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LifeTouch Pictures at Groton Area High School

3:30pm: Region 1A Cross Country Meet at Webster

Junior High Football hosts Webster Area (7th grade at 4:30 p.m., 8th at 5:30 p.m.)

Volleyball at Milbank (Junior High matches are cancelled. C/JV matches at 6 p.m. followed by varsity match.

Friday, October 16, 2020

End of 1st Quarter

7:00pm: Football hosting Stanley County



OPEN: Recycling Trailer in Groton

The recycling trailer is located west of the city shop. It takes cardboard, papers and aluminum cans.

Tigers beat Tiospa Zina in a five-set match

It was, perhaps, the most intense and exciting match of the season. For the first time this season, the Lady Tigers played five sets and ended up with a 3-2 win over Tiospa Zina. But the path to the win was anything but easy.

The match was broadcast live on GDILIVE.COM and GDIRADIO locally 89.3 FM, sponsored by the Groton Vet Clinic, Bary Keith at Harr Motors, Milbrandt Enterprises, Inc., and Tyson DeHoet Trucking.

The first set was tied three times early in the game and there were three lead changes. The Wambdi got the upper hand and held a 17-11 lead and held a five point advantage late in the set at 22-17. The Tigers then battled back and tied the set at 22 and took a 23-22 lead. Tiospa Zina tied the game and took a 24-23 lead. Groton tied the set at 24 and 25 before taking a 26-25 lead when Jasmine Gengerke scored on an ace serve. Kenzie McInerney had the game winning kill, 27-25. In the first set, McInerney



Kenzie McInerney

(Photo by Paul Kosel)

and Madeline Flihs each had two kills, Sydney Leicht had two kills, Jasmine Gengerke had three kills, one block and one ace serve; Trista Keith and Brooklyn Gilbert each had an ace serve and Allyssa Locke and Maddie Bjerke each had a kill.

In the second set, the game was tied three times and there were two lead changes before the Wambdi rallied to take a 10-6 lead. The Wambdi upped its lead to six at 17-11 and later, went on a five-point run to take a 24-17 lead en route to a 25-18 win. Sydney Leicht had three kills and an ace serve, Madeline Flihs had two kills, Maddie Bjerke, Kenzie McInerney and Jasmine Gengerke each had one kill, and Alyssa Thaler had an ace serve.

The third set was tied six times and there were two lead changes as the Wambdi won, 25-22. Groton held an 18-16 lead, but Tiospa Zina scored three straight to take a 21-18 lead. Groton tied the set at 21. Sydney Leicht had three kills and two ace serves, Maddie Bjerke had four kills, Kenzie McInerney had a kill and a block, Stella Meier and Madeline Flihs each had a kill and Trista Keith, Allyssa Locke and Brooklyn Gilbert each had an ace serve.

The atmosphere in the Arena was starting to get intense by the time the fourth set rolled around. Some of the volleys in the fourth set were long and challenging and there were times when it seemed the ball was dead, it sprung back to life and the other side had to scramble to keep it in play. One volley went so long that as it went on, the Arena got quieter and quieter and the coaches and fans were spellbound, waiting to see who would get the point. The Wambdi ended up with the point and Coach Chelsea Hanson called time-out as Tiospa Zina had closed to within three, 21-18. Groton Area had to overcome its own challenge as the Tigers trailed for most of the set, only tying the set at 17 and taking a 21-17 lead. The Wambdi tied the game at 21, but Groton went on to win, 25-22. Maddie Bjerke had four kills, Kenzie McInerney had three kills, Sydney Leicht had three kills and an ace serve, Madeline Flihs had a kill and Jasmine Gengerke had an ace serve.

Now that the match was tied at two, that set up the final set, which is normally suppose to go to 15 points. The set was tied at one and three as Tiospa Zina took the lead and held an 8-5 lead. Groton Area scored four straight to tie the set at eight and to take a 9-8 lead. Tiospa Zina scored five straight to tie the game at nine and took a 13-9 lead. The Wambdi had a 14-12 lead, but Groton Area rallied to tie the set at 14 and Jasmine Gengerke had an ace serve to give the Tigers the lead, 15-14. But Tiospa Zina would score the next two points to take a 16-15 lead. Groton Area scored the next two to take a 17-16

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lead. Tiospa Zina tied the game at 17 and the Tigers scored the last two points for the 19-17 win. Sydney Leight had two kills and an ace serve, Jasmine Gengerke had a kill, a block and an ace serve, Kenzie McInerney, Allyssa Locke and Maddie Bjerke each had a kill and Brooklyn Gilbert had an ace serve.

Groton Area was 100 of 109 in serving with 16 ace serves. Trista Keith was 18 of 20 with four ace serves. Sydney Leicht was 20 of 23 for four ace serves and Jasmine Gengerke was 19 of 20 with three ace serves.

Groton Area had 48 kills with Sydney Leicht having 13, Maddie Bjerke 12 and Kenzie McInerney eight.

The Tigers had 41 sets with Allyssa Locke having 38 and Maddie Bjerke two. The Tigers had 130 digs with Alyssa Thaler having 38 and Madeline Flihs having 31. McInerney had two blocks.

Groton Area won the junior varsity match, 25-15 and 25-17. Megan Flihs had four kills, a block and an ace serve. Aspen Johnson had five kills and a block. Kelsie Frost had three kills and two ace serves. Emma Schinkel and Lydia Meier each had four kills. Brooke Gengerke had two ace serves and Emilie Thurston and Riley Leicht each had an ace serve.

Both the junior varsity and C matches were broadcast live on GDILIVE.COM and GDIRADIO locally 89.3 FM, sponsored by Frost Construction and family members.

Groton Area won the C match, 25-20 and 25-17. Elizabeth Flihs had seven ace serves. Ava Wienk and Hollie Frost each had five kills. Shallyn Foertsch had three kills and three ace serves. Marlee Tollifson had three ace serves. Lydia Meier had three kills and an ace serve. Ashlyn Sperry had a kill and Camryn Kurtz had an ace serve.

Groton Area is on a two-game winning streak and will be at Milbank on Thursday.

- Paul Kosel



Jasmine Gengerke

(Photo by Paul Kosel)

Service Notice: Dr. T.J. Johnson

Memorial services for Dr. T.J. Johnson, 38, of Groton will be 10:30 a.m., Saturday, October 17th at the Groton High School Arena. Rev. Brandon Dunham will officiate. Arrangements are under the direction of Paetznick-Garness Funeral Chapel, Groton.

T.J. passed away Tuesday, October 13, 2020 at his home.

The service will be broadcast live on GDILIVE.COM and will also be broadcast on GDIRADIO at 89.3 FM, available within 1 mile of Groton.

Death Notice: Grant Richmond

Grant Richmond, 50, of Groton passed away Monday, October 12, 2020 at his home. Arrangements are under the direction of Paetznick-Garness Funeral Chapel, Groton.

South Dakota's Traditional Pheasant Hunting Season Opens: A Day Like No Other

PIERRE, S.D. – The South Dakota pheasant hunting season is underway with blaze orange as the state's prime color. This weekend, hunters, families and friends from across the country will be welcomed to South Dakota to take part in a tradition more than 100 years old.

Pheasant hunting is a key part of South Dakota's outdoor legacy. Earlier this year, a nationwide marketing campaign launched to encourage adventurers, traditional hunters, and those who may have skipped a year or two of hunting to experience pheasant hunting in our great state. #HuntTheGreatest is a collaboration between the Department of Game, Fish and Parks and the Department of Tourism aimed at getting more individuals and families into the field to share in the camaraderie, the flush of birds and the satisfaction of a great pheasant hunt.

"It's not only about the birds," said Kelly Hepler, Secretary of South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks. "This is about getting into the field with family and friends. Getting away from the screens, sharing stories, watching the dogs do what they love while taking in our amazing landscapes are all part of the experience here. In South Dakota's fresh air and autumn sunshine, it just doesn't get any better, and we are excited to welcome hunters from all over to our great state."

According to the United States Department of Agriculture, 39% of the corn in South Dakota was harvested as of October 11. This is well ahead of 4% harvested last year at this time and the 15% average, which is good news for bird hunters.

"Veteran hunters know that large amounts of standing crops can be a challenge, but that won't be an issue this year. The air will be fresh, the birds will be plentiful and the outdoors will be open for everyone to enjoy," concluded Hepler.

Increased public hunting access is also good news. With 1.1 million acres of public and private land open to public hunting within the heart of South Dakota's pheasant range, great opportunities exist for public access to pheasant hunting. GFP has added over 40,000 acres of private land to the Walk-In Area program in the last two years, while also maintaining over 77,000 acres in the James River Watershed as part of the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP). For more information on areas open to hunting, visit gfp.sd.gov/hunting-areas.

In addition, some recent rule changes by the Game, Fish and Parks Commission are giving hunters more opportunity in the field. Shooting hours begin at 10 a.m., central time, starting on October 17, and the season will remain open until January 31. The most up-to-date information can be found in the hunting handbook online, gfp.sd.gov/pages/regulations.

To purchase your South Dakota small game license, go online to gfp.sd.gov/hunt-fish-license or visit your local licensing agent.

#234 in a series

Covid-19 Update: by Marie Miller

Big numbers again tonight: 55,800 new cases today, a 0.7% increase to 7,948,600 total cases in the US so far in this pandemic. There were 935 deaths reported today, a 0.4% increase. To date, 216,650 people have died from this virus in the US.

The rolling seven-day new-case average nationwide passed 50,000 again yesterday; it was just over 34,000 a month ago, so it's increased by 48%. At least 36 states' cases rose by more than 10% in the last week. Hospital utilization is going up. The risks of hospitals approaching capacity are not just that Covid-19 patients cannot be accommodated; they are that strokes and heart attacks and other kinds of infections or injuries also cannot be accommodated. When hospitals have to divert patients to other, farther-away institutions, care is delayed, which can have serious effects on medical outcomes.

Unlike the spikes this spring which occurred mostly in urban centers, much of this increase is found in rural areas—both largely rural states and rural areas of states which have large cities. The top states for per capita cases over the past week are as follows: North Dakota (509 new cases/100,000 residents), South Dakota (419/100,000), Montana (379/100,000), Wisconsin (348/100,000), Utah (261/100,000), Idaho (252/100,000), Nebraska (247/100,000), Iowa (242/100,000), Wyoming (206/100,000), and Oklahoma (206/100,000). Note that these are all but one northern states where case numbers are fully expected to soar as colder weather closes in. These numbers exceed anything we saw in the Sun Belt in the summer as they staggered under unmanageable case loads. I'll also point out that the total cases/100,000 residents in these states for the entire pandemic are now well above the terrible numbers we see in early-hit New York and New Jersey, places we never dreamed any other state would catch up to at any point: North Dakota has the highest per capita total cases in the nation (3800/100,000 residents). South Dakota is in 6th place with 3400/100,000, and Iowa is in 7th with 3300/100,000. By comparison, New York and New Jersey each have 2500/100,000. So with all the demographic and social advantages these rural, lightly-populated states enjoy, they're far worse off over the course of the pandemic than the early houses of horror. The difference? These rural states have done somewhere between nothing at all and very, very little in mitigation.

It appears the current spread is being largely driven by the kind of get-togethers that can't really be regulated by public health authorities. CDC director, Dr. Robert Redfield, on a call with governors yesterday, said, "In the public square, we're seeing a higher degree of vigilance and mitigation steps in many jurisdictions. But what we're seeing as the increasing threat right now is actually acquisition of infection through small household gatherings"—you know, where you have a few people over for dinner and game night. Now, as these gatherings move indoors, the threat level increases; and there's really no way to make them safe.

Looking ahead, experts are recommending against Thanksgiving dinners with non-household members. Dr. Redfield: "Particularly with Thanksgiving coming up, we think it's really important to stress the vigilance of these continued mitigation steps in the household setting." Dr. Jonathan Reiner, professor of medicine at George Washington University, said he is recommending the same: "If you're lucky enough to live in a part of the country where the weather will be moderate in November, do an outdoor Thanksgiving. I think in the places in the country where the winter comes early, I think you have to really be careful. The consequences of this virus, particularly for older folks—the people that we really want to gather with on Thanksgiving—can be really dire. And frankly I'd rather do a Zoom Thanksgiving with people that I love than expose them to something that might kill them." Dr. Deborah Birx, White House Coronavirus Task Force coordinator said pretty much the same thing, urging us to "carefully weigh" those gatherings. She points out that, even if people appear healthy, you cannot know for sure whether they are infected.

I don't sign on to this recommendation lightly; we have hosted a large family dinner every Thanksgiving since the late-'70s, and that annual event is extremely important to us, especially as we are coming to realize there is a limited number more Thanksgivings we're going to be around, however lucky we are. We are, however, unwilling to make this one our last Thanksgiving, and therefore we are deferring the

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family party for a year. I don't have high hopes for Christmas either, truth be told.

So if you're young and healthy and you don't invite anyone with risk factors, would it be OK to host a dinner? Before you pull the trigger on that, please consider that gathering in groups helps this virus to continue its spread through our communities, that even if no one at your party gets sick, one of them—or one of their contacts—can spread it to people who are at risk, that we'll never get this thing shut down if we don't all take steps to mitigate transmission. The fact that you'll never know about the dead guy at the end of a chain of transmission which started at your house doesn't make him any less dead. We really all have to pull together going into winter, or there will be thousands and thousands more of those dead guys. This isn't going away by itself. And if you're in a hurry to resume normal life, if you're longing for this to be over, then recognize that pulling back from normal life for a while is the way to get that done. The way we're going, we are simply perpetuating this pandemic into the foreseeable future. The more we keep on keeping on with what passes for "normal life" these days, the longer it will be before we're really back to "normal."

This week, Pfizer is enrolling children as young as 12 in its vaccine trial, starting with 16- and 17-year-olds this week and 12- to 15-year-olds soon after. Even though children are highly unlikely to develop serious disease or to die from this infection, some do, and they also act as a source of transmission in communities; so protecting them is a reasonable step. Pfizer currently has about 38,000 volunteers in its trial, and more than 31,000 of them have received their second and final dose of the vaccine. According to Dr. Anthony Fauci, director of the National Institute for Allergy and Infectious Diseases, we have trials nearing a predetermined interim check point where we can start to look for evidence of efficacy. So there is hope for the relatively near future. We know a vaccine will not magically end the pandemic the first week it is distributed, but we also know it can be an important step in wrestling this thing to the ground. We continue to hope for good news from these trials in the next few weeks.

We remain fairly sure reinfections after recovery from this coronavirus are exceedingly rare (just four confirmed cases of reinfection out of some 38 million cases worldwide over the past nine months) and appear to be mild in most cases, but there is disquieting news from the Netherlands as a Dutch woman recently died from reinfection. The patient was 89 years old and suffered from a bone marrow cancer, so her immune system was greatly compromised. Just about two months after her first episode of the infection began and two days into a chemotherapy regimen, she developed a new Covid-19 infection and died two weeks later. The viruses recovered from her specimens in the two episodes of Covid-19 were genetically distinct, so it is relatively certain these were two separate infections, not just one that never went away.

And in counterpoint to that news, there are three new studies which all seem to indicate that immunity after infection can last for months, and possibly longer—hard to say about that when this virus has only been around for a few months. One study conducted in Arizona and published yesterday in the journal *Immunity* found that antibodies last at least five to seven months and are protective against infection. What they saw was, as we've heard before, a high level of antibodies immediately after infection, then those levels plummeting; but then as the B-cells which make antibodies mature, the ones producing the most protective antibodies, so-called neutralizing antibodies, are lingering after others disappear. This virus is starting to look more like its cousin, the first SARS coronavirus, which has yielded immunity for as long as 17 years after infection. We might not get that long with this one, but signs the immunity is of longer duration are good signs indeed. People who were sicker appear to have stronger responses; we do not yet know whether that immunity will also last longer. We should recognize that there was a relatively small number of cases many months out from infection in a very large study of some 30,000 individuals, but seeing this sort of outcome in patients is encouraging.

Research conducted at Massachusetts General Hospital with 343 patients, most severely ill, and reported in the journal *Science Immunology*, found elevated levels of antibodies for up to four months. Two classes of antibodies known as IgM and IgA spiked early and then bottomed out within three months or so; but IgG antibodies, which are typically longer-lived, persisted as long as 115 days. A Canadian team testing saliva for IgA antibodies had similar findings. These data may provide a framework for tracking outbreaks

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based on the kinds of antibodies detected in a person and also suggest that a properly designed vaccine has the potential to induce a durable response which is protective. And because the IgA antibodies are found in saliva, it is possible this will provide a means for antibody testing in recovered patients without having to draw blood.

Something interesting that is showing up in a fairly small number of people with Covid-19 is hearing loss. Dr. Matthew Stewart, associate professor of otolaryngology at Johns Hopkins Medicine, says, "We're hearing more and more that people have hearing loss as part of their Covid infection. We're not sure how common this is, but a study in Manchester, England, found 13% of patients reported some hearing changes or ringing in the ears. It's risky to sample cells from the middle ear of a living patient, but cadaver studies found virus there and in the mastoid bone (a part of the skull adjacent to the ear). Stewart speculates that virus-caused blood clots may be lodging in the "extremely small blood vessels" in the inner ear and therefore cause hearing loss. The loss seems to respond to high doses of oral steroids in at least some patients, although some show long-term loss of certain pitches and persistence of the ringing and others don't seem to respond to treatment at all.

Sasha Tinning took her five-year-old grandson, Carver, shopping this month to buy snacks to contribute to a donation drive for firefighters on the fire line in Oregon; but when they walked down the toy aisle at the store, they spotted a Baby Yoda doll. They decided the firefighters could use a friend; Carver said, "He would be a very good friend for them." So they agreed the firefighters needed "The Force" more than snacks and hauled Baby Yoda off to the donation booth. Carver added a hand-written note: "Thank you, firefighters. Here is a friend for you, in case you get lonely. Love, Carver."

The volunteer in the booth that day, Tyler Eubanks, reports pretty much everyone in the booth started crying when they read the note. "We were all really touched that Carver wanted to give a companion to the men and women who were out there risking their lives to fight the wildfires." So she brought Baby Yoda to the volunteers on the Unger Road Fire and snapped a few photos so she could send them to Carver. She figured that would be the end of it; but as sometimes happens with these things, that was far from the end of it.

The firefighters said, "We want to take him with us." And so they did. They showed off their Baby Yoda to other crews, and those firefighters asked if they could have him for a while. Eubanks reports, "Before I knew it, Baby Yoda was out there traveling the universe." She had wisely added her phone number on Yoda's back so firefighters could text her their photos. "People obviously want to hold on to something positive right now." And how.

Eubanks started a Facebook page, Baby Yoda Fights Fires, for the photos. More than 26,000 people follow the page, perusing photos of Baby Yoda hanging out with firefighters, having breakfast with them, chilling around the camp. He's been to the Cameron Peak wildfire in Colorado, and the page is filling up with comments from people on his adventures. "Because of all these photos, people are now seeing the human faces behind the wildfires. The attention is giving firefighters a huge morale boost, which is something that's really needed right now."

Baby Yoda now has a red-white-and-blue bandanna on his head and wears an official firefighters' shirt. Fire crews in California and Canada have requested a turn with him, so travel arrangements are being made. And there's talk of a stint in Australia when their fire season rolls around in a few months. Eubanks says, "He's a free agent." And once more, one tiny gesture ripples across the world in places no one could have anticipated. Seems like it could be worth it if you were to make your own tiny gesture, doesn't it?

Take care. I'll be back tomorrow.

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Area COVID-19 Cases

	Oct. 7	Oct. 8	Oct. 9	Oct. 10	Oct. 11	Oct. 12	Oct. 13
Minnesota	105,740	106,651	107,922	109,312	110,828	112,268	113,439
Nebraska	48,757	49,396	50,059	50,059	51,144	52,382	52,839
Montana	15,347	16,063	16,677	17,399	18,117	18,702	19,125
Colorado	74,191	74,922	75,785	76,619	77,642	78,461	79,037
Wyoming	5,751	5,866	6,031	6,226	6,338	6,476	6,628
North Dakota	24,364	24,857	25,384	26,040	26,628	27,265	27,737
South Dakota	24,876	25,433	26,441	27,215	27,947	28,564	28,925
United States	7,501,847	7,551,257	7,607,890	7,667,640	7,719,254	7,763,457	7,804,643
US Deaths	210,918	211,844	212,789	213,816	214,379	214,776	215,089
Minnesota	+941	+911	+1271	+1,390	+1,516	+1,440	+1,171
Nebraska	+950	+639	+663	----	+1,085	+1,238	+457
Montana	+500	+716	+614	+722	+818	+585	+423
Colorado	+654	+731	+863	+834	+1,023	+819	+576
Wyoming	+91	+115	+165	+195	+112	+138	+152
North Dakota	+502	+493	+527	+656	+588	+637	+472
South Dakota	+278	+557	+528	+774	+732	+617	+359
United States	+48,018	+49,410	+56,633	+59,750	51,614	+44,203	41,186
US Deaths	+791	+926	+945	+1,027	+563	+397	+313
	Oct. 14	Oct. 15					
Minnesota	114,574	115,763					
Nebraska	53,543	54,467					
Montana	19,611	20,210					
Colorado	80,085	80,777					
Wyoming	6,740	6,914					
North Dakota	28,245	28,947					
South Dakota	29,339	30,215					
United States	7,859,365	7,917,223					
US Deaths	215,914	216,904					
Minnesota	+1,135	+1,189					
Nebraska	+704	+924					
Montana	+486	+599					
Colorado	+1,048	+692					
Wyoming	+112	+174					
North Dakota	+508	+702					
South Dakota	+414	+865					
United States	+54,722	+57,858					
US Deaths	+825	+990					

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October 14th COVID-19 UPDATE

Groton Daily Independent from State Health Lab Reports

Three deaths in South Dakota and eight more in North Dakota. In South Dakota, two were in their 80s and one in their 70s. One was male and two were female. One in each county: Codington, Douglas and Pennington.

South Dakota's positivity rate topped 20 percent at 20.4 percent. That's the first time in a long time that it has been that high. There were 865 positive cases. Minnehaha County had 208 positive cases.

Locally, Brown had 33 positive and 20 recovered, leaving 306 active cases. Day had 1 positive, 1 recovered leaving 24 active cases. Edmunds had 0 positive, 0 recovered, and 11 active; Marshall had 2 positive, 1 recovered, 13 active; McPherson had 0 positive, 0 recovered, 10 active; Spink had 6 positive, 4 recovered, 40 active.

Someone had asked about the prison numbers. Among the nine department of correction facilities, there are 31 active cases among inmates and eight active among the faculty. Specifically, in the women's Prison, Unit E, there are 18 active members there and seven in the women's prison.

Positive cases in the under 18 group was 26, those in the teens was 93, 20s was 138, 30s was 126, 40s was 131, 50s was 119, 60s was 137, 70s was 51 and 80+ was 55.

Brown County:

Total Positive: +33 (1,626) Positivity Rate: 14.3%

Total Tests: +175 (15,017)

Recovered: +20 (1,316)

Active Cases: -13 (306)

Ever Hospitalized: +2 (82)

Deaths: +0 (4)

Percent Recovered: 80.9

South Dakota:

Positive: +865 (30,215 total) Positivity Rate: 20.4%

Total Tests: 4,245 (338,717 total)

Hospitalized: +52 (1,963 total). 303 currently hospitalized +1)

Deaths: +3 (291 total)

Recovered: +313 (23,320 total)

Active Cases: +560 (6,604)

Percent Recovered: 77.2%

Staffed Hospital Bed Capacity: 12% Covid, 54% Non-Covid, 34% Available

ICU Bed Capacity: 21% Covid, 40% Non-Covid, 39% Available

Ventilator Capacity: 7% Covid, 19% Non-Covid, 74% Available

The following is the breakdown by all counties. The number in parenthesis right after the county name represents the number of deaths in that county.

Aurora: +3 positive, +5 recovered (60 active cases)

Beadle (11): +33 positive, +6 recovered (166 active

cases)

Bennett (4): +5 positive, +4 recovered (37 active cases)

Bon Homme (1): +15 positive, +3 recovered (81 active cases)

Brookings (2): +26 positive, +10 recovered (205 active cases)

Brown (4): +33 positive, +20 recovered (309 active cases)

Brule (1): +7 positive, +0 recovered (49 active cases)

Buffalo (3): +4 positive, +8 recovered (23 active cases)

Butte (3): +7 positive, +4 recovered (59 active cases)

Campbell: +1 positive, +1 recovered (24 active cases)

Charles Mix: +9 positive, +7 recovered (90 active cases)

Clark: +4 positive, +0 recovered (19 active cases)

Clay (8) +13 positive, +5 recovered (97 active cases)

Codington (10): +28 positive, +6 recovered (227 active cases)

Corson (1): +1 positive, +0 recovered (19 active cases)

Custer (3): +10 positive, +3 recovered (46 active case)

Davison (4): +30 positive, +15 recovered (246 active cases)

Day: +1 positive, +1 recovered (24 active cases)

Deuel: +7 positive, +1 recovered (31 active cases)

Dewey: +10 positive, +6 recovered (92 active cases)

Douglas (2): +3 positive, +2 recovered (55 active cases)

Edmunds: +0 positive, +0 recovered (11 active cases)

Fall River (6): +7 positive, +1 recovered (45 active cases)

cases)

Faulk (1): +6 positive, +0 recovered (43 active cases)

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Grant (2): +4 positive, +2 recovered (64 active cases)
 Gregory (7): +4 positive, +0 recovered (28 active cases)
 Haakon (1): +4 positive, +1 recovered (20 active case)
 Hamlin: +8 positive, +0 recovered (35 active cases)
 Hand (1): +2 positive, +1 recovered (21 active cases)
 Hanson (1): +2 positive, +1 recovered (18 active cases)
 Harding: +1 positive, +0 recovered (6 active cases)
 Hughes (5): +11 positive, +11 recovered (130 active cases)
 Hutchinson (2): +6 positive, +5 recovered (59 active cases)
 Hyde: +1 positive, +0 recovered (7 active cases)
 Jackson (1): +7 positive, +0 recovered (24 active cases)
 Jerauld (4): +1 positive, +1 recovered (22 active cases)
 Jones: +1 positive, +0 recovered (3 active cases)
 Kingsbury: +3 positive, +1 recovered (33 active cases)
 Lake (8): +10 positive, +4 recovered (53 active cases)
 Lawrence (5): +27 positive, +13 recovered (138 active cases)
 Lincoln (10): +79 positive, +15 recovered (469 active cases)

Lyman (4): +1 positive, +1 recovered (23 active cases)
 Marshall: +2 positive, +1 recovered (13 active cases)
 McCook (1): +9 positive, +1 recovered (55 active cases)
 McPherson: +0 positive, +0 recovery (10 active case)
 Meade (6): +12 positive, +11 recovered (149 active cases)
 Mellette: +2 positive, +1 recovered (8 active cases)
 Miner: +4 positive, +0 recovered (36 active cases)
 Minnehaha (88): +208 positive, +53 recovered (1443 active cases)
 Moody (1): +2 positive, +1 recovered (51 active cases)
 Oglala Lakota (4): +15 positive, +6 recovered (152 active cases)
 Pennington (42): +85 positive, +35 recovered (706 active cases)
 Perkins: +2 positive, +1 recovered (15 active cases)
 Potter: +0 positive, +1 recovered (21 active cases)
 Roberts (2): +2 positive, +6 recovered (35 active cases)
 Sanborn: +1 positive, +0 recovered (19 active cases)
 Spink (1): +6 positive, +4 recovered (40 active cases)
 Stanley: +3 positive, +0 recovery (16 active cases)
 Sully: +0 positive, +0 recovered (8 active cases)
 Todd (5): +23 positive, +12 recovered (104 active cases)
 Tripp (1): +8 positive, +4 recovered (40 active cases)
 Turner (8): +21 positive, +0 recovered (109 active cases)
 Union (10): +13 positive, +3 recovered (155 active cases)
 Walworth (1): +4 positive, +3 recovered (67 active cases)
 Yankton (5): +8 positive, +4 recovered (128 active cases)
 Ziebach (1): +2 positive, +2 recovered (11 active case)

AGE GROUP OF SOUTH DAKOTA COVID-19 CASES

Age Range	# of Cases	# of Deaths
0-9 years	944	0
10-19 years	3389	0
20-29 years	6521	2
30-39 years	5063	7
40-49 years	4116	10
50-59 years	4182	23
60-69 years	3165	45
70-79 years	1635	54
80+ years	1200	150

SEX OF SOUTH DAKOTA COVID-19 CASES

Sex	# of Cases	# of Deaths
Female	15909	132
Male	14306	159

North Dakota Dept. of Health Report
 COVID-19 Daily Report, October 14:

- 7.9% rolling 14-day positivity
 - 9.5% daily positivity
 - 713 new positives
 - 7,475 susceptible test encounters
 - 132 currently hospitalized (-26)
 - 4,759 active cases (+159)
- Total Deaths: +8 (365)

