find a very different result than what he got caught up a bit in."

Kesha has put out two albums post-lawsuit that were released on Dr. Luke's label but without his creative input.

"Six years is a pretty long time," McDonnell said of the time Dr. Luke went without a pop hit. "Is it long enough for redemption? I don't think so. Not when he's still fighting the lawsuit. That's what's, I think, really troubling."

Theron Thomas, who has co-written hits for Miley Cyrus, Beyoncé, Lizzo and Rihanna and frequently collaborates with Dr. Luke, said he was advised to not work with Dr. Luke but decided to do so anyway.

"I feel like if you're going to work with somebody and be with somebody ... you got to be with them in the storm and out the storm," he said.

Thomas admits when he first met Dr. Luke, it wasn't pretty: "Our relationship was a bit rocky. I hated him. I thought he was the biggest (expletive) ever."

"The more and more we worked, I understood his reasoning," Thomas added. "It justified it for me. No lie. He was right most of the time."

Thomas said before the coronavirus pandemic hit the United States, he was in Hawaii working on new music with Dr. Luke and Doja Cat.

Pitbull, who is also working on music with Dr. Luke, said he never hesitated in collaborating with him.

"I deal with people for when I'm working with them on the business side. If I'm dealing with you on the personal side and you do something that I think is disrespectful on the personal side, then that's a different story. But if I'm not there to see what goes on, then guess what? We're just going to continue to live with three sides of a story: he says, she says, and the truth," Pitbull said. "I just know what he does musically, how talented he is and how amazing we work together. That's what my business is at the end of the day."

Associated Press Writer Jennifer Peltz contributed to this report.

Poll shows a partisan split over virus-era religious freedom

By ELANA SCHOR and EMILY SWANSON undefined

NEW YORK (AP) — As the nation's houses of worship weigh how and when to resume in-person gatherings while coronavirus stay-at-home orders ease in some areas, a new poll points to a partisan divide over whether restricting those services violates religious freedom.

Questions about whether states and localities could restrict religious gatherings to protect public health during the pandemic while permitting other secular activities have swirled for weeks and resulted in more than a dozen legal challenges that touch on freedom to worship.

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President Donald Trump's administration has sided with two churches contesting their areas' pandemic-related limits on in-person and drive-in services — a stance that appeals to his conservative base, according to the new poll by The University of Chicago Divinity School and The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research.

The poll found Republicans are more likely than Democrats to say prohibiting in-person services during the coronavirus outbreak violates religious freedom, 49% to 21%.

A majority of Democrats, 58%, say they think in-person religious services should not be allowed at all during the pandemic, compared with 34% of Republicans who say the same. Among Republicans, most of the remainder — 48% — think they should be allowed with restrictions, while 15% think they should be allowed without restrictions. Just 5% of Democrats favor unrestricted in-person worship, and 38% think it should be permitted with restrictions.

Caught between the poles of the debate are Americans like Stanley Maslowski, 83, a retired Catholic priest in St. Paul, Minn., and an independent who voted for Trump in 2016 but is undecided this year. Maslowski was of two minds about a court challenge by Kentucky churches that successfully exempted in-person religious services from the temporary gathering ban issued by that state's Democratic governor.

"On the one hand, I think it restricts religious freedom," Maslowski said of the Kentucky ban. "On the other hand, I'm not sure if some of that restriction is warranted because of the severity of the contagious virus. It's a whole new situation."

The unprecedented circumstance of a highly contagious virus whose spread was traced back, in some regions, to religious gatherings prompted most leaders across faiths to suspend in-person worship during the early weeks of the pandemic. But it wasn't long before worship restrictions prompted legal skirmishes from Kansas to California, with several high-profile cases championed by conservative legal nonprofits that have allied with the Trump administration's past elevation of religious liberty.

One of those conservative nonprofits, the First Liberty Institute, spearheaded a Tuesday letter asking federal lawmakers to extend liability protections from coronavirus-related negligence lawsuits to religious organizations in their next coronavirus relief legislation.

Shielding houses of worship from potential legal liability would "reassure ministries that voluntarily closed that they can reopen in order to resume serving their communities," the First Liberty-led letter states.

