

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Oct. 22, 2020 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 111 ~ 1 of 97

- [1- This Week](#)
- [2- Water Tower work resumes](#)
- [3-4- Snow Photos](#)
- [5- Covid-19 Update by Marie Miller](#)
- [9- Area COVID-19 Cases](#)
- [10- October 21st COVID-19 UPDATE](#)
- [14- South Dakota COVID-19 Numbers](#)
- [15- Brown County COVID-19 Numbers](#)
- [15- Day County COVID-19 Numbers](#)
- [16- Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs](#)
- [17- Weather Pages](#)
- [21- Daily Devotional](#)
- [22- 2020 Groton Events](#)
- [23- News from the Associated Press](#)



No School In Groton Area Today This week

On Thursday, a newly scheduled match will have Groton Area traveling to Wilmot with a JV match at 6:15 p.m. followed by the varsity match.

On Saturday, the state cross country meet will be held at Yankton Trails in Rapid City (Isaac Smith is a state qualifier). The ACT Testing will be held at GHS on Saturday.



OPEN: Recycling Trailer in Groton

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

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Oct. 22, 2020 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 111 ~ 2 of 97



Sections of the tower were going up on Wednesday. (Photo by Paul Kosel)

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Oct. 22, 2020 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 111 ~ 3 of 97



Something doesn't seem right here. The tree still has its leaves and the snow is falling. (Photo by Paul Kosel)

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Oct. 22, 2020 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 111 ~ 4 of 97



The City of Groton Public Works Dept. was out early this morning removing the newly fallen snow off the streets. (Photo by Paul Kosel)

#241 in a series

Covid-19 Updates: by Marie Miller

Today looks a lot like yesterday; we're in sort of a holding pattern, which, considering the recent trajectory, is actually something of a relief. We are now up to 8,371,100 cases in the US. 57,800 new cases were reported today, a 0.7% increase. There were 1037 deaths reported, our first day over 1000 in two weeks and a 0.5% increase. There have been 221,948 deaths reported so far in the US during this pandemic.

I know I sound like a church-hater, but I have to warn you once again about church attendance, especially when people are not taking precautions. Here's another cautionary tale, this one about a church in Charlotte, North Carolina, where we have at least 68 cases, six of them residents of an assisted living facility, four hospitalizations, and two deaths associated with services a couple of weeks ago. There are 94 more close contacts still being evaluated, and residents of five states have been exposed. There were just nine cases by last weekend, but the numbers have burgeoned since. Over 1000 people were involved with services during the critical week, and although the church tried to ensure mask wearing and social distancing, they reported measures were difficult to enforce. And that lack of cooperation exacerbates what is already a high-risk situation. Here's the thing: If you're going to sit indoors in an enclosed environment with lots of people from other households, you are incurring risk. If those people are speaking, shouting, or singing, the level of risk increases. The longer you're there, the higher the risk. If not every single person is wearing a mask and distancing from other households, the risk is higher yet. I get how important a church family is to folks. I get how important worshiping in a group is. I get how odd it feels to a regular church-goer to stay home on Sunday morning. But dead is dead; you can't make up for that later. I know the goal for believers is to someday see God; but most of us didn't mean we wanted to do it today.

We have new CDC guidance on transmission. You're not going to like it either. There are now data from a CDC study indicating that your exposure to an infected person does not need to be continuous to pose a risk; rather, multiple short exposures to infected people have led to transmission. One person in a contact-tracing investigation was found to have had 22 interactions totaling 17 minutes over eight hours and become infected; those would be less than two-minute interactions, on average. What this means is that, if you spend time with an infected person, even intermittently over a longer period, you are at increased risk; the benchmark 15 minutes do not have to occur all at once. And there's nothing magical about six feet either: Closer is worse, and farther is better.

How you interact matters. Whether the infected person is coughing, wearing a mask, indoors or outdoors, early in their infection or late in it all play into how high-risk an encounter turns out to be. Context matters: A haircut in a salon with only a few people, all of whom are masked, is a far different matter than a brief stop-in at a buzzing bar where people are unmasked and shouting to be heard over the music. A person shedding a lot of virus and actively coughing could infect you as they walk past. Another who is not shedding much might be able to spend a half hour with you. We do not have any guarantees, and there are really no short-cuts to safety. Do all of the things which reduce the risk of infection: wearing a mask, washing your hands, keeping your distance, keeping interactions outdoors, avoiding crowds, staying out of poorly-ventilated spaces. Layer on as many of these things as you can as much of the time as you can. Still, none of this is a guarantee, but it is the very best you can do and it's a whole lot better than ignoring the problem.

There's some very interesting news on the how-this-virus-works front which may have real implications for treatment, but it's pretty complicated news, so we're going to have to lay some groundwork before we get to the gee-whiz portion of our program. I'm going to try to avoid getting too deep into the weeds here, but we need to talk for a moment about a specific piece of your immune response in order to understand what this is all about. The topic is a system of some 30 proteins found in your blood plasma and on the surfaces of your cells called, collectively, the complement system, so called because it complements or supplements all of your other responses. These complement proteins are organized into a hierarchy of what are called cascades; think of these as chemical chain reactions where one thing

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Oct. 22, 2020 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 111 ~ 6 of 97

happens, which triggers the next event, which then sets off another set of events, each step involving a different complement protein and kicking out its own products that set the next step in motion. The start of these cascades is typically the recognition of a pathogen—a disease-causing unit like a bacterium or a virus, and the end-point is the destruction of the pathogen. That destruction can be effected in a few ways. One is promotion of inflammation. I know we're accustomed to thinking of inflammation as a bad thing—and it can be—but inflammation is a means for activating your immune responses so they're more efficient at targeting and destroying invading pathogens. So, properly controlled, inflammation is a valuable tool in your arsenal against infection. Another way is through a process called opsonization, which results in coating the pathogen with chemicals that attract phagocytes (cells that engulf and digest invaders). And the third is through lysis, which involves assembling membrane-penetrating pores called membrane-attack complexes or MACs on the invader's surface; those cause disintegration, or lysis. This complement system is a powerful one designed specifically to destroy cells and viruses, and it is highly protective. There are three means by which the complement system can be activated, the classical pathway, the lectin pathway, and the alternative pathway (APC). The APC, in particular, has a self-reinforcing mechanism built in so that, once it's initiated, a positive feedback loop is generated; this makes it possible that the cascade, once activated, can grow and grow and grow in magnitude, generating really overwhelming activity.

Now, let's consider for a moment the potential downside: the possible threat posed by having in your body a system that can set off runaway inflammatory responses, convince your phagocytes to gobble up and destroy cells, and poke little holes in cells, killing them. A thing to consider here is that you, yourself, are composed of cells. This means having highly efficient cell-destroying stuff running around loose inside your body made of cells could be dangerous. This is particularly problematic when we're talking about the APC, the one with the potent feedback amplification ability. There is a real need to confine its activity to appropriate pathogenic surfaces—the surfaces of bacteria and viruses and not give it a shot at host cell surfaces. That is why, in addition to the activation mechanisms for complement, we also have mechanisms for exerting tight regulation to prevent collateral damage to healthy host tissue. That regulation is imposed at many steps along these pathways where it is checked by inhibitors, chemicals that maintain an intricate balance between the desirable destruction of pathogens and the undesirable possibility of bystander tissue damage.