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County	Positive Cases	Recovered Cases	Negative Persons	Deceased	Community Spread	% RT-PCR Test Positivity
Aurora	140	82	662	0	Substantial	18.32%
Beadle	994	825	3596	11	Substantial	12.32%
Bennett	114	78	868	4	Substantial	15.69%
Bon Homme	182	100	1334	1	Substantial	23.91%
Brookings	1051	823	5473	2	Substantial	18.72%
Brown	1626	1316	8072	4	Substantial	20.10%
Brule	186	137	1327	1	Substantial	25.66%
Buffalo	185	162	812	3	Substantial	39.73%
Butte	179	120	1915	3	Substantial	15.38%
Campbell	56	34	160	0	Substantial	26.92%
Charles Mix	277	192	2798	0	Substantial	8.99%
Clark	59	42	638	0	Moderate	3.55%
Clay	667	565	2949	8	Substantial	14.93%
Codington	1151	940	5847	10	Substantial	15.73%
Corson	121	99	761	1	Moderate	35.90%
Custer	234	186	1537	3	Substantial	20.49%
Davison	615	367	4065	4	Substantial	18.04%
Day	115	91	1140	0	Substantial	11.00%
Deuel	133	97	710	0	Substantial	15.63%
Dewey	230	142	3254	0	Substantial	11.29%
Douglas	136	81	650	2	Substantial	10.26%
Edmunds	113	102	674	0	Moderate	2.34%
Fall River	143	94	1650	6	Substantial	15.84%
Faulk	139	94	502	1	Substantial	22.22%
Grant	228	167	1380	2	Substantial	14.66%
Gregory	166	133	726	7	Substantial	15.15%
Haakon	55	32	403	1	Substantial	5.66%
Hamlin	139	104	1119	0	Substantial	6.44%
Hand	80	61	531	1	Substantial	16.85%
Hanson	56	37	399	1	Moderate	8.47%
Harding	10	4	103	0	Minimal	33.33%
Hughes	667	541	3463	5	Substantial	13.71%
Hutchinson	167	109	1431	2	Substantial	5.56%

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Hyde	29	23	285	0	Moderate	15.38%
Jackson	64	39	705	1	Substantial	21.88%
Jerauld	151	126	367	4	Substantial	11.11%
Jones	23	18	117	0	Minimal	5.56%
Kingsbury	107	76	950	0	Substantial	12.66%
Lake	270	206	1673	8	Substantial	16.09%
Lawrence	596	463	4930	5	Substantial	14.49%
Lincoln	1976	1459	12022	10	Substantial	16.76%
Lyman	204	181	1361	4	Substantial	11.73%
Marshall	54	41	719	0	Moderate	5.36%
McCook	163	105	1017	1	Substantial	6.86%
McPherson	49	38	366	0	Moderate	4.05%
Meade	737	600	4506	6	Substantial	13.29%
Mellette	44	38	536	0	Moderate	11.11%
Miner	73	35	395	0	Substantial	18.26%
Minnehaha	8397	6800	47417	88	Substantial	13.69%
Moody	151	100	1011	1	Substantial	23.40%
Oglala Lakota	456	304	5132	4	Substantial	10.97%
Pennington	3292	2569	22087	42	Substantial	13.63%
Perkins	54	42	419	0	Moderate	15.22%
Potter	78	57	568	0	Substantial	6.83%
Roberts	258	220	3037	2	Substantial	13.17%
Sanborn	62	41	396	0	Substantial	10.53%
Spink	197	149	1575	1	Substantial	11.27%
Stanley	61	45	486	0	Moderate	13.51%
Sully	24	17	149	0	Moderate	26.92%
Todd	264	168	3233	5	Substantial	19.15%
Tripp	218	176	1075	1	Substantial	11.88%
Turner	315	188	1688	8	Substantial	27.56%
Union	599	425	3669	10	Substantial	18.14%
Walworth	197	130	1222	1	Substantial	15.09%
Yankton	565	423	5410	5	Substantial	7.02%
Ziebach	73	61	553	1	Moderate	5.56%
Unassigned	0	0	2081	0		

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South Dakota

New Total Cases Today	New Confirmed Cases	New Probable Cases
876	813	63
Currently Hospitalized	Active Cases	Recovered Cases
303	6,604	23,320
Total Cases	Total Confirmed Cases	Total Probable Cases
30,215	29,520	695
Ever Hospitalized	Total Persons Tested	Total Tests
1,963	222,321	342,962
Deaths	% Progress (September Goal: 44,233 Tests)	% Progress (October Goal: 44,233 Tests)
291	216%	120%

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Brown County

New Total Cases Today	New Confirmed Cases	New Probable Cases
33	33	0
Currently Hospitalized	Active Cases	Recovered Cases
16	306	1,316
Total Cases	Total Confirmed Cases	Total Probable Cases
1,626	1,622	4
Ever Hospitalized	Total Persons Tested	Total Tests
82	9,698	15,017
Deaths	% Progress (September Goal: 44,233 Tests)	% Progress (October Goal: 44,233 Tests)
4	216%	120%

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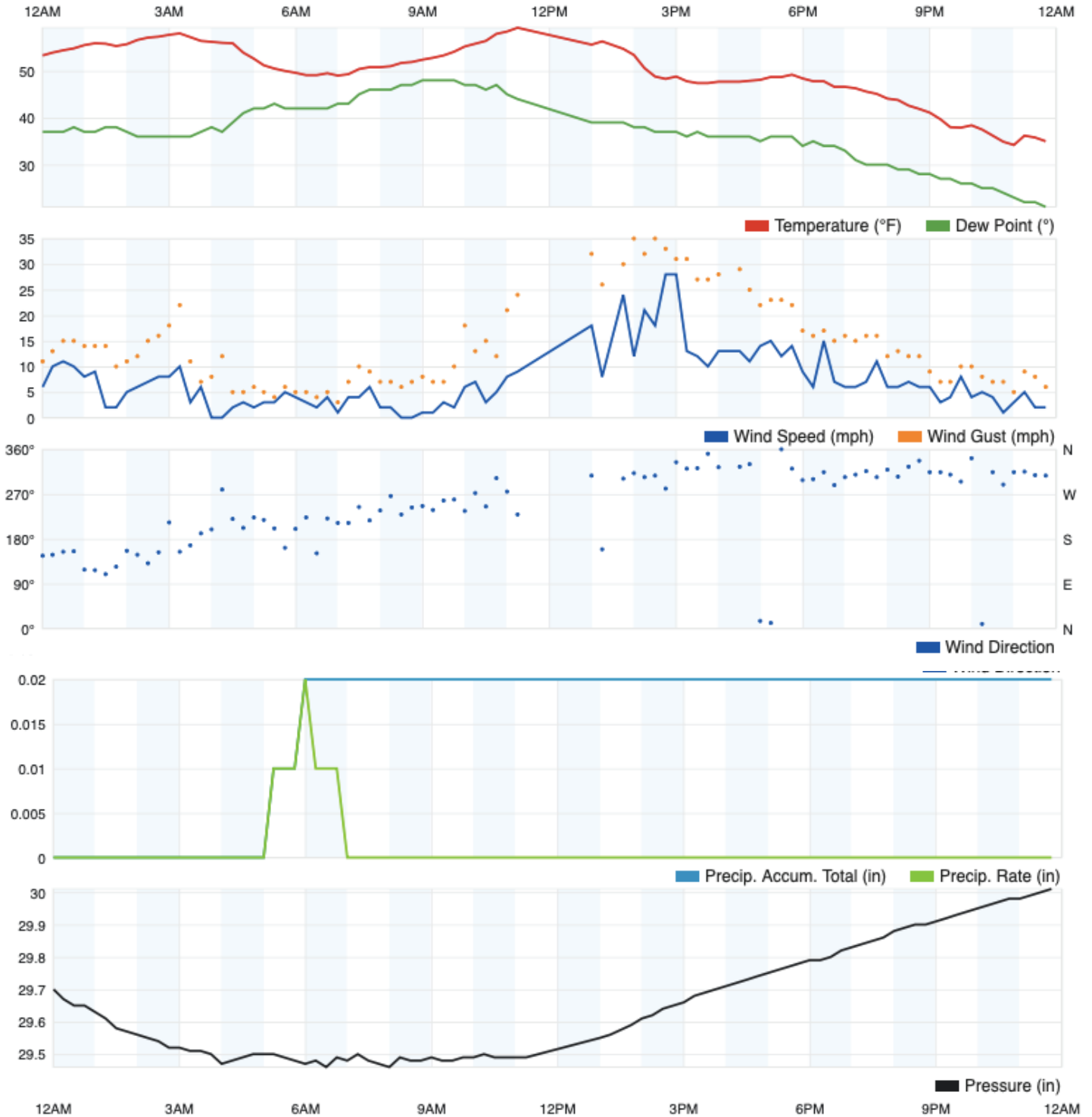
Day County

New Total Cases Today	New Confirmed Cases	New Probable Cases
1	1	0
Currently Hospitalized	Active Cases	Recovered Cases
1	24	91
Total Cases	Total Confirmed Cases	Total Probable Cases
115	115	0
Ever Hospitalized	Total Persons Tested	Total Tests
14	1,255	2,057
Deaths	% Progress (September Goal: 44,233 Tests)	% Progress (October Goal: 44,233 Tests)
0	216%	120%

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Yesterday's Groton Weather



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Today

Tonight

Friday

Friday
Night

Saturday



Sunny then
Mostly Sunny
and Breezy

High: 52 °F



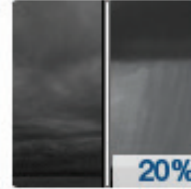
Partly Cloudy

Low: 28 °F



Increasing
Clouds

High: 51 °F



Cloudy then
Slight Chance
Showers

Low: 34 °F



Partly Sunny
then Partly
Sunny and
Breezy

High: 47 °F

Cooling Down Showers Possible Today And Saturday

Today

Friday

Saturday

48 to 53°



Wind gusts 25-35
mph this
afternoon. Isolated
rain showers
possible in central
SD.

48 to 56°



Mostly cloudy,
breezy with wind
gusts 20-30 mph

45-52



Overcast with
isolated rain
showers and
possible snow
flurries



www.weather.gov/abr

Created:
10/15/2020 4:30 AM

Windy conditions are expected again today, with isolated rain showers possible in central SD this afternoon. Saturday brings another chance for isolated showers and may see the first snowfall depending on timing of the precipitation. If snow does occur, little to no accumulation is expected.

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Today in Weather History

October 15, 1880: A violent early season blizzard devastated Minnesota and the Dakotas. Winds gusted to 70 mph at Yankton, SD, and snow drifts 10 to 15 feet high were reported in northwest Iowa and southeast South Dakota. Canby Minnesota reported 20 feet high snow drifts from this storm. Saint Paul, MN, reported a barometric pressure of 28.65 inches on the 16th. Piles of snow, which remained throughout the severe winter to follow, blocked railroads. The winter of 1880-81 is vividly portrayed in Laura Ingalls Wilder's Book: The Long Winter.

October 15, 1992: Snow fell throughout the day across the north-central and northwest part of the state with 2 to 6 inches occurring. There was a separate report of 7 inches near Harding in northwestern South Dakota.

1608: Evangelista Torricelli, the Italian physicist and mathematician who invented the barometer, was born on this day. In 1644, Evangelista Torricelli built the first barometer with mercury.

1984: The Monday Night Football game in Denver, Colorado, was played in a raging blizzard. 15 inches of snow fell with up to 34 inches reported in the nearby mountains. The Air Force Academy canceled classes for the first time in its' recorded history.

1987: Beginning on the night of October 15th, an unusually strong weather system caused extremely high winds in the United Kingdom. This storm became known as the Great Storm of 1987. It was the worst storm to hit the UK since the Great Storm in 1703.

1880 - A violent early season blizzard raked Minnesota and the Dakotas. Winds gusted to 70 mph at Yankton SD, and snow drifts 10 to 15 feet high were reported in northwest Iowa and southeast South Dakota. Saint Paul MN reported a barometric pressure of 28.65 inches on the 16th. Railroads were blocked by drifts of snow which remained throughout the severe winter to follow. Gales did extensive damage to ship on the Great Lakes. (15th-16th) (David Ludlum) (The Weather Channel)

1954 - Hurricane Hazel struck the Carolina coastline. The hurricane demolished every pier along a 170 mile stretch from Myrtle Beach SC to Cedar Island NC, and obliterated entire lines of beach homes. Hurricane Hazel also destroyed 1500 homes as it moved inland with seventeen foot tides. Winds between Myrtle Beach SC and Cape Fear NC gusted to 150 mph. Hurricane Hazel caused 163 million dollars damage, and claimed the lives of 98 persons. (David Ludlum) (The Weather Channel)

1966 - Iowa experienced its worst late season tornado of record. In just one minute a twister tore through the town of Belmont leveling 75 percent of the businesses, and 100 homes, causing more than eleven million dollars damage. (The Weather Channel)

1987 - Unseasonably cold weather continued in the eastern U.S., with thirteen cities reporting record low temperatures for the date. The low of 34 degrees at Montgomery AL was their coldest reading of record for so early in the season. Lows of 32 degrees at Harrisburg PA and 34 degrees at Parkersburg WV marked their third straight morning of record cold. (The National Weather Summary)

1988 - The cold high pressure system responsible for the record low temperatures in the eastern U.S. began to move out to sea, giving way to a trend toward "Indian Summer". Thunderstorms developing ahead of a cold front produced golf ball size hail at Altamont KS and hail two inches in diameter at Yates City IL. (Storm Data) (The National Weather Summary)

1989 - Hurricane Jerry made landfall at Galveston, TX, at 6 30 PM (CDT). Winds at the Galveston Airport reached 75 mph, with gusts to 100 mph. Tides along the island were six to eight feet, and rainfall totals ranged up to slightly more than six inches north of Beaumont. Three persons were killed when their vehicle was blown off the Galveston seawall into the pounding surf. Total damage along the Upper Texas Coast was estimated at fifteen million dollars. Thunderstorms produced severe weather in Lower Michigan during the late morning. Two persons were injured when a tree fell on their camper at the Traverse City State park. While strong northerly winds ushered much colder air into the central U.S., unseasonably warm weather continued in the south central and eastern U.S. The afternoon high of 82 degrees at Bluefield WV was a record for October. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

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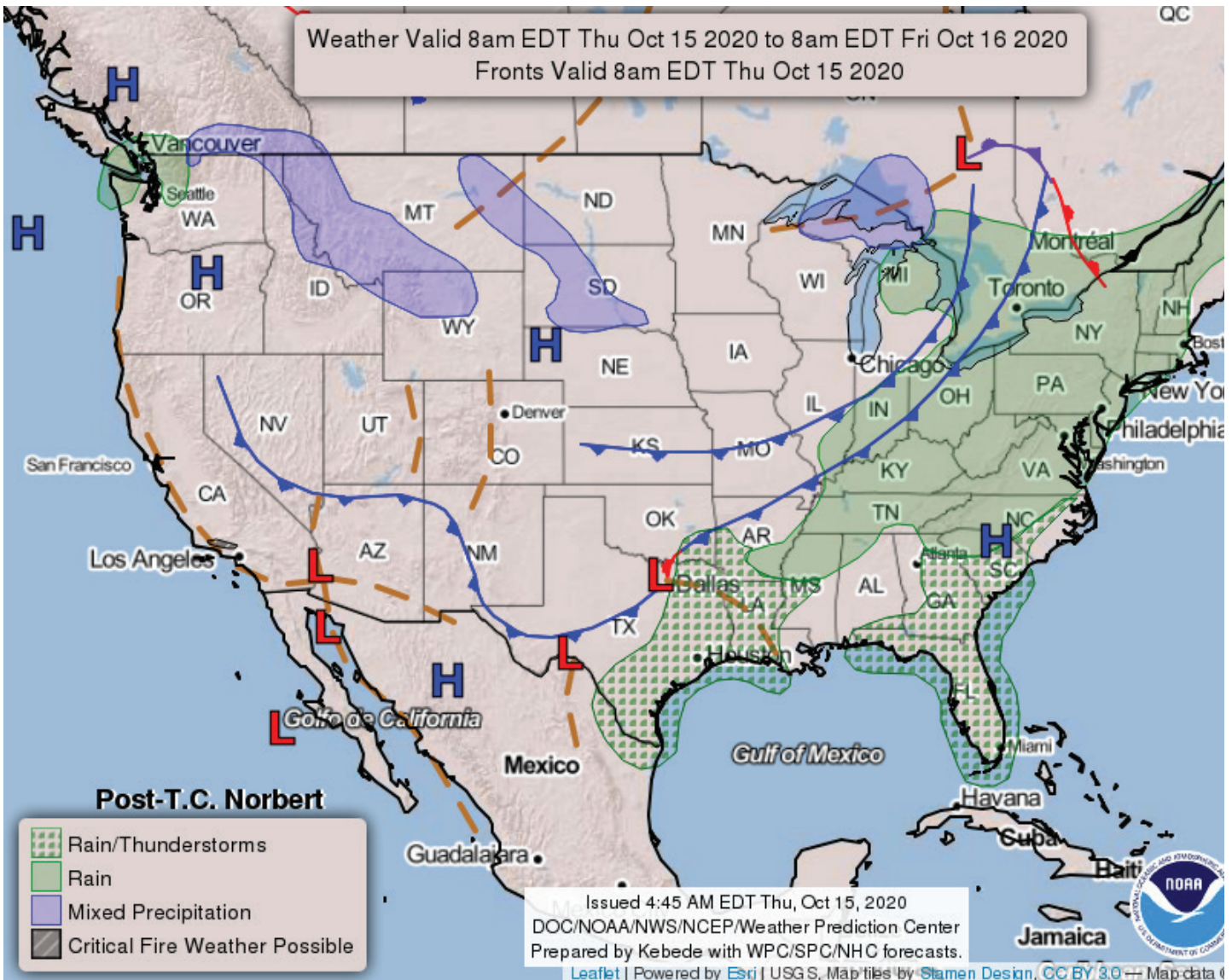
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Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 62 °F at 4:20 PM
Low Temp: 41 °F at 7:29 AM
Wind: 22 mph at 1:38 PM
Precip: .00

Today's Info

Record High: 88° in 1958
Record Low: 15° in 1918
Average High: 58°F
Average Low: 33°F
Average Precip in Oct.: 1.01
Precip to date in Oct.: 0.00
Average Precip to date: 19.49
Precip Year to Date: 15.28
Sunset Tonight: 6:47 p.m.
Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:52 a.m.



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ANYONE CAN BE A QUITTER

His lifelong ambition was to play professional football. Finally, the day was scheduled for him to try out before the coaches of the San Diego Chargers. But, on the day before the tryout, Dale lost both of his legs and three fingers on one hand in an explosion.

Sixty long days after the explosion, he was discharged from the hospital. As he was wheeled from his room to a waiting car, he looked at the two "stubs" that were now his legs and his right hand that had only a thumb and little finger remaining.

He could have given up in disappointment, gone on welfare, and received a lifelong disability. But he didn't.

He could have focused on everything he lost in the explosion and chosen to live a life of anger and hatred. But he didn't.

He could have become filled with resentment for those who made the team that year and were hailed as heroes. But he didn't.

Instead of giving up or becoming angry and hateful or filled with resentment, he challenged himself with the reality that "Anyone can become a quitter. But I'm going to become the greatest insurance salesman my company has ever seen!" And he did.

Paul said, if I chose, "I can know Christ and experience the mighty power that raised Him from the dead." He did, and we can see the difference Christ made in His life. Fortunately, that same power is available today for Christians who choose to use that power to glorify God with their lives. Life in Christ is a choice!

Prayer: Help us, Heavenly Father, to accept the challenges You bring into our lives as opportunities to trust in Your power to accomplish great things for You. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: I want to know Christ and experience the mighty power that raised him from the dead. I want to suffer with him, sharing in his death. Philippians 3:10

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2020 Groton SD Community Events

- **CANCELLED** Groton Lions Club Easter Egg Hunt - City Park (Saturday a week before Easter Weekend)
- **CANCELLED** Dueling Piano's Baseball Fundraiser at the American Legion
- **CANCELLED** Fireman's Fun Night (Same Saturday as GHS Prom)
- **POSTPONED** Front Porch 605 Rural Route Road Trip
- **CANCELLED** Father/Daughter dance.
- **CANCELLED** Spring City-Wide Rummage Sales, (1st Saturday in May)
- **CANCELLED** Girls High School Golf Meet at Olive Grove Golf Course
- 05/25/2020 Groton American Legion Post #39 Memorial Day Services
- 07/04/2020 Firecracker Golf Tourney at Olive Grove Golf Course
- 07/12/2020 Summer Fest/Car Show
- 07/16/2020 Olive Grove Golf Course Pro Am Golf Tourney
- 07/24/2020 Olive Grove Golf Course Ferney Open Golf Tourney
- 07/25/2020 City-Wide Rummage Sales
- **CANCELLED** State American Legion Baseball Tournament in Groton
- 08/07/2020 Wine on Nine Event at Olive Grove Golf Course
- 09/12-13/2020 Groton Fly-In/Drive-In at the Groton Airport north of Groton
- 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)
- 10/30/2020 Downtown Trick or Treat
- 10/31/2020 Groton United Methodist Trunk or Treat
- **CANCELLED** 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

News from the Associated Press

1 in custody, second suspect sought in fatal shooting

SIoux FALLS, S.D. (AP) — One man has been arrested and police are searching for a second suspect in a fatal shooting in Sioux Falls.

A 39-year-old local man has been arrested in the death of 36-year-old Clay Stubbs. He was found dead near a vehicle that had crashed Oct. 8. Police say Stubbs was shot to death shortly before the crash, the Argus Leader reported.

Authorities are also looking for a 34-year-old Sioux Falls man in connection with Stubbs' death.

According to court documents, Stubbs was planning to sell a pound of marijuana to the man in custody. Police say the two men were planning to jump Stubbs during the drug deal because he owed one of the men some money.

The man in custody told investigators the second suspect approached Stubbs' vehicle and shot him two times.

Officers say they found shell casings, two live 9mm rounds, a spent round and a bullet hole in a Grand Jeep Cherokee in the apartment parking lot. Lt. Terrance Matia says police have not recovered a gun.

Court documents say authorities found a half-pound of marijuana, 28 grams of meth, 27 pills and a baggie of methamphetamine in the SUV.

Stubbs was found lying on the ground in front of the crashed vehicle with a gunshot wound to his torso.

SD Lottery

By The Associated Press undefined

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

Dakota Cash

01-02-09-23-31

(one, two, nine, twenty-three, thirty-one)

Estimated jackpot: \$264,000

Lotto America

04-14-24-25-33, Star Ball: 7, ASB: 2

(four, fourteen, twenty-four, twenty-five, thirty-three; Star Ball: seven; ASB: two)

Estimated jackpot: \$2.75 million

Mega Millions

Estimated jackpot: \$77 million

Powerball

21-37-52-53-58, Powerball: 5, Power Play: 2

(twenty-one, thirty-seven, fifty-two, fifty-three, fifty-eight; Powerball: five; Power Play: two)

Estimated jackpot: \$72 million

South Dakota sets daily coronavirus record as hospitals fill

By STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press

SIoux FALLS, S.D. (AP) — South Dakota on Wednesday broke its record for COVID-19 hospitalizations and new cases, and the state has already had more deaths from the disease less than halfway through October than it had in any other month.

Despite the grim prognosis — South Dakota had the nation's highest rate of positive tests over the last 14 days, according to the COVID Tracking Project — Republican Gov. Kristi Noem has resisted pressure to step up the state's response to the disease, explaining Tuesday that the surge in case numbers was "expected" because the state was conducting more tests.

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Secretary of Health Kim Malsam-Rysdon said she thinks the state is doing a good job conducting enough tests to detect outbreaks.

However, South Dakota's 14-day average positivity rate of nearly 24% is more than four times the national average of 5.1%, according to the COVID Tracking Project.

State Epidemiologist Josh Clayton said that the increase in testing led to more positive cases being identified. But he also acknowledged that infections are spreading in communities across the state.

"If you take all of that put together, we are seeing a fair bit of COVID-19 transmission," he said.

The state's hospitals are feeling the effects, reporting that they are caring for 303 COVID-19 patients. As hospitals see patient increases from COVID-19 and other medical issues, some have experienced backups. Roughly 34% of general care beds and 39% of intensive care units statewide remain available, according to the Department of Health.

Noem said she is focused on making sure the state has enough hospital capacity.

South Dakota arena to host 8-team Thanksgiving week tourney

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — Four teams that finished last season in The Associated Press Top 25 make up half the field for a three-day tournament Thanksgiving week in South Dakota's largest city.

The event will be held Nov. 25-27 at the Sanford Pentagon in Sioux Falls, organizers of the inaugural Bad Boy Mowers Crossover Classic announced Wednesday.

The field includes: Dayton, which was No. 3 in the final poll; Creighton, No. 7; Ohio State, No. 19; and West Virginia, No. 24.

The eight teams have combined for 70 Sweet Sixteen appearances and 20 trips to the Final Four.

First-round games include: West Virginia vs. Texas A&M; Ohio State vs. Memphis; Creighton vs. Utah; and Dayton vs. Wichita State.

Members of team traveling parties will be tested regularly for COVID-19 once they arrive in Sioux Falls, and all will remain in a controlled environment.

Dr. Jeremy Cauwels, senior vice president of quality at Sioux Falls-based Sanford Health, is a member of the NCAA COVID-19 Medical Advisory Group.

"We aim to provide the blueprint for safely returning to competition for college sports as we navigate COVID-19's presence in our lives," Cauwels said. "We want student-athletes to be able to play the sports they love, but we want them and everyone else around them to be in a safe environment."

More AP college basketball: <https://apnews.com/Collegebasketball> and https://twitter.com/AP_Top25

Man dies in Rapid City brush fire, police investigate

RAPID CITY, S.D. (AP) — A man has died of smoke inhalation in a brush fire in Rapid City, authorities said. The victim was discovered when police and firefighters responded to the fire Saturday night, police said Tuesday. The man has not been identified.

The fire broke out in a wooded area just southwest of a commercial building and near the north bank of Rapid Creek. Police say the area is occupied by many homeless people.

Several people were in the area when the fire spread. A witness told police the man didn't make it out of the fire.

Forensic testing is needed to identify the man due to his serious injuries, officials said.

Kyrgyzstan's president announces his resignation amid unrest

By DARIA LITVINOVA Associated Press

MOSCOW (AP) — Kyrgyzstan's president announced his resignation Thursday, bowing to the demands of protesters who have taken to the streets of this Central Asian nation to contest the results of a recent parliamentary election.

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Protesters in the capital of Bishkek celebrated Sooronbai Jeenbekov's decision, but it's not clear it will quell the unrest that has gripped the country since last week. The demonstrators quickly moved on to demanding that Parliament be dissolved and that the body's speaker, who is next in line in the order of succession, also resign.

Jeenbekov had dismissed calls he step down just a day earlier. But in a statement released by his office Thursday, he said that he feared violence if he stayed in power, noting that protesters were facing off against police and military.

"In this case, blood will be shed, it is inevitable," Jeenbekov's statement said. "I don't want to go down in history as a president who shed blood and shot at his own citizens."

Parliament must officially approve his resignation, and Speaker Kanat Isayev, who was appointed earlier this week, told local media that the legislature would gather Friday to consider it. Raising the possibility of further confusion and turmoil, Isayev told the Kyrgyz news outlet 24.kg that he doesn't feel he has the right to take over the presidency since the current parliamentary term is about to end.

Jeenbekov's announcement was hardly a surprising turn for the country of 6.5 million people on the border with China: He is the third president to be chased from power by popular uprisings since 2005.

The country was most recently plunged into chaos following an Oct. 4 vote that election officials say was swept by pro-government parties. The opposition said the election was tainted by vote-buying and other irregularities.

Protesters have taken over government buildings, looting some offices, and the Central Election Commission nullified the election. The opposition then announced plans to oust Jeenbekov and form a new government.

Jeenbekov kept a low profile in the first few days after the vote, using the infighting among protest leaders to dig in. He introduced a state of emergency in Bishkek, which was endorsed Tuesday by Parliament.

Authorities deployed troops to the capital over the weekend and introduced a curfew. The move eased tensions in the city, where residents feared the violence and vandalism that accompanied previous uprisings and began forming vigilante groups to protect property. Stores and banks that were closed last week have reopened.

In an effort to stem the unrest, Jeenbekov on Wednesday endorsed the appointment of Sadyr Zhaparov, a former lawmaker who was freed from jail by demonstrators last week, as the country's new prime minister. He also approved Zhaparov's new Cabinet.

Zhaparov promised his supporters to push for Jeenbekov's resignation — but Jeenbekov continued to resist, saying he would stay in the job until the political situation in Kyrgyzstan stabilizes.

Hundreds of Zhaparov's supporters rallied in the capital Wednesday, demanding the president's resignation and threatening to storm his residence. Zhaparov promised he would meet with the president again on Thursday to talk about his resignation.

It wasn't immediately clear whether the meeting took place, but the protests continued.

As in the uprisings that ousted presidents in 2005 and 2010, the current unrest has been driven by clan rivalries that shape the country's politics.

Jeenbekov said in his statement that the situation in Bishkek "remains tense" and that he didn't want to escalate those tensions.

"For me, peace in Kyrgyzstan, the country's integrity, the unity of our people and the calm in the society are above all else," Jeenbekov's statement said.

Jeenbekov has called on Zhaparov and other politicians to get their supporters off the streets of the capital and "bring peaceful life back to the people of Bishkek."

EU imposes sanctions on 6 Russians over Navalny poisoning

By RAF CASERT and LORNE COOK Associated Press

BRUSSELS (AP) — The European Union and Britain imposed sanctions Thursday on six Russians, some among the highest-ranked officials in the nation, and one organization over the poisoning of Russian op-

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position leader Alexei Navalny with a Soviet-era nerve agent.

Foreign Minister Heiko Maas of Germany, which holds the EU's rotating presidency, said that "only with a clear position and by sticking to principles can we as the European Union make progress with respect to Russia."

The sanctions consist of a travel ban to the EU and an asset freeze for individuals and the targeted organization, the EU said.

The list includes Alexander Bortnikov, the chief of Russia's Federal Security Service, the top KGB successor agency that is in charge of domestic security, and Sergei Kiriyenko, Putin's deputy chief of staff. The EU is also targeting the State Scientific Research Institute for Organic Chemistry and Technology.

The U.K. said it would also apply the EU sanctions and will continue them once it leaves a post-Brexit transition period at the end of the year.

"Any use of chemical weapons by the Russian state violates international law. We are determined to hold those responsible to account," British Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab said.

Russian officials have repeatedly denied any involvement in the poisoning and Russian doctors who first examined Navalny have said they found no signs of a poisoning.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov called the move "a deliberate unfriendly step towards Russia" and said that the EU "inflicted damage" on the bloc's relations with Russia.