Among the hundreds of faith leaders signing the letter were several conservative evangelical Christian supporters of Trump, including Family Research Council President Tony Perkins, and Rabbi Pesach Lerner, the president of the Coalition for Jewish Values.

John Inazu, a law professor at Washington University in St. Louis who studies the First Amendment, said the letter's warning of legal peril for religious organizations that reopen their doors amid the virus appeared inflated. But he predicted further legal back-and-forth over whether eased-up gathering limits treat religious gatherings neutrally.

"I would think the greater litigation risk is not from private citizens suing churches but from churches suing municipalities whose reopening policies potentially disadvantage churches relative to businesses and other social institutions," Inazu said by email. "Some of those suits will have merit, and some won't."

Drive-through or drive-in services have grown in popularity during the virus as ways for houses of worship to continue welcoming the faithful while attempting to keep them at a reasonable social distance. Local limits on those services prompted high-profile legal challenges, including one of the two where the Justice Department weighed in on behalf of churches. The new poll also points to a partisan split on that issue.

Fifty-nine percent of Republicans say prohibitions on drive-in services while the outbreak is ongoing are a violation of religious freedom, compared with 30% of Democrats. Republicans are also more likely than Democrats to say that drive-through religious services should be allowed without restriction, 38% to 18%.

Most Republicans and Democrats think drive-in services should be restricted, with few thinking they shouldn't be allowed at all.

Daniel Bennett, an associate political science professor at John Brown University, pointed to high support for Trump among white evangelicals — whom the poll showed are also more likely than others to say in-person worship should be allowed during the virus — as a possible driver of Democratic sentiment in

the opposite direction.

Religious freedom can grow "more partisan when you have these white evangelicals who are such a key part of the Trump administration's voting bloc," said Bennett, who wrote a book on conservative Christian legal organizations. "It's a gut reaction to say, 'oh, you're for this -- I have to be against this'."

Bennett pointed to a bigger question that predated, and promises to outlast, the virus: "How do we communicate these issues in terms of religious freedom while not alienating people for partisan reasons?"

Swanson reported from Washington.

The AP-NORC poll of 1,002 adults was conducted April 30-May 4 using a sample drawn from NORC's probability-based AmeriSpeak Panel, which is designed to be representative of the U.S. population. The margin of sampling error for all respondents is plus or minus 4.2 percentage points.

Online:

AP-NORC Center: <http://www.apnorc.org/>

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Pandemic piles new pressures on foster children, caretakers

By ELANA SCHOR Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Jessica Overstreet first entered foster care at age 14, separated from her siblings and knowing very little about what her new life meant aside from what she had seen in the popular musical "Annie." So for a while, at the beginning, she kept her status a secret.

Her case manager was "a very good person," she said, but so overwhelmed that Overstreet wishes she'd had more one-on-one time to share how hard it was to be separated from her family.

"We had Zoom, we had Skype and stuff like that. But it wasn't utilized at all," Overstreet, now 26 and living on her own in Tampa, Florida, recalled in a video interview.

Foster children have enormous challenges even in the best of times. The coronavirus pandemic threatens them with even greater turmoil, isolating them from adult supervisors and friends and making it harder to move on to new lives — either with biological or adoptive families, or as newly independent adults.

Overstreet fears the new reality brought by the COVID-19 pandemic has made some foster kids' already difficult situations "100 times worse."

Celeste Bodner, executive director of FosterClub, a nonprofit organization through which foster youth connect and support each other, says mental health crises are a palpable risk, given "the stress this crisis is causing, layered on top of the preexisting trauma."

Because of the pandemic, the teachers, coaches and other adults whose watchful eyes once proved a helpful barometer of foster children's well-being are now kept at a distance.

Jeff Sprinkle, a longtime court-appointed foster child advocate in Georgia, estimates that under normal circumstances, 17 adults are engaged to some extent in the lives of each of the foster children he helps. That has shrunk drastically, he said.

"It's hard on the children," said Sprinkle, 66. "But it's also hard on the foster parents, because they end up filling the shoes of the 17 people who were investing in the children's lives previously."

Bodner's group is hosting online meetings to help foster children stay connected at a time when they've lost the typical communication channels that school and outside socializing provide.