So now that we understand how complement works, let's talk about this discovery. A group of researchers at Johns Hopkins Medicine, publishing last month in the journal *Blood*, report identifying a means by which viral spike protein (S) blocks a complement-inhibitor protein called factor H. Now, we've talked before about the S proteins on the virus. Spikes are those little knobs you see all over the surface of this virus in all of its many portraits, and the S protein is at the business end of the spikes. S protein is what enables the virus to bind to and get inside your cells where it makes its mischief. Remember, a virus that cannot gain access to a host cell is dead in the water; it has no metabolic or reproductive machinery of its own and cannot, therefore, do anything at all unless it hijacks your cells for the purpose. (If you're a little shaky on those details, have a look at our conversation on that in my Update #25 posted on March 20 at <https://www.facebook.com/marie.schwabmiller/posts/3443290772353971>.)

So here's what this S protein does: It grabs hold of heparan (not to be confused with the anticoagulant heparin—complete different thing) sulfate, a large complex sugar molecule on the surface of cells in your lungs, blood vessels, and the smooth muscle composing most organs. It is this heparan sulfate binding which enables the virus to use angiotensin-converting enzyme 2 (ACE2) as a doorway into your cell so it can replicate. Thing is, this heparan sulfate binding activates the APC which can lead to inflammation and cell destruction if misdirected at healthy organs. Now, normally that's not going to be an issue because something also found on these cells is factor H, which regulates the chemical signals that trigger inflammation and keeps the immune system from harming healthy cells; this is part of that intricate mechanism we talked about a minute ago which keeps the complement system in check so things don't get out of hand. Unfortunately, in order to protect those cells, factor H needs to bind heparan sulfate, and in our situation, the virus, having gotten there first, is blocking the heparan sulfate so factor H can't get into the act. This blocks the complement regulation we were counting on factor H to do for us. What we end up with is a

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Oct. 22, 2020 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 111 ~ 7 of 97

bunch of those MACs poking holes in your cells instead of in the viral envelope where they would do some good. As host cells die from the lytic activity of the MACs, the chemicals they release kick up the inflammatory response; and with no inhibitory activity from factor H, you end up with a runaway response that leads to organ damage and failures. And all of this means, we've figured out one of this virus's important secrets—how it causes the level of tissue damage we're seeing in patients. That's big news because, once we understand what it's doing, we can look for ways to deal with the problem.

And sure enough, that's just where we are. With this knowledge under their belts, the research team turned its attention to solutions, and they landed on another complement protein called factor D. This one's upstream of factor H in the APC, and it turns out if you block factor D, the virus can't activate the APC in the first place because it lacks the products to initiate the next step, so you never get to the point in the cascade where you need factor H at all; this makes the blockage of heparan sulfate a non-issue.

They were able to figure this out because it happens that cell death and organ damage from a mis-directed APC due to factor H suppression is not a new thing with this coronavirus; the same problem happens in some other complement-related diseases like age-related macular degeneration and a rare uremic syndrome caused by blood clots messing with your kidneys. And because this is not an unknown phenomenon, there is already work underway on complement-inhibiting drugs which block factor D. The research team comments that there are such drugs in the pipeline, some within a couple of years of FDA approval. This is an interesting possibility with possible broader applicability to viruses which may emerge in the future—because we're sure there will be another such, probably sooner than we want to think about.

This is week-old news I could have sworn I shared already, but I cannot find it in any of my updates, so I thought I'd pass it along today. Eli Lilly has had a monoclonal antibody treatment in clinical trials for a while now; this would be similar to the Regeneron one also in trials. Lilly has two antibodies it is testing both separately and in a combination therapy. You will recall that monoclonal antibodies are lab-made, highly purified versions of the antibodies you or I might make ourselves in our bodies in response to this virus; this sort of therapy has been quite promising, if very expensive and in short supply. Last week, they announced a pause in their trial which has been recommended by the trial's Data Safety Monitoring Board (DSMB), that body of independent scientists who monitor a clinical trial. We are not clear what the reason was for the pause, but typically, it would be because a volunteer became ill. The company said only, "Safety is of the (utmost) importance to Lilly." So we'll wait around to discover what that is about. This will at least slow down the process of getting this therapy on the market; if the news is bad enough, it could even scuttle the drug. We can hope that doesn't happen; only time will tell.

We have an election coming up in less than two weeks. How do you vote safely during a pandemic? Clearly, the safest method is to vote by mail; but I know many people have become nervous about whether their ballots will arrive on time and about the higher probability a mail-in ballot will be thrown out than an in-person ballot. So if you are unwilling to push your luck with an absentee ballot and have decided in-person voting is for you, what can you do? First, consider voting at times when fewer people will be voting. Early voting is one alternative; when there are many hours available for voting, the number of people in the voting place at any given time is likely to be small. If you choose to vote on Election Day, go during off-hours if you can—during the work day as opposed to before- and after-work hours when there are more likely to be crowds and you're more likely to spend time indoors standing in line. Wear a mask, practice social distancing, and carry hand sanitizer and disinfectant wipes for use in the polling place. Do not engage in conversation; there is plenty of evidence speaking spreads more virus than remaining quiet. Study the ballot in advance so that you can vote quickly; every state has a web site where you can examine the sample ballot to prepare. If there are many items and races on the ballot, consider writing notes on your voting preferences and bringing them with you to the polls so you can move rapidly through your ballot. If there is likely to be a line at your voting place and you are an at-risk person, consider asking a friend to hold your place in line, contacting you at the last minute when your turn is approaching. However you vote, whenever you vote, be sure that you do vote.

This summer, at the height of the protests over the murder of George Floyd, one city that saw some vio-

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Oct. 22, 2020 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 111 ~ 8 of 97

lence was Long Beach, California. Sitting at home watching the news, Zahealea Anderson saw a business neighboring her martial arts school in flames and wanted to rush down there; her husband convinced her to stay home and safe. So the next morning, she dreaded what she would find when she went to work. It was as she had feared: The fire had seriously damaged her school and a number of other businesses. She was able to salvage a few items with sentimental value, but it was mostly soot, ash, debris, and broken glass. This woman who often puts at-risk kids on scholarship because their families can't afford her classes and checks on kids as often as she can to make sure they have enough to eat and somewhere safe to sleep was down and close to out. Often students return to thank her for her training that has kept them safe, even saved their lives. She says, "That's what drives me. For me, it's not about the money." But you can't rebuild a business without money either. She'd been looking forward to reopening as California lifted restrictions; now she's looking at classes in the park while she figures out what's next.

The school, started by her father more than a quarter-century ago, was in ruins. She said, "I felt so hopeless seeing everything I've put my heart and soul into go up in flames. My head was down. A part of me said, 'Yeah, it's a wrap. It's over.'" It might have really been over too except for happenstance. A woman in Michigan, half a country away, Marie Hosep, saw mention of Anderson's plight on Twitter and felt like she'd come home. She had been looking for a way to express her concern after Floyd's death that was more meaningful than marching or posting on social media, and this story struck her as the way to do just that. She said, "I figured why not help this person who has lost her business for no good reason." And so she set up a GoFundMe page and spread the word.

By the time she was able to contact Anderson to explain what she was doing, she had met her goal of \$2000. That certainly wasn't the end of it though. Donations were over \$40,000 by the end of the first day and were over \$100,000 by the next morning. Anderson is staggered by the support. Instead of packing it in, she now has options, thanks to a generous community and a stranger who decided to find a way to do some good in the world. She says, "Everyone keeps telling me I'm going to be the phoenix. I'm going to rise up out of these ashes. Now, I see the possibility."

We need more possibilities, fewer limitations. And we—each of us—can contribute toward that sort of outcome. See what you can do too.