"Moscow will analyze the situation and will act in accordance with its own interests," Peskov said, adding that "no logic can be seen in such a decision" by the EU.

EU foreign ministers agreed Monday to impose the sanctions, following a push by France and Germany to freeze the assets of those suspected of involvement in the poisoning and ban them from traveling in Europe under sanctions to combat the use and spread of chemical weapons.

The legal procedures were completed Thursday.

French Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian said the EU had acted "with exceptional speed, in keeping with the seriousness of this act and the methods used."

"This demonstrates a European Union that acts in the face of the new, unacceptable and destabilizing use of a chemical weapon," he said at a meeting in Paris.

Navalny, an anti-corruption investigator who is the most visible political opponent of Russian President Vladimir Putin, fell ill on Aug. 20 during a domestic flight in Russia. He was flown to Germany for treatment two days later and is still recovering there.

Last week, tests conducted at labs designated by the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons confirmed that Navalny was poisoned by a Novichok nerve agent. They confirmed results found earlier in labs in Germany and elsewhere.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov has suggested that Moscow might even sever ties over the Navalny dispute, claiming Wednesday that "the Germans are not planning to provide any facts, despite all international and legal obligations. We respond in kind. This is diplomatic practice."

"We probably simply have to temporarily stop talking to those people in the West who are responsible for foreign policy and don't understand the need for mutually respectful dialogue," he said a day earlier.

Lavrov specifically pointed at European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen's recent statements ruling out a partnership with Russia, saying that scenario will play out if that's what the EU wants.

"Russia wants to understand whether it's possible to do any business with the EU in the current conditions," Lavrov said at a foreign policy conference attended by experts in Moscow.

In a phone call Tuesday with Lavrov, EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell insisted that the EU "wishes to maintain open channels of communication with Russia and to enhance cooperation on issues of mutual interest," according to a statement from Borrell's office.

Borrell also underlined that Moscow "must do its utmost to investigate this crime thoroughly in full transparency and to fully cooperate" with the OPCW. He said the EU "will continue to defend its interests and values, including respect for international law and fundamental rights."

Daria Litvinova in Moscow, Geir Moulson in Berlin, and Jill Lawless in London, contributed to this report.

Election 2020 Today: Town hall duel; mail changes reversed

By The Associated Press undefined

Here's what's happening Thursday in Election 2020, 19 days until Election Day:

HOW TO VOTE: AP's state-by-state interactive has details on how to vote in this election.

ON THE TRAIL: President Donald Trump will be in North Carolina and Florida; Democratic challenger Joe Biden will be in Pennsylvania.

TODAY'S TOP STORIES:

DUELING TOWN HALLS: Trump and Biden will compete for TV audiences in dueling town halls instead of meeting face-to-face for their second debate as originally planned. The two will take questions in different cities on different networks: Trump on NBC from Miami, Biden on ABC from Philadelphia. Trump backed out of plans for the presidential faceoff originally scheduled for the evening after debate organizers shifted the format to a virtual event following Trump's coronavirus diagnosis.

BARRETT'S FATE: The Senate Judiciary Committee is poised to take the first steps toward approving Supreme Court nominee Amy Coney Barrett. After the two days of questioning, the committee is scheduled to start considering the nomination. The meeting is a procedural formality and will be conducted ahead of a panel of law experts and advocates who will testify for and against Barrett's nomination. A vote by the committee isn't expected until next week.

MAIL REVERSAL: The U.S. Postal Service is resuming full operations after changes that slowed mail service nationwide. The Postal Service agreed to reverse all changes, which included reduced retail hours, removal of collection boxes and mail sorting machines, closure or consolidation of mail processing facilities, restriction of late or extra trips for timely mail delivery, and banning or restricting overtime. The agreement also requires the service to prioritize election mail.

BIDEN EXPLAINER: Looking to undermine rival Joe Biden just weeks before the election, Trump's campaign has seized on a tabloid story offering bizarre twists to a familiar line of attack: Biden's relationship with Ukraine. But the story in the New York Post raises more questions than answers, including about the authenticity of an email at the center of the story. The origins of the story also trace back to Trump lawyer Rudy Giuliani, who has repeatedly pushed unfounded claims about Biden and his son, Hunter Biden. Even if the emails in the Post are legitimate, they don't validate Trump and Giuliani's claims that Biden's actions were influenced by his son's business dealings in Ukraine.

IOWA RULING: Iowa's highest court upheld a state directive that was used to invalidate tens of thousands of absentee ballot requests mailed to voters pre-filled with their personal information. The court rejected a Democratic challenge that argued the directive issued by Republican Secretary of State Paul Pate was unconstitutional. Pate instructed county elections commissioners in July that all absentee ballot request forms they mailed to voters must be blank in order to ensure uniformity statewide.

VISION 2020: Can you trust the U.S. Postal Service to deliver your ballot on time? If you plan on voting by mail, election officials say it's best to do it as early as possible so your ballot gets to its destination well before Election Day. On top of that, each state has different rules on whether it accepts mail ballots that arrive after Nov. 3. Read more in Vision 2020, a new series of stories answering questions from our audience about the election.

ICYMI:

History, mistrust spurring Black early voters in Georgia

Jones: Tuberville charity filings raise questions

Battleground North Carolina begins in-person early voting

California GOP says it won't remove unofficial ballot boxes

Pence in Michigan says 'road to victory' runs through state

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Space probe makes 1st Venus fly-by on way to Mercury

BERLIN (AP) — A spacecraft bound for Mercury swung by Venus on Thursday, using Earth's neighbor to adjust its course on the way to the solar system's smallest and innermost planet.

Launched almost two years ago, the European-Japanese probe BepiColombo took a black-and-white snapshot of Venus from a distance of 17,000 kilometers (10,560 miles), with some of its own instruments in the frame.

The fly-by is the second of nine so-called planetary gravity assists that the spacecraft needs for its seven-year trip to Mercury. The first, around Earth, took place in April.

The European Space Agency has described the 1.3 billion-euro (\$1.5 billion) mission as one of its most challenging yet. Mercury's extreme temperatures, the intense gravity pull of the sun and blistering solar radiation make for hellish conditions.

BepiColombo will make one more fly-by of Venus and six of Mercury itself to slow down before its arrival in 2025. Once there, the spacecraft will split in two, releasing a European orbiter nicknamed Bepi that will swoop into Mercury's inner orbit while Mio, built by the Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency, gathers data from a greater distance.

Both probes are designed to cope with temperatures varying from 430 degrees Celsius (806 degrees Fahrenheit) on the side facing the sun, and -180 degrees Celsius (-292 F) in Mercury's shadow.

Researchers hope the BepiColombo mission will help them understand more about Mercury, which is only slightly larger than Earth's moon and has a massive iron core.

The last spacecraft to visit Mercury was NASA's Messenger probe, which ended its mission in 2015 after a four-year orbit. Before that, NASA's Mariner 10 flew past the planet in the mid-1970s.

London shifts into 2nd-highest virus risk tier as cases rise

By DANICA KIRKA Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — Britain's health secretary has shifted London into the second-highest COVID-19 alert level amid a rise in cases.

Health Secretary Matt Hancock told the House of Commons that the government acted because infection rates are rising rapidly in the capital and swift action was necessary to control the virus.

The move comes as millions of people in northern England are waiting to find out whether they will be placed under the government's tightest COVID-19 restrictions, which the city of Liverpool already faces.

London Mayor Sadiq Khan expected the move. Khan told the London Assembly that talks were continuing but he expected authorities to move London into the second of three risk categories based on "expert public health and scientific advice" about what is needed to save lives.

Khan has written to Prime Minister Boris Johnson seeking details about what assistance would be provided to businesses and individuals affected by such a move.

"Nobody wants to see more restrictions," Khan said. "But this is deemed to be necessary in order to protect Londoners' lives by myself, London council leaders and by ministers."

Meanwhile, the mayor of the greater Manchester area, with 2.8 million people, says he expects to meet with Johnson's team on Thursday for talks on whether the region will be classified as a "high risk" area. T

That is the highest risk category in the government's new three-tier regional COVID-19 strategy and would require restrictions such as closing bars and banning social gatherings outside one's own home.

The government has said it is also talking with leaders of other parts of northern England where COVID-19 infection rates are high.

German, Czech, Italian virus records deepen Europe worries

By GEIR MOULSON Associated Press

BERLIN (AP) — Record daily infection figures in Germany, the Czech Republic, Italy, Poland and elsewhere added to fears on Thursday that Europe is running out of chances to control its latest coronavirus out-

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break. France has set a 9 p.m. curfew for many of its biggest cities as governments across the continent take increasingly tough action.

New infections have surged across Europe over recent weeks as the fall kicks in, prompting authorities in many places to start reimposing restrictions relaxed over the summer. The Czech Republic, Belgium, the Netherlands, Spain, France and Britain are among countries causing particular concern.

The head of the World Health Organization's Europe office urged countries to be "uncompromising" in controlling the virus.

Europe's financial markets fell sharply on concerns that the new restrictions on swathes of the region's economy are already ending the nascent recovery from its sharpest recession in modern history. Major stock indexes were well over 2% lower in Europe on Thursday.

While Germany, the European Union's most populous nation, is still in comparatively good shape, alarm bells are ringing there too. On Thursday, the national disease control center reported 6,638 cases over 24 hours — exceeding the previous record of nearly 6,300 set in late March, although testing in the country of 83 million has expanded greatly since then.

Chancellor Angela Merkel and Germany's 16 state governors agreed Wednesday night to tighten mask-wearing rules, make bars close early and limit the number of people who can gather in areas where coronavirus infection rates are high. Merkel, who stressed the importance of keeping contact-tracing efforts on track, said "we must stop this exponential rise, the quicker the better."

Officials said that is still possible, but more efforts may be necessary.

"Yesterday's decisions are an important step, but they probably won't be enough," Merkel's chief of staff, Helge Braun, told ARD television. "So now it is up to the population that we don't just look at 'what am I allowed to do now,' but basically we must do more and be more cautious than what the governors decided yesterday."

Merkel noted that neighboring countries are having to take "very drastic measures."

This week has seen the Netherlands close bars and restaurants, and the Czech Republic and Northern Ireland shut schools. The Czech Health Ministry said the country, with a population of over 10 million, confirmed 9,544 new cases on Wednesday, over 900 more than the days-old previous record.

The government says hospitals could reach full capacity by the end of October, and announced Thursday that the military will set up a hospital at Prague's exhibition center to treat COVID-19 patients.

"We have to build extra capacity as soon as possible," Czech Prime Minister Andrej Babis said. "We have no time. The prognosis is not good."

In France, President Emmanuel Macron announced on Wednesday night that 18 million residents in nine regions, including Paris, will have a 9 p.m. curfew starting Saturday until Dec. 1.

Aurelien Rousseau, director of the Paris region's public health agency, said that nearly half of intensive care beds are now occupied by coronavirus patients, with other hospital beds filling rapidly too.

"It's a kind of spring tide that affects everybody simultaneously," Rousseau said. "We had a blind spot in our tracking policies. It was the private sphere, festive events."

The head of WHO's Europe office, Dr. Hans Kluge, said most of the spread is happening in homes, indoor spaces and communities not complying with protection measures.

"These measures are meant to keep us all ahead of the curve and to flatten its course," Kluge said. "It is therefore up to us to accept them while they are still relatively easy to follow instead of following the path of severity."

Still, Paris restaurant, cinema and theater owners are fuming at the new curfew rules. Tighter local restrictions in northern England and Northern Ireland have prompted similar emotions there. London Mayor Sadiq Khan said he expects the British government to announce Thursday that the capital is moving to a higher level of restrictions.

Just as Macron's government tackles the resurgence of infections, French police on Thursday searched the homes of the former prime minister, the current and former health ministers and other top officials in an investigation into the government's pandemic response. It was triggered by dozens of complaints over

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recent months, particularly over shortages of masks and other equipment.

Belgium's Ghent University said it will move to online education whenever possible starting Oct. 26.

Italy, so far spared the worst of the second wave, on Wednesday also recorded its biggest single-day jump in infections since the start of the pandemic. It added another 7,332 cases amid a resurgence that is straining the country's contact-tracing system.

Poland registered a record of nearly 9,000 new cases on Thursday. Masks have been required outdoors since Saturday and strict limits imposed on the size of gatherings.

Slovakia and Croatia announced record daily case numbers. Slovakia was imposing new restrictions Thursday, once again making it mandatory to wear masks outdoors and shutting fitness centers, public swimming pools, theaters and cinemas.

Sweden, which has chosen a much-debated approach of keeping large parts of society open, also raised the prospect of tougher restrictions.

"Too many don't follow the rules," Prime Minister Stefan Lofven said. "If there is no correction here, we must take sharper measures."

He didn't specify what those measures might be.

Associated Press writers around Europe contributed to this report.

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

The Latest: WHO: European cases rocket, strong limits needed

By The Associated Press undefined

LONDON — The exponential surge of coronavirus cases across Europe has warranted the restrictive measures being taken in numerous countries, making them "absolutely necessary," the head of the World Health Organization's Europe office says.

In a press briefing Thursday, Dr. Hans Kluge warned that even more drastic steps could be taken if the pandemic does not recede.

He called for countries to be "uncompromising" in their attempts to control the virus and said most of the COVID-19 spread is happening in homes, indoor spaces and communities not complying with protection measures.

"These measures are meant to keep us all ahead of the curve and to flatten its course," Kluge said, while wearing a mask. "It is therefore up to us to accept them while they are still relatively easy to follow."

Kluge cited epidemiological models that suggested if 95% of people wear masks and other social distancing measures are applied, Europe could avoid about 281,000 deaths by February. But he warned that relaxing measures could lead to a five-fold increase in deaths by January.

"The evolving epidemic in Europe raises great concern," he said. "But we should not hold back with relatively smaller actions in order to avoid the same very painful damaging actions we saw in the first peak."

HERE'S WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT THE VIRUS OUTBREAK:

— European nations hit repeated daily virus records, hospitals see strains

— Rights groups say some European officials are using the virus as a cover to target Roma ethnic communities

— Extra safety scrutiny planned as virus vaccine worries grow

— Melania Trump says son Barron had coronavirus, but no symptoms

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

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HERE'S WHAT ELSE IS HAPPENING:

PRAGUE — The Czech Republic's military will establish a hospital at Prague's exhibition center to treat COVID-19 patients, the first such facility in one of the hardest-hit European countries.

Thursday's announcement by Interior Minister Jan Hamacek comes amid a record surge of new coronavirus cases in the country that reached a record high of 9,544 a day earlier.

Reacting to growing number of coronavirus hospitalizations, Prime Minister Andrej Babis says the government is planning to buy 4,000 extra hospital beds. The country's hospitals currently treat 2,678 coronavirus patients and the government says the hospitals could reach their full capacity by the end of October.

"We have to build extra capacity as soon as possible," Babis said Thursday. "We have no time, the prognosis is not good," Babis told reporters ahead of his trip to Brussels for an EU summit.

Health Minister Roman Prymula said sports grounds and other venues can also be used for treating coronavirus patients.

LONDON — Millions of people in northern England are waiting to find out whether they will be placed under the government's tightest COVID-19 restrictions as local leaders meet with senior government officials about efforts to slow the spread of the virus.

The mayor of the greater Manchester area, with 2.8 million people, says he expects to meet with Prime Minister Boris Johnson's team on Thursday for talks on whether the region will be classified as a "high risk" area. That's the highest risk category in the government's new three-tier regional COVID-19 strategy and would require restrictions such as closing bars and banning social gatherings outside one's own home.

The government is also talking with leaders of other parts of northern England where COVID-19 infection rates are high.

London Mayor Sadiq Khan says his city may soon move into the high alert level. He wrote to Johnson on Wednesday seeking details about what assistance would be provided to businesses and individuals affected by such a move.

"Urgent action is needed to protect Londoners and bring the virus under control in our city," Khan said in a tweet posted Thursday. "The government must provide proper financial help to all businesses and vulnerable Londoners affected by further restrictions."

ATHENS, Greece — Greek civil servants have walked off the job in a 24-hour strike demanding, among other things, better pay for health and education workers and more hiring during the coronavirus pandemic.

Thursday's strike shut down public services across the country, while the participation of air traffic controllers forced airlines to cancel or reschedule flights until 8 a.m. Friday.

Hundreds of health care workers marched through central Athens ahead of the main strike demonstration set for the center of the capital later Thursday.

The country's main civil servants' union, ADEDY, called the strike over a series of demands, including an increase in health spending, more intensive care unit beds and new permanent hirings in education to let school classes be limited to 15 pupils.

Greece has been experiencing a resurgence in the pandemic that has increased pressure on the health system. The government has increased the number of intensive care unit beds available for coronavirus patients.

The country of around 11 million people has seen new daily coronavirus cases hovering around the 300 to 400 mark. It currently has a total of 23,495 confirmed cases, with 469 deaths.

BRATISLAVA, Slovakia — Slovakia is registering a new record high in coronavirus infections with the new confirmed cases in one day almost reaching 2,000.

The Health Ministry says the day-to-day increase of those tested positive was 1,929 on Wednesday. The previous record of 1,887 was set on Friday.

Slovakia imposed new restrictive measures on Thursday, making it mandatory again to wear face masks

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outdoors and banning all public events. Fitness and wellness centers, public swimming pools, theaters and cinemas will be closed. Restaurants are banned from serving meals indoors and the number of people in stores is limited.

Slovakia has seen 24,225 confirmed infections with 71 deaths.

—
ZAGREB, Croatia — Croatia is reporting record numbers of new infections for the second day in a row amid alarm over the rise in cases.

Authorities said Thursday that 793 people have tested positive in the past 24 hours while 10 people have died. On Wednesday, Croatia reported 748 new cases and four deaths.

The confirmed new cases are the highest in the European Union country of some 4.2 million people since the start of the outbreak. Authorities have tightened preventive measures to try and curb the spread. Most of the new cases have been recorded in the capital of Zagreb.

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TIRANA, Albania — Fearing a resurgence of COVID-19 cases with the winter and flu ahead, the Albanian government has ordered the mandatory use of masks outdoors starting Thursday.

The rules, which likely run until February, also impose a 3,000 lek (\$28) fine on those who flout the law. Mask use has been mandatory indoors, too. Only homes, restaurants and cafes will be where people are allowed not to wear a mask.

Albania, with 2.8 million people, had 203 new confirmed virus cases on Wednesday.

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PRAGUE — Coronavirus infections in the Czech Republic have hit a new record high, surpassing 9,000 confirmed cases in one day for the first time.

The Health Ministry says the day-to-day increase registered on Wednesday reached 9,544, more than 900 more than the previous record set on Friday in the nation of over 10 million.

The Czech Republic has had a total of 139,290 cases since the beginning of the pandemic with 1,172 deaths.

The record surge is followed by the growing number of COVID-19 patients in hospitals. Of the 77,217 currently ill with the virus, 2,678 need hospitalization while 518 are in serious condition.

The government says the hospitals could reach its full capacity by the end of October while working to increase the number of beds available to 10,000.

The Health Ministry has imposed a series of restrictive measures in efforts to contain the spike with schools and restaurants closed and public events banned.

—
HONG KONG — Hong Kong and Singapore say they have agreed to a bilateral air travel bubble, re-establishing travel links as coronavirus infections in both cities decline.

Under the air travel bubble, travelers from Hong Kong and Singapore will not be restricted on their travel purposes, Hong Kong commerce minister Edward Yau said Thursday. This means that tourists from each city will be able to visit the other.

Under the air travel bubble, travelers will also not be subject to compulsory quarantine, provided they have taken coronavirus tests mutually recognized by both cities, with a negative test result.

Additionally, travelers are required to fly on dedicated flights, which will only serve air travel bubble travelers between Hong Kong and Singapore. The launch date has yet to be announced.

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BERLIN — Germany has reported more than 6,600 new coronavirus cases, its highest recorded daily total since the pandemic began.

The national disease control center, the Robert Koch Institute, said early Thursday that 6,638 infections were reported over the past 24 hours. That is about 1,500 higher than a day earlier, and exceeds the previous high of nearly 6,300 seen in late March. Testing has been expanded considerably over recent months.

While Germany is still in better shape than many other European countries, the latest figures underscore concern about a rapid rise in infections over recent weeks.

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On Wednesday night, Chancellor Angela Merkel and the country's 16 state governors agreed to tighten mask-wearing rules, make bars close early and limit the number of people who can gather in areas where coronavirus infection rates are high.

In total, Germany has reported more than 341,000 cases of COVID-19, including 9,710 deaths. On Thursday, 33 new deaths were reported.

BRUSSELS — One of Belgium's main universities is moving to online education whenever possible because the coronavirus is continuing to soar across the nation and another is preparing to follow suit.

Ghent University said the measure will enter into force on Oct. 26 and Dutch-speaking Free University of Brussels said it already prepared its staff and facilities to do likewise if necessary.

Belgium has said keeping its schools open was a key goal while it took other measure to counter the resurgence of the virus, but the main indicators are spiking at a sustained rate.

Over the week ending Oct. 11, new cases increased by 101% compared to the previous week and stood at 5,421. The total of confirmed cases since the pandemic began stood at 181,511 in the nation of 11.5 million. The cases per 100,000 inhabitants stood at 494, one of the highest in Europe.

The virus has killed 10,278 people in Belgium.

NEW DELHI — India has reported its lowest daily increase in coronavirus deaths in nearly three months.

The Health Ministry on Thursday reported 680 fatalities in the past 24 hours, the lowest in 11 weeks, raising the country's death toll since the pandemic began to 111,266. The country was seeing more than 1,000 virus deaths per day last month.

The ministry also reported 67,708 new infections, raising India's total to more than 7.3 million.

According to the ministry, India's average number of daily cases dropped to 72,576 last week from 92,830 during the week of Sept. 9-15, when the virus peaked. Over the last month, the country has been seeing a trend of declining cases on a week-to-week basis.

Health experts have warned about the potential for the virus to spread during the religious festival season beginning later this month, which is marked by huge gatherings of people in temples and shopping districts.

COLOMBO, Sri Lanka — Authorities in Sri Lanka will impose a curfew on a key industrial town, after a surge of COVID-19 cases centered around a garment factory in the capital's suburbs.

Police spokesman Ajith Rohana says a curfew will be imposed in Katunayake from Thursday until further notice.

Katunayake houses the country's flagship industrial zone where more than 50,000 workers are employed. The country's main international airport is also located there.

Authorities say the factories in the zone will continue their operations despite the curfew.

The Indian Ocean island nation last week reported its first locally transmitted infection in more than two months when a garment factory worker tested positive.

By Thursday, the number of infections linked to the cluster had climbed to 1,723, and more than 2,000 other people have been asked to quarantine at home.

MEXICO CITY — Mexico has reported that 1,744 health-care workers have died so far of COVID-19, and another 164 are suspected to have died of it but their test results are still pending.

The number of doctors, nurses, technicians and hospital employees confirmed to have been infected with the novel coronavirus in Mexico now amounts to 127,053. That means health care professionals account for about 15% of all Mexico's confirmed coronavirus cases, and about 18% of all COVID-19 deaths.

The Health Department said that of those who died, 42% were nurses, 26% were doctors, and 32% were technicians, cleaning staff or other hospital employees.

Mexico has one of the highest rates of medical-personnel deaths in the world, and hospital employees have staged a number of demonstrations in Mexico to protest insufficient personal protective equipment.

But Health Department officials denied the death rates was because of a lack of protective gear.

Thailand declares emergency after unprecedented protest

By GRANT PECK and CHRIS BLAKE Associated Press

BANGKOK (AP) — Thailand's government declared a strict new state of emergency for the capital on Thursday, a day after a student-led protest against the country's traditional establishment saw an extraordinary moment in which demonstrators heckled a royal motorcade.

After the pre-dawn declaration, riot police moved in to clear out demonstrators who after a day of rallies and confrontation had gathered outside Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-ocha's office to push their demands, which include the former general's stepping down, constitutional changes and reform of the monarchy.

Several top leaders of the protest movement were taken into custody, with one later declaring on his Facebook page that he had been denied access to a lawyer and was being forced onto a helicopter and taken to a city in the country's north. Police said they had made 22 arrests.

Despite a new ban against large public gatherings, as many as 1,000 people answered protest leaders' calls to rally again in another area of the city later Thursday.

The text of the emergency declaration said it was needed because "certain groups of perpetrators intended to instigate an untoward incident and movement in the Bangkok area by way of various methods and via different channels, including causing obstruction to the royal motorcade."

The protest Wednesday in Bangkok's historic district, not far from glittering temples and royal palaces, was the third major gathering by student-led activists who have been pushing the boundaries of what is considered acceptable — and legal — language by publicly questioning the role of Thailand's monarchy in the nation's power structure.

Thailand's royal family has long been considered sacrosanct and a pillar of Thai identity. King Maha Vajiralongkorn and other key member of the royal family are protected by a lese majeste law that has regularly been used to silence critics who risk up to 15 years in prison if deemed to have insulted the institution.

The protest — held on the anniversary of a 1973 student-led uprising against a military dictatorship — was complicated by the presence of royalist counter protesters who had gathered both to show support for the government and to greet the royal family as they traveled to and from a religious ceremony in the area.

That led to a moment captured in photos and video that circulated widely on social media in which what appeared to be protesters gestured and shouted just meters (feet) from the royal motorcade. Such actions are unprecedented in Thailand, where those waiting for a royal motorcade regularly sit on the ground or prostrate themselves.

Some experts say a line may have been crossed.

"What seemed to be a low-boil stalemate that the Prayuth government was managing with reasonable success has now, following the incident involving the procession of the queen's motorcade down a street in which an active protest was under way and the arrests of protest leaders, become a full-blown crisis," said Michael Montesano, coordinator of the Thailand Studies Program at the ISEAS-Yusof Isak Institute in Singapore. "Unlike even 48 hours ago, the country is in dangerous territory now."

Government spokesman Anucha Buraphachaisri announced Thursday morning that the prime minister had ordered police to take strict action against those who obstruct a royal procession or otherwise insult the monarchy.

One change is that police said they will install checkpoints around Bangkok for security purposes.

Keeping order will be facilitated by the new emergency decree for Bangkok, which bans unauthorized gatherings of more than five people and gives authorities other powers they deem needed to prevent unrest, including detaining people temporarily without charge. It also outlaws news that distorts information or could cause a "misunderstanding."

Thailand is already under a national state of emergency as part of its efforts to fight the coronavirus, and it was not immediately clear how the new decree was different.

Protesters were undaunted and gathered again in a Bangkok shopping district Thursday afternoon. After

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some initial milling around, the crowd grew big enough to block a major intersection flanked by several malls and a famous shrine, where they were addressed by one of the protest leaders who had not been taken into custody. Police stood by while the crowd chanted rude slogans calling for the prime minister to step down.

Deputy police spokesman Col. Kissana Phathanacharoen warned earlier that calling for such a protest or attending one was against the law.

"You cannot say that they are not aware of the order. We are making it clear," Kissana said at a news conference.

Human rights group Amnesty International criticized the crackdown as "unjustified." Its deputy regional director Ming Yu Hah urged Thai authorities to "engage in constructive dialogue with the protesters."

"These moves are clearly designed to stamp out dissent, and sow fear in anyone who sympathizes with the protesters' views," the group said in a statement.

The protest movement was launched in March by university students, but quickly put on hold as Thailand was gripped by the coronavirus pandemic. It came back in July, when the threat from the virus eased, and has since grown in size.

The movement's original core demands were new elections, changes in the constitution to make it more democratic, and an end to intimidation of activists.

The protesters charge that Prayuth, who as army commander led a 2014 coup that toppled an elected government, was returned to power unfairly in last year's general election because laws had been changed to favor a pro-military party. The protesters say a constitution promulgated under military rule and passed in a referendum in which campaigning against it was illegal is undemocratic.

The movement took another stunning turn in August, when students at a rally aired unprecedented criticism of the monarchy and issued calls for its reform. Using direct language normally expressed in whispers if at all, the speakers criticized the king's wealth, his influence and that he spends much of his time in Germany, not Thailand.

Conservative royalist Thais accuse the protest movement of seeking to end the monarchy, an allegation its leaders deny.

Nevertheless, analysts say the incident with the royal motorcade may harden positions.

It "is not just unprecedented but will be shocking for many," said Kevin Hewison, professor emeritus from the University of North Carolina and veteran Thai studies scholar. "Yet it is reflective of how a new generation of protesters sees the monarchy and military-backed regime as intertwined and that political reform demands reform of the monarchy as well."

Indian cinemas reopen after going dark for months amid virus

By SHEIKH SAALIQ Associated Press

NEW DELHI (AP) — Seven months after screens went dark, cinemas reopened Thursday in much of India with mostly old titles on the marquee — a sign of the country's efforts to return to normal as the pace of coronavirus infections slows but also of the roadblocks that remain.

The return to movie theaters comes as India is registering the highest number of daily cases globally and is expected to soon top the list worldwide in terms of total number of reported infections, passing the United States. But trends also suggest the spread is beginning to slow.

Nearly 10,000 theaters closed in mid-March when the government imposed restrictions to fight the virus, which has torn through India, killing more than 110,000 people. Cinemas are among the last public places to reopen — a hugely symbolic move in a country known the world over for the lavish productions pumped out by its Bollywood film industry.

Every year, the \$2.8 billion juggernaut produces more than 2,000 films that feature complex dance routines, singing and spectacularly large casts, serving to unite a diverse nation of 1.4 billion people. The industry's success over the years has embedded moviegoing into India's contemporary culture and been a boon for the economy, which, since the pandemic began, has nosedived to its slowest growth on record.

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But even if theaters are reopening, filmmaking still hasn't rebounded. Reeling from zero box-office returns in this pandemic year, Indian filmmakers have so far not lined up any new big-ticket releases and have pushed any films they have made directly to online streaming platforms like Netflix and Amazon Prime.