But children in foster care may have less access to technology than their peers, she said, particularly those in group care facilities where use of digital devices can be limited.

Group facilities pose other challenges, such as maintaining social distancing and taking other measures that health officials have recommended to prevent the coronavirus's spread, noted Jennifer Pokempner,

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senior attorney at the Philadelphia-based Juvenile Law Center.

Advocates for foster children have long urged a decreased reliance on such institutions, which housed about 10% of the 437,283 children in the U.S. foster care system as of Sept. 30, 2018, according to an annual report by the Department of Health and Human Services.

But for some, group homes are the only stable environment available. Foster children stay in group facilities or individual foster homes while they await long-term placement — either through adoption or a return to their biological families — or come of age and move out on their own.

The stress of transitioning from foster care to legal adulthood — never an easy task — has been exacerbated by the coronavirus pandemic, which has devastated local economies and further complicated the process of finding a new home and job.

“You’re expected to turn 18 and do all this stuff, and it’s just hard,” said Overstreet, who is using her own experience to help current and former foster youth through the Florida Youth Shine advocacy group.

Natasha, a 19-year-old foster youth from South Gate, a city outside Los Angeles, was visiting her biological parents with her two younger sisters recently when she was notified that she would lose her placement in her foster home if she didn’t return within two weeks because of the distance she’d traveled. But she was also required to get tested for the virus before she could return, which she still hasn’t been able to do.

“Courts are closed,” said Natasha, who spoke on the condition that her last name not be used. “We can call our lawyers, but they can’t really do anything.”

Federal law permits states to keep providing foster care benefits to youth after they turn 18, and many extend some level of services until age 21. In response to the virus outbreak, several states have opted to pay the cost of keeping foster youth who would otherwise age out.

At the federal level, the Department of Health and Human Service’s Children’s Bureau is asking welfare agencies to ensure that foster children in college have a stable place to stay as long as on-campus dormitories remain closed.

The bureau is also urging attorneys and court officials to use technology to help child welfare cases move through the system. The American Bar Association asked congressional leaders last month to route \$30 million in emergency funding to help cases get processed remotely while courts remain closed.

“Case delays mean more than just the passage of time – they can mean celebrating a birthday away from home, first words or steps that parents don’t get to see, or just missing the sense of security that comes from being with family during this uncertain time,” the bar association’s president, Judy Perry Martinez, said in a statement.

Virus relief legislation released Tuesday by the Democratic-controlled House of Representatives includes some foster care-related provisions, including a reprieve for those who might age out of care, although that bill is in the early stages of congressional negotiations.

Tara Perry, CEO of the National Court Appointed Special Advocate/Guardian ad Litem Association for Children, is hoping the current upheaval leads to positive long-term change in the foster care system.

“Usually what happens out of these crisis-type situations is you see humanity at its best,” Perry said. “I’m hoping more foster homes will be available, that there will be more incentive.”

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

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

Couples turn to 'minimonies' to salvage wedding plans

By LEANNE ITALIE Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Couples trying to salvage weddings put on hold by the coronavirus are feeding a fresh trend in the bridal industry: the "minimony."

Rather than wait, they're getting hitched alone or with a few local loved ones looking on at a safe social distance as other guests join virtually. Then they plan to reschedule larger celebrations when allowed.

"We were about to put a \$15,000 deposit down on a venue when coronavirus hit," said Kate Whiting, 35, in Northern California's tiny Lake Almanor Peninsula. "Why would I want to wait to marry my best friend?"

The 300-guest wedding of her dreams, and those of her 40-year-old fiance, Jake Avery, will happen once a COVID-19 vaccine is in place. For now, a close friend recently ordained will marry them in their yard June 6.

Their approach, born of necessity, is a play on micro weddings, the first choice for some couples looking for a more intimate experience or unable to afford splashier affairs.

Before the pandemic so dramatically changed lives, 20,000 to 30,000 weddings happened every weekend in the U.S., with more than 550,000 originally planned for April, May and June this year, according to data from the wedding planning site TheKnot.com.

Worldwide, 93% of couples whose weddings are impacted by the virus are rescheduling, with only 7% canceling altogether, the site said.

The average cost of weddings pre-pandemic was teetering at just under \$34,000, and the average guest count at 131.