Take care. I'll be back tomorrow.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Oct. 22, 2020 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 111 ~ 9 of 97

Area COVID-19 Cases

	Oct. 21	Oct. 22
Minnesota	125,531	126,591
Nebraska	59,409	60,308
Montana	24,093	
Colorado	87,582	+88,849
Wyoming	8,070	8,305
North Dakota	33,666	34,165
South Dakota	33,836	34,031
United States	8,275,093	8,338,413
US Deaths	221,083	222,220

Minnesota	+1,092	+1,060
Nebraska	+592	+899
Montana	+703	
Colorado	+1,208	+1,267
Wyoming	+146	+235
North Dakota	1,036	+516
South Dakota	+562	+558
United States	+59,515	+63,320
US Deaths	+949	+1,137

	Oct. 14	Oct. 15	Oct. 16	Oct. 17	Oct. 18	Oct. 19	Oct. 20
Minnesota	114,574	115,763	117,106	119,145	121,090	122,812	124,439
Nebraska	53,543	54,467	55,428	56,714	57,334	58,068	58,817
Montana	19,611	20,210	20,933	21,595	22,233	22,821	23,390
Colorado	80,085	80,777	81,918	83,230	84,369	85,302	86,374
Wyoming	6,740	6,914	7,089	7,337	7,479	7,673	7,924
North Dakota	28,245	28,947	29,653	30,414	31,261	31,978	32,637
South Dakota	29,339	30,215	31,012	31,805	32,611	33,269	33,836
United States	7,859,365	7,917,223	7,980,899	8,052,978	8,107,404	8,148,368	8,215,578
US Deaths	215,914	216,904	217,717	218,618	219,311	219,668	220,134
218,							
Minnesota	+1,135	+1,189	+1,343	+2,039	+1,945	+1,722	1,627
Nebraska	+704	+924	+961	1,286	+620	+734	+749
Montana	+486	+599	+723	+662	+638	+588	+569
Colorado	+1,048	+692	+1,141	1,312	+1,139	+933	+1,072
Wyoming	+112	+174	+175	+248	+142	+194	+251
North Dakota	+508	+702	+706	+761	+847	+717	+659
South Dakota	+414	+865	+797	+793	+806	+658	+567
United States	+54,722	+57,858	+63,676	+72,079	+54,426	+40,964	+67,210
US Deaths	+825	+990	+813	+901	+693	+357	+466

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Oct. 22, 2020 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 111 ~ 10 of 97

October 21st COVID-19 UPDATE

Groton Daily Independent from State Health Lab Reports

Three more deaths in South Dakota. Marshall and Miner county each recorded their first deaths and one was in Buffalo County. One was a female and two were males. One in each age group: 80+, 70s and 60s.

Brown County:

Total Positive: +16 (1,817) Positivity Rate: 7.2%

Total Tests: +220 (16,329)

Recovered: +13 (1,443)

Active Cases: -3 (376)

Ever Hospitalized: +1 (91)

Deaths: +0 (4)

Percent Recovered: 79.9

South Dakota:

Positive: +558 (34,031 total) Positivity Rate: 12.0%
Total Tests: 4,666 (380,661 total)
Hospitalized: +46 (2,239 total). 332 currently hospitalized +3)
Deaths: +3 (333 total)
Recovered: +337 (26,023 total)
Active Cases: +300 (8,688)
Percent Recovered: 76.4%
Staffed Hospital Bed Capacity: 12% Covid, 51% Non-Covid, 37% Available
ICU Bed Capacity: 23% Covid, 44% Non-Covid, 33% Available
Ventilator Capacity: 7% Covid, 20% 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: +0 positive, +2 recovered (59 active cases)
Beadle (13): +16 positive, +3 recovered (202 active cases)
Bennett (5): +4 positive, +0 recovered (44 active cases)
Bon Homme (1): +9 positive, +2 recovered (199 active cases)
Brookings (2): +11 positive, +6 recovered (314 active cases)
Brown (4): +16 positive, +13 recovered (376 active cases)
Brule (2): +7 positive, +3 recovered (65 active cases)
Buffalo (4): +5 positive, +3 recovered (32 active cases)

Butte (3): +9 positive, +8 recovered (97 active cases)
Campbell: +2 positive, +1 recovered (35 active cases)
Charles Mix: +4 positive, +8 recovered (82 active cases)
Clark: +8 positive, +0 recovered (33 active cases)
Clay (8): +3 positive, +3 recovered (109 active cases)
Codington (10): +11 positive, +5 recovered (277 active cases)
Corson (1): +5 positive, +0 recovered (33 active cases)
Custer (3): +2 positive, +5 recovered (76 active case)
Davison (4): +13 positive, +9 recovered (274 active cases)
Day (1): +1 positive, +0 recovered (35 active cases)
Deuel: +2 positive, +2 recovered (42 active cases)
Dewey: +1 positive, +1 recovered (129 active cases)
Douglas (4): +1 positive, +1 recovered (45 active cases)
Edmunds (1): +0 positive, +0 recovered (20 active cases)
Fall River (6): +4 positive, +3 recovered (48 active cases)
Faulk (1): +16 positive, +2 recovered (75 active cases)
Grant (2): +4 positive, +1 recovered (87 active cases)
Gregory (8): +4 positive, +1 recovered (39 active cases)
Haakon (1): +2 positive, +1 recovered (27 active case)
Hamlin: +4 positive, +4 recovered (41 active cases)
Hand (1): +3 positive, +0 recovered (22 active cases)
Hanson (1): +0 positive, +1 recovered (20 active cases)
Harding: +4 positive, +1 recovered (31 active cases)
Hughes (5): +6 positive, +3 recovered (131 active cases)
Hutchinson (2): +6 positive, +1 recovered (66 active

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Oct. 22, 2020 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 111 ~ 11 of 97

cases)

Hyde: +1 positive, +0 recovered (11 active cases)
 Jackson (1): +9 positive, +0 recovered (45 active cases)
 Jerauld (6): +0 positive, +0 recovered (20 active cases)
 Jones: +1 positive, +1 recovered (6 active cases)
 Kingsbury (2): +1 positive, +3 recovered (57 active cases)
 Lake (8): +5 positive, +1 recovered (77 active cases)
 Lawrence (5): +17 positive, +9 recovered (179 active cases)
 Lincoln (16): +40 positive, +22 recovered (617 active cases)
 Lyman (4): +1 positive, +0 recovered (20 active cases)
 Marshall (1): +0 positive, +0 recovered (14 active cases)
 McCook (1): +1 positive, +0 recovered (55 active cases)
 McPherson: +3 positive, +0 recovery (19 active case)
 Meade (9): +16 positive, +13 recovered (164 active cases)
 Mellette (1): +1 positive, +0 recovered (12 active cases)
 Miner (1): +4 positive, +2 recovered (70 active cases)

Minnehaha (97): +146 positive, +92 recovered (1911 active cases)
 Moody (2): +3 positive, +0 recovered (58 active cases)
 Oglala Lakota (5): +38 positive, +8 recovered (305 active cases)
 Pennington (45): +55 positive, +41 recovered (856 active cases)
 Perkins: +3 positive, +2 recovered (22 active cases)
 Potter: +3 positive, +1 recovered (23 active cases)
 Roberts (4): +6 positive, +4 recovered (54 active cases)
 Sanborn: +0 positive, +1 recovered (22 active cases)
 Spink (1): +4 positive, +3 recovered (62 active cases)
 Stanley: +1 positive, +3 recovery (20 active cases)
 Sully: +1 positive, +0 recovered (19 active cases)
 Todd (5): +16 positive, +6 recovered (131 active cases)
 Tripp (1): +2 positive, +4 recovered (46 active cases)
 Turner (8): +5 positive, +6 recovered (166 active cases)
 Union (10): +4 positive, +7 recovered (181 active cases)
 Walworth (1): +7 positive, +6 recovered (85 active cases)
 Yankton (5): +10 positive, +6 recovered (181 active cases)
 Ziebach (1): +0 positive, +0 recovered (19 active case)