Such struggles can be seen the world over as the pandemic has devastated the entertainment industry. Earlier this month, a major American movie theater chain said it would temporarily shutter hundreds of locations in the U.S. and the U.K.

Movie theaters pose some of the biggest infection risks since they put people in a closed space, where the virus can spread easily, for an extended period of time.

To minimize the danger, Indian cinemas have separated seats, staggered show times and are encouraging digital payments. Masks and temperature checks are mandatory.

"We have put everything into place, maybe more than what has been prescribed," said Gagan Kapur, regional head of the PVR Cinemas in New Delhi.

Still, some Indian states have been cautious.

Authorities in Mumbai, the home of Bollywood, put off reopening cinemas for the time being. The southern state of Maharashtra, of which Mumbai is the capital, is the worst-hit in India, with more than 37% of the country's COVID-19 fatalities.

With few new films coming out of Bollywood, theaters on Thursday mostly re-released earlier hits, though one new film, "Khaali Peeli," a typical Bollywood potboiler, came out.

Older films like "Tanhaji," a historical epic about a Hindu warrior who rises against the Mughals, "Thapad," a social drama on domestic violence, and "Shubh Mangal Zyada Saavdhan," a rom-com featuring a gay couple, were played across multiple screens. "PM Narendra Modi," an unabashed hagiography of the Indian prime minister that was released last year, also ran in some places.

The reopening of cinemas comes as trends suggest a decline in new infections.

India saw a surge in July and added more than 2 million in August and another 3 million in September. But it is seeing a slower pace of coronavirus spread since mid-September, when the daily infections touched a record of 97,894. It is recording an average of just over 70,000 cases daily so far this month.

But some experts say that India's tally of more than 7.3 million total infections may not be reliable because of poor reporting and inadequate health infrastructure. India is also relying heavily on antigen tests, which are faster but less accurate than traditional RT-PCR tests.

Health officials have also warned about the potential for the virus to spread during the religious festival season beginning later this month.

"The next two and a half months are going to be very crucial for us in our fight against corona because of the winter season and the festival season," Health Minister Harsh Vardhan said Wednesday. "It becomes responsibility of every citizen to not let our guard down and follow COVID-19 appropriate behavior to curb spread of the infection."

Associated Press video journalist Shonal Ganguly contributed to this report.

Dueling town halls for Trump, Biden after debate plan nixed

By ZEKE MILLER, BILL BARROW and AAMER MADHANI Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump and challenger Joe Biden will compete for TV audiences in dueling town halls instead of meeting face-to-face for their second debate as originally planned.

The two will take questions in different cities on different networks Thursday night: Trump on NBC from Miami, Biden on ABC from Philadelphia. Trump backed out of plans for the presidential faceoff originally scheduled for the evening after debate organizers shifted the format to a virtual event following Trump's coronavirus diagnosis.

As the pace of the campaign speeds up in its final weeks, the two candidates first are taking care of other electoral necessities Thursday: Trump has a midday rally in battleground North Carolina, and Biden is raising campaign cash at a virtual event.

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Trump has also been trying to shore up support from constituencies that not so long ago he thought he had in the bag: big business and voters in the red state of Iowa.

In a Wednesday morning address to business leaders, he expressed puzzlement that they would even consider supporting Biden, arguing that his own leadership was a better bet for a strong economy. Later, the president held his third campaign rally in three nights, this time in Iowa, a state he won handily in 2016 but where Biden is making a late push.

Trump claimed to be leading in the most recent Iowa poll he saw. "For me to only be up six, I'm a little bit concerned," he asserted. Multiple polls have shown a much closer race.

Biden, for his part, held a virtual fundraiser from Wilmington, Delaware, and used his appearance to say that Trump was trying to rush through Amy Coney Barrett, his nominee for the Supreme Court, to help his efforts to repeal the Obama health care law, calling that "an abuse of power."

Trump used his economic address Wednesday to play up his administration's commitment to lowering taxes and deregulation of industry, and he didn't hide his frustration with signs that some in the business community are tilting to Biden.

"I know I'm speaking to some Democrats, and some of you are friends of mine," Trump said in a virtual address to the Economic Clubs of New York, Florida, Washington, D.C., Chicago, Pittsburgh and Sheboygan, Wisconsin. Should Biden be elected, he continued, "you will see things happen that will not make you happy. I don't understand your thinking."

The former vice president has collected more than \$50 million in campaign contributions from donors in the securities and investment sectors, according to the private nonpartisan Center for Responsive Politics. During his decades in the Senate representing Delaware, a center for the credit card and banking industries, Biden built relationships and a voting record in the business sector that has raised suspicion on the left but provides Wall Street with a measure of ease at the prospect of a Biden administration.

After being sidelined by the coronavirus, Trump resumed a breakneck schedule this week, with aides saying he is expected to travel and host campaign rallies every day through Nov. 3. Trump has appeared hale in his public appearances since reemerging from quarantine, though at moments during his economic address on Wednesday his voice was raspy.

In Iowa, Trump tossed away his tie and donned a red hat to fight off the stiff breeze on the airport tarmac. He made a direct appeal to the state's farmers, saying that he was responsible for \$28 billion in aid designed to help offset damage stemming from his trade war with China. "I hope you remember that on Nov. 3," Trump said.

But after years of farmers supporting him despite the trade war, some Republicans say Trump's renewable fuel policy has sown some doubt.

Trump's Environmental Protection Agency granted dozens of waivers to petroleum companies seeking to bypass congressional rules requiring the level of the corn-based fuel additive ethanol that gasoline must contain. He has recently denied more waiver requests, but the EPA's previous action removed about 4 billion gallons of ethanol demand, resulting in the closure — at least temporarily — of more than a dozen ethanol plants in Iowa.

While mostly laying low on Wednesday, Biden has stepped up campaign travel in the past week, with visits to Arizona, Nevada, Florida and Pennsylvania. The former vice president isn't introducing new themes in his pitch that he's a steady alternative to Trump. Biden and his aides believe the president's scattershot campaign messaging since his COVID-19 diagnosis proves the core of Biden's case.

Trump's return to Iowa came as he has been forced into playing defense following a widely panned performance in the first debate and his illness. Republicans have raised alarm that enthusiasm among Trump's base has waned slightly after the one-two punch of those events, casting his reelection into doubt.

Barrow reported from Wilmington, Del., and Madhani from Chicago.

Some European officials use virus as a cover to target Roma

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By MARIA CHENG and TEODORA BARZAKOVA Associated Press

BURGAS, Bulgaria (AP) — In Bulgaria, Roma communities were sprayed with disinfectant from crop dusters this spring as coronavirus cases surged in the country. In Slovakia, their villages were the only ones where the army conducted testing. And across Central and Eastern Europe, reports of police using excessive force against Roma spiked as officers were deployed to enforce lockdowns in their towns.

Human rights activists and experts say local officials in several countries with significant Roma populations have used the pandemic to unlawfully target the minority group, which is Europe's largest and has faced centuries of severe discrimination. With COVID-19 cases now resurging across the continent, some experts fear the repression will return, too.

To make matters worse, activists say such discrimination often draws little opposition from other Europeans and the Roma are reluctant to speak about it, fearing repercussions.

One afternoon, Azime Ali Topchu, 48, said the police-enforced lockdown of her village in Burgas, on Bulgaria's Black Sea Coast, made her family "really sad."

"It was hard. Hard. For my whole family to go to work — for my husband and son they had to go, fill in the papers, so they could go through the police checks," she said, as her three grandchildren played near piles of neatly stacked wood.

But Topchu, who lives in a one-story brick house next to her son and daughter-in-law, was unwilling to go much further than that. The streets of their village were sprayed with disinfectant — though not from the sky — several months earlier.

Topchu said she considered the disinfecting "something that had to be done."

But other Roma villages — in Yambol, Kyustendil and elsewhere in Bulgaria — were showered with thousands of gallons of disinfectant from helicopters or planes usually used to fertilize crops in March and April, according to local authorities and Bulgarian Roma activists.

"That was clearly racist, because it was only done in Roma neighborhoods," said Radoslov Stoyanov of the Bulgarian Helsinki Committee, a human rights group. "The broader message that was sent to the non-Roma population was that the Roma are dangerous."

The Roma people are descended from tribes in northern India, and centuries of persecution and marginalization have left them some of the poorest and least educated people in Europe. Known pejoratively as "gypsies," many live in segregated neighborhoods, often with limited access to electricity, running water and health care. Many face discrimination in getting jobs, getting medical care and have a shorter average lifespan than non-Roma.

The stringent measures used against Roma communities come even though no big outbreak was ever reported among them — and echo the way some governments have used the pandemic as cover for repressive tactics. Many European countries do not track coronavirus cases among the Roma, but Slovak officials reported at the end of the summer that there had been 179 cases in Roma districts, out of a population of more than 500,000.

In May, two U.N. human rights advocates issued an open letter calling on the Bulgarian government to suspend its pandemic-related police operations in Roma neighborhoods and to "stop hate speech" against the group after one nationalist party leader described the communities as "nests of infection."

Officials in other European countries have also targeted the Roma: A mayor in northern Moldova blamed their communities for spreading the virus, while a Ukrainian city official in Ivano-Frankivst instructed police to evict all Roma from the town. This is not limited to Eastern Europe: the mayor of a village outside Paris called on residents to contact the French government "as soon as you see a caravan circulating," referring to the Roma.

In a recent report, the European Roma Rights Centre documented 20 instances of what it called disproportionate force by police against Roma in five countries — noting that was an unusually high number. In one video on social media, a Romanian officer appeared to repeatedly press a knee into a handcuffed man as he was dragged following the arrest of several people for flouting virus restrictions. Elsewhere in the country, the group reported police used tear gas and pepper spray to disperse a group of Roma,

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including children, who had climbed on top of an apartment block during the lockdown.

Slovak authorities are investigating allegations that an officer beat five Roma children with a baton and threatened to shoot them after they were found playing outside their village, breaching the national quarantine.

"It is unacceptable for the police to use force against children," said Maria Patakyova, Slovakia's public defender of rights, the head of an independent body that aims to uphold human rights. "Not even the pandemic can be a reason to use disproportionate policing methods."

Last month, Patykova's office concluded that quarantines in three Roma communities unfairly infringed their right to free movement, though the regional leaders who imposed the measures have dismissed the findings.

Numerous Roma activists and others also raised concerns when Slovak soldiers were brought in to conduct COVID-19 testing in some Roma villages and patrolled neighborhoods armed with automatic rifles.

Juraj Jando, who also works for the rights defender's office, said despite this show of force, the government failed to help communities meaningfully fight the virus. For instance, people who came into contact with someone who was infected and wanted to stay in a government-run isolation facility had to pay 13 euros (\$15) per day to cover their food expenses — a sum that would be beyond many in Roma communities. Authorities were also often quick to seal off entire Roma neighborhoods even when case numbers were below the threshold they had set for such actions.

Petar Lazarov, a spokesman for Slovakia's Interior Ministry, said all actions taken were in accordance with the country's public health laws.

In Bulgaria, the authorities' use of thermal drones to measure the temperatures of entire Roma neighborhoods has raised surveillance concerns.

"This wouldn't have happened in a white, middle-class neighborhood, and it shouldn't have happened to the Roma either," said Jonathan Lee of the European Roma Rights Centre.

Krassimir Brumbarov, a Roma health worker in Burgas, where thermal drones were used, noted that people were also angered by the nearly constant police presence in the village.

The mayor's office in Burgas declined to respond to repeated questions from the AP about why such measures were taken.

As in Slovakia, Lee said Bulgarian authorities did little to help the Roma protect themselves from the virus, noting that at the height of the epidemic in April, about 500 Romani residents in Tsarevo were left without water for 10 days.

Ognyan Isaev, a Roma activist in Sofia, the Bulgarian capital, said he worried that discriminatory measures might be reintroduced if the pandemic worsens, noting that the local authorities who implemented them have faced little pushback.

"Next time," said Isaev, "it could be even worse."

Cheng reported from London.

Follow all of AP's coronavirus pandemic coverage at <http://apnews.com/VirusOutbreak> and <https://apnews.com/UnderstandingtheOutbreak>

Follow all AP stories on racial injustice at <https://apnews.com/Racialinjustice>.

Does the flu vaccine affect my chances of getting COVID-19?

By The Associated Press

Does the flu vaccine affect my chances of getting COVID-19?

The flu vaccine protects you from seasonal influenza, not the coronavirus — but avoiding the flu is especially important this year.

Health officials and medical groups are urging people to get either the flu shot or nasal spray, so that

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doctors and hospitals don't face the extra strain of having to treat influenza in the midst of the coronavirus pandemic.

Not to mention the confusion factor: The illnesses have such similar early symptoms that people who get the flu may mistakenly think they have COVID-19, said Dr. Gregory Poland, an infectious disease specialist at Mayo Clinic.

Only a test can tell the two apart.

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends the flu vaccine for everyone starting at 6 months of age, and suggests getting it by the end of October.

The CDC says the vaccine will not cause you to fall ill with the flu, and that the protection it provides takes about two weeks to kick in. And the flu vaccine isn't perfect but studies show if the vaccinated get sick, they don't get as severely ill.

A few flawed studies over the years have attempted to link the flu vaccine to increased risk of other respiratory infections, but experts say there is no evidence that's true.

The AP is answering your questions about the coronavirus in this series. Submit them at: FactCheck@AP.org.

Read previous Viral Questions:

How can I tell the difference between the flu and COVID-19?

How long can I expect a COVID-19 illness to last?

Can the coronavirus travel more than 6 feet in the air?

US warned Nevada not to use Chinese COVID tests from UAE

By JON GAMBRELL and MICHELLE L. PRICE Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — U.S. diplomats and security officials privately warned the state of Nevada not to use Chinese-made coronavirus test kits donated by the United Arab Emirates over concerns about patient privacy, test accuracy and Chinese government involvement, documents obtained by The Associated Press show.

The documents illustrate how the U.S. government actively — if quietly — tried to keep the state out of a project involving the Chinese firm BGI Group, which is the world's largest genetic sequencing company and which has expanded its reach during the coronavirus pandemic.

U.S. intelligence agencies have warned that foreign powers like China could exploit samples to discover the medical history, illnesses or genetic traits of test takers, though they have not offered any public evidence. Internal emails and documents obtained by the AP from the Nevada governor's office through a public records request show U.S. authorities expressing such concerns specifically about BGI.

"I hope the Nevada COVID-19 task force leadership is aware of this so they can make an educated decision and know some of the U.S. Government's concerns," William Puff, a Homeland Security regional attaché at the U.S. Embassy in Abu Dhabi, wrote in an email forwarded to Nevada officials.

The warnings from the Department of Homeland Security and the State Department led the office of Nevada Gov. Steve Sisolak in April to direct a Nevada hospital not to use any of the donated 250,000 test kits as officials turned down an offered laboratory deal.

Geopolitics could play a role in the U.S. warning. President Donald Trump and his administration have been locked in a trade war with China and also have actively lobbied its allies not to use telecommunication equipment from Chinese firm Huawei, for instance, citing security concerns.

The donation offer to Nevada also involved a shadowy Emirati company called Group 42, which partnered with Shenzhen-based BGI to create a rapid-testing system in the United Arab Emirates. G42 and government officials in the UAE did not respond to multiple requests for comment.

In response to queries from the AP, BGI said in an email that G42 made the donation to Nevada on its own without BGI's knowledge and that BGI never had direct contact with the state. BGI's COVID-19 tests have approval from the U.S. Food and Drug Administration for use on an emergency basis and are used in

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some labs in the United States — but “BGI has no access to either patient samples or patient data,” it said. “BGI Group takes all aspects of patient data protection, privacy and ethics extremely seriously, and is committed to full compliance with all applicable regulations in the countries in which it operates,” the company said.

In April, the UAE announced its interest in donating an estimated \$20 million worth of coronavirus testing kits to Nevada.

The unusual offer came at a time when Nevada, like other states, were in a mad scramble amid mounting COVID-19 cases and a shortage of test kits. Nevada had shut down the Las Vegas casinos that power the state’s economy as it rushed to set up temporary hospitals, stockpile ventilators and assemble test kits.

The UAE’s oil-fueled sovereign wealth funds and state-owned enterprises long have eyed Las Vegas as an investment opportunity. In its biggest investment, a state-owned Dubai firm partnered with MGM Resorts to build Las Vegas’ \$9.2 billion multi-resort CityCenter development.

Former MGM chairman Jim Murren heads Nevada’s COVID-19 Response, Relief and Recovery Task Force, appointed by Sisolak as part of a public-private partnership to seek funding and aid for the state.

In late March, Murren forwarded to the governor’s office an email from Peng Xiao, the CEO of G42, pitching his company’s help. Murren wrote that the Emiratis were making the offer “both as a public service and because they see this as a future investment opportunity for them.”

“They have unlimited capital and would be incredibly flexible on terms- I will handle that part,” he wrote.

Murren told the AP that the initial G42 proposal was to set up a “turnkey” high-capacity lab processing COVID-19 tests.

G42 and BGI partnered to create a similar lab in Abu Dhabi in March, part of a mass testing campaign in the Emirates that has conducted over 11 million tests in a nation of 9 million people.

Along with its sale of tests, BGI has expanded into multiple countries by offering such turnkey labs, which it says can analyze 10,000 to 50,000 tests a day. It has set up such labs in multiple Chinese cities and in countries like Angola, Australia, Brunei, Kazakhstan, Saudi Arabia, Serbia and Togo. Those labs use BGI equipment, which the U.S. government fears could be a means of spying by the Chinese government.

The proposed lab in Nevada would rapidly process samples from polymerase chain reaction, or PCR, tests. Those genetic tests, using long cotton swabs that collect samples from deep inside a person’s nose and throat, detect an active case of the coronavirus.

Days after G42 announced its aid to Nevada, the U.S. government broached its concerns with the state.

In an email sent to Nevada officials on April 20, Puff, the Homeland Security attaché, alleged without offering evidence that G42’s tests were “closer to 60% accurate” rather than the 90% claimed by the firm. BGI long has maintained its PCR tests have high accuracy, though factors like “the sampling process, storage and transportation of samples” can affect results.

Puff also raised concerns about the potential risks of Americans sharing medical samples with BGI.

“The embassy has concerns with G42’s relationship with the Chinese government and BGI, and patient privacy concerns,” Puff wrote. “The guidance we received from the U.S. Department of State is we should decline testing from G42.”

Asked for comment by the AP, Puff said: “I think it’s probably best I don’t.”

The same day, the Nevada governor’s chief of staff, Michelle White, emailed the University Medical Center, which received the G42 supplies.

“Based on the information communicated to me by Homeland Security, we highly recommend that you discontinue these tests and any usage of testing equipment immediately,” she wrote.

Sisolak’s office did not respond to phone and email messages from the AP seeking comment. Murren said state health officials ultimately decided they wanted to build their own high-capacity lab.

The University Medical Center used 20,000 specimen collection kits offered by G42, which are comprised of nasal swabs and tubes to store samples, spokesman Scott Kerbs said. UMC did not use the donated 250,000 analysis kits because they were “not compliant with UMC’s laboratory technology,” he said.

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Kerbs said the collection kits "helped us to support local testing at a time when specimen collection materials were scarce in our community." He did not respond to questions from AP about the warnings. "UMC always appreciates the generosity of donors," he said.

Since then, the casinos, along with much of Nevada's shuttered economy, have reopened. Coronavirus testing now is widely available. Nevada has now performed more than 1.1 million tests for COVID-19 and has reported more than 85,000 cases and 1,600 deaths.

Notably, even as U.S. authorities warned Nevada, they did not alert the 75,000 Americans living in the United Arab Emirates about any concerns over the BGI tests used by the Emirati firm, even though the same tests are used widely in the country. The UAE insists all genetic data is kept private and is not shared with BGI.

The State Department told the AP that it shares information to Americans abroad "regarding safety and security threats that might affect them. ... In this case, the Department did not deem the use of BGI COVID-19 tests to be a threat to safety."

The push to convince Nevada not to use the BGI tests comes amid the increasingly antagonistic relationship between the U.S. and China under the Trump administration that has witnessed an ongoing trade war and the expulsions of diplomats and journalists.

U.S. intelligence agencies worry China's genetic research could provide it a way to spy on or leverage American sources.

In May, the U.S. National Counterintelligence and Security Center issued a warning to state health officials about "potential threats posed by foreign powers in connection with COVID tests." It did not specify BGI, though it did link to a news report on Israel's largest health care plan declining to work with BGI.

In June, The Washington Post reported that California's health department decided to steer clear of offers by BGI and G42 to provide testing and test lab facilities. The report said the decision was taken on the advice of the state's coronavirus test task force advisers, in part because of concerns over China gaining access to private patient information.

The U.S. Embassy in Abu Dhabi quietly declined an offer by the Emirati government to conduct free coronavirus testing of its diplomats because of concerns about Chinese involvement. It did not publicize that decision. The UAE also is home to some 5,000 American troops and Dubai's Jebel Ali port, the U.S. Navy's busiest port of call outside of the U.S.

Efforts by the United Arab Emirates — a hereditarily ruled country where political parties and unions remain illegal — to fight the pandemic have renewed concerns about its mass surveillance programs.

Officials at G42 have refused to identify who owns the company, though many suspect it links back to Abu Dhabi's ruling family.

G42's CEO, Peng Xiao, previously ran Abu Dhabi-based firm DarkMatter's "big data" application, which could pool hours of surveillance video to track anyone. DarkMatter's hiring of former CIA and National Security Agency analysts has raised concerns, especially as the UAE has harassed and imprisoned human rights activists.

According to the Nevada emails, among G42's marketing and communications staff is Giacomo Ziani, who told the AP in January he was the co-creator of a video and voice calling app suspected of being a spying tool of the UAE — though he denied the accusation. Ziani did not answer requests for comment.

BGI formed in 1999 as a state-backed lab to work on the Human Genome Project. It later became a private company and has found itself as a foremost force among companies worldwide in coronavirus testing.

China's ruling Communist Party hopes companies like BGI and Huawei will boost the country into becoming a global technology leader.

In its email to the AP, BGI said it is not owned or funded by the Chinese government and "has no government capital." A U.S. Trade Office report in 2018 said the company has "evident links to the government" as its leadership includes individuals who previously held positions in the Chinese government and Communist Party.

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Two BGI subsidiaries have been sanctioned by the U.S. Commerce Department for allegedly “conducting genetic analyses used to further the repression of Uighurs and other Muslim minorities” in China. BGI said one subsidiary had done no business while the other was not involved in work that “includes personally identifiable information or violations of privacy or human rights.”

When asked about the perceived danger from China’s influence in the Nevada testing kit offer, the State Department referenced a February speech given by Secretary of State Mike Pompeo.

“What China does in Topeka and Sacramento reverberates in Washington, in Beijing and far beyond,” Pompeo said then. “Competition with China is happening. It’s happening in your state.”

Price reported from Las Vegas. Associated Press writer Dake Kang in Beijing contributed to this report.

Follow Jon Gambrell and Michelle L. Price on Twitter at www.twitter.com/jongambrellAP and www.twitter.com/michellelprice.

Health issues as wildfire smoke hits millions in US

By MATTHEW BROWN and CAMILLE FASSETT The Associated Press

SANTA CRUZ, Calif. (AP) — Wildfires churning out dense plumes of smoke as they scorch huge swaths of the U.S. West Coast have exposed millions of people to hazardous pollution levels, causing emergency room visits to spike and potentially thousands of deaths among the elderly and infirm, according to an Associated Press analysis of pollution data and interviews with physicians, health authorities and researchers.

Smoke at concentrations that topped the government’s charts for health risks and lasted at least a day enshrouded counties inhabited by more than 8 million people across five states in recent weeks, AP’s analysis shows.

Major cities in Oregon, which has been especially hard hit, last month suffered the highest pollution levels they’ve ever recorded when powerful winds supercharged fires that had been burning in remote areas and sent them hurtling to the edge of densely populated Portland.

Medical complications began arising while communities were still enveloped in smoke, including hundreds of additional emergency room visits daily in Oregon, according to state health officials.

“It’s been brutal for me,” said Barb Trout, a 64-year-old retiree living south of Portland in the Willamette Valley. She was twice taken to the emergency room by ambulance following severe asthmatic reactions, something that had never happened to her before.

Trout had sheltered inside as soon as smoke rolled into the valley just after Labor Day but within days had an asthma attack that left her gasping for air and landed her in the ER. Two weeks later, when smoke from fires in California drifted into the valley, she had an even more violent reaction that Trout described as a near-death experience.

“It hit me quick and hard __ more so than the first one. I wasn’t hardly even breathing,” she recalled. After getting stabilized with drugs, Trout was sent home but the specter of a third attack now haunts her. She and her husband installed an alarm system so she can press a panic button when in distress to call for help.

“It’s put a whole new level on my life,” she said. “I’m trying not to live in fear, but I’ve got to be really really cautious.”

In nearby Salem, Trout’s pulmonologist Martin Johnson said people with existing respiratory issues started showing up at his hospital or calling his office almost immediately after the smoke arrived, many struggling to breathe. Salem is in Marion county, which experienced eight days of pollution at hazardous levels during a short period, some of the worst conditions seen the West over the past two decades, according to AP’s analysis.

Most of Johnson’s patients are expected to recover but he said some could have permanent loss of lung function. Then there are the “hidden” victims who Johnson suspects died from heart attacks or other problems triggered by the poor air quality but whose cause of death will be chalked up to something else.

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"Many won't show up at the hospital or they'll die at home or they'll show up at hospice for other reasons, such as pneumonia or other complications," Johnson said.

Based on prior studies of pollution-related deaths and the number of people exposed to recent fires, researchers at Stanford University estimated that as many as 3,000 people over 65 in California alone died prematurely after being exposed to smoke during a six-week period beginning Aug. 1. Hundreds more deaths could have occurred in Washington over several weeks of poor air caused by the fires, according to University of Washington researchers.

The findings for both states have not been published in peer-reviewed journals. No such estimate was available for Oregon.

Wildfires are a regular occurrence in Western states but they've grown more intense and dangerous as a changing climate dries out forests thick with trees and underbrush from decades of fire suppression. What makes the smoke from these fires dangerous are particles too small for the naked eye to see that can be breathed in and cause respiratory problems.

On any given day, western fires can produce 10 times more particles than are produced by all other pollution sources including vehicle emissions and industrial facilities, said Shawn Urbanski, a U.S. Forest Service smoke scientist.

Fires across the West emitted more than a million tons of the particles in 2012, 2015 and 2017, and almost as much in 2018 — the year a blaze in Paradise, California killed 85 people and burned 14,000 houses, generating a thick plume that blanketed portions of Northern California for weeks. Figures for 2017 and 2018 are preliminary.

A confluence of meteorological events made the smoke especially bad this year: first, fierce winds up and down the coast whipped fires into a fury, followed in Oregon by a weather inversion that trapped smoke close to the ground and made it inescapable for days. Hundreds of miles to the south in San Francisco, smoke turned day into night, casting an eerie orange pall over a city where even before the pandemic facemasks had become common at times to protect against smoke.

AP's analysis of smoke exposure was based on U.S. Environmental Protection Agency data compiled from hundreds of air quality monitoring stations. Census data was used to determine the numbers of people living in affected areas of Oregon, Washington, California, Idaho and Montana.

At least 38 million people live in counties subjected to pollution considered unhealthy for the general population for five days, according to AP's analysis. That included more than 25 million people in California, 7.2 million in Washington, 3.5 million in Oregon, 1 million in Idaho and 299,000 people in Montana.

The state totals for the number of people exposed to unhealthy air on a given day were derived from counties where at least one monitoring site registered unhealthy air.

Scientists studying long-term health problems have found correlations between smoke exposure and decreased lung function, weakened immune systems and higher rates of flu. That includes studies from northwestern Montana communities blanketed with smoke for weeks in 2017.

"Particulate matter enters your lungs, it gets way down deep, it irrigates the lining and it possibly enters your bloodstream," said University of Montana professor Erin Landguth. "We're seeing the effects."

The coronavirus raises a compounding set of worries: An emerging body of research connects increased air pollution with greater rates of infection and severity of symptoms, said Gabriela Goldfarb, manager of environmental health for the Oregon Health Authority.

Climate experts say residents of the West Coast and Northern Rockies should brace for more frequent major smoke events, as warming temperatures and drought fuel bigger, more intense fires.

Their message is that climate change isn't going to bring worse conditions: they are already here. The scale of this year's fires is pushing the envelope of wildfire severity modeled out to 2050, said Harvard university climate researcher Loretta Mickley

"The bad years will increase. The smoke will increase," said Jeffrey Pierce an atmospheric scientist at Colorado State University. "It's not unreasonable that we could be getting a 2020-type year every other year."

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Brown reported from Billings, Montana.

On Twitter follow Matthew Brown: @MatthewBrownAP and Camille Fassett: @camfassett.

Springer, Altuve homer to keep Astros alive in ALCS

By BERNIE WILSON AP Sports Writer

SAN DIEGO (AP) — José Altuve and the Houston Astros are eager to match the 2004 Boston Red Sox in the history books.

Beating the Tampa Bay Rays three more times to reach the World Series won't be easy, but the Astros believe they can do it.

George Springer broke a tie with a two-run homer, Altuve also went deep and hit an RBI double, and Zack Greinke escaped a bases-loaded jam as Houston stayed alive in the AL Championship Series with a 4-3 victory Wednesday night in Game 4.

"We are very motivated," Altuve said. "We know the team we have and yes, we want to be the second team coming back from 0-3."

Big league clubs leading 3-0 in a best-of-seven postseason series are 37-1. The only one to rally from an 0-3 deficit was the 2004 Red Sox, who beat the New York Yankees in the ALCS and went on to win their first World Series in 86 seasons.

Greinke pitched six effective innings for the Astros, who held a meeting before the game. Houston manager Dusty Baker said he had no idea what was brought up, but he also addressed the team.

"We've got some real leaders on this team, some dominant personalities who listen more than they talk," Baker said.