Nicole Ochoa and Brad Wilkinson, both 27, had an initial guest list of 200-plus before choosing to go micro for their July nuptials. Really, really micro. The Sonoma County, California, couple decided on fewer than a dozen guests for the wedding on a ranch near home that overlooks estate vineyards.

"We just really wanted it to be personal," Ochoa said. "I hope that other people can pause and consider this as an option. It feels like the wedding industry and wedding trends have turned into such a show."

Guest lists of 50 or fewer accounted for just 8 percent of U.S. weddings last year, down from 10 percent the year before, according to The Knot, which surveys more than 25,000 couples annually. Weddings with 51 to 150 guests encompassed 54 percent of couples.

Kristen Maxwell Cooper, editor in chief of The Knot, said couples who want to keep their original plans but worry that virus restrictions will drive their guest counts down might consider "shift weddings."

Once conditions allow, she said, "They can host their ceremony with a group of 25 of their guests while live-streaming to the rest of their loved ones, followed by a reception with the same group who attended the ceremony for a few hours before the next group of guests arrive."

With the second of three deposits due on their venue, Ochoa and Wilkinson are in the process of asking for a "force majeure" clause in their contract so they can get their money back in case virus restrictions remain in place.

"If the venue denies our request, we've decided to keep the date and get married in Nicole's parent's Sonoma County backyard," Wilkinson said.

Ochoa added: "We would be incredibly sad if we can't be married at the venue we fell so hard for, but there's something pretty magical about the thought of walking across the lawn in my dress with my Dad, too."

Vendors focused on micro weddings and organized elopements have seen an uptick in interest since the virus struck, but some couples were ahead of that curve.

Melissa Todd, 50, and Jeffrey Hall, 59, used PopTheKnot.com for their \$7,000 elopement with seven guests. They married last November in Chicago, where they live, and wanted to do something quick.

"I'm just one of those people who never dreamed of a big elaborate wedding," Todd said. "I'm pretty mellow."

Pop the Knot makes use of downtime at venues around the country. It operates in nine cities, including New York, Los Angeles, Atlanta and Austin, Texas.

"We already were quite busy, but sadly we have been receiving a ton of emails from clients that had

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their weddings canceled due to COVID and are now wanting to do a small pop-up," said owner and wedding planner Michele Velazquez.

SimplyEloped.com offers low-cost packages in destinations including the Florida Keys, Lake Tahoe and New Orleans.

"Since the coronavirus outbreak, I've had numerous couples come to me every day with similar stories: They're canceling their big wedding due to travel complications, not wanting to assemble a big group of people or other virus-related problems," said the site's editor, Karen Norian.

"These couples are heartbroken, not just about the financial losses, but the thought of pushing their marriages out to some ambiguous future date is devastating," she said.

Renee McCarthy, 33, and her husband, Ryan McCarthy, live in San Diego and wed at Temecula Creek Inn in Temecula, California, in March 2019, with 24 guests attending.

"We both wanted to focus on the guests we did have there, our families and closest friends," Renee said. "Even for a small wedding it was overwhelming trying to put it together, but we couldn't be happier with how our wedding turned out."

Today in History By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Thursday, May 14, the 135th day of 2020. There are 231 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On May 14, 1940, the Netherlands surrendered to invading German forces during World War II.

On this date:

In 1643, Louis XIV became King of France at age 4 upon the death of his father, Louis XIII.

In 1796, English physician Edward Jenner inoculated 8-year-old James Phipps against smallpox by using cowpox matter.

In 1804, the Lewis and Clark expedition to explore the Louisiana Territory as well as the Pacific Northwest left camp near present-day Hartford, Illinois.

In 1863, Union forces defeated the Confederates in the Battle of Jackson, Mississippi.

In 1948, according to the current-era calendar, the independent state of Israel was proclaimed in Tel Aviv by David Ben-Gurion, who became its first prime minister; U.S. President Harry S. Truman immediately recognized the new nation.

In 1955, representatives from eight Communist bloc countries, including the Soviet Union, signed the Warsaw Pact in Poland. (The Pact was dissolved in 1991.)

In 1961, Freedom Riders were attacked by violent mobs in Anniston and Birmingham, Alabama.