AGE GROUP OF SOUTH DAKOTA COVID-19 CASES

Age Range	# of Cases	# of Deaths
0-9 years	1091	0
10-19 years	3842	0
20-29 years	7391	2
30-39 years	5867	7
40-49 years	4836	12
50-59 years	4886	29
60-69 years	3780	48
70-79 years	1923	63
80+ years	1428	172

North Dakota Dept. of Health Report
 COVID-19 Daily Report, October 21:

- 9.6% rolling 14-day positivity
- 516 new positives
- 6,176 susceptible test encounters
- 152 currently hospitalized (+7)
- 5,974 active cases (-58)
- 422 total deaths (+10)

SEX OF SOUTH DAKOTA COVID-19 CASES

Sex	# of Cases	# of Deaths
Female	18408	150
Male	16636	183

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Oct. 22, 2020 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 111 ~ 12 of 97

County	Positive Cases	Recovered Cases	Negative Persons	Deceased	Community Spread	% RT-PCR Test Positivity
Aurora	159	100	690	0	Substantial	21.05%
Beadle	1094	879	3796	13	Substantial	21.38%
Bennett	136	86	912	5	Substantial	23.44%
Bon Homme	332	133	1404	1	Substantial	36.19%
Brookings	1242	926	6002	2	Substantial	22.18%
Brown	1823	1443	8362	4	Substantial	21.21%
Brule	228	161	1362	2	Substantial	26.85%
Buffalo	213	177	810	4	Substantial	27.78%
Butte	248	149	2013	3	Substantial	28.50%
Campbell	72	37	154	0	Substantial	39.39%
Charles Mix	320	238	2885	0	Substantial	10.39%
Clark	81	48	658	0	Substantial	18.42%
Clay	724	599	3133	8	Substantial	20.29%
Codington	1296	1009	6218	10	Substantial	21.63%
Corson	139	105	767	1	Substantial	45.95%
Custer	283	202	1623	3	Substantial	30.00%
Davison	753	475	4268	4	Substantial	18.58%
Day	141	105	1171	1	Substantial	19.78%
Deuel	157	115	751	0	Substantial	22.31%
Dewey	276	147	3331	0	Substantial	17.28%
Douglas	151	102	682	4	Substantial	15.09%
Edmunds	126	105	694	1	Moderate	4.53%
Fall River	173	119	1716	6	Substantial	21.60%
Faulk	182	106	508	1	Substantial	28.00%
Grant	273	184	1425	2	Substantial	15.69%
Gregory	186	139	771	8	Substantial	18.10%
Haakon	70	42	409	1	Substantial	9.16%
Hamlin	166	125	1163	0	Substantial	10.55%
Hand	93	70	547	1	Substantial	13.33%
Hanson	68	46	430	1	Moderate	16.42%
Harding	38	7	107	0	Substantial	68.75%
Hughes	750	609	3614	5	Substantial	17.12%

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Oct. 22, 2020 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 111 ~ 13 of 97

Hyde	35	24	289	0	Moderate	21.05%
Jackson	94	49	745	1	Substantial	19.77%
Jerauld	154	128	372	6	Moderate	10.53%
Jones	28	22	120	0	Moderate	43.75%
Kingsbury	149	90	999	2	Substantial	16.20%
Lake	314	229	1778	8	Substantial	26.32%
Lawrence	710	526	5197	5	Substantial	18.91%
Lincoln	2313	1680	12641	16	Substantial	24.32%
Lyman	213	189	1389	4	Substantial	9.64%
Marshall	60	45	749	1	Moderate	17.78%
McCook	188	132	1063	1	Substantial	10.30%
McPherson	59	40	384	0	Moderate	7.30%
Meade	826	653	4761	9	Substantial	15.69%
Mellette	54	41	559	1	Moderate	16.67%
Miner	121	51	396	1	Substantial	34.78%
Minnehaha	9437	7429	49947	97	Substantial	17.86%
Moody	179	119	1053	2	Substantial	23.15%
Oglala Lakota	652	342	5415	5	Substantial	21.47%
Pennington	3742	2841	23302	45	Substantial	12.98%
Perkins	67	45	438	0	Moderate	19.44%
Potter	87	64	580	0	Substantial	10.26%
Roberts	296	238	3173	4	Substantial	16.87%
Sanborn	74	52	410	0	Substantial	25.64%
Spink	227	164	1630	1	Substantial	11.48%
Stanley	76	56	504	0	Substantial	21.74%
Sully	39	20	157	0	Substantial	38.71%
Todd	357	221	3309	5	Substantial	25.00%
Tripp	242	195	1097	1	Substantial	13.15%
Turner	399	225	1764	8	Substantial	23.53%
Union	673	502	3892	10	Substantial	18.67%
Walworth	254	164	1251	1	Substantial	20.89%
Yankton	652	467	5645	5	Substantial	8.42%
Ziebach	81	61	560	1	Moderate	13.64%
Unassigned	0	0	1750	0		

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Oct. 22, 2020 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 111 ~ 14 of 97

South Dakota



Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Oct. 22, 2020 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 111 ~ 15 of 97