With Altuve atoning for his poor defense in this series, the Astros finally got their offense going after being pushed to the brink of a sweep. Seeking their third pennant in four seasons, they trail 3-1 going into Game 5 on Thursday afternoon.

"I'm just happy that we won the game and we're on to tomorrow," Springer said.

The Rays remain one win from advancing to the World Series for the second time in franchise history.

"The team feels good," rookie slugger Randy Arozarena said. "We're going to stay positive. We came in here knowing we were going to face a solid team. They're probably feeling the same way."

Greinke, bothered by a sore arm in the Division Series against Oakland, made only one big mistake when he allowed a two-run homer to Arozarena that tied the game at 2 in the fourth.

Given a 4-2 lead by Springer's homer in the fifth, Greinke's biggest pitch came when he struck out Mike Brosseau on a 3-2 changeup to end the sixth with the bases loaded.

After Greinke allowed consecutive singles by Manuel Margot and Austin Meadows with one out, Baker came out for a chat and decided to let the veteran right-hander continue. Arozarena struck out on a check-swing and Ji-Man Choi singled to load the bases before Greinke fanned Brosseau.

On Friday night, Brosseau hit a go-ahead homer in the eighth inning off Aroldis Chapman of the New York Yankees that carried the Rays to a 2-1 victory in the Game 5 clincher of the ALDS.

Baker said he thought about putting in Ryan Pressly, but catcher Martin Maldonado said, "He can get this guy."

"I guess I don't change my mind, but I hadn't had my mind really, really made up until I got out there and I saw the look in Zack's eyes and Maldy was adamant about he can get this guy," Baker said. "I said, 'OK then you've got it then. This is the ballgame here.'"

Greinke said the meeting was "very intense," and praised the 71-year-old Baker. "He reads people really good. I don't think I've ever seen him make a wrong decision when he trusts what he sees. He sees the right thing almost 100% of the time. And not everyone has that skill."

Greinke held the Rays to two runs and five hits for his first postseason win since 2015. He struck out seven and walked one.

Tampa Bay's Willy Adames hit an RBI double off the bottom of the left-center wall and advanced to

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third on a wild pitch in the ninth before Pressly got rookie Yoshi Tsutsugo on a liner to right for the save.

"We've got to get the bats going, no doubt about it," Rays manager Kevin Cash said. "We've been carried here by our pitching and defense, which is how we're built, but we sure would like to get some (hits)."

Rays towering right-hander Tyler Glasnow also went six innings, allowing four runs and eight hits while striking out five and walking two.

Altuve hit a homer in the first and an RBI double in the third for a 2-0 lead. And when he needed to make an accurate throw to second for a key forceout in the ninth, the star second baseman was right on target.

His offense helped make up for his three errors that helped the Rays win Games 2 and 3 to move to the cusp of their first World Series since 2008.

Altuve homered for the second straight game and third time this series, all in the first inning. He and Springer are tied for the most homers in Astros postseason history, 18.

With two outs in the third, Altuve doubled into the right-field corner to bring in Maldonado.

"One of the most impressive things about José is how he can clear his head and contribute in all aspects of his game, and to see him go out there and still wanting the ball hit to him and still swinging the bat is a testament to him," Springer said.

Watching Altuve's errors was "tough," Springer said. "But I know who he is. I know the head he has on his shoulders. He's our leader and he always has been."

Arozarena homered onto the lower balcony on the Western Metal Supply Co. brick warehouse in the left-field corner with one out in the fourth to tie the game at 2. An inning later, Springer one-upped him when he hit a two-run shot onto the upper balcony of Petco Park's main landmark to regain the lead for the Astros.

"I knew it was a homer. I was able to hit a high fastball there. It's a tight line, so I'm happy that it stayed fair," Springer said.

It was the third home run of the postseason for Springer, the MVP of the 2017 World Series.

It was the fifth of these playoffs for Arozarena, who homered in each of the first three games against the Yankees and then connected in the ALCS opener.

THE VILLAINS

The Astros remain villains in many people's eyes for their sign-stealing scandal three years ago. On Wednesday night, someone with a megaphone on a balcony on a nearby building heckled members of the 2017 team by name: "Carlos Correa. You are a cheater. Shame on you. Josh Reddick. You are a cheater. Shame on you," and so on.

TRAINER'S ROOM

Rays: Gold Glove CF Kevin Kiermaier was out of the lineup with a bruised left hand after being hit with a pitch in Tampa Bay's five-run sixth inning Tuesday night. Cash said Kiermaier would be available to hit if necessary.

UP NEXT

Rays: TBA.

Astros: TBA.

More AP MLB: <https://apnews.com/MLB> and https://twitter.com/AP_Sports

China fires 2 health officials following new virus outbreak

BEIJING (AP) — A hospital president and the director of the health commission in the northern Chinese city of Qingdao have been fired after China's latest coronavirus outbreak, authorities said Thursday.

A brief notice on the Qingdao city government's official microblog Thursday said Health Commission Director Sui Zhenhua and Deng Kai, president of Qingdao's thoracic hospital to which the cases have been linked, were placed under further investigation. No other details were given.

Authorities ordered testing of all 9 million people in the city after a total of 12 cases, including those not displaying symptoms, were discovered over the weekend, accounting for China's first local transmissions in about two months.

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Similar mass testing campaigns have taken place after previous outbreaks. Testing began with "close contacts, close contacts of those close contacts and more casual contacts," gradually expanding to all districts of the city, Qingdao's health department said.

Qingdao is a major commercial harbor and industrial center known for electronics and the country's most famous brewery, as well as the home of the Chinese navy's northern fleet.

China, where coronavirus was first detected late last year, has largely eradicated the virus domestically but remains on guard against imported cases and a second wave of domestic transmission.

Qingdao on Wednesday reported more than 8 million tests have been conducted, with no additional cases discovered among the almost 5 million results returned.

On Thursday, the National Health Commission reported 11 new cases over the past 24 hours, 10 of them imported. The other case listed as asymptomatic was discovered Sept. 24 and had been recategorized as a confirmed case.

Hospitals were treating 240 people for COVID-19, with another 392 people being kept under observation in isolation for having tested positive without showing symptoms or for being suspected cases.

China has reported 4,634 deaths among 85,622 cases of the disease.

11-spot: Dodgers huge 1st in 15-3 win over Braves in NLCS

By STEPHEN HAWKINS AP Baseball Writer

ARLINGTON, Texas (AP) — The Los Angeles Dodgers were already having a grand time before Max Muncy's big slam capped the highest-scoring inning in a major league playoff game.

That new ballpark in his home state of Texas where the Dodgers hope to keep playing right through the World Series suddenly doesn't seem too big anymore, and they are right back in the National League Championship Series after a 15-3 rout of the Atlanta Braves on Wednesday night.

Muncy's slam off Grant Dayton capped an 11-run first inning when Los Angeles benefitted from a game-starting replay challenge, hit three home runs and had nine consecutive batters reach base after two outs. The Dodgers set franchise postseason records for runs and home runs with five, cutting their NLCS deficit to 2 games to 1.

"It's pretty cool. Not too many things that are cooler than that," Muncy said. "But the biggest thing to me is our team got a W and got us back on track."

Joc Pederson hit a three-run homer off starter Kyle Wright to start his four-hit night, and Edwin Rios went deep on next pitch. Corey Seager had a pair of RBI hits in the opening burst, then added a solo homer in the third as the Dodgers built a 15-0 lead — the first team with that many runs in the first three innings of a postseason game.

Winner Julio Urías, made his first postseason start and improved to 3-0 in these playoffs, striking out five while allowing one run and three hits over five innings. He walked the first two batters but no more.

Atlanta's miserable start was eerily similar to the Braves' flop in Game 5 of last year's Division Series against St. Louis, when they gave up a 10-run first inning at home in a season-ending start by Mike Foltyniewicz.

Manager Dave Roberts said Clayton Kershaw will start Game 4 for the Dodgers, two nights after the three-time NL Cy Young Award winner from Dallas was scratched because of back spasms. Bryse Wilson makes his postseason debut as the third rookie right-handed starter for Atlanta in this series in what will be his first appearance since the final day of the regular season on Sept. 27.

"We still are in a good spot with four games left," Braves manager Brian Snitker said. "Like I say, for the whole team, you just turn the page and get ready to go tomorrow."

The Dodgers had left the tying run at third base in a four-run bottom of the ninth during an 8-7 loss on Tuesday night. They were the visiting team in Game 3 and sent 14 batters to the plate for seven hits, three walks and a hit batter over 32 minutes in the the 29,786th half-inning in postseason history.

"It was a carryover," reigning NL MVP Cody Bellinger insisted.

"That was fun to be a part of," Pederson said. "I think some of the momentum from last night, the last inning definitely carried over and got us feeling a little bit more comfortable at the plate."

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Those 15 runs over two times up came after the Braves had allowed only nine runs in their previous six games plus eight innings, a stretch that included four shutouts en route to a 7-0 postseason start.

Bellinger walked and scored in the first, led off the second with a homer and added an RBI single in the third. His long ball came right after his running, leaping catch at the center field wall to rob Ozzie Albies with two on to end the Atlanta first.

"It's not ideal how we started the series, but we feel good about ourselves," Bellinger said.

Wright gave up seven runs while facing only nine batters. He had had thrown six scoreless innings in the Game 3 NL Division Series clincher over Miami last Thursday.

Mookie Betts had an infield single on the first pitch of the game, though he was initially called out before a replay challenge overturned the call by umpire Dan Iassogna. Seager drove in Betts with a double on the next pitch before groundouts by Justin Turner and Muncy.

"To get that infield hit, and then the next pitch, you see two pitches and you've already got a run, that was quite the change," Roberts said.

Pederson that overturn "got us going, and then from there you saw what happened."

Nine consecutive batters reached with two outs. Will Smith had an RBI double to make it 2-0, when he just beat a throw to the bag to avoid being the third out before Bellinger's walk and the homers by Pederson and Rios. After No. 9 batter Chris Taylor drew a free pass, Dayton walked Betts, gave up the the RBI single to Seager and hit Turner on the foot before Muncy's 435-foot slam to right-center.

"I just realized that we got all those runs with two outs. Just really good at-bats," Roberts said. "We hit some homers, took some walks. Just really a well-played inning. I do think last night's ninth bled over into tonight."

When Braves No. 9 hitter Cristian Pache finally got to bat leading off the third, the rookie hit his first big league homer — in the regular season or playoffs. All but one Dodgers starter had already batted three times.

Ozzie Albies, who homered in the ninth inning in each of the first two games for Atlanta, this time had to settle in the final frame for a double and scoring the final run on Joahan Camargo's two-out single.

"At the end of the day it only counts as one game, right? Everybody in the clubhouse knows that," shortstop Dansby Swanson said. "Tomorrow we'll come back and put our best foot forward. ... There are things to build on."

JANSEN IN RELIEF

Kenley Jansen, the Dodgers' primary closer since 2012 and career leader with 312 saves, pitched a 1-2-3 sixth. It was a week after he needed 30 pitches to get two outs and gave up two runs without being able to finish the 6-5 victory in Game 2 of the NLDS against the Padres.

Roberts, who bypassed Jansen when he went to the bullpen to start the ninth in a 1-1 tie in Game 1 of this series, has avoided being specific about the closer's role. The 33-year-old Jansen's velocity had been noticeably down and his control inconsistent.

Jansen threw seven of his 10 pitches for strikes, all but one of them between 88-92 mph. He was averaging 93-94 mph earlier this season.

"Kenley's still our guy," Seager said. "You trust him to go out there and get outs. We expect nothing different."

STREAKING SEAGER

Including his final two at-bats in Game 2 and his first three in Game 3, Seager had a span of producing an RBI in five consecutive plate appearances. That ties Carlos Beltran with the 2004 Houston Astros for the longest such streak in postseason history.

DOUBLE 7s

Wright and Dayton were the second set of teammates to both allow at least seven runs in a postseason game after Cleveland starter Bartolo Colon (seven runs) and Steve Reed (eight runs) in a 23-7 loss to the Boston Red Sox in Game 4 of the 1999 AL Division Series.

DEEP IN TEXAS

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The Dodgers, who led the majors with 118 homers in the pandemic-shortened 60-game regular season, had only one homer in their three-game NL Division Series sweep of the Padres last week at the Texas Rangers' new \$1.2 billion ballpark with the retractable roof also open. They have eight through three games of the NLCS, where the World Series will be played.

LOT OF BIG NUMBERS

The 15 runs matched the most in an NLCS game — the Braves beat the St. Louis Cardinals 15-0 in Game 7 of the 1996 NLCS. ... Only the Chicago Cubs, with six in Game 3 of the 2015 NLDS, hit more homers in any postseason game. ... The Dodgers' eight extra-base hits matched the franchise record for a postseason game, and their 18 total bases in the first were an MLB record for an inning. ... Only three other teams have had five different players homer in a playoff game. ... Atlanta was the only team in the majors with an 11-run inning during the regular season.

More AP MLB: <https://apnews.com/MLB> and https://twitter.com/AP_Sports

Senate Judiciary to consider Barrett ahead of vote next week

By MARK SHERMAN, LISA MASCARO and MARY CLARE JALONICK Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Senate Judiciary Committee is poised to take the first steps toward approving Supreme Court nominee Amy Coney Barrett following two long days of Senate testimony in which she stressed that she would be her own judge and sought to create distance between herself and past positions.

Barrett's confirmation to take the seat of the late Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg seems inevitable, as even some Senate Democrats acknowledged in Senate hearings on Tuesday and Wednesday. The shift would cement a 6-3 conservative majority on the court and would be the most pronounced ideological change in 30 years, from the liberal icon to the conservative appeals court judge.

After the two days of questioning, the Judiciary panel is scheduled to start considering the nomination Thursday morning. The meeting, which is a procedural formality, will be held ahead of a panel of law experts and advocates who will testify for and against Barrett's nomination. Senators are expected to discuss the nomination but then push the committee vote on Barrett until next week, per committee rules. Barrett will not be present.

Facing almost 20 hours of questions from senators, the 48-year-old judge was careful not to take on the president who nominated her and sought to separate herself from writings on controversial subjects when she was an academic. She skipped past Democrats' pressing questions about ensuring the date of next month's election or preventing voter intimidation, both set in federal law, and the peaceful transfer of presidential power.

She also refused to express her view on whether the president can pardon himself. "It's not one that I can offer a view," she said in response to a question Wednesday from Democratic Sen. Patrick Leahy of Vermont.

Democrats raised those questions because President Donald Trump has done so himself.

When it came to major issues that are likely to come before the court, including abortion and health care, Barrett repeatedly promised to keep an open mind and said neither Trump nor anyone else in the White House had tried to influence her views.

"No one has elicited from me any commitment in a case," she said.

Nominees typically resist offering any more information than they have to, especially when the president's party controls the Senate, as it does now. But Barrett wouldn't engage on topics that seemed easy to swat away, including that only Congress can change the date that the election takes place.

She said she is not on a "mission to destroy the Affordable Care Act," though she has been critical of the two Supreme Court decisions that preserved key parts of the Obama-era health care law. She could be on the court when it hears the latest Republican-led challenge on Nov. 10.

Barrett is the most open opponent of abortion nominated to the Supreme Court in decades, and Democrats fear that her ascension could be a tipping point that threatens abortion rights.

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There was no hiding her views in at least three letters and ads she signed over 15 years and her membership in Notre Dame's Faculty for Life. So Republican senators embraced her stance, proudly stating that she was, in the words of Judiciary Committee Chairman Lindsey Graham, R-S.C., an "unashamedly pro-life" conservative who is making history as a role model for other women.

Sen. Josh Hawley, R-Mo., said there "is nothing wrong with confirming a devout pro-life Christian."

Barrett refused to say whether the 1973 landmark Roe v. Wade ruling on abortion rights was correctly decided, though she signed an open letter seven years ago that called the decision "infamous."

Democrats pressed repeatedly on the judge's approach to health care, abortion, racial equity and voting rights, but conceded they were unlikely to stop her quick confirmation.

"When you are on the court," Sen. Sheldon Whitehouse, D-R.I., began one question in which he asked her to keep an open mind on the high court bench. Barrett readily agreed to do so.

In an exchange with Sen. Dianne Feinstein, D-Calif., Barrett resisted the invitation to explicitly endorse or reject the late Justice Antonin Scalia's comments about perpetuating "racial entitlement" in a key voting rights case.

"When I said that Justice Scalia's philosophy is mine, too, I certainly didn't mean to say that every sentence that came out of Justice Scalia's mouth or every sentence that he wrote is one that I would agree with," Barrett said.

She called the Voting Rights Act a "triumph in the civil rights movement," without discussing the specifics of the earlier challenge to it. The court will hear another challenge to the law early next year.

One of the more dramatic moments came late Wednesday when Barrett told California Sen. Kamala Harris, the Democratic vice presidential nominee, that she wouldn't say whether racial discrimination in voting still exists nor express a view on climate change.

Harris asked if she agreed with Chief Justice John Roberts, who wrote in a 2013 voting rights case that "voting discrimination still exists; no one doubts that."

Barrett said she would "not comment on what any justice said in an opinion."

Asked whether "climate change is happening," Barrett said she wouldn't engage because it is "a very contentious matter of public debate." Barrett did, however, say she believes the novel coronavirus is infectious and that smoking causes cancer.

Along with trying to undo the health care law, Trump has publicly stated he wants a justice seated for any disputes arising from the election, and particularly the surge of mail-in ballots expected during the pandemic as voters prefer to vote by mail.

Barrett testified she has not spoken to Trump or his team about election cases, and declined to commit to recusing herself from any post-election cases.

She did describe what the role of the court would be if it were asked to intervene. "Certainly the court would not see itself -- and would not be -- electing the president. It would be applying laws that are designed to protect the election and protect the right to vote," Barrett said.

In 2000, the court's decision in Bush v. Gore brought a Florida recount to a halt, effectively deciding the election in George W. Bush's favor. Barrett was on Bush's legal team in 2000, in a minor role.

Barrett's nomination has been the focus at a Capitol mostly shut down by COVID-19 protocols. The health care debate has been central to the week's hearings, as Americans struggle during the pandemic, leading to a sharp exchange among senators at one point.

Associated Press writers Mary Clare Jalonick, Matthew Daly and Jessica Gresko in Washington, and Elana Schor in New York contributed to this report.

Post Malone owns Billboard Awards, Legend shines onstage

By MESFIN FEKADU AP Music Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Walking into the show with 16 nominations, Post Malone won nine honors at the 2020 Billboard Music Awards, where John Legend gave a heartfelt performance that was dedicated to his wife.

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With his voice aching as he sang passionately from the piano, Legend told viewers "this is for Chrissy" before singing "Never Break," which includes the lyrics "we will never break." The performance comes two weeks after Chrissy Teigen announced she had a miscarriage, explaining in a heart wrenching social media post that she and Legend drove "home from the hospital with no baby."

"John, that was so beautiful," host Kelly Clarkson said following Legend's performance. "All my love to you and Chrissy."

It was one of several performances that were pre-taped for Wednesday's show. Other musicians attended and performed at the empty Dolby Theatre in Los Angeles during the three-hour show, which aired on NBC.

After announcing that Malone won the show's biggest honor, top artist, Clarkson wheeled out eight more trophies for the hitmaker.

"I'm honestly blown away by the love everyone's shown to me," said Malone, who also won top rap artist, top male artist and top rap album. "It's kind of big deal to me and everybody involved because we work our (butts) off."

He beat out Eilish for the top prize, but she was still a winner, taking home top Billboard 200 album, top female artist and top new artist.

The 18-year-old, wearing a face mask, told viewers to "please vote, please wear a mask, please wash your hands."

Others had similar messages. Khalid, who won five honors, told fans "your voice matters now more than ever." And Lizzo wore a black dress with "vote" printed across it.

She also gave an encouraging speech, telling viewers to find their voices and don't change to meet society standards.

"I just want to say I've been thinking a lot about suppression and the voices that refused to be suppressed. And I wonder, 'Would I be standing here right now if it weren't for the big Black women who refuse to have their voices be suppressed?' And I just want to say right now, if you're at home watching this and you were thinking about changing yourself to feel worthy, this is your sign to remain true to who you are," Lizzo said onstage after winning top songs sales artist.

"Let me tell you all something — when people try to suppress something, it's normally because that thing holds power. They're afraid of your power. There's power in who you are. There's power in your voice. So whether it's through music, protest or your right to vote, use your power, use your voice and refuse to be suppressed."

Other winners included Lil Nas X, who took home four honors and was on-hand to accept top Hot 100 song for "Old Town Road," which set the record for most weeks at No. 1. Kanye West, who released two gospel albums last year, also won four prizes: top gospel artist, top gospel song, top gospel album and top Christian album.

Luke Combs followed with three wins, and after his performance he offered positive words to his fans and the crew working on the awards show.

"I know that everybody has been through so much this year. I wanna thank the crew that is working on this show tonight because they have gone through some insane stuff to make this happen for you guys. I hope everybody is staying safe there at home," he said.

Garth Brooks accepted the Icon Award from Cher, who called the country star "a true music legend and my friend Garth Brooks." Brooks, who is the only artist to have nine of his albums sell more than 10 million units each and reach diamond status, performed a medley of his hits.

Other performers included BTS, Alicia Keys, Kane Brown, Khalid, Swae Lee, Sia, Brandy, Bad Bunny, Doja Cat, SAINT JHN, En Vogue and Demi Lovato, who sang her new song aimed at President Donald Trump called "Commander In Chief."

Clarkson kicked off the show singing Steve Winwood's "Higher Love," which became a dance hit last year after Whitney Houston's cover of the song was remixed by Norwegian DJ-producer Kygo and became an international hit. Clarkson was joined by drummer Sheila E. and a cappella group Pentatonix for the performance of the song, which earned Houston a posthumous nomination for top dance/electronic song.

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Houston died in 2012.

Guitar rock legend Eddie Van Halen, who died last week, was honored as the show aired a clip of his Billboard Awards performance from 2015. And rapper-activist Killer Mike received the Change Maker Award.

This year's Billboard Awards were originally supposed to take place in April but were postponed because of the pandemic. It's the reason why some of the nominees in the 55 categories may feel dated.

For instance, all five nominees for the main song award were nominated for Grammys earlier this year in January. And nominees for top Billboard 200 album included Ariana Grande "Thank U, Next," released in Oct. 2018, and Swift's "Lover," not her recent release "Folklore." Some of the nominees were even big contenders at the 2019 MTV Video Music Awards — held more than year ago — including Lil Nas X's "Old Town Road" and Lizzo's "Truth Hurts."

Thai police disperse protesters outside PM's office

By TASSANEE VEJPONGSA Associated Press

BANGKOK (AP) — Thai police early Thursday dispersed a group of pro-democracy protesters who camped out overnight outside the office of the prime minister to demand his resignation, leading him to implement a "severe" state of emergency in the capital area.

An Associated Press journalist saw riot police advance from multiple locations to force out a few hundred protesters who remained outside Government House, the seat of Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-ocha. Protesters were seen taken away into police trucks.

The police operation came after Prayuth declared a severe state of emergency in the Bangkok area to allow authorities to move against the protests. It bans unauthorized gatherings of more than five people.

Thailand is technically still under a state of emergency as part of coronavirus restrictions.

Before the police dispersal, a large number of protesters had already left the area after one of their leaders announced the end of the rally at Government House though a few hundred stayed on. Protesters also announced that the rally would move to a different location in the capital Thursday afternoon, but deputy police spokesman Col. Kissana Phathanacharoen warned them not to do so.

Police said they arrested more than 20 people for violating the state of emergency. They have not been officially charged. Among them were protest leaders Arnon Nampha, Parit "Penguin" Chiwarak and Prasadhi Grudharochana.

"Those who are calling for a protest later at Rajaprasong are clearly breaking the law. Those who attend will be breaking the law. You cannot say that they are not aware of the order. We are making it clear," Kissana said at a news conference.

Human rights group Amnesty International criticized the crackdown. Its deputy regional director Ming Yu Hah urged Thai authorities to "engage in constructive dialogue with the protesters."

"The scale of today's early morning arrests seems completely unjustified based on yesterday's events. The assemblies were overwhelmingly peaceful. These moves are clearly designed to stamp out dissent, and sow fear in anyone who sympathizes with the protesters' views," the group said in a statement.

The latest rally started on Wednesday with thousands of protesters marching from Bangkok's Democracy Monument to Government House. It was the third major gathering by activists who want to keep up the momentum in their campaign for democratic change.

The protesters have drawn attention because of their demands for reforms to Thailand's constitutional monarchy, which they claim does not properly operate in a democratic framework.

That demand has caused a huge controversy because the royal institution has long been considered sacrosanct and a pillar of Thai identity. It is also protected by a lese majeste law that mandates three to 15 years in prison for defaming the monarchy.

Conservative royalist Thais accuse them of seeking to end the monarchy, an allegation they deny. Before leaving Democracy Monument, several small clashes broke out between protesters and their opponents, who traded punches and threw plastic bottles as police tried to keep them apart.

The situation was complicated by King Maha Vajiralongkorn's scheduled drive past the protest venue to

attend a royal ceremony. The protesters said they would make way but there was a possibility that they could at a minimum show public disrespect for the crown. Several cars normally used by the royal family were seen on nearby streets but their occupants could not be confirmed. Unverified video and photos on social media showed what was purported to be protesters gesturing and shouting close to the vehicles, which would be unprecedented for Thailand, where the royal family has traditionally been revered.

The king made a similar drive past the area on Tuesday after police cleared tents set up near the monument and arrested 21 people on minor charges.

The protest movement was launched in March by university students but quickly put on hold as Thailand was gripped by surges in coronavirus cases. It came back in July, when the threat from the virus eased, and since then has again been spearheaded by students and publicized on social media.

The movement's original core demands were new elections, changes in the constitution to make it more democratic, and an end to intimidation of activists.

The protesters charge that Prayuth, who as army commander led a 2014 coup that toppled an elected government, was returned to power unfairly in last year's general election because laws had been changed to favor a pro-military party. Protesters say a constitution promulgated under military rule is undemocratic.

Associated Press writer Busaba Sivasomboon contributed to this report.

AP Explains: Trump seizes on dubious Biden-Ukraine story

By ERIC TUCKER and STEPHEN BRAUN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Looking to undermine rival Joe Biden 20 days before the election, President Donald Trump's campaign has seized on a tabloid story offering bizarre twists to a familiar line of attack: Biden's relationship with Ukraine. But the story in the New York Post raises more questions than answers, including about the authenticity of an email at the center of the story.

The origins of the story also trace back to Trump lawyer Rudy Giuliani, who has repeatedly pushed unfounded claims about Biden and his son, Hunter Biden. Even if the emails in the Post are legitimate, they don't validate Trump and Giuliani's claims that Biden's actions were influenced by his son's business dealings in Ukraine.

A look at the development:

HOW DID BIDEN'S SON BECOME A CAMPAIGN ISSUE?

Hunter Biden joined the board of the Ukrainian gas company Burisma in 2014, around the time his father, then U.S. vice president, was helping conduct the Obama administration's foreign policy with Ukraine.

Senate Republicans said in a recent report that the appointment may have posed a conflict of interest, but they did not present evidence that the hiring influenced U.S. policies.

Trump and his supporters, meanwhile, have advanced a widely discredited theory that Biden pushed for the firing of Ukraine's top prosecutor to protect his son and Burisma from investigation. Biden did indeed press for the prosecutor's firing, but that's because he was reflecting the official position of not only the Obama administration but many Western countries and because the prosecutor was perceived as soft on corruption.

WHAT DOES THE NEW YORK POST STORY SAY?

The main email highlighted by the Post is an April 2015 message that it said was sent to Hunter Biden by Vadym Pozharskyi, an adviser to Burisma's board. In it, he thanks the younger Biden "for inviting me to DC and giving an opportunity to meet your father and spent (sic) some time together. It's really (sic) an honor and pleasure."

The wording makes it unclear if he actually met Joe Biden. The Biden campaign said in a statement that it had reviewed Biden's schedules from the time and that no meeting as described by the newspaper took place.

HOW DID THE POST OBTAIN THE EMAILS?

It's a tangled saga. The Post says it received a copy of a hard drive containing the messages on Sunday

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from Giuliani, who has pushed the unfounded idea that Ukraine was trying to interfere with the 2016 election and that the younger Biden may have enriched himself by selling his access to his father.

The Post says the emails were part of a trove of data recovered from a laptop that was dropped off at a computer repair shop in Delaware in April 2019. It says the customer, whom the owner could not definitively identify as Hunter Biden, never paid for the service or retrieved it, and says the owner made a copy of the hard drive that he provided to Giuliani's lawyer.

The owner of the Wilmington shop declined to comment Wednesday to The Associated Press, saying he didn't feel like talking. The newspaper says the owner alerted the FBI to the computer and hard drive, and that agents took possession of them. That could not immediately be confirmed, and the FBI declined to comment Wednesday.

Asked via text by an AP reporter how long he had the hard drive, Giuliani replied, in part: "You're interested in the wrong thing. This time the truth will not be defeated by process. I've got a lot more to go."

ARE THE NEW EMAILS AUTHENTIC?

The actual origins of the emails are unclear. And disinformation experts say there are multiple red flags that raise doubts about their authenticity, including questions about whether the laptop actually belongs to Hunter Biden, said Nina Jankowicz, a fellow at the nonpartisan Wilson Center in Washington.

The Biden campaign didn't address that issue Wednesday, but Hunter Biden's lawyer, George Mesires, said in a statement to the AP that "we have no idea where this came from, and certainly cannot credit anything that Rudy Giuliani provided to the NY Post." He added that "what I do know for certain is that this purported meeting never happened."

Another potential alarm is the involvement of another Trump associate, Steve Bannon, who the Post says first alerted it to the existence of the hard drive and who along with Giuliani has been active in promoting an anti-Biden narrative on Ukraine.

"We should view it as a Trump campaign product," Jankowicz said.