In 1968, John Lennon and Paul McCartney held a news conference in New York to announce the creation of the Beatles' latest business venture, Apple Corps.

In 1998, singer-actor Frank Sinatra died at a Los Angeles hospital at age 82. The hit sitcom "Seinfeld" aired its final episode after nine years on NBC.

In 2001, the Supreme Court ruled 8-0 that there is no exception in federal law for people to use marijuana for medical purposes.

In 2003, more than 100 immigrants were abandoned in a locked trailer at a Texas truck stop; 19 of them died. (Truck driver Tyrone Williams was later sentenced to nearly 34 years in prison for his role in the deaths; of the 13 others indicted in the case, two had charges against them dismissed, one who cooperated with prosecutors was sentenced to the three days in jail and the others were given sentences ranging from 14 months to 23 years.)

In 2008, the Interior Department declared the polar bear a threatened species because of the loss of Arctic sea ice. Justine Henin (EH'-nen), 25, became the first woman to retire from tennis while atop the WTA rankings.

Ten years ago: President Barack Obama heatedly condemned what he called a "ridiculous spectacle" of

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oil executives shifting blame for the BP oil spill in congressional hearings and denounced a “cozy relationship” between their companies and the federal government. Space shuttle Atlantis thundered away on what turned out to be its next-to-last voyage into orbit. NBC canceled the long-running police/courtroom drama “Law & Order” after 20 seasons on the air.

Five years ago: President Barack Obama, at a Camp David summit, assured Arab allies they were safe from the threat of an empowered Iran, pledging an “ironclad commitment” to the Sunni governments of the Persian Gulf. B.B. King, 89, the “King of the Blues,” died in Las Vegas. Award-winning poet Franz Wright, 62, died in Waltham, Massachusetts.

One year ago: Former Rep. Anthony Weiner left a New York City halfway house after completing his prison sentence for illicit online contact with a 15-year-old girl. Comedy actor Tim Conway, winner of four Emmy Awards on “The Carol Burnett Show” after earlier starring aboard “McHale’s Navy,” died in Los Angeles; he was 85. The New Orleans Pelicans bucked long odds to win the NBA draft lottery, giving the team the right to draft former Duke star Zion Williamson. Montana gov. Steve Bullock announced that he was seeking the Democratic presidential nomination. (He would end his campaign in December, becoming the third Western governor to fail to gain momentum.)

Today’s Birthdays: Photo-realist artist Richard Estes is 88. Actress Dame Sian Phillips is 87. Former Sen. Byron Dorgan, D-N.D., is 78. Movie producer George Lucas is 76. Guitarist Gene Cornish is 76. Actress Meg Foster is 72. Movie director Robert Zemeckis is 69. Rock singer David Byrne is 68. Actor Tim Roth is 59. Rock singer Ian Astbury (The Cult) is 58. Rock musician C.C. (aka Cecil) DeVille is 58. Actor Danny Huston is 58. Rock musician Mike Inez (Alice In Chains) is 54. Fabrice Morvan (ex-Milli Vanilli) is 54. Rhythm-and-blues singer Raphael Saadiq is 54. Actress Cate Blanchett is 51. Singer Danny Wood (New Kids on the Block) is 51. Movie writer-director Sofia Coppola (KOH’-pah-lah) is 49. Former Homeland Security Secretary Kirstjen Nielsen is 48. Actor Gabriel Mann is 48. Singer Natalie Appleton (All Saints) is 47. Singer Shanice is 47. Actress Carla Jimenez is 46. Rock musician Henry Garza (Los Lonely Boys) is 42. Alt-country musician-singer Ketch Secor is 42. Rock singer-musician Dan Auerbach is 41. Rock musician Mike Retondo (Plain White T’s) is 39. Actress Amber Tamblyn is 37. Facebook co-founder Mark Zuckerberg is 36. Actress Lina Escó is 35. Retired NFL player Rob Gronkowski is 31. Actress Miranda Cosgrove is 27.

Thought for Today: “Silence cannot hide anything — which is more than you can say for words.” — From the play “The Ghost Sonata” by Swedish author-playwright August Strindberg (born 1849, died this date in 1912).

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