Brown County



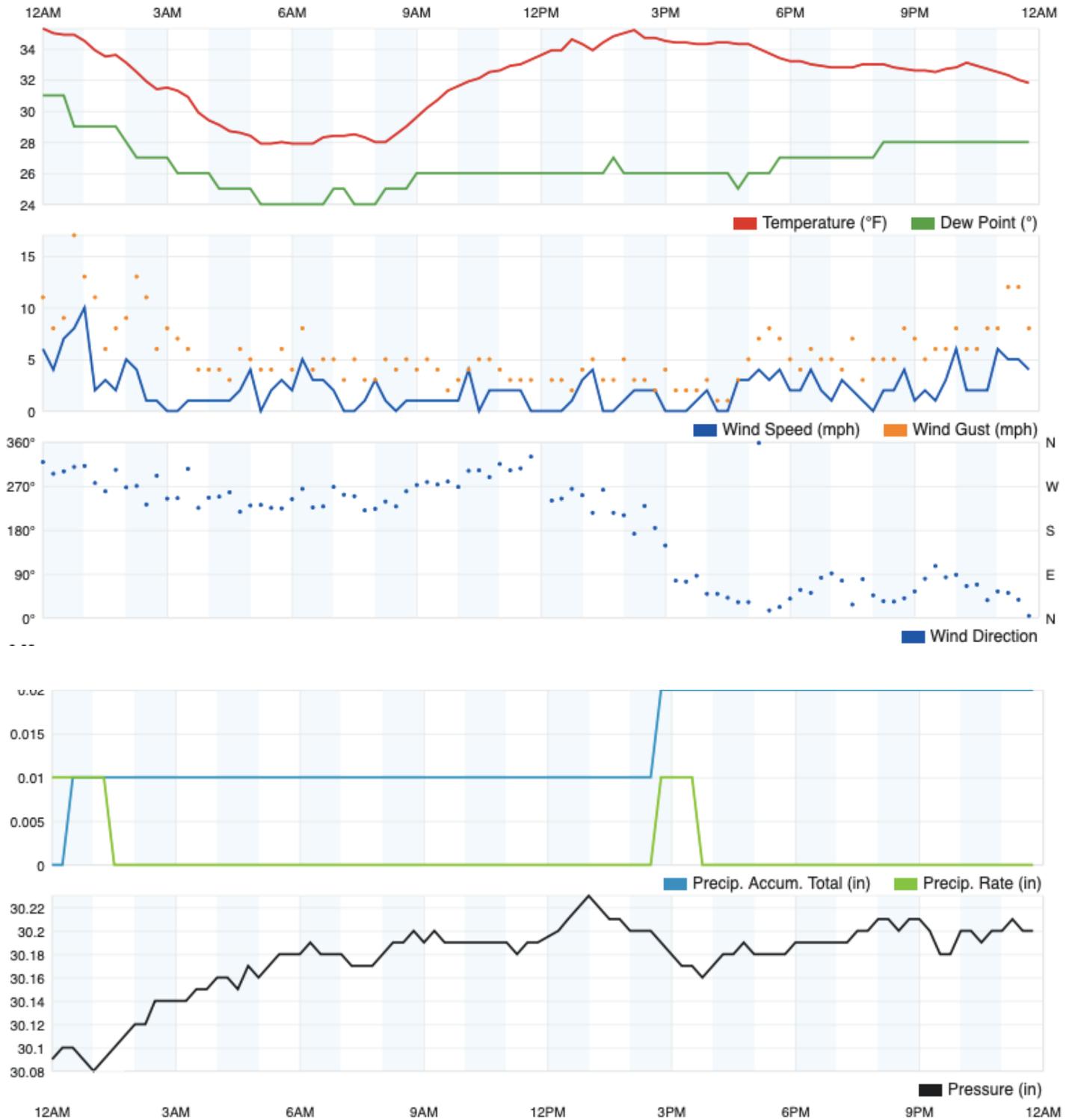
Day County



Groton Daily Independent

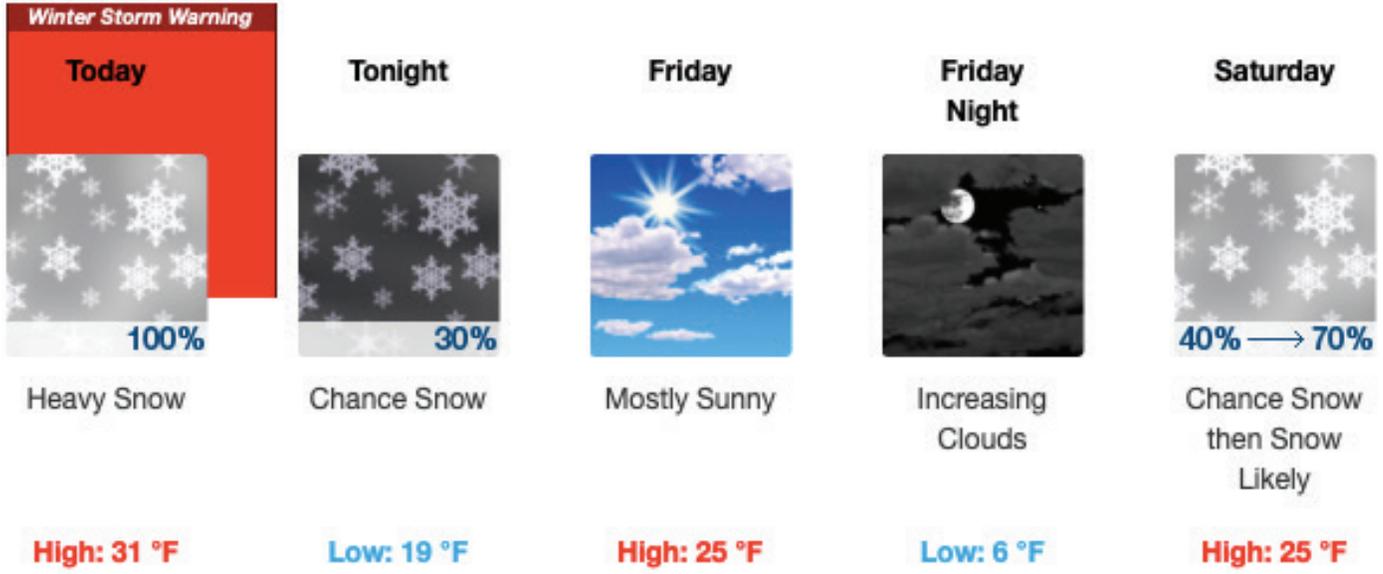
Thursday, Oct. 22, 2020 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 111 ~ 16 of 97

Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



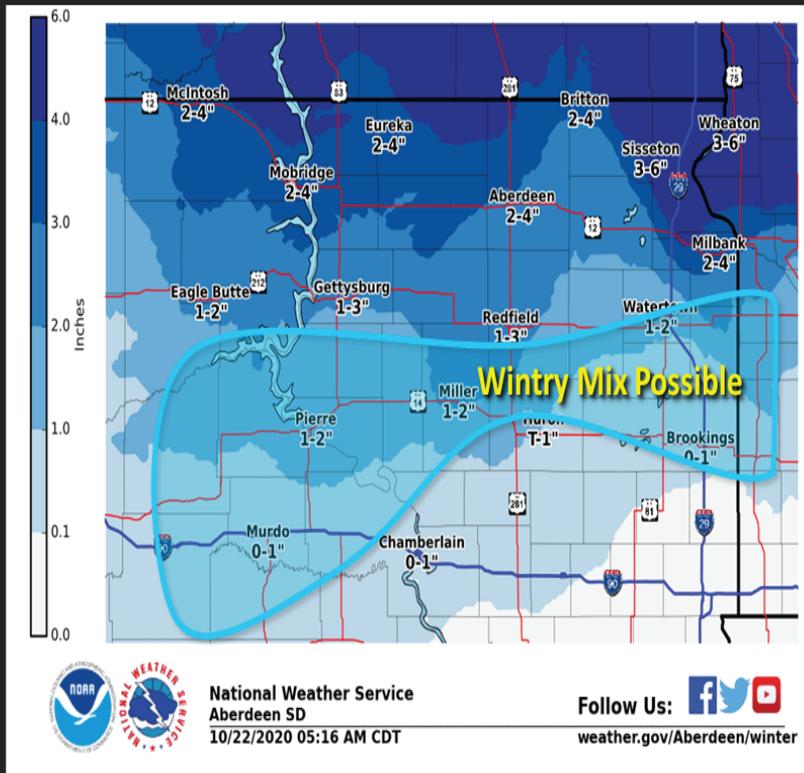
Broton Daily Independent

Thursday, Oct. 22, 2020 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 111 ~ 17 of 97



Additional Snowfall After 7 AM Today

Map Does NOT Include Snow Before 7 AM



National Weather Service Aberdeen, SD

Updated: 10/22/2020 5:32 AM Central

Snow continues today (7am to 10pm) with an additional 2 to 4 inches mainly north of Highway 212. Higher amounts will be possible closer to the ND/SD border. A wintry mix of precipitation will be possible along and south of Highway 212.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Oct. 22, 2020 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 111 ~ 18 of 97

Abnormally Cold and Snowy Weather

Location	Present October Snow Record	Record Low High Oct 26th	Forecast* High Oct 26th	Record Low Oct 27th	Forecast* Low Oct 27th
Aberdeen	16.0" in 1906; 8.5" in 1929	18 in 1919	21	10 in 1919	5
Watertown	12.6" in 1995	29 in 1919	24	12 in 1967	10
Mobridge	8.0" in 1929	31 in 1976	24	7 in 1917	9
Pierre	7.3" in 1970	29 in 1976	24	17 in 1951	8
Sisseton	6.0" in 1995	31 in 1976	26	13 in 1976	10
Wheaton	7.5" in 1951	20 in 1919	24	11 in 1976	7

*Forecast values will change over the coming days



 NATIONAL WEATHER SERVICE
OCEANIC AND ATMOSPHERIC ADMINISTRATION

Updated: 10/21/2020 11:30 AM Central

Monthly total snowfall records for October may fall in some locations this month. In addition, very cold air will settle into the region for Friday through early next week potentially breaking other records. Highlighted in the image are combined total snow records for October as well as the coldest forecast daytime high and nighttime low over the next week and associated records. Various other low (coldest) high temperature, low temperatures, and daily snowfall records are also under threat to fall through early next week.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Oct. 22, 2020 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 111 ~ 19 of 97

Today in Weather History

October 22, 1992: Record heat occurred on this date. Temperatures rose into the upper 70s to the mid-80s across central and northeast South Dakota as well as west central Minnesota. The record highs were 79 degrees at Mobridge and Timber Lake, 80 degrees at Sisseton, 82 degrees at Aberdeen, 83 degrees at Wheaton, and 85 degrees at Pierre. Although not a record high, Kennebec rose to 87 degrees on this date in 1992.