Thomas Rid, a political scientist and disinformation expert at Johns Hopkins University's School of Advanced International Studies, said it was not clear to him yet whether the emails were hacked or forged but said they "could be either or both."

"It's a common feature in these operations that you combine generic content, accurate content, with forged content," Rid said.

IF AUTHENTIC, ARE THESE EMAILS DAMAGING TO BIDEN?

The suggestion that Joe Biden might have met with a Burisma representative is consequential, because he has repeatedly insisted that he never discussed his son's business with him.

But the emails provide no details on whether Pozharskyi and Biden actually met and, if so, what they discussed.

If Biden did meet with Pozharskyi, he was not the only U.S. official who may have done so. Pozharskyi was part of a Burisma delegation that lobbied congressional officials in 2014 in an attempt to show that the firm was not a corruption risk.

HOW DID SOCIAL MEDIA COMPANIES RESPOND TO THE STORY?

Companies like Twitter and Facebook, already under pressure to police their platforms ahead of the election, quickly flagged the article and moved to restrict its accessibility online — an action decried by Trump and his supporters, including congressional Republicans.

Facebook spokesman Andy Stone announced on Twitter that the company was working to reduce the distribution of the article on its platform.

On Wednesday afternoon, Twitter began banning its users from sharing links to the article in tweets and direct messages because it violated the company's policy that prohibits hacked content.

Twitter, whose chief executive tweeted later in the evening that it was "unacceptable" that the company had not provided more context around its action, said the images in the article include personal and private information in violation of its rules, and said it considered material included in the article to be a violation of its hacked materials policy.

WHAT'S THE POLITICAL IMPACT?

With less than three weeks until Election Day and polls showing him trailing Biden, Trump appears to be returning to the subject of his opponent's family to energize his base.

But in an election dominated by concerns about the coronavirus pandemic, it's less certain Trump's strategy will appeal to the voters he needs to win back, including moderate Republicans and suburban women.

Trump's called for a full accounting of Biden's conversations with Hunter and with Pozharskyi. Trump said in an interview with Newsmax that the Post had caught Biden "cold" with "serious" allegations.

At a campaign rally in Iowa Wednesday night, Trump led with the Post story and called Biden "a corrupt politician who shouldn't even be allowed to run for the presidency."

Biden's campaign, meanwhile, pointed to the recent Republican-led Senate investigation that found no evidence of wrongdoing on Biden's part with regard to Ukraine. It also pointedly noted the involvement of Giuliani, saying his "discredited conspiracy theories and alliance with figures connected to Russian intelligence have been widely reported."

Associated Press writers Amanda Seitz in Chicago, Jonathan Lemire in New York, Alexandra Jaffe in Washington, Barbara Ortutay in Oakland, Calif., and Bill Barrow in Wilmington, Del., contributed to this report.

Vision 2020: Will mailed-in ballots be delivered on time?

The Associated Press undefined

Can you trust the U.S. Postal Service to deliver your ballot on time?

If you plan on voting by mail, election officials say it's best to do it as early as possible so your ballot gets to its destination well before Election Day, which is Nov. 3.

Postal officials have repeatedly said the agency has more than enough capacity to handle the surge of ballots this fall, and its leaders have committed to prioritizing election mail. But on-time delivery rates vary widely depending on where you live, and the service has been falling short of its internal goals to deliver all first-class mail within five days.

On top of that, each state has different rules on whether it accepts mail ballots that arrive after Election Day. Some policies are the subject of court cases and could change before Nov. 3, so voters should check with their local election officials if they're unsure.

All that is to say, the earlier you mail your ballot, the better.

It has been a tumultuous few months for the Postal Service. This summer, the agency's new leader, Louis DeJoy, a major donor to the GOP and President Donald Trump, set in motion a series of controversial policy changes that have delayed deliveries nationwide.

Then, not too long after DeJoy took over, Trump openly admitted he was starving the Postal Service of coronavirus relief money to make it harder for the agency to process ballots. The combination of Trump's remarks and DeJoy's policies have led to a lot of distrust in the agency and fears about political manipulation.

The Postal Service has been sued several times in multiple states over the policy changes and has been handed a series of bruising court decisions blocking them. One judge in Washington state called them "a politically motivated attack on the efficiency of the Postal Service" before the election.

The Postal Service agreed Wednesday to reverse changes that had slowed mail service nationwide, settling a lawsuit filed by Montana Gov. Steve Bullock. The changes had included reduced retail hours, removal of collection boxes and mail sorting machines, closure or consolidation of mail processing facilities, restriction of late or extra trips for timely mail delivery, and banning or restricting overtime. The agreement also requires the Postal Service to prioritize election mail.

So, if you're worried about voting by mail, what should you do? Consider early voting options in your state, check if your area has ballot drop boxes or go to the polls on Election Day.

Otherwise, return your ballot early and don't wait until the last few days.

Vision 2020 is a new series from the AP dedicated to answering commonly asked questions from our

audience about the 2020 U.S. presidential election. Submit your questions at: Vision2020@AP.org.

AP's Advance Voting guide brings you the facts about voting early, by mail or absentee from each state: <https://interactives.ap.org/advance-voting-2020>.

Nude photos and death threats: Scandal topples Alaska mayor

By MARK THIESSEN Associated Press

ANCHORAGE, Alaska (AP) — A stunning tale of inappropriate behavior between a politician and a television anchor, death threats and nude photos culminated in a joint police and FBI investigation, the arrest of the journalist and the resignation of the mayor of Anchorage.

Ethan Berkowitz, the top elected Democrat in Alaska, submitted his resignation to the Anchorage Assembly on Tuesday night, just days after he vehemently denied allegations by YourAlaskaLink anchor Maria Athens that he had posted nude photos of himself on an underage website.

The mayor's resignation followed Berkowitz's jaw-dropping admission Monday that he was involved in an inappropriate sexting — he called it "messaging" — relationship with Athens, the anchor of a combined Fox/ABC station in Anchorage. She says their relationship started in 2016, and declined to say whether it ever became sexual in nature.

"My resignation results from unacceptable personal conduct that has compromised my ability to perform my duties with the focus and trust that is required," Berkowitz wrote.

"I apologize to the people of Anchorage for a major lapse in judgment I made several years ago when I had a consensual, inappropriate messaging relationship with reporter Maria Athens. I'm embarrassed and ashamed for the hurt I've caused my family and our community. I take responsibility for my actions," Berkowitz added.

The five days that roiled Alaska's largest city began Friday morning, when Athens allegedly placed a profanity- and racist-laden phone call to Berkowitz. The voicemail, a copy of which was obtained by The Alaska Landmine online blog, started with the caller announcing herself as Athens and rattling off her various network affiliations.

The caller claimed to have learned from sources that Berkowitz had been posting nude photos on an underage website, and that she planned to report this on that evening's news. The caller threatened to kill Berkowitz, who is Jewish, and his wife, in a diatribe laced with racist insults.

"You either turn yourself in, kill yourself or do what you need to do," the voicemail says.

"I can't believe I am such a good person and thought I loved you," the caller continued. "I don't even hate you. I will pray for your Zionist f-----g ass. ... And I'm putting this on the news tonight. Bye. Have a great Friday!"

The caller also predicted she would win an Emmy for her reporting.

Later Friday, Athens taped a tease for the story and posted it to her Facebook page, prompting this denial from the mayor's office: "The slanderous allegations from Your Alaska Link reporter Maria Athens are categorically false and appear to be the product of someone who is hostile and unwell."

The same afternoon, Athens then posted what she claims to be a photo of Berkowitz's nude backside as proof of her allegations.

Here is what happened later that day, according to the district attorney's charging documents:

Athens and the station's manager, who is described as her boyfriend in the documents, got into an argument while driving in Anchorage. He made her get out of the car and told her she was barred from returning to the station.

Athens nevertheless went back to the television studio and attacked him. When police arrived, she hit an officer trying to arrest her and was placed in full restraints after she tried to kick out the back window of the police cruiser with her high heels.

Athens was charged with assault, criminal mischief and disorderly conduct, and released after posting bail. Anchorage police and the FBI investigated the allegations and the death threat, but an FBI statement

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released Tuesday said it found “no immediate evidence to support a violation of federal law; however, the FBI Anchorage Field Office continues to monitor the situation.”

Athens told the Anchorage Daily News she and Berkowitz began communicating in 2016 on the messaging platform WhatsApp.

“When he slid into my texts, he was so smooth with his little witty slogans and pictures,” Athens told the newspaper. She has not returned messages left by The Associated Press.

Athens, a graduate of Seton Hall University in New Jersey, said she was feeling isolated in Alaska. “He gave me attention when I was lonely.” She declined to say whether the texting relationship ever became physical.

Athens said she deleted the messages from her phone, which she said is now in the hands of law enforcement.

She also declined to elaborate on her assertion that Berkowitz was involved in illegal activities, saying it was based on what sources told her. She did not say who the sources were.

Messages left with Berkowitz through his office and with station management were not returned to the AP. Berkowitz’s resignation is effective Oct. 23.

According to the city charter, Felix Rivera, chairman of the Anchorage Assembly, will serve as acting mayor until a special election is held if the assembly doesn’t choose to reorganize. If Rivera does become mayor, he will hold a trio of distinctions: the city’s first openly gay mayor, the first Latino and at age 31, the youngest. The next youngest would be James Delaney Sr., who was either 32 or 33 when he was elected in 1929.

Berkowitz was elected to his second three-year term as mayor in 2018. The officially non-partisan position is limited to two terms.

Berkowitz, a native of San Francisco, is also a lawyer and Anchorage businessman. He served as a Democrat in the Alaska House of Representative from 1997 to 2006, serving the last two years as minority leader.

AP investigative researcher Randy Herschaft in New York contributed to this report

‘A little bit concerned’: Trump looks to boost Iowa support

By ZEKE MILLER, BILL BARROW AND AAMER MADHANI Associated Press

DES MOINES, Iowa (AP) — President Donald Trump on Wednesday sought to shore up support from constituencies that not so long ago he thought he had in the bag: big business and voters in the red state of Iowa.

In a morning address to business leaders, he expressed puzzlement that they would even consider supporting his Democratic challenger, Joe Biden, arguing that his own leadership was a better bet for a strong economy. Later, the president held his third campaign rally in three nights, this time in Iowa, a state he won handily in 2016 but where Biden is making a late push.

Trump claimed to be leading in the most recent poll he saw. “For me to only be up six, I’m a little bit concerned,” he asserted. Multiple polls have shown a much closer race.

Biden, for his part, held a virtual fundraiser from Wilmington, Delaware, and delivered pretaped remarks to American Muslims. He did not have any public campaign events, unusual for just 20 days out from Election Day.

The Democratic nominee used his appearance at the fundraiser to say that Trump was trying to rush through Amy Coney Barrett, his nominee for the Supreme Court, to help his efforts to repeal the Obama health care law, calling that “an abuse of power.”

Biden was expected to spend much of the day preparing for a town-hall-style TV appearance in battleground Pennsylvania on Thursday, which was to have been the night of the second presidential debate.

Instead, the candidates will have dueling town halls on network television — Trump’s in Miami and sponsored by NBC News, Biden’s in Philadelphia and on ABC. Trump backed out of plans for the originally scheduled presidential faceoff after debate organizers shifted the format to a virtual event following

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Trump's coronavirus diagnosis.

Trump used his economic address Wednesday to play up his administration's commitment to lowering taxes and deregulation of industry, and he didn't hide his frustration with signs that some in the business community are tilting to Biden.

"I know I'm speaking to some Democrats, and some of you are friends of mine," Trump said in a virtual address to the Economic Clubs of New York, Florida, Washington, D.C., Chicago, Pittsburgh and Sheboygan, Wisconsin. Should Biden be elected, he continued, "You will see things happen that will not make you happy. I don't understand your thinking."

The former vice president has collected more than \$50 million in campaign contributions from donors in the securities and investment sectors, according to the private nonpartisan Center for Responsive Politics. During his decades in the Senate representing Delaware, a center for the credit card and banking industries, Biden built relationships and a voting record in the business sector that has raised suspicion on the left but provides Wall Street with a measure of ease at the prospect of a Biden administration.

After being sidelined by the coronavirus, Trump resumed a breakneck schedule this week, with aides saying he is expected to travel and host campaign rallies every day through Nov. 3. Trump has appeared hale in his public appearances since reemerging from quarantine, though at moments during his economic address on Wednesday his voice was raspy.

His trip to Iowa comes as the state this week surpassed 100,000 coronavirus cases and has seen a recent surge in hospitalizations. The number of people being treated in Iowa hospitals for COVID-19 reached a new high Wednesday of 473 people.

Biden has tried to make Trump's handling of the pandemic, which has killed more than 215,000 Americans, the central issue of the election.

"President Trump isn't coming to the Hawkeye State to offer words of comfort to those suffering, or a helping hand to the Iowans who are out of a job, or an actual plan to get the virus under control," Biden said in a statement. "Instead, he's here to spread more lies about the pandemic and distract from his record of failure."

Officials at the Des Moines airport were told to plan for up to 10,000 people, and such Trump campaign events typically feature little to no social distancing and only spot mask wearing.

A public health emergency declared by Republican Gov. Kim Reynolds in March remains in place and requires that organizers of mass gatherings "must ensure at least 6 feet (1.8 meters) of physical distance between each group or individual attending alone."

Trump acknowledged Reynolds' presence at the rally. "Thank you, honey," he said.

Trump had an extra treat in mind for Iowa voters, drawing on one of the perquisites of his office: Ahead of his visit, Trump said he would be awarding the Presidential Medal of Freedom to Iowa wrestling legend Dan Gable. The former University of Iowa coach won 15 NCAA team championships from 1976 to 1997.

Donning a red hat and tossing away his tie to fight off the stiff breeze on the airport tarmac, Trump made a direct appeal to the state's farmers, saying that he was responsible for \$28 billion in aid designed to help offset damage stemming from his trade war with China. "I hope you remember that on Nov. 3," Trump said.

But after years of farmers supporting him despite the trade war, some Republicans say Trump's renewable fuel policy has sown some doubt.

Trump's Environmental Protection Agency granted dozens of waivers to petroleum companies seeking to bypass congressional rules requiring the level of the corn-based fuel additive ethanol that gasoline must contain. He has recently denied more waiver requests, but the EPA's previous action removed about 4 billion gallons of ethanol demand, resulting in the closure — at least temporarily — of more than a dozen ethanol plants in Iowa.

While mostly laying low on Wednesday, Biden has stepped up campaign travel in the past week, with visits to Arizona, Nevada, Florida and Pennsylvania. The former vice president isn't introducing new themes in his pitch that he's a steady alternative to Trump. Biden and his aides believe the president's scattershot campaign messaging since his COVID-19 diagnosis proves the core of Biden's case.

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Trump's return to Iowa comes as he has been forced into playing defense following a widely panned debate performance and his own coronavirus diagnosis. Republicans have raised alarm that enthusiasm among Trump's base has waned slightly after the one-two punch of those events, casting his reelection into doubt.

Barrow reported from Wilmington, Del., and Madhani reported from Chicago. Associated Press writer David Pitt in Des Moines, Iowa, contributed to this report.

Postal Service agrees to reverse service changes

By IRIS SAMUELS Associated Press/Report for America

HELENA, Mont. (AP) — The U.S. Postal Service agreed Wednesday to reverse changes that slowed mail service nationwide, settling a lawsuit filed by Montana Gov. Steve Bullock during a pandemic that is expected to force many more people to vote by mail.

The lawsuit filed against Postmaster General Louis DeJoy and the U.S. Postal Service on Sept. 9 argued changes implemented in June harmed access to mail services in Montana, resulting in delayed delivery of medical prescriptions, payments, and job applications, and impeding the ability of Montana residents to vote by mail.

The postal service agreed to reverse all changes, which included reduced retail hours, removal of collection boxes and mail sorting machines, closure or consolidation of mail processing facilities, restriction of late or extra trips for timely mail delivery, and banning or restricting overtime.

The agreement also requires the Postal Service to prioritize election mail.

The settlement agreement was reached a day ahead of a hearing in the U.S. District Court in Great Falls. It applies to all states.

"Montanans never gave up this fight and as a result, we are ensuring stability through and beyond the election by immediately restoring the mail services folks rely on, whether it's receiving vital medication or ensuring they can pay their bills on time," Bullock said in a statement.

A spokesperson for the U.S. Postal Service did not immediately respond to an email seeking comment.

Many more voters are expected to vote by mail this November to limit the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic. The majority of Montana counties are holding elections by mail, after a directive by Bullock permitted them to do so to limit the spread of the coronavirus. Bullock is running for a seat in the U.S. Senate.

The agreement comes after a federal judge temporarily blocked the controversial Postal Service changes on Sept. 17, calling the changes "a politically motivated attack on the efficiency of the Postal Service" before the November election.

Judge Stanley Bastian in Yakima, Washington, issued the nationwide preliminary injunction sought by 14 states that brought forward a separate suit against the Trump administration and the U.S. Postal Service. The 14 states, led by Democratic attorneys general, expressed concern that delays might result in voters not receiving ballots or registration forms in time.

Following a national uproar last month, DeJoy, a major donor to President Donald Trump and the GOP, announced he was suspending some of the changes, including the removal of mail collection boxes, but other changes remained in place.

This story has been corrected to accurately spell the name of Louis DeJoy.

Samuels is a corps member for the Associated Press/Report for America Statehouse News Initiative. Report for America is a nonprofit national service program that places journalists in local newsrooms to report on undercovered issues.

Nick Saban, Alabama AD Greg Byrne test positive for COVID-19

By JOHN ZENOR AP Sports Writer

Alabama coach Nick Saban and athletic director Greg Byrne have tested positive for COVID-19, three

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days before the second-ranked Crimson Tide is set to face No. 3 Georgia in a clash of Southeastern Conference and national powers.

Both said their tests Wednesday morning came back positive, and Saban said in a statement that he "immediately left work and isolated at home."

Saban, who monitored practice Wednesday from home, said he didn't have any symptoms as of early evening. But the second-ranked Crimson Tide will almost certainly be without their iconic 68-year-old coach on the sideline when they play Georgia.

Saban said he informed the team via a Zoom call at 2 p.m. Wednesday, about an hour after he learned of the test results, and that offensive coordinator Steve Sarkisian will oversee game preparations within the football building while he works from home.

Saban said Sarkisian, a former head coach at Washington and USC, will still call the offensive plays. Saban has led Alabama to five national titles since taking over the program in 2007, and also won one at LSU.

Saban wasn't sure how game day will go when it comes to communication with his staff, but is confident he can still lead practices and run meetings from home via Zoom calls. He communicated with a team manager when he saw a mistake in practice and wanted a play repeated.

He plans to go through his usual Thursday routine, which includes watching the offense and defense practice, work on two-point plays, and will preside over meetings all from home.

"I didn't leave the country or anything," Saban said. "I'm just right down the street. And we have this technology, so it's really unique.

"Now, I don't have experience at that. But we're going to do the best we can to keep everything as normal as possible."

The Tide played at Mississippi last weekend, and Rebels coach Lane Kiffin said Wednesday his team had some positive tests. Saban said Alabama hasn't "had any indication" of an outbreak within the team.

Saban said he and staffers — from coaches to secretaries — had done a good job of wearing masks around each other while in the football building. Asked about his No. 1 concern, Saban mentioned getting his players ready for the game, not his health.

"It's a big game for them," he said. "Our goal as coaches is always to get them in the best position they can be in to be able to have success, and we need to try to continue to do that. That would be the greatest concern that I have.

"I haven't blocked anybody or tackled anybody, caught any passes, thrown any passes in a game in a long, long time, so it's still going to be up to how the players are able to execute and it's up to us to try to get them in the best position to do that."

The news out of Tuscaloosa was a nother body blow for the SEC, which had postponed two games this week already: No. 10 Florida against defending national champion LSU and Missouri-Vanderbilt.

Alabama's head trainer Jeff Allen and medical director Jimmy Robinson said in a joint statement that Saban and Byrne were the only initial positive tests.

"All individuals who are considered high risk contacts have been notified and will follow quarantine guidelines," the statement said. "We will follow the SEC's Return to Activity and Medical Guidance Task Force Protocol for testing asymptomatic positives."

Byrne said he would "remain at home and follow all guidelines."

"We've been diligent about mask wearing and social distancing from the start and want to continue to encourage you all to take the necessary precautions to help stop the spread of this virus for yourself and those around you," the 48-year-old AD said.

Tennessee coach Jeremy Pruitt, one of five former Saban assistants now leading SEC programs, said "it has been a tough day."

"It's the reality," Pruitt said. "I don't think there's probably any family across our country that has not been affected during this pandemic."

AP Sports Writer Teresa Walker contributed to this report.

More AP college football: <https://apnews.com/Collegefootball> and https://twitter.com/AP_Top25

Month after mass shooting, Rochester seeks answers, suspects

By MICHAEL R. SISAK and CAROLYN THOMPSON Associated Press

ROCHESTER, N.Y. (AP) — It's the big question looming over one of this year's bloodiest mass shootings: Who opened fire at a crowded house party in Rochester, New York, on the last weekend of summer, killing two teenagers and wounding 14 other people?

Nearly a month after gunshots rang out just after midnight on Sept. 19, there have been no arrests, no rewards offered and little word from authorities on where the investigation stands. If the police have suspects in mind, they haven't said so publicly. Nor have they told people who lost loved ones or were wounded themselves.

"I'm sure they'll figure something out, but I don't really know what information they have or anything else — what evidence they found on the scene," said Emar Bouie, a 23-year-old recent college graduate who still struggles with movement in the arm where he was shot.

Rochester, a post-industrial city of about 206,000 people on the shores of Lake Ontario, is still reeling from the revelation last month that police officers killed a Black man, Daniel Prude, in March by pressing him into the ground until he stopped breathing. City officials stoked outrage by staying quiet about the death for months.

Prude's death exacerbated residents' mistrust of the police department. The shooting — which ended the lives of Jaquayla Young and Jarvis Alexander, both 19 — has only added to the city's collective pain.

"In terms of the city healing, we're not there yet," said Marlowe Washington, the pastor of Seneca United Methodist Church. "We're nowhere near any form of healing and I don't know how we're going to get there yet."

A police spokesperson, Jacqueline Shuman, said the shooting investigation is progressing and that detectives "are still in the process of sorting through the voluminous evidence."

Shuman said the police department is working on the case with the county's crime lab and prosecutors, as well as federal agencies including the U.S. attorney's office and the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives, which typically helps local police trace guns.

The party was supposed to be a small gathering, but people from two other nearby parties went there in the early morning and an argument broke out. Three or four people opened fire, and police found more than 40 bullet casings at the scene. The wounded and the dead were all between the ages of 17 and 23.

Young, who was attending Monroe Community College, was captain of her high school's cheerleading team and a member of the track team. Alexander, a sophomore at Alfred University, was on his high school's football and track teams and won a state championship in the 4x100-meter relay.

"What happened to my son is just devastating. It doesn't even seem real at this point," said Alexander's father, James Alexander. "He touched the heart of so many people and that's really what I'm trying to absorb right now. Because his legacy is just amazing."

Since the shooting, the city has been rocked further by Mayor Lovely Warren's indictment on state campaign finance fraud charges, related to her last reelection campaign. The city council recently issued subpoenas in its investigation into Prude's death. Protesters have continued to demonstrate in the city's streets.

On Wednesday, there was another big development: Cynthia Herriott-Sullivan, who retired from the police department in 2009 as a lieutenant, took over as the city's interim police chief. In addition to the Herculean chore of reforming a force with a tattered reputation, she'll be tasked with solving a shooting that has been described in local media as one of the most violent crimes in the city's history.

Speaking at her swearing-in ceremony, she told residents: "We rise and fall together."

Washington, in a telephone interview, called on the police department to be more transparent about the investigation and suggested that the city offer a reward to give reluctant witnesses an extra incentive

to come forward.

"We need the city to step this up more to say we are not going to let this sit down, this will not be a cold or pre-cold case. We are going to up the ante," Washington said.

James Alexander said he's been so focused on mourning his son and supporting his family that he hasn't had time to dwell on the investigation.

"There's a lot of disaster and turmoil going on in the city of Rochester and something needs to be done about it, but as far as what's going on in the police department and those things, I put my trust in the law," said Alexander. "I have no objections to the way they do their job."

Bouie said he too has faith — and patience.

"They'll figure out something, whether it takes a year from now," he said.

This story has been corrected to place Rochester on the shores of Lake Ontario, not Lake Erie.

Sisak reported from New York.

On Twitter, follow Michael Sisak at twitter.com/mikesisak and Carolyn Thompson at twitter.com/apbuf

Takeaways: Pardon power, silent mics on Barrett's final day

By MATTHEW DALY Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Health care again played a starring role in Supreme Court nominee Amy Coney Barrett's confirmation hearing before the Senate Judiciary Committee as Democrats sought to highlight an issue they want voters to consider on Election Day.

During Wednesday's hearing, Barrett maintained her view that it would be inappropriate to comment on the national health care law or other cases that may come before her as a justice. She also declined to say whether a president can pardon himself.

Republicans appeared undeterred and likely successful in their effort to have Barrett confirmed before the election, just three weeks away.

Takeaways from Day 3 of the hearing:

FILLING A SEAT IN TIME FOR 'OBAMACARE' CASE

Democrats noted that Trump has made clear he wishes to undo the Affordable Care Act, saying Trump and Senate Republicans are rushing to confirm Barrett so she can be seated in time to hear a case next month challenging that 'Obamacare' law.

Sen. Dick Durbin, D-Ill., said there's an "orange cloud" hanging over Barrett's nomination — a political jab at Trump's tan and a reference to the president's oft-stated wish to overturn the law.

Barrett told senators she is not "hostile" to the law and promised to consider all arguments.

Republicans played down the threat to the health law posed by the court case. "This hearing has been more about Obamacare than it has you," the committee chairman, Sen. Lindsey Graham, R-S.C., told Barrett. He added: "Obamacare is on the ballot" next month.

Republicans object to the health law because "it was written and passed on a partisan line," Graham said. "Most big changes in society have more buy-in (from the public and the two political parties) than that. You're talking about one-fifth of the American economy."

Still, Graham and other Republicans stressed that even if parts of the law were struck down, important aspects such as coverage for preexisting conditions could still be preserved, under a concept known as severability. "The doctrine of severability presumes — and its goal is — to preserve (key parts of) the statute if that is possible," Graham said.

Barrett agreed, saying, "The presumption is always in favor of severability."

Republicans have introduced bills to protect Americans with preexisting conditions and bring down drug prices, said Sen. Chuck Grassley, R-Iowa. "And if we act, (voters) don't have to worry about you doing away with preexisting conditions in some future case down the road," he told Barrett.

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NO ONE IS ABOVE THE LAW

On another issue where Trump's views and tweets are well-known, Barrett declined to say whether a president can pardon himself. But she said she agrees no one is above the law.

Under questioning from Sen. Patrick Leahy, D-Vt., Barrett said the question of a self-pardon has never come before the court. "That question may or may not arise, but it is one that calls for a legal analysis of what the scope of the pardon power is," Barrett said. She said offering an opinion now "would be opining on an open question ... it's not one in which I can offer a view."

Multiple investigations are looking into Trump's taxes, his businesses and his associates, and he has said he has "an absolute right" to pardon himself.

While declining to address whether Trump would be able to pardon himself, Barrett said she agreed with Leahy's assertion that "no one is above the law."

NO PREVIEW OF JUDICIAL VIEWS

For the second straight day, Barrett repeatedly declined to give her personal views, or to preview how she might rule, on issues that could become before the court. Like other Supreme Court nominees, Barrett said she was prohibited from expressing those opinions by the "canons of judicial conduct."

In addition to a possible presidential self-pardon and whether to overturn the health law, Barrett said she could not give an opinion on whether she would withdraw from any election-related litigation involving Trump. He said when he nominated her that he wanted the full nine justices in place before any possible election decisions.

Barrett also said she can't express a view on climate change because it is a "very contentious matter of public policy." Under questioning from Sen. Kamala Harris, D-Calif., the party's vice presidential nominee, Barrett called climate change "politically controversial," adding that discussion of the issue is "inconsistent with the judicial role as I have explained."

Scientists say climate change is caused by people burning fossil fuels such as coal, oil and natural gas and is worsening sharply. Parched lands in the American West are getting drier and suffering deadly wildfires, while the much wetter East keeps getting drenched in hurricanes and other mega-rainfall events. Climate change is magnifying both extremes.

BREAKTHROUGH FOR CONSERVATIVE WOMEN

Graham opened Wednesday's hearing by proclaiming Barrett's expected confirmation a historic victory for conservative women. Like "conservatives of color," conservative women, he said, are often "marginalized" in public life.

"This hearing, to me, is an opportunity to not punch through a glass ceiling but a reinforced concrete barrier around conservative women," Graham told Barrett. "You are going to shatter that barrier."

Graham said he has "never been more proud of a nominee" than he is of Barrett, a federal appeals court judge from Indiana. "This is the first time in American history that we've nominated a woman who is unashamedly pro-life and embraces her faith without apology, and she is going to the court. This is history being made, folks."

Barrett has declined to say how she would rule on a challenge to the Roe v. Wade decision that established abortion rights, but she has made clear she opposes abortion rights and signed a 2006 letter objecting to "abortion on demand."

SHIFTING THE SUPREME COURT BALANCE

Sen. Chris Coons, D-Del., asked Barrett whether she would acknowledge that her confirmation would mean a shift to the right on the Supreme Court that would have "profound" implications.

Coons referred to an interview that Barrett gave where she spoke of a balance shift if Merrick Garland, a federal appeals court judge nominated in 2016 by President Barack Obama, were elevated to the high

court. Obama picked Garland after Justice Antonin Scalia's death, but Republicans in the Senate refused to give Garland a hearing, citing the presidential election that was months away that year.

Barrett told Coons she was referring in the interview to Garland's judicial approach, not his more liberal views. Unlike the conservative Scalia, Garland was not an originalist, which refers to a way of interpreting the Constitution that focuses on the text and Founding Fathers' intentions in resolving legal disputes.

"It would be away from one balance and toward another in terms of how judges think about the text," said Barrett, who like Scalia is an originalist.

Coons noted that Barrett, who claims Scalia as her mentor, would replace Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg, who was not an originalist and was the court's liberal leader. Barrett's confirmation would shift the court's previous 5-4 conservative majority to 6-3.

Americans need to better understand the originalist philosophy, Coons said, "because I think it means our entire modern understanding of certain constitutional commitments around liberty, privacy and equality under the law could, in fact, be rolled back to 19th or even 18th century understandings in a way unrecognizable to most Americans."

SOUNDS OF SILENCE

The hearing paused twice Wednesday because of audio problems in the Dirksen Senate Office Building. The sound in the hearing room cut out a little before 2 p.m. and was off for 40 minutes. It cut out again after the hearing resumed, this time for about 15 minutes.

The problem happened the first time just after Sen. Richard Blumenthal, D-Conn., asked Barrett whether she had gotten some rest after a long day of questioning Tuesday. "I did have a glass of wine. I'll tell you, I needed that at the end of the day," she said.

On that point, "You have a right to remain silent," Blumenthal told Barrett.

Associated Press writer Colleen Long contributed to this report.

Barrett keeps Democrats, Trump at bay in Senate hearing

By MARK SHERMAN, LISA MASCARO and LAURIE KELLMAN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Over and over, Amy Coney Barrett said she'd be her own judge if confirmed to the Supreme Court. But she was careful in two long days of Senate testimony not to take on the president who nominated her, and she sought to create distance between herself and past positions, writings on controversial subjects and even her late mentor.

Barrett's confirmation to the Supreme Court to take the seat of the late Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg seems inevitable, as even some Senate Democrats acknowledged in Senate hearings on Tuesday and Wednesday. The shift would cement a 6-3 conservative majority on the court and would be the most pronounced ideological change in 30 years, from the liberal icon to the conservative appeals court judge.

The 48-year-old judge skipped past Democrats' pressing questions about ensuring the date of next month's election or preventing voter intimidation, both set in federal law, and the peaceful transfer of presidential power. She also refused to express her view on whether the president can pardon himself. "It's not one that I can offer a view," she said in response to a question Wednesday from Sen. Pat Leahy of Vermont.

Democrats raised those questions because President Donald Trump has done so himself.

When it came to major issues that are likely to come before the court, including abortion and health care, she repeatedly promised to keep an open mind and said neither Trump nor anyone else in the White House had tried to influence her views.

"No one has elicited from me any commitment in a case," she said.

Nominees typically resist offering any more information than they have to, especially when the president's party controls the Senate, as it does now. But Barrett wouldn't engage on topics that seemed easy to swat away, including that only Congress can change the date that the election takes place.

She said she is not on a "mission to destroy the Affordable Care Act," though she has been critical of

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the two Supreme Court decisions that preserved key parts of the Obama-era health care law. She could be on the court when it hears the latest, Republican-led challenge on Nov. 10.

Barrett is the most open opponent of abortion nominated to the Supreme Court in decades, and Democrats fear that her ascension could be a tipping point that threatens abortion rights.

There was no hiding her views in at least three letters and ads she signed over 15 years and her membership in Notre Dame's Faculty for Life. So Republican senators embraced her stance, proudly stating that she was, in Judiciary Committee Chairman Lindsey Graham's words, an "unashamedly pro-life" conservative who is making history as a role model for other women.

Sen. Josh Hawley, R-Mo., said there "is nothing wrong with confirming a devout pro-life Christian."

Barrett refused to say whether the 1973 landmark Roe v. Wade ruling on abortion rights was correctly decided, though she signed an open letter seven years ago that called the decision "infamous."

Democrats pressed repeatedly on the judge's approach to health care, abortion, racial equity and voting rights, but conceded they were unlikely to stop her quick confirmation.

"When you are on the court," Sen. Sheldon Whitehouse, D-R.I., began one question in which he asked her to keep an open mind on the high court bench. Barrett readily agreed to do so.

In an exchange with Sen. Dianne Feinstein, D-Calif., Barrett resisted the invitation to explicitly endorse or reject the late Justice Antonin Scalia's comments about perpetuating "racial entitlement" in a key voting rights case.

"When I said that Justice Scalia's philosophy is mine, too, I certainly didn't mean to say that every sentence that came out of Justice Scalia's mouth or every sentence that he wrote is one that I would agree with," Barrett said.

She called the Voting Rights Act a "triumph in the civil rights movement," without discussing the specifics of the earlier challenge to it. The court will hear another challenge to the law early next year.

One of the more dramatic moments came late Wednesday when Barrett told California Sen. Kamala Harris, the Democratic vice presidential nominee, that she wouldn't say whether racial discrimination in voting still exists nor express a view on climate change.

Harris asked if she agreed with Chief Justice John Roberts, who wrote in a 2013 voting rights case that "voting discrimination still exists; no one doubts that."

Barrett said she would "not comment on what any justice said in an opinion."

Asked whether "climate change is happening," Barrett said she wouldn't engage because it is "a very contentious matter of public debate." Barrett did, however, say she believes the novel coronavirus is infectious and smoking causes cancer.

Along with trying to undo the health care law, Trump has publicly stated he wants a justice seated for any disputes arising from the election, and particularly the surge of mail-in ballots expected during the pandemic as voters prefer to vote by mail.

Barrett testified she has not spoken to Trump or his team about election cases, and declined to commit to recusing herself from any post-election cases.

She did describe what the role of the court would be if it were asked to intervene. "Certainly the court would not see itself -- and would not be -- electing the president. It would be applying laws that are designed to protect the election and protect the right to vote," Barrett said. In 2000, the court's decision in Bush v. Gore brought a Florida recount to a halt, effectively deciding the election in George W. Bush's favor. Barrett was on Bush's legal team in 2000, in a minor role.

Barrett's nomination has been the focus at a Capitol mostly shut down by COVID-19 protocols. The health care debate has been central to the week's hearings, as Americans struggle during the pandemic, leading to a sharp exchange among senators at one point.

Republican Ted Cruz of Texas scoffed that few Democratic senators attended the hearing. Durbin retorted that health risks left many senators monitoring from their offices rather than convening as a group. Two GOP senators who tested positive for COVID-19 after attending Barrett's nomination at the White House now say they are symptom free, and they are attending in person.

Underscoring the Republicans' confidence, Graham set an initial committee vote on the nomination for Thursday, the last day of hearings, which would allow final approval by the full Senate by the end of the month.

Associated Press writers Mary Clare Jalonick, Matthew Daly and Jessica Gresko in Washington, and Elana Schor in New York contributed to this report.

White woman charged in racist NYC run-in made a 2nd 911 call

By MICHAEL R. SISAK Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Amy Cooper, the white woman charged with filing a false police report for calling 911 during a dispute with a Black man in New York's Central Park in May, made a second, previously unreported call in which she falsely claimed the man had "tried to assault her," a prosecutor said Wednesday.

Assistant District Attorney Joan Illuzzi-Orbon described the second call as Cooper was being arraigned by video in a case that had garnered worldwide attention but was put on hold for months because of the coronavirus pandemic. Cooper did not enter a plea to the misdemeanor charge.

In the first 911 call, which was captured on a widely seen video of the confrontation, Cooper told a dispatcher only that the man, a birdwatcher named Christian Cooper, was threatening her. The second call was not recorded on video, but a 911 dispatcher provided prosecutors with a sworn affidavit regarding the calls, Illuzzi said.

"Using the police in a way that is both racially offensive and designed to intimidate is something that can't be ignored. Therefore we charged her," said Illuzzi, whose last high-profile prosecution sent Harvey Weinstein to prison in March for rape.

The case was adjourned until Nov. 17 to allow prosecutors and her lawyer to work on a possible resolution that Illuzzi said could see Cooper participating in a program to educate her and the community "on the harm caused by such actions."

Illuzzi didn't get into details on what actions Cooper might be required to take, but said the 40-year-old former investment portfolio manager would have to take responsibility for her actions. The criminal process "can be an opportunity for introspection and education," Illuzzi said. The range of options could include some type of racial sensitivity training or a public awareness campaign.

In a statement, Manhattan District Attorney Cyrus Vance Jr. said his office "will pursue a resolution of this case which holds Ms. Cooper accountable while healing our community, restoring justice, and deterring others from perpetuating this racist practice."

Cooper drew widespread condemnation and was fired from her job at investment firm Franklin Templeton after frantically calling 911 to claim she was being threatened by "an African American man," Christian Cooper, who had confronted her for walking her dog without a leash. On the video Christian Cooper recorded of Amy Cooper, he sounded calm and appeared to keep a safe distance from her.

There is no relation between Christian Cooper and Amy Cooper.

In the video posted on social media, Christian Cooper claimed her cocker spaniel was "tearing through the plantings" in the Ramble, a secluded section of Central Park popular with birdwatchers, and told her she should go to another part of the park. When she refused, he pulled out dog treats, causing her to scream at him to not come near her dog.

Amy Cooper also warned him she would summon police unless he stopped recording.

"I'm going to tell them there's an African American man threatening my life," Amy Cooper is heard saying in the video as she pulls down her face mask and struggles to control her dog.

"Please call the cops," said Christian Cooper.

"There's an African American man, I'm in Central Park, he is recording me and threatening myself and my dog. ... Please send the cops immediately!" she said during the 911 call before the recording stops.

Police said that by the time officers responded, Amy and Christian Cooper were both gone.

After the backlash, Amy Cooper released an apology through a public relations service, saying she "re-

acted emotionally and made false assumptions about his intentions.”

“He had every right to request that I leash my dog in an area where it was required,” she said in the written statement. “I am well aware of the pain that misassumptions and insensitive statements about race cause and would never have imagined that I would be involved in the type of incident that occurred with Chris.”

Amy Cooper’s 911 calls, which happened the same day that Minneapolis police killed George Floyd, was seen by many as a stark example of everyday racism and fueled outrage in the period leading up to street protests sparked by Floyd’s death.

It also inspired New York state lawmakers in June to pass a law that makes it easier under civil rights law to sue an individual who calls a police officer on someone “without reason” because of their background, including race and national origin.

Cooper was charged under an existing false-report law that’s been long on the books and doesn’t reference race.

“Fortunately, no one was injured or killed in the police response to Ms. Cooper’s hoax,” said Vance.

Associated Press writer Tom Hays contributed to this report.

Follow Michael Sisak at twitter.com/mikesisak

Census whiplashed by changing deadlines, accuracy concerns

By MIKE SCHNEIDER Associated Press

Shortly after the Supreme Court ruled that the Trump administration can end the 2020 census, a text message went out to field supervisors in Northern California telling them to start collecting the iPhones their census takers use for gathering household information during their door-knocking.

It was the fifth time in two months that they were given a new end date — this one Thursday — for the head count of everyone living in the U.S.

The Supreme Court decision Tuesday was just the latest case of whiplash for the census, which has faced starts and stops from the pandemic, natural disasters and court rulings, as well as confusion over when it was going to end and questions over whether minorities, immigrants, poor people and others would be counted accurately.

Minority groups have historically been undercounted in the once-a-decade census that determines how many congressional seats each state gets, as well as how \$1.5 trillion in federal spending is distributed each year, and advocates said the two-week-shorter schedule will make that even worse.

“The Trump administration is acting out of fear. They fear a future America where we are majority minority. They don’t want to see the power shift,” Meeta Anand, a fellow at the New York Immigration Coalition, said Wednesday. “They will ignore the rules. They will do everything they can to make sure the true nature of our society is not reflected.”

The Trump administration had argued that the head count needed to end immediately to give the Census Bureau time to meet a congressionally mandated Dec. 31 deadline for completing the figures that will be used to apportion House seats.

A coalition of local governments and advocacy groups had sued to keep the census going through October, saying that minorities and others would be missed if the census ended early.

By sticking to the Dec. 31 deadline, the Trump administration would end up controlling the numbers used for the apportionment, no matter who wins next month’s presidential election. Opponents fear the administration will depart from past practice and leave out of the count people who are in the U.S. illegally.

The nation’s highest court didn’t offer a reason for ending the census, though Justice Sonia Sotomayor said in a dissent that minorities and others “will disproportionately bear the burden of any inaccuracies.”

The end date for the 2020 census has been a moving target since the pandemic temporarily halted field operations last spring.

The Census Bureau pushed an end-of-July deadline for concluding the count to the end of October

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because of the virus. But the Commerce Department, which oversees the agency, decided to move up the deadline to late September, then early October, and was thwarted both times by a federal judge in California.

The constantly fluctuating deadline probably affected the quality of the data gathered, since census takers were more likely to rely on administrative records or neighbors instead of making an extra visit to a household if they were under the gun to end the count, Minnesota State Demographer Susan Brower said.

Many census takers have said they hadn't been given work since the beginning of the month, with little explanation, even though they had been planning to work through the end of October.

In recent weeks, "the census operation has been in a holding pattern," Brower said. "They didn't say, 'Great! More time. Let's go back and revisit some of those things we've already done.' The attitude was more, 'What's done is done, and we will put our energy toward closing cases.'"

Brower said she is more concerned about whether Census Bureau statisticians can process the data accurately by Dec. 31, in less than three months, when they originally had five months to do it.

"My interpretation is it cannot be done in that amount of time," she said..

Whether that Dec. 31 deadline holds is still being decided in the courts.

The data processing phase takes time since the statisticians must remove duplicate answers, fill in information gaps by using records and check for quality, said Thomas Saenz, president and general counsel for the Mexican American Legal Defense and Education Fund.

Losing two weeks of the count is going to be felt in New York City, where activists since the start of the month had held 100 events to get people to fill out the census form, and "every single day we were moving the numbers upward," said Julie Menin, director of NYC Census 2020.

"We could have done so much more. Paid canvassing. Advertising. Phone banking. Texting," Menin said. "To lose those two weeks is unconscionable."

Follow Mike Schneider on Twitter at <https://twitter.com/MikeSchneiderAP>

History, mistrust spurring Black early voters in Georgia

By RUSS BYNUM, KATE BRUMBACK and JEFF MARTIN Associated Press

SAVANNAH, Ga. (AP) — They came by the thousands to vote early, descendants of slaves, children of the civil rights era and other Georgians standing in line for hours when all could have been somewhere else.

Yet in a year when issues including prejudice, racial justice and voter suppression are at the forefront, the Black voters saw giving up time to cast a ballot for the next U.S. president as worth the trade - even early in the voting process and during a pandemic that made merely going to a polling place a risky act.

Still waiting three hours after she showed up to vote in Savannah on Wednesday, Khani Morgan, 75, wasn't taking any chances with her health months after suffering a stroke: she wore a mask and a plastic shield that covered her entire face.

But Morgan said the importance of voting was drilled into her as a girl by great-grandmother Sally Williams, who was born a slave in 1850 and lived to be more than 100. Morgan felt compelled to vote early to register her support for Democrat Joe Biden over President Donald Trump.

"I won't let anything get in the way of me and this opportunity," said Morgan, who coordinates an adult literacy program.

The willingness of many Black voters to queue up instead of coming back another day is a measure of their determination and their skepticism about the system. Those in Georgia acknowledged they could have voted by mail or returned to a polling place at a different time; but with no expectation of voting becoming easier in the weeks to come, they saw waiting as a necessary step to ensure their votes get counted.

Born during a pivotal year of the civil rights movement, when Black people were still fighting for the right to vote across the South, 56-year-old Donovan Stewart put on sweatpants and sneakers for comfort and prepared to wait as long as needed to vote in the Atlanta suburb of Duluth.

"Many individuals went through a lot, suffered a lot for this opportunity," Stewart, a military retiree,

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said. "So I could stand in line for four hours to do my civic duty. That's what we're called to do, to vote and try to make a change."

Early voters have waited in long lines in other states, including Texas, Kentucky and Tennessee. But in Georgia, which is viewed as more of a contested state than in the past, elections have drawn heightened attention in recent years.

That's been the case particularly since 2018, when Republican Brian Kemp defeated Democrat Stacey Abrams in a close gubernatorial contest that was plagued by long waits and allegations of voter suppression.

Long lines caused in part by equipment problems marred the state's June primary, and concerns about voter disenfranchisement have resulted in a flood of election-related lawsuits seeking quick-fixes before the November election as well as broader, long-term changes to the voting system, but officials have defended Georgia's system.

While acknowledging equipment glitches, Secretary of State Brad Raffensperger said pandemic-related cleaning procedures and a large turnout resulted in the long waits voters encountered so far during early voting.

"If you look at those lines, they look like they're long, but everyone is spaced 6 feet out on center, and that just makes your lines look a whole lot longer," he said during a news conference at the Capitol.

Many Georgia voters said they decided to vote near the beginning of early voting rather than wait until closer to Election Day since long lines seem a given this year. Voting has been heavy in both Democratic-leaning precincts and Republican strongholds.

Stephanie Loftin, 48, backed up her desire to see change in Washington by taking about four hours to vote in person near Atlanta. While absentee voting would have allowed her to avoid a line and stay off her creaky knees, Loftin didn't feel comfortable with the idea of mailing her ballot or dropping it into a collection box.

"I just don't really trust the system, to say the least," she said. "I feel that me standing in line and actually making sure my ballot it is in makes me feel better, makes me rest better at night."

Unable to find the end of the long line during her first try at early voting on Monday, Michelle Lynch tried again on Wednesday and took a selfie while displaying her "I voted" sticker after she succeeded. No fan of Trump, Lynch voted for Biden and plans to share her story in years to come.

"I want to be able to tell my grandchildren that I was part of voting in this election," she said. "Our ancestors fought so hard for the vote and that was a moment then, and I feel like this is a moment now."

In Marietta, Georgia, Alexis Daniels, 26, was not deterred by long lines at a main polling place where the fencing used to weave people back and forth resembled the mazes used in amusement parks and airport security check points.

"Our country's just a hot mess now, so I had to come out, I've to make my voice heard," Daniels said as she waited her turn in the city just northwest of Atlanta.

Back in Savannah, Crystal Clark arrived at the polls prepared for a long wait in line while wearing a mask for virus protection and carrying a folding stool for rest and a multicolored umbrella for shade.

Still unsure why she was dropped from voting rolls two years ago, Clark decided to vote early in person after the mail-in ballot she requested in early September never arrived. Clark, who sells real estate, said she's more protective than ever of her right to vote, and going to the precinct was worth the risk and trouble.

"I guess it's insurance that my vote is going to count," she said.

Brumback reported from Duluth, Georgia, and Martin reported from Marietta, Georgia. AP writer Jay Reeves contributed from Birmingham, Alabama.

Earth breaks September heat record, may reach warmest year

By SETH BORENSTEIN AP Science Writer

Earth sweltered to a record hot September last month, with U.S. climate officials saying there's nearly a two-to-one chance that 2020 will end up as the globe's hottest year on record.

Boosted by human-caused climate change, global temperatures averaged 60.75 degrees (15.97 Celsius)

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last month, edging out 2015 and 2016 for the hottest September in 141 years of recordkeeping, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration said Wednesday. That's 1.75 degrees (0.97 degrees Celsius) above the 20th century average.

This record was driven by high heat in Europe, Northern Asia, Russia and much of the Southern Hemisphere, said NOAA climatologist Ahira Sanchez-Lugo. California and Oregon had their hottest Septembers on record.

Earth has had 44 straight Septembers where it has been warmer than the 20th century average and 429 straight months without a cooler than normal month, according to NOAA. The hottest seven Septembers on record have been the last seven.

That means "that no millennial or even parts of Gen-X has lived through a cooler than normal September," said North Carolina state climatologist Kathie Dello, herself a millennial.

What's happening is a combination of global warming from the burning of coal, oil and natural gas and natural variability, Sanchez-Lugo said. But the biggest factor is the human-caused warming, she and Dello said.

The globe set this record despite a La Nina, which is a cooling of parts of the central Pacific that changes weather patterns and usually slightly lowers temperatures.

"A La Nina is no match for how much we're warming the planet," Dello said.

The first nine months of 2020 are the second warmest on record, a shade behind 2016 when there was a strong warming El Nino. But Sanchez-Lugo said her office's calculations show that there's a 64.7% chance that 2020 will pass 2016 in the last three months to take the title as the warmest year on record. And if it doesn't make it, she said it'll easily be in the top three, probably top two.

"We're catching up" to 2016, Sanchez-Lugo said. "It's a very tight race."

With the climate trend, heat records that looked like it would take many years to break get passed quicker, said Colorado University weather data scientist Sam Lillo.

Follow AP's climate coverage at <https://www.apnews.com/Climate>

Follow Seth Borenstein on Twitter at @borenbears .

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.

St. Louis couple who waved guns at protest plead not guilty

By JIM SALTER Associated Press

ST. LOUIS (AP) — A St. Louis couple celebrated in some circles and vilified in others for waving guns at protesters marching on their private street pleaded not guilty to two felony charges at a brief hearing Wednesday.

Mark and Patricia McCloskey, who are both attorneys in their early 60s, were indicted by a St. Louis grand jury last week on charges of unlawful use of a weapon and tampering with evidence. They will appear in court again Oct. 28.

St. Louis Circuit Attorney Kim Gardner originally filed the weapons charge in July. The grand jury added the evidence tampering charge. The indictment states that a semiautomatic pistol was altered in a way that "obstructed the prosecution of Patricia McCloskey" on the weapons charge.

The McCloskeys have blamed the "leftist" Democrats in St. Louis for their plight and have become folk heroes among some conservatives. They have received support from President Donald Trump and they spoke on video during the opening night of the Republican National Convention.

In fact, the McCloskeys' attorney, Joel Schwartz, indicated that Trump remains interested in the case.

"They have spoken with the president," Schwartz said after the hearing. "The president contacts them semi-frequently." He declined to elaborate and the McCloskeys declined to be interviewed.

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Missouri Gov. Mike Parson has defended the couple's right to protect their home and said he will pardon them if they are convicted.

The protest on June 28 came in the midst of national racial injustice demonstrations that followed the death of George Floyd in Minneapolis. A few hundred marchers were on their way to St. Louis Mayor Lyda Krewson's home when they veered onto a private street made up of million-dollar homes in St. Louis' posh Central West End.

The McCloskeys claimed the protesters not only ignored a "No Trespassing" sign but also broke down an iron gate. Protest leaders said they did not damage the gate.

Mark McCloskey emerged from his home armed with an AR-15 rifle and Patricia McCloskey came out with a semiautomatic handgun. It wasn't immediately clear if that gun was the same one that was the subject of the evidence tampering charge.

Cellphone video captured the tense confrontation between the McCloskeys and the protesters. The couple said they felt threatened but protest leaders said the demonstration was peaceful on their end. No shots were fired and no one was hurt.

Gardner, a Democrat, said the display of guns risked bloodshed. A police probable cause statement said protesters feared "being injured due to Patricia McCloskey's finger being on the trigger, coupled with her excited demeanor."

Schwartz called the charges a "travesty" and a "political prosecution," citing as evidence Gardner's ads in her successful Democratic primary campaign in August in which she referenced the case.

Schwartz said he will ask that Gardner's office be disqualified so another prosecutor can take over the case.

Gardner said in a statement: "As in all cases prosecuted by the Circuit Attorney Office, we seek justice on behalf of the people of the city of St. Louis that ensures fairness while protecting the due process rights of the accused."

Nine people involved in the protest were charged with misdemeanor trespassing, but the city counselor's office later dropped the charges. The city counselor's office handles lesser crimes and is not affiliated with the circuit attorney's office.

Mark McCloskey, after a brief court hearing last week, expressed anger that he and his wife faced criminal charges while those who trespassed on his property did not.

"Every single human being that was in front of my house was a criminal trespasser," McCloskey said. "They broke down our gate. They trespassed on our property. Not a single one of those people is now charged with anything. We're charged with felonies that could cost us four years of our lives and our law licenses."

G-20 suspends poor nations' debt payments for 6 more months

By MARTIN CRUTSINGER and AYA BATRAWY Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Group of 20 nations, representing the world's biggest economies, agreed Wednesday to extend the suspension of debt payments by an additional six months to support the most vulnerable countries in their fight against the coronavirus pandemic.

The suspension of what the G-20 says could provide relief of \$14 billion in debt payments had been due to expire at the end of the year. Wednesday's decision gives developing nations until the end of June 2021 to focus spending on health care and emergency stimulus programs rather than debt repayments.

The G-20 announcement was made initially on Twitter during a meeting of the group's finance ministers and central bank governors, and later confirmed at a news conference. The virtual discussions are being held at the start of this week's meetings of the 189-nation International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, which are also being conducted virtually because of the coronavirus pandemic.

International aid groups expressed disappointment that more debt relief isn't being provided by extending the moratorium on debt payments for a full year or by forgiving part of the debt rather than merely suspending payments.

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"This pandemic has laid bare a glaring and unjust double standard: The world's wealthiest countries play by one set of rules, and the world's poorest by another," said David McNair, executive director for global policy at ONE, an international aid group.

G20 officials argued that the relief that is being provided is helping 46 of the 73 countries eligible with efforts under way to expand the help.

Some critics have also complained that China objected to portions of the debt relief plans that have been advanced.

"It is unfortunate that the pressing need for broader debt relief for poor countries is being stymied by the apparent recalcitrance of China, which has become a major creditor," said Eswar Prasad, an economics professor at Cornell University and a former head of the IMF's China division. "China has proven a reluctant participant in multilateral debt relief efforts, putting its narrow economic and geopolitical interests ahead of a collective approach to easing the burden on poor countries."

"We still need to do more," Mohammed al-Jadaan, the finance minister for Saudi Arabia, this year's chair of the G-20, acknowledged at a news conference after Wednesday's meeting. "We must ensure these nations are fully supported in their efforts to tackle the COVID-19 pandemic. ... We have agreed to extend the debt service suspension initiative by six months."

Al-Jadaan said there will be further discussions at April's spring meetings to decide whether the suspension should be extended for an additional six months. He stressed that the pandemic has threatened the fiscal stability of many countries, particularly the poorest.

Al-Jadaan said that another finance ministers' meeting will be held virtually next month, before the leaders' summit on Nov. 21-22. He said the goal will be to agree on a framework that goes beyond even the current debt suspension initiative. He did not elaborate. The United States is represented at the G-20 finance meetings by Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin and Federal Reserve Chairman Jerome Powell.

Transparency International, Amnesty International and a collective of groups called CIVICUS had written to the G-20 finance ministers ahead of their meeting to warn that the world is facing a crisis unlike any in the last century and that debt suspension is only a first step. Though the global economy has begun a gradual recovery with the reopening of businesses and borders, the recovery has been sharply uneven.

The groups said that many of the poorest countries are still spending more on debt payments than on life-saving public services. They urged the G-20 nations to suspend debt payments at least through 2021. Some countries, like Pakistan, have called for an outright cancellation of debt payments.

Oxfam International said it believes that the six month extension was "the bare minimum the G-20 could do."

"The failure to cancel debt payments will only delay the tsunami of debt that will engulf many of the world's poorest countries, leaving them unable to afford the investment in healthcare and social safety nets so desperately needed," said Jaime Atienza, an Oxfam official who manages debt policy.

Oxfam and other groups are also calling for private lenders and investment funds to make similar concessions for the poorest countries by suspending their debt repayments.

The G-20, in a final communique, also urged private lenders to join its initiative for debt suspension.

"We are disappointed by the absence of progress of private creditors' participation" in the debt relief, "and strongly encourage them to participate on comparable terms when requested by eligible countries," it said.

Batrawy contributed from Dubai.

Online fall Broadway play revivals attract starry casts

By MARK KENNEDY AP Entertainment Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Broadway theaters may be dark, but there will be plenty of new online productions of some of classic plays this fall with some starry self-isolating actors, including Matthew Broderick, Morgan Freeman, Patti LuPone, Laura Linney and David Alan Grier.

Producer Jeffrey Richards on Wednesday unveiled a weekly play run of livestreamed works to benefit

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The Actors Fund. They will stream on Broadway's Best Shows and ticket buyers can access the events through TodayTix starting at \$5. The series will last seven weeks.

The push begins Oct. 14 with Gore Vidal's "The Best Man" starring Matthew Broderick, Morgan Freeman, John Malkovich, Zachary Quinto, Phylicia Rashad, Vanessa Williams, Reed Birney, Stacy Keach and Elizabeth Ashley.

On Oct. 20, a production of Kenneth Lonergan's "This Is Our Youth" will star Lucas Hedges, Paul Mescal and Grace Van Patten. David Mamet's "Race" is up on Oct. 29, starring David Alan Grier and Ed O'Neill.

Mamet's "Boston Marriage" is slated for Nov. 12 with Patti LuPone and Rebecca Pidgeon. A revival of Anton Chekhov's "Uncle Vanya" adapted by Neil LaBute follows on Nov. 19 with Alan Cumming, Samira Wiley, Constance Wu and Ellen Burstyn.

On Dec. 3, the original Broadway cast of Donald Margulies' "Time Stands Still" reunites with Eric Bogosian, Brian d'Arcy James, Laura Linney and Alicia Silverstone. The last effort is Robert O'Hara's "Barbecue" on Dec. 10 with Carrie Coon, Colman Domingo, S. Epatha Merkerson, Laurie Metcalf, David Morse and Kristine Nielsen.

Mark Kennedy is at <http://twitter.com/KennedyTwits>

Extra safety scrutiny planned as virus vaccine worries grow

By LAURAN NEERGAARD AP Medical Writer

Facing public skepticism about rushed COVID-19 vaccines, U.S. health officials are planning extra scrutiny of the first people vaccinated when shots become available — an added safety layer experts call vital.

A new poll suggests those vaccine fears are growing. With this week's pause of a second major vaccine study because of an unexplained illness — and repeated tweets from President Donald Trump that raise the specter of politics overriding science — a quarter of Americans say they won't get vaccinated. That's a slight increase from 1 in 5 in May.