1884: A drought which began in August, extended through September and continued until the last week October brought hardship to Northern, Central, and Eastern Alabama. The 22nd was the first day of general showers, and gentle rains fell from the 26th to the 29th.

1997: Game 4 of the World Series between the Cleveland Indians and the Florida Marlins was the coldest game in World Series history. The official game-time temperature was 38 degrees at Jacobs Field in Cleveland. Wind chills as low as 18 degrees was reported during the game.

1998: Tropical Depression Thirteen formed on October 22 over the southwestern the Caribbean Sea. By the 24th, this tropical depression became Hurricane Mitch. This hurricane would rapidly intensify over the next two days, reaching Category 5 strength on the 26th. Hurricane Mitch would end up being the second deadliest hurricane in the history of the Atlantic Ocean.

1965 - The temperature soared to 104 degrees at San Diego, CA. Southern California was in the midst of a late October heat wave that year. Los Angeles had ten consecutive days with afternoon highs reaching 100 degrees. (David Ludlum) (The Weather Channel)

1985 - A guest on the top floor of a hotel in Seattle, WA, was seriously injured while talking on the phone when lightning struck. Several persons are killed each year when the electrical charge from a lightning bolt travels via telephone wiring. (The Weather Channel)

1987 - Yakutat, AK, surpassed their previous all-time yearly precipitation total of 190 inches. Monthly records were set in June with 17 inches, in September with 70 inches, and in October with more than 40 inches. (Sandra and TI Richard Sanders - 1987) Twenty-two cities in the eastern U.S., most of them in the southeast states, reported record low temperatures for the date. Morning lows of 30 degrees at Athens GA, 28 degrees at Birmingham AL, and 23 degrees at Pinson AL, were the coldest of record for so early in the season. (The National Weather Summary) Showers produced heavy rain in southern California, with amounts ranging up to five inches at Blue Jay. Flash flooding resulted in two deaths, ten injuries, and more than a million dollars damage. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - A "nor'easter" swept across the coast of New England. Winds gusted to 75 mph, and large waves and high tides caused extensive shoreline flooding. A heavy wet snow blanketed much of eastern New York State, with a foot of snow reported in Lewis County. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 - A storm system moving out of the Gulf of Alaska brought rain to the Northern and Central Pacific Coast Region, with snow in some of the mountains of Oregon, and wind gusts to 60 mph along the Oregon coast. Six cities in Florida reported record low temperatures for the date, including Tallahassee with a reading of 34 degrees. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Oct. 22, 2020 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 111 ~ 21 of 97



THE EYE OF THE BEHOLDER

Michelangelo's statue David is considered to be one of the most beautiful sculptures in the world. Many believe it is his most noteworthy accomplishment. Few know its unpromising beginning.

The block of marble from which he fashioned David had been disfigured by another artist. After attempting to "make" something from the marble, he cast it aside as "worthless" and having no potential.

But Michelangelo was not discouraged when he looked at the rejected mass of marble. While another saw only flaws, he saw a future locked up inside a piece of cold, rejected rock that was colored with irregular chisel markings.

There is an important lesson for each of us here. Paul wrote, "Those who become Christians become new persons!" When we accept Christ as our Savior and Lord, He starts a "work" on the inside that will manifest itself on the outside. Through Him, we become brand-new people from the life that is given to us by the Holy Spirit. We are not the same people we once were. God looked at us, saw the potential in us, and began to form us into the likeness of Christ. We are not re-formed, or reshaped, we are, in fact, re-created!

Michelangelo was ultimately limited by the size and shape of the block of marble and his vision. But as new persons in Christ we are only limited by the limits we place on God and what He can do through us!

Prayer: We pray, Father, that our minds and hearts will be open to the limitless potential we have through You. May we grow into the likeness of Christ through You. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: This means that anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person. The old life is gone; a new life has begun! 2 Corinthians 5:17

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Oct. 22, 2020 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 111 ~ 22 of 97

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
- 10/30/2020 Groton United Methodist Trunk or Treat at church parking lot
- **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

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Oct. 22, 2020 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 111 ~ 23 of 97

News from the Associated Press

SD Lottery

By The Associated Press undefined

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

Dakota Cash

02-05-22-28-30

(two, five, twenty-two, twenty-eight, thirty)

Estimated jackpot: \$285,000

Lotto America

01-35-36-37-46, Star Ball: 9, ASB: 3

(one, thirty-five, thirty-six, thirty-seven, forty-six; Star Ball: nine; ASB: three)

Estimated jackpot: \$2.85 million

Mega Millions

Estimated jackpot: \$97 million

Powerball

01-03-13-44-56, Powerball: 26, Power Play: 3

(one, three, thirteen, forty-four, fifty-six; Powerball: twenty-six; Power Play: three)

Estimated jackpot: \$91 million

Editorial Roundup: Excerpts from South Dakota editorials

By The Associated Press undefined

Yankton Press and Dakotans, Yankton, Oct. 19

Does AT&T have Plan B on cell tower issue?

There was an odd feeling in the air last week after the Yankton County Planning Commission rejected a request for a conditional-use permit tied to the construction of a cell tower just north of Lewis & Clark Lake.

Even though the permit needed to build the 199-foot tower was denied, it was clear that many of the people on either side of the issue still wanted the applicant, AT&T, to be part of life in the lake area.

As such, AT&T is probably exploring its next options, which can range from filing a lawsuit against the county to secure the permit for its preferred site or selecting another site to build the tower, which would provide much better wireless service to the lake area. Thus, the commission's rejection probably isn't the end of the story.

It feels odd because this county has become accustomed to emotional battles over concentrated animal feedlot operations (CAFOs), an issue that usually stirs very strong, polarizing feelings whenever it takes the spotlight.

For the cell tower, the main point of contention is the site, for which the permit was rejected primarily over road access issues. Some opponents also objected to having such a tower in their vicinity, which is a common complaint with similar structures everywhere.

No one, however, denied what such a tower can do for the lake area, for it would provide much better wireless service.

Proponents of the cell tower's proposed location declared their support in messages submitted to the commission because of what it could mean for lake-area residents and for the nearly 2 million people who visit the park annually.

"There is a need for improved cell phone connectivity throughout the campground, especially west of the Gavins section of the park," District Park Supervisor Shane Bertsch wrote in one submission. "The improved coverage will enhance our park visitors' experience, allow (people) to work remotely and will allow them to call first responders in case of an emergency."

Added Kasi Haberman of the Yankton Convention and Visitors Bureau: "It is imperative that our visitors'

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Oct. 22, 2020 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 111 ~ 24 of 97

first experience in Yankton does not showcase its lack of quality cell phone connectivity, indicating that Yankton is not keeping up with today's technology. Rather, the connectivity in the lake area should surpass today's expectations, proving that Yankton is on the cutting edge of technology and that we truly care about our visitor's experiences and safety."

Even opponents of building a tower at its proposed location see the importance of AT&T's service.

"I am definitely in favor of AT&T building a new tower and getting better cell coverage in the lake area," said local resident Todd Huber. "But AT&T did not perform the necessary due diligence in selection of a cell tower site."

Ultimately, Yankton Planning Commissioner/County Commissioner Dan Klimisch echoed the sentiment: "AT&T, we want you in our community. We want internet, but it has to be in the appropriate spot."