The poll from The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research found only 46% of Americans want a COVID-19 vaccine and another 29% are unsure.

More striking, while Black Americans have been especially hard-hit by COVID-19, just 22% say they plan to get vaccinated compared with 48% of white Americans, the AP-NORC poll found.

"I am very concerned about hesitancy regarding COVID vaccine," said Dr. William Schaffner, a vaccine specialist at Vanderbilt University who says even the primary care doctors who'll need to recommend vaccinations have questions.

"If the politicians would stand back and let the scientific process work, I think we'd all be better off," he added.

The stakes are high: Shunning a COVID-19 shot could derail efforts to end the pandemic — while any surprise safety problems after one hits the market could reverberate into distrust of other routine vaccines.

On top of rigorous final testing in tens of thousands of people, any COVID-19 vaccines cleared for widespread use will get additional safety evaluation as they're rolled out. Among plans from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: Texting early vaccine recipients to check how they're feeling, daily for the first week and then weekly out to six weeks.

Any vaccine before Election Day is extremely unlikely. Over Trump's objections, the Food and Drug Administration issued clear safety and effectiveness standards that shots must meet — and Commissioner Stephen Hahn insists career scientists, not politicians, will decide each possible vaccine's fate only after all the evidence is debated at a public meeting.

Dr. Anthony Fauci, the top U.S. infectious diseases expert, says that should be reassuring because it means scientists like himself will see all the evidence.

"So the chances of there being secret hanky-panky are almost zero, because everything is going to be transparent," he told The AP.

Here are some things to watch as vaccines get closer to the finish line.

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THERE'S STILL NO GUARANTEE

Furthest along in final-stage testing in the U.S. are a vaccine candidate made by Pfizer Inc. and Germany's BioNTech, and another developed by Moderna Inc. and the National Institutes of Health.

Fauci says "the best bet" is that data about whether one or both work will emerge sometime in November or December.

How soon depends on an independent Data Safety and Monitoring Board -- the only group that can peek at the data before the study's finished. At pre-set time points, the board can analyze the number of infections occurring so far among participants and decide if the study should be stopped early because of strong evidence the vaccine works, or if it's failing, or that it's too soon to know.

EFFECTIVENESS IS ONLY HALF THE STORY

The DSMB also watches for side effects. Many vaccines cause temporary side effects like fever, chills and other flu-like symptoms.

Two other vaccine candidates in final-stage testing in the U.S. have been temporarily halted to investigate additional safety questions. Johnson & Johnson paused its study this week after learning of "an unexplained illness" in one participant, and the company expects it will take a few days to learn if the problem is a side effect or a coincidence.

But testing of AstraZeneca's vaccine has been on hold in the U.S. for over a month after news emerged of neurological illnesses in two British participants. Regulators let AstraZeneca's study resume in Britain and several other countries, but FDA still is deciding.

Stopping those studies "shows you that the system that we have in place to monitor the safety of the vaccines and the rigorous conduct of the trial is in place and it's working," Schaffner said.

Looking back at vaccines for other diseases, side effects show up within two to three months, said FDA vaccine chief Dr. Peter Marks.

So FDA told COVID-19 vaccine makers: If they seek "emergency use authorization" to get their shot to market faster than normal, they still would have to track half the participants for two months after the last dose.

Then it would take FDA several weeks of breakneck work to decide if a COVID-19 vaccine really was suitable for emergency use, Marks said. In contrast, evaluating an application for full approval could take months, as FDA officials comb through fuller records of how participants fared.

EXTRA SAFETY STEPS

Even large final tests won't catch a side effect that happens in, say, 1 in 100,000 people. So there's an early warning system that monitors every vaccine sold in the U.S. to spot unsuspected side effects.

"It's a system that has served us very well," said Dr. Bruce Gellin of the Sabin Vaccine Institute, who once directed the government's National Vaccine Program Office. "But for this unprecedented vaccination campaign, we need to expand" that monitoring.

Once the FDA clears a vaccine, health workers and other essential workers are expected to get the first doses — and they'll have to sign an agreement to do so that includes their cell number and email. The CDC will use those registrations to check how the vaccinated are feeling.

Any health complaint bad enough that they missed work, couldn't do a normal activity or had to seek medical care gets a follow-up probe, said CDC's Dr. Tom Shimabukuro.

Separately, the FDA will be checking giant databases of insurance claims and electronic medical records, to see if people who received vaccine also have an uptick in health care.

And states including New York, Rhode Island and Virginia are forming advisory committees to review the safety of any COVID-19 vaccines that pass FDA.

AP writer Candice Choi and video journalist Federica Narancio contributed to this report.

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On Brazil's tropical island of cats, virus led to starvation

By DIARLEI RODRIGUES and DAVID BILLER Associated Press

MANGARATIBA, Brazil (AP) — All the locals knew the island just west of Rio de Janeiro was teeming with cats. They left food and even brought tourists. Then the coronavirus pandemic hit, and human support dried up, resulting in a gruesome scene witnessed by fishermen: a group of cats devouring others' corpses.

Furtada Island, referred to widely as "Island of the Cats," is 20 minutes by motorboat from the city of Mangaratiba, at one extreme of Brazil's Green Coast, a vast swath of mountainous tropical forest and sandy coves dotted with hundreds of islands.

Over the years, fishermen tossed fish guts and any unneeded catch onto the island, while other kind souls left bowls of water and store-bought cat food. That has helped the island's hundreds of residents stay fed, particularly the recently marooned cats that lack the skills of their wild-born brethren, which climb trees to raid birds' nests.

When the pandemic forced people to quarantine, sunk tourism and shut restaurants that dish up seafood, boat traffic around the island fell sharply — and with it, the food and water deposited there.

Locals didn't realize the horror playing out on the island until the fishermen reported back in April.

"The number of boats fell, the number of tourists, and we saw the condition of those animals on the island," said Jorge de Moraes, 58, who works with a local group that rescues animals from abuse. "So we mobilized."

He and other volunteers asked local businesses for donations. In April, they started installing rudimentary food and water dispensers, made from PVC pipes, and now make weekly trips to restock them.

On Tuesday, as cats milled about, de Moraes and three others filled the dispensers on the small island, where thick vegetation spills down to meet a rocky shore.

"Cats that are recently discarded, they're more sociable. You saw we can get close, pet them," said Joice Puchalski, the coordinator for the volunteer group. "But not the feral ones. They're all hidden, and you see them at night, because of their eyes."

The roughly 250 cats on the island trace their origins to a couple who were the only residents some two decades ago, Puchalski, 47, explained. They decamped, leaving behind their two cats to do what most creatures, left to their own devices on a deserted island, would do. As the cat population grew, people took notice, and some believed they'd found a repository for an urban scourge: unwanted and stray cats.

Authorities are looking into ways to stop people from abandoning animals on the island. It's already a crime, but signs noting that have had little effect.

Karla de Lucas, who oversees animal protection in Rio state, inspected the Island of the Cats in June, and she met with the Navy and environmental authorities to explore punishments, according to a statement at the time. Congress also passed a law last month increasing the penalties for mistreatment of cats and dogs, including up to five years in prison.

There are no springs on the island, and limited drinking water causes frequent kidney problems for the cats, according to Puchalski. But the greatest perils are the pit vipers and their poisonous bites. Opportunistic lizards will also attack and wound kittens. Some cats are injured when boatmen throw them onto the rocks.

The volunteers transport cats to shore as needed, for treatment or surgery. They try to find someone to adopt each animal and, failing that, bring it back to the island so they can attend to others requiring medical attention.

It's a Sisyphean endeavor, Puchalski said.

"We really need someone who can join forces with us to try to heal this criminality that, for us, is cruelty," she said.

Biller reported from Rio de Janeiro.

Pennsylvania becomes a battleground over election security

By MARC LEVY and CHRISTINA A. CASSIDY Associated Press

HARRISBURG, Pa. (AP) — For anxiety over voting and ballot counting in this year's presidential election, it's hard to top Pennsylvania.

Election officials in Philadelphia, home to one-fifth of the state's Democratic voters, have been sued by President Donald Trump's campaign, blasted by the president as overseeing a place "where bad things happen" and forced to explain security measures after a theft from a warehouse full of election equipment.

Add to that an investigation into military ballots that were mistakenly discarded in one swing county, partisan sniping in the state Capitol over the processing of what is expected to be an avalanche of mailed-in ballots and an 11th hour attempt by Republican lawmakers to create an election integrity commission.

One of the most hotly contested presidential battleground states is trying to conduct a pandemic election in a hyper-partisan environment where every move related to the voting process faces unrelenting scrutiny from both sides. State and local election officials say they are doing all they can to make sure Pennsylvania doesn't end up like Florida two decades ago, when the last drawn-out presidential tally ended before the U.S. Supreme Court.

"For years, we have trusted our election officials to be reliable and nonpartisan. Why should we suddenly not trust them?" said Eileen Olmsted with the League of Women Voters of Pennsylvania, a nonpartisan organization that advocates to expand access to voting. "A lot of this is based on the perception of voter fraud, which there is absolutely no evidence of."

In many ways, Pennsylvania election officials are in the same position as their colleagues across the country, with the pandemic forcing them to alter their normal procedures. Other states also are using new voting systems this year and facing lawsuits over election procedures.

But the stakes are higher in Pennsylvania than in most other states. Democratic presidential candidate Joe Biden, a Pennsylvania native, has visited it more than any other state since Sept. 1, and TV spending is higher than in any other state except Florida, according to the political ad tracking firm Kantar/CMAG.

Trump won Pennsylvania narrowly in 2016 — by less than 1 percentage point — to become the first Republican presidential candidate to carry the state since 1988. Tied for the fifth-most electoral votes, it is of the utmost value to both Trump and Biden. Polls show a tight race in Pennsylvania, with Biden holding a single-digit lead, often within the margin of error.

Republicans have signaled that the battle for who wins Pennsylvania's 20 electoral votes could extend past Election Day amid challenges to individual ballots.

"We are seeing the kind of incidents that are likely to happen in every election be blown up to mean there is something fundamentally wrong with Pennsylvania election administration and we can't trust the Department of State or the counties to give us an accurate count," said Suzanne Almeida with Common Cause Pennsylvania, a nonpartisan organization that advocates to expand access to voting. "There are any number of reasons why that's not true."

The biggest challenge could simply be verifying and counting the crush of mail-in ballots, with some 3 million voters expected to request them. That would be over 10 times the number from four years ago. As of Tuesday, more than 2.6 million registered voters had already applied for mail-in ballots.

The Republican-controlled state Legislature has so far refused to allow local election offices to start processing those ballots before Election Day. That all but ensures the vote count will continue for days, if not weeks, and perhaps delay a final result in the presidential election.

Yet for all the accusations, investigations and political fear-mongering, many voters so far say they have had a problem-free experience registering and casting ballots since counties started mailing ballots to voters and opening offices to accept drop-offs late last month. That offers a glimmer of hope that perhaps Pennsylvania will avoid the national spotlight for the wrong reasons on Election Day.

Elzena Hall changed her registration from independent to Democrat and cast her ballot last week at a satellite election office in Philadelphia.

"Switching and registering and voting ... it was like so easy," said Hall, 48, who was given a T-shirt say-

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ing she had voted early.

Susan Stirling, a university academic adviser, had always planned to vote in-person on Election Day because she was concerned about dropping a ballot in the mail. But she had Monday off, so she decided to cast her ballot early at one of the city's election centers.

"It went really quickly and smoothly," she said.

Whether that continues could hinge on several legal cases that remain unresolved. With voting already underway, judges could still decide fundamental questions about running the election and which ballots get counted.

One lawsuit before the U.S. Supreme Court involves a state court order to allow late-arriving mail-in ballots to be counted for up to three days after Election Day. Another involves the Trump campaign's effort to limit the use of drop boxes.

"A huge concern I have is the confusion that outstanding litigation causes with election officials and voters," said Witold J. Walczak, the legal director of the American Civil Liberties Union of Pennsylvania. "Confusion does not promote safe, accessible and secure elections."

The answer seems obvious to Katy Parr, a 30-year-old pursuing a master's degree at the University of Pennsylvania: Just make voting easier.

She's a native of Colorado, one of five states to conduct elections almost entirely by mail. Parr said she was bewildered by the fight over drop boxes, which are used extensively in Colorado.

"It blows my mind how much of a fight it was here to have them," said Parr, who cast her ballot at an election office in Philadelphia this week.

Republicans and the Trump campaign say they are only trying to protect the integrity of the election.

"His position was we have to have an election that is fair, and that every vote is counted and counted the right way," said Bernadette Comfort, Trump's state campaign chair.

Democrats use the same argument to criticize moves by Republicans. That includes lawmakers' attempt to create a GOP-controlled legislative panel to investigate how the election is being conducted. Democrats called it an attempt to "steal the election."

They also want the Republican-dominated legislature to repeal a requirement that mail-in ballots be rejected if voters fail to use a so-called secrecy envelope on the outside. A Philadelphia election official has said missing secrecy envelopes could trigger "electoral chaos" in November with potentially 100,000 or more ballots getting rejected across the state.

"What (Trump) has encouraged people to engage in is the only type of voter fraud that's actually real, and that's voter suppression," said Democratic state Rep. Malcolm Kenyatta, of Philadelphia.

Against this backdrop, election officials are trying to prepare knowing that something is bound to go wrong with some aspect of the election system.

Nick Custodio, a deputy commissioner with Philadelphia's election office, recalled a time two years ago when an election judge who was scheduled to open a polling place fell and broke her hip the morning of the election.

"The polling place didn't open on time because this poor woman was sitting in the snow," Custodio said. "Elections are put on by human beings. We're in a situation where it's gotten worse over the last few years, where anything happens is assumed to be malicious or some outside actor."

When asked what keeps him up at night, Custodio said: "The sheer enormity of it."

Cassidy reported from Atlanta. Associated Press writer Claudia Lauer in Philadelphia contributed to this report.

AP's Advance Voting guide brings you the facts about voting early, by mail or absentee from each state: <https://interactives.ap.org/advance-voting-2020/>

AP Road Trip: Racial tensions in America's 'sundown towns'

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TIM SULLIVAN and NOREEN NASIR Associated Press

VIENNA, Ill. (AP) — Ask around this time-battered Midwestern town, with its empty storefronts, dusty antique shops and businesses that have migrated toward the interstate, and nearly everyone will tell you that Black and white residents get along really well.

"Race isn't a big problem around here," said Bill Stevens, a white retired prison guard with a gentle smile, drinking beer with friends on a summer afternoon. "Never has been, really."

"We don't have any trouble with racism," said a twice-widowed woman, also white, with a meticulously-kept yard and a white picket fence.

But in Vienna, as in hundreds of mostly white towns with similar histories across America, much is left unspoken. Around here, almost no one talks openly about the violence that drove out Black residents nearly 70 years ago, or even whispers the name these places were given: "sundown towns."

Unless they're among the handful of Black residents.

"It's real strange and weird out here sometimes," said Nicholas Lewis, a stay-at-home father. "Every time I walk around, eyes are on me."

The rules of a sundown town were simple: Black people were allowed to pass through during the day or go in to shop or work, but they had to be gone by nightfall. Anyone breaking the rules could risk arrest, a beating or worse.

These towns were an open secret of racial segregation that spilled over much of the nation for at least a century, and still exist in various forms, enforced today more by tradition and fear than by rules.

Across America, some of these towns are now openly wrestling with their histories, publicly acknowledging now-abandoned racist laws or holding racial justice protests. Some old sundown towns are now integrated. But many also still have tiny Black communities living alongside residents who don't bother hiding their cold stares of disapproval.

This story was produced with the support of the Pulitzer Center on Crisis Reporting.

This part of southern Illinois had at least a half-dozen sundown towns. We came here on the second stop of The Associated Press' road trip across America, a reporting journey that three of us are taking to look at how the U.S. has been shaken and shaped by months of protests, the COVID-19 pandemic, an economic crisis and the looming November elections.

We wanted to take a close look at systemic racism, trying to understand how something that is so crushingly obvious to some people can be utterly invisible to others.

So we went to a longtime sundown town.

They were called "grey towns," in some parts of America, "sunset towns" in others. The terms were used by both Black and white people.

Very often, especially in well-to-do suburbs that didn't want to be known as racist, they had no name at all. But they still kept out Black residents. There were hundreds of such towns, scholars say, reaching from New York to Oregon. Perhaps thousands.

James Loewen, a historian who spent years studying sundown towns, found them in the suburbs of Detroit, New York City and Chicago. He found them outside Los Angeles, in midwestern farming villages and in New England summer towns.

Sometimes, the rules were official policies, with signs at the edge of towns warning Black people to be gone by nightfall. More often, everyone - both Black and white - simply knew the unwritten rules.

In this area, near the borders of both Missouri and Kentucky, young Black people were raised to be aware of which towns they should avoid.

"It was something that was known," said James Davis, 27, a Black truck driver from the nearby town of Cairo, which is largely Black. "But also something that our parents taught us growing up."

In places still seen as sundown towns, many Black people now follow their own rules: Avoid them if

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possible, and lock your car doors if you have to drive through. If you stop for gas, look for a well-lit gas station with security cameras.

So it is in Vienna.

"Every time you come into town, or you go into a gas station, or in a store, people look at you," said Victoria Vaughn, a biracial 17-year-old who has been coming to Vienna for years to visit her white grandparents.

"You can feel them looking at you, feel them staring," she said. "I've never had anybody say anything (racist) to me in Vienna, but I've definitely felt the way they felt about me."

She was in Vienna on a recent Saturday to join a rally organized after a group of Vienna High School students created a social media account that included the phrase "hate Black people" in its title. Vaughn and her grandmother were among the 50 or so people who turned out for the rally, along with about 25 counter-protesters.

At first things went well. Protesters and counter-protesters prayed together. They talked calmly about race. But not for long.

"Bullshit!" an older white man shouted at Vaughn, after she said Black people aren't treated equally. "They get the same as the white people get!"

Vaughn, whose grandmother gently pulled her back from the confrontation with the angry older man, isn't surprised that Vienna's white residents don't see racial issues around them. The situation is far more subtle today than when Black residents were forced out.

"Until you live in a Black or brown person's body you're not going to understand," she said. "You have to know somebody who lived it, or live it yourself, to truly understand."

Today it's just an overgrown field, vibrant green from recent rains.

But 60 years ago, there was a small collection of houses along that stretch of 7th Street, where the outer edges of Vienna bump up against Little Cache Creek. Everyone who lived there was Black.

The violence erupted in August, 1954, after the arrest of a 31-year-old resident, Thomas Lee Latham, who was accused of brutally beating an elderly white woman with a soft drink bottle and trying to rape her granddaughter.

"Vienna Negro Held on Charge of Assault With Attempt to Murder," the Vienna Times declared on its front page after Latham was arrested, hours after the attack. The older woman died days later.

A few weeks after his arrest, Latham escaped from jail. Dozens of armed men took to the streets of Vienna and the surrounding fields, backed up by bloodhounds and spotters in low-flying planes.

Within hours, the cluster of Black homes along 7th Street were ablaze, with smoke and flames rising above the town.

A week or so later Latham gave himself up and pleaded guilty. One day after he surrendered, he was sentenced to 180 years in prison.

By then, the town's Black residents were gone.

"The Black community, from that point on, disappeared from Vienna," said Darrel Dexter, a historian and high school teacher who has studied the violence of 1954.

Black people had lived in and around Vienna since the late 1820s or early 1830s, said Dexter. But he estimates that after the fires, perhaps 50 people fled the town. The town later repaid Black residents for their lost homes, the Times reported, though there is no indication anyone was ever prosecuted.

The 1950 census showed 54 Black people living in Vienna.

In 2000, it showed one.

A couple of blocks from the field where Vienna's Black community once lived, down a narrow dead-end street, a grandmother with pink fingernails and an easy laugh watches over an extended family that spans much of America's Black-white divide.

They are not what you'd expect to find here.

"It's our sanctuary," Maribeth Harris said of the street. One of her daughters lives next door. Another

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lives across the street with her boyfriend, Nicholas Lewis. Harris has custody of three grandkids while Lewis cares for the fourth, an 18-month-old in Spiderman pajamas on a recent afternoon.

Harris, her husband and their daughters are white. Lewis is Black. The grandchildren are biracial.

"This is our own little world down here," Harris said, sighing before she begins listing some of the troubles the family has faced. "They just brush everything under the rug."

There was the time one of the kids was called "burned toast" by a classmate. Or when an elderly woman walked past the family at a church dinner and loudly called the children "damn half-breeds."

There was the day the 10-year-old came home with a painful question: "Grandma, why do I have to be Black?"

She and her husband moved to Vienna about 10 years ago from northern Illinois, chasing work and a cheaper cost of living. But with her oldest grandson edging up on adolescence, she knows they should leave soon, before they have to worry about such things as confrontations with police.

"We want to get out of here," she said. "We have to figure out what's good for them. And Vienna won't be good for them."

Lewis joined the little enclave two years ago, expecting a short visit but staying after his girlfriend, one of Harris' daughters, got pregnant.

He's an unassuming man deeply in love with his young son, Nick. If he hasn't felt the sting of outright racism in Vienna, he's exhausted by how residents constantly watch him.

It's complicated, he added, because most people are friendly once they know him. But he also believes his family should leave.

"I don't want my son raised down here," he said. "I don't want him out here where (white people) are all he sees."

They call themselves The Gunsmoke Club.

Their clubhouse, a few miles outside Vienna, is an old gas station, later turned into a convenience store and now a gathering place for a dozen or so friends. It's part workshop, part bar, part informal store. But mostly it's a place for a bunch of gray-haired men to pass the time, drink light beer and relive a sliver of their childhoods every day at noon with reruns of "Gunsmoke," the TV show about a marshal whose steely nerve and Colt revolver kept the peace in the American West.

"That's what formed this nation!," said Rick Warren, a 65-year-old in blue jeans and a T-shirt, only partially joking. "Gunsmoke' and John Wayne!"

This is a deeply conservative part of the nation — 77 percent of the county voted for President Donald Trump in the 2016 elections; just 19 percent went for Hillary Clinton. The Gunsmoke Club reflects that. They are pro-Trump, anti-abortion, virulently against gun control and distrust the coronavirus rules and the media (though after warming up they were very welcoming to us).

For them, race has become an issue twisted far beyond proportion, a cudgel for hypocritical liberals.

"Really, we got a good country, and I think there is probably some racism going on. But I try not to be racist," Stevens, the retired prison guard, said in his gentle drawl about this year's protests over racial injustice. "I think they're overreacting a little bit."

Warren is more blunt, pounding his fist on a particle-board table when he gets really angry.

"I've had Black friends. I've had Black babysitters. I had Black people who took care of me through my childhood," he said. But the easygoing race relations of his youth were lost, he said, when President Lyndon Johnson, who pushed through some of the most important civil rights legislation of the 20th century, "came along and turned it into a bunch of racial bullshit!"

Then there's former President Barack Obama, who speaks regularly about his white mother from Kansas and his Black father from Kenya, but who personally identifies as Black.

"He claims to be Black!" Warren said, pounding the table. "What the hell happened to his white mama?"

Another of the men later pulls back his shirt to show that he now carries a .357-magnum revolver tucked into his jeans, worried about the unrest that occasionally flared during this year's racial protests.

Vienna's own violent history doesn't come up until the men are asked about it.

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Stevens was about 10 when it happened.

"When they burned them out that time, a lot of them just packed their bags and went up north," said Stevens, who said he hated to see Black classmates driven from town.

"For a long time there were very very few Blacks in this county, and then they started easing back in," he said. "We got a few more families in here now, but we get along good."

How many sundown towns remain? It's rarely clear anymore. Openly racist laws are now largely illegal, and few towns want the infamy of being known for keeping out Black people. Scholars often rely now on demographic data, looking carefully at towns that have tiny Black populations.

Loewen, the historian, says the number is clearly dropping, categorizing many as "recovering" sundown towns, where organized resistance to Black residents has ended but the racial divide can remain wide. Vienna would almost certainly fall into that category.

Dexter sees hope in the dozens of towns with racist histories that have held racial justice protests, from the infamous Illinois sundown town of Anna to Howell, Michigan, once home to a powerful Ku Klux Klan leader, which Black Detroit residents have long avoided.

"I do think that there are lots of changes, and progress, being made today. Mostly I think that comes from people talking about the issue," he said. "People didn't want to talk about it before."

But while legal protections and changing mores have lessened the power of sundown towns, there are still plenty of them with well-known racist histories. Sometimes, towns know their violent past keeps racial minorities away. Sometimes, that history makes those minorities avoid them.

"It's not by law" that Black people remain a tiny population in many towns, Dexter said. "It's by tradition." Even in Vienna things are changing.

But ever so slowly.

In 2010, the U.S. census said there were 1,434 people in Vienna. Sixteen of them were Black.

This story has been corrected to change the name of a town to Howell, and not Hopewell, Michigan.

Today in History

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Thursday, Oct. 15, the 289th day of 2020. There are 77 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On Oct. 15, 1976, in the first debate of its kind between vice-presidential nominees, Democrat Walter F. Mondale and Republican Bob Dole faced off in Houston.

On this date:

In 1815, Napoleon Bonaparte, the deposed Emperor of the French, arrived on the British-ruled South Atlantic island of St. Helena, where he spent the last 5 1/2 years of his life in exile.

In 1917, Dutch exotic dancer Mata Hari (Margaretha ZelleGeertruida MacLeod), 41, convicted by a French military court of spying for the Germans, was executed by a firing squad outside Paris. (Maintaining her innocence to the end, Mata Hari refused a blindfold and blew a kiss to her executioners.)

In 1940, Charles Chaplin's first all-talking comedy, "The Great Dictator," a lampoon of Adolf Hitler, opened in New York.

In 1945, the former premier of Vichy France, Pierre Laval, was executed for treason.

In 1946, Nazi war criminal Hermann Goering (GEH'-reeng) fatally poisoned himself hours before he was to have been executed.

In 1954, Hurricane Hazel made landfall on the Carolina coast as a Category 4 storm; Hazel was blamed for some 1,000 deaths in the Caribbean, 95 in the U.S. and 81 in Canada.

In 1966, President Lyndon B. Johnson signed a bill creating the U.S. Department of Transportation. The revolutionary Black Panther Party was founded by Huey Newton and Bobby Seale in Oakland, California.

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In 1969, peace demonstrators staged activities across the country as part of a "moratorium" against the Vietnam War.

In 1991, despite sexual harassment allegations by Anita Hill, the Senate narrowly confirmed the nomination of Clarence Thomas to the U.S. Supreme Court, 52-48.

In 2001, Bethlehem Steel Corp. filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy.

In 2003, eleven people were killed when a Staten Island ferry slammed into a maintenance pier. (The ferry's pilot, who'd blacked out at the controls, later pleaded guilty to eleven counts of manslaughter.)

In 2017, actress and activist Alyssa Milano tweeted that women who had been sexually harassed or assaulted should write "Me too" as a status; within hours, tens of thousands had taken up the #MeToo hashtag (using a phrase that had been introduced 10 years earlier by social activist Tarana Burke.)

Ten years ago: The Obama administration reported that the federal deficit had hit a near-record \$1.3 trillion for the just-completed budget year. Workers hugged, cheered and set off fireworks as a huge drill broke through a last stretch of rock deep in the Swiss Alps for construction of the 35.4-mile Gotthard Base Tunnel; the railway tunnel would go into operation in 2016.

Five years ago: President Barack Obama abandoned his pledge to end America's longest war, announcing plans to keep at least 5,500 U.S. troops in Afghanistan at the end of his term in 2017 and hand the conflict off to his successor. Ken Taylor, Canada's ambassador to Iran who'd sheltered Americans at his residence during the 1979 Iran hostage crisis, died in New York at age 81.

One year ago: Elizabeth Warren, carrying a new status as a front-runner for the Democratic presidential nomination, came under attack from rivals at a debate in Ohio; they accused her of ducking questions about the cost of Medicare for All and her signature wealth tax plan. The Washington Nationals scored seven runs in the first inning on the way to a 7-4 win and a sweep of the St. Louis Cardinals in the National League Championship Series; the wild-card Nationals advanced to the World Series, where they would defeat the Houston Astros. Actor Felicity Huffman reported to a federal prison in California to start a two-week sentence for paying a college admissions consultant to have a proctor correct her daughter's SAT answers. (She was released two days before the end of the sentence.) Newly-elected inductees to the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame included, posthumously, Whitney Houston and The Notorious B.I.G.; they were joined by Depeche Mode, the Doobie Brothers, Nine Inch Nails and T-Rex.

Today's Birthdays: Singer Barry McGuire is 85. Actor Linda Lavin is 83. Rock musician Don Stevenson (Moby Grape) is 78. Baseball Hall of Famer Jim Palmer is 75. Singer-musician Richard Carpenter is 74. Actor Victor Banerjee is 74. Former tennis player Roscoe Tanner is 69. Singer Tito Jackson is 67. Actor-comedian Larry Miller is 67. Actor Jere Burns is 66. Movie director Mira Nair is 63. Britain's Duchess of York, Sarah Ferguson, is 61. Chef Emeril Lagasse (EM'-ur-ul leh-GAH'-see) is 61. Actor Tanya Roberts is 61. Rock musician Mark Reznicek (REHZ'-nih-chehk) is 58. Singer Eric Benet (beh-NAY') is 54. Actor Vanessa Marcil is 52. Singer-actor-TV host Paige Davis is 51. Country singer Kimberly Schlapman (Little Big Town) is 51. Actor Dominic West is 51. Rhythm-and-blues singer Ginuwine (JIHN'-yoo-wyn) is 50. Actor Devon Gummersall is 42. Actor Chris Olivero is 41. Christian singer-actor Jaci (JAK'-ee) Velasquez is 41. Actor Brandon Jay McLaren is 40. Rhythm-and-blues singer Keyshia Cole is 39. Actor Vincent Martella is 28. Actor Bailee Madison is 21.