So, this story figures to be far from over. If AT&T didn't have a Plan B, it needs to find one. While the permit failed, this effort can still turn out well for everyone.

Madison Daily Leader, Madison, Oct. 20

County roads plan moving in right direction

There appears to be a consensus that Lake County roads need improvement. That isn't new. But the approach is changing, and we think it's for the better.

Maintaining county roads and bridges is complicated and expensive. Our climate is particularly hard on roads, and heavier vehicles are running on roads that weren't designed for that weight.

Some of Lake County's roads date back more than a century and were constructed with little engineering in mind. County roads connect to, and are mixed in with, state highways, city streets, township roads and private drives.

Traffic patterns change, also, with development and changing agriculture uses. Roads that were rarely used can now be heavily trafficked.

So amidst all these changes, Lake County commissioners file a five-year plan each year with the South Dakota Department of Transportation, listing maintenance and repair activities, bridge replacement, estimated costs and funding sources. It's a challenge to prioritize when there are many needs and a budget to stay within.

But we think current activity and the upcoming plan show the possibility of making progress in coming years. Most controversial is the "depaving" of eight miles of county roads, converting them to gravel. County staff determined that they are essentially unrepairable and need to start over.

The traditional goal of overlaying five miles a year is also being reconsidered. Only one mile is scheduled for 2021, with money shifted to replacing culverts that are failing. We think this is a sound decision. Five miles was an arbitrary number, and we need to be more calculating in how to spend tax money on roads.

County Highway Superintendent Nels Nelson worked at the state Department of Transportation, which went through its own reprioritizing during the Daugaard administration. That experience should help here.

Lake County residents will need a lot of patience in coming years as roads are slowly repaired, maintained and rebuilt. But we do think progress is on the horizon.

South Dakota's Noem reports cash flow from national profile

SIoux FALLS, S.D. (AP) — South Dakota Gov. Kristi Noem reported a relatively large haul of campaign cash this year as she vaulted to prominence in conservative circles nationwide for her hands-off approach to the pandemic.

The Republican governor's state is currently suffering through one of the worst surges in the country, but she has downplayed the severity of the virus and campaigned across the country as a surrogate for President Donald Trump. The Argus Leader reported that Noem has cashed in on her nationwide appearances, with her gubernatorial campaign committee raising more than \$850,000 between May 17 and Oct. 14.

That's a big uptick from the \$136,000 she raised from January to May, and more money appears to be headed her way. She attended a private fundraiser in Texas on Monday with recommended contributions

ranging from \$1,000 to \$8,000. On Wednesday, her campaign organized a reception in Pierre with a suggested contribution of \$1,000.

Noem's campaign is also selling T-shirts that say, "Less COVID More Hunting," borrowing a line she used in a recent Twitter video in which she shot a bird. Her staff has pointed out that she is using the newfound fame to pitch the state's tourism and business offerings.

But the T-shirts and Noem's refusal to step up her messaging on the seriousness of the pandemic as deaths mount this month has drawn blowback from critics.

"Our healthcare workers are exhausted and South Dakotans are dying daily," said Democratic Party vice-chair Nikki Gronli in a statement. "I can't believe she's treating these deaths as a joke. This is truly tasteless."

Noem reported donors from 41 different states and Washington, D.C., in her latest campaign finance report. About \$110,000 of the fundraising came from small gifts that were \$100 or less. One of the largest donations was \$100,000 from the Republican Governors Association's RGA Right Direction PAC

South Dakota reports 332 COVID-19 hospitalizations

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — The number of people hospitalized by COVID-19 climbed to a new high in South Dakota on Wednesday as 332 people received hospital care.

Health officials also reported three more deaths from the virus, along with 582 more cases. The state has ranked second in the country for new cases per capita in the last two weeks, according to Johns Hopkins researchers. There were 1,086 new cases per 100,000 people, meaning that one in every 92 people in the state has been infected in the last two weeks alone.

The surge in cases has prompted the Department of Health to scale up its staff for contact tracing, activating National Guard members to work as contact tracing investigators. Health officials are relying on schools, tribes and some health care providers to assist contact tracing efforts, said Secretary of Health Kim Malsam-Rysdon

She said the National Guard is also ready to set up 100-bed field hospitals, though they are not needed currently. The Department of Health reported that about 37% of general-care hospital beds and 33% of Intensive Care Units are available.

The state's two largest hospital systems have adjusted some of their elective procedures to free up space and staff to handle the influx of patients.

Viewers' Guide: After chaotic debate, Trump, Biden try again

By MICHELLE L. PRICE Associated Press

After meeting last month in perhaps the most chaotic debate in modern history, President Donald Trump and his Democratic rival, Joe Biden, will take the stage Thursday to give it another go.

The bar to improve upon their last prime-time meeting is low: Their first debate was punctuated by frequent interruptions, mostly from Trump, leaving the two men talking over each other and Biden eventually telling the president to "shut up." A planned second debate didn't happen after the Republican president was diagnosed with the coronavirus and refused to participate in a virtual format. Biden and Trump instead participated in dueling town halls on competing television networks.

Thursday's debate, starting at 9 p.m. EDT, from Nashville, Tennessee, marks the candidates' second and final face-to-face meeting, with Election Day less than two weeks away.

Here's what to watch:

MUTED MICROPHONES

After viewers of the last presidential debate bemoaned the moderator's inability to cut off the candidates' microphones, the nonpartisan Commission on Presidential Debates responded with an announcement this week that each candidate's microphone will be turned off while his opponent gives a two-minute answer to an initial question on each debate topic.

After those initial replies, the microphones will stay on during open discussion, leaving it likely there will

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Oct. 22, 2020 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 111 ~ 26 of 97

still be lots of crosstalk during rebuttals.

CORONAVIRUS

Since the last debate, Trump was diagnosed with and hospitalized for COVID-19. The Republican has cast the virus and his own infection in positive terms, resumed holding large campaign rallies and attacked the government's top infectious-disease expert, Dr. Anthony Fauci. Biden, who has portrayed the Trump administration's response as an abject failure, has taken a much more cautious approach. He regularly wears a mask, holds small in-person campaign events and releases his COVID-19 test results, which have been negative. Look for them to focus on personal choices as much as their differing policy plans.

FAMILY AND PERSONAL ATTACKS

The president for months has been making accusations of corruption against Biden and has lately intensified his focus on unverified claims about Biden's son Hunter. During the last debate, the president did not shy away from bringing up Biden's family, targeting the former vice president's son for his history of substance misuse, and attacked Biden's intelligence.

Biden aides anticipate Trump will again level searing personal attacks during the debate. The Democrat is expected to try to redirect to his core argument that Trump is unfit for the job.

RACE

Following a summer marked by protests across the country over racial injustice, Trump has repeatedly portrayed himself as a greater champion for Black Americans than Biden is while emphasizing a law-and-order theme. But during the last debate, Trump gave a reluctant answer when asked if he would condemn white supremacists, and he refused to outright condemn a far-right fascist group, instead telling them to "stand back and stand by."

Biden, who frequently acknowledges systemic racism, has accused the president of encouraging a rise of white supremacy and armed militias and cites Trump's comments that there were "very fine people" on both sides of a 2017 white supremacist rally in Charlottesville, Virginia, as the impetus for his presidential run.

Look for the Democrat to continue hitting those themes while Trump casts Biden as responsible for helping send millions of Black Americans to prison with a 1994 crime law when Biden was a senator.

LEADERSHIP AND NATIONAL SECURITY

Look for Trump to continue promoting his "America First" policies, which have pulled the U.S. out of multilateral agreements that he maintains were not in the country's interests. He's also likely to highlight construction of more than 200 miles (320 kilometers) of his promised wall along the U.S.-Mexico border and recently brokered deals normalizing relations between Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates and Israel.

Biden has accused the president of alienating long-standing U.S. allies. Expect him to focus on Trump's efforts to sustain a relationship with Vladimir Putin's Russia despite warnings from U.S. intelligence agencies that Russia interfered in the 2016 U.S. presidential election and allegations that Russia offered secret bounties for American deaths in Afghanistan.

IMMIGRATION

Immigration isn't among the featured topics expected during the debate, but look to whether Biden seeks to raise the issue on the heels of a report this week that court-appointed lawyers have been unable to find the parents of 545 children separated at the U.S.-Mexico border early in the Trump administration. Biden has repeatedly slammed Trump's immigration policies, something that Trump featured prominently in his 2016 campaign.

MODERATOR AND FORMAT

The debate will be moderated by NBC News White House correspondent Kristen Welker. Welker will be the first Black woman to serve as the moderator of a presidential debate since Carole Simpson in 1992.

The debate be divided into six 15-minute segments, each on a topic selected by Welker: "Fighting COVID-19," "American Families," "Race in America," "Climate Change," "National Security" and "Leadership."

Trump and Biden will each have his microphone cut off while his rival delivers an opening two-minute answer to each of the six debate topics, the commission announced. The mute button won't figure into the open discussion portion of the debate.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Oct. 22, 2020 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 111 ~ 27 of 97

HOW TO WATCH

The 90-minute debate will start at 9 p.m. EDT and will be aired on major networks and cable news channels including ABC, CBS, CNN, Fox, Fox News Channel, Fox Business Network, PBS, NBC, MSNBC, Noticias Telemundo and C-SPAN. Most of the networks will offer a way to watch the debate live online, through their apps and accounts on YouTube and other social media channels.

Associated Press writer Bill Barrow in Atlanta contributed to this report.

Some world leaders have big stake in US election

By JOSEF FEDERMAN Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — While the world will be closely watching the U.S. election, some countries will be watching more closely than others.

A number of world leaders have a personal stake in the outcome, with their fortunes depending heavily on the success – or failure – of President Donald Trump.

Perhaps none has so much riding on a Trump victory as Israel's prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu. The Israeli leader, who had a rocky relationship with President Barack Obama, has praised Trump as "the greatest friend" Israel ever had in the White House.

Trump has delivered a series of diplomatic gifts to Netanyahu, recognizing Jerusalem as Israel's capital, withdrawing from Obama's nuclear deal with Iran and offering a Mideast plan that heavily favors Israel over the Palestinians. The White House brokered the establishment of diplomatic ties between Israel and the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain.

But Netanyahu's close relationship with Trump — and more broadly the Republican party and its evangelical Christian base — has come with a price. It has undercut Israel's traditional bipartisan support in Washington and alienated many Democrats, especially the rising progressive wing, and the largely liberal Jewish American community.

"For Netanyahu, a Biden victory would be a disaster," said Eytan Gilboa, an expert on U.S.-Israel relations at Israel's Bar Ilan University. He noted that Biden has already promised a different approach to Iran and the Palestinians.

Sidelined and humiliated by Trump, the Palestinians have made no secret about their hopes for a Biden victory.

"If we are going to live another four years with President Trump, God help us," the Palestinian prime minister, Mohammad Shtayyeh, said last week.

Here is a look at some of the other world leaders who have a big stake in the U.S. election:

BRITAIN'S BORIS JOHNSON

The Conservative prime minister's bombastic style and populist instincts have often been compared to Trump's and the two have struck a friendly relationship. Trump has called the British leader a "great guy."

Trump's enthusiasm for Brexit helped Johnson talk up the prospect of securing a quick U.S. trade deal now that Britain has left the European Union.

Kim Darroch, who was the British ambassador to Washington until 2019, said recently that Johnson would likely be Trump's "best friend in Europe" if the president is reelected.

Still, London and Washington differ on many international issues, and a Biden victory could restore relative normality in trans-Atlantic relations.

CHINA'S XI JINPING

For the Chinese leader, a second Trump term would bring a continuation of the bruising trade disputes, diplomatic jousting, and near-daily accusations against China on issues from human rights to the environment and the South China Sea.

Trump's onslaught has offered Xi an opportunity to portray the U.S. as a declining democracy coping with racial unrest and a bungled response to the coronavirus.

Under Biden, the U.S. may move closer to its allies and reengage with international organizations that

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Oct. 22, 2020 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 111 ~ 28 of 97

might make demands of China. But Biden would bring a level of predictability and normalcy that Chinese leaders prefer and lessen the chances of outright confrontation.

INDIA'S NARENDRA MODI

The right-wing populist prime minister and Trump are known for a similar style of leadership deeply rooted in using nationalist sentiments.

Critics say Trump has looked the other way while Modi carries out a Hindu nationalist agenda at the expense of Indian minorities. A victory could embolden Modi to continue his harshly criticized policies with little scrutiny from Washington.

In contrast, Biden and running mate Kamala Harris, whose mother was Indian, have been vocal about India's controversial decision to revoke the Muslim-majority region of Kashmir's semi-autonomy, the state of religious freedom in the country, press freedom violations and a new citizenship law seen as discriminatory toward Muslims.

GULF RULERS

Saudi Arabia's King Salman and Crown Prince Mohammed bin Zayed, the de facto ruler of the United Arab Emirates, were no big fans of the Obama administration. Their countries welcomed Trump's withdrawal from the Iran nuclear deal and the imposing of sanctions that have sent Iran's economy into a freefall.

Trump also stood by Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman in the face of sharp criticism after the killing of Washington Post writer Jamal Khashoggi by Saudi agents in late 2018. Trump vetoed a Senate resolution that would have ended U.S. support for the Saudi and UAE-led war in Yemen, which has created the world's most devastating humanitarian crisis.

The Mideast monarchs fear Biden could be an extension of the Obama era, with renewed engagement with Iran and greater concern for human rights.

IRAN'S AYATOLLAH ALI KHAMENEI

Iran's supreme leader has suffered the equivalent of diplomatic whiplash between the Obama and Trump administrations.

People crowded the streets to praise the 2015 nuclear deal, hoping for normalized ties with the West. Trump's unilateral withdrawal from the deal subsequently led to Iran resuming nuclear activities. Tensions ratcheted up in a series of incidents culminating in with an Iranian missile attack on U.S. forces in Iraq after an American drone strike killed a top Iranian general.

Biden has said that he's willing to sit back down with Iran if it honors the limits of the nuclear deal. Another Trump term could see tensions again return to a boil.

THE PHILIPPINES' RODRIGO DUTERTE

Regarded by some as Asia's Trump for his unorthodox political style and brash language, Duterte has nurtured friendly ties with the U.S. leader and even called on American Filipinos to vote for Trump.

Trump, in contrast to Obama, has not publicly raised alarm over the Philippines' deadly anti-drug crackdown. The tough-talking Duterte once said in a speech that Obama could "go to hell."

A Biden victory could potentially bring a more adversarial relationship.

VENEZUELA'S NICOLAS MADURO

The embattled Venezuelan president expects no relief no matter who wins the White House.

Accused of authoritarian rule, Maduro oversees one of history's most abysmal economic collapses, sparking the flight of 5 million Venezuelans from the country.

Trump has imposed stiff economic sanctions and endorsed opposition politician Juan Guaidó. U.S. justice officials also indicted Maduro, labelling him as a narco-terrorist with a \$15 million bounty for his arrest.

Biden has called Maduro a "dictator" and vowed to keep up the pressure.

"If Trump wins the elections, we'll face him and defeat him," Maduro said recently. "And if Biden wins, we will also take him on and overcome."

BRAZIL'S JAIR BOLSONARO

Bolsonaro has consistently sought to curry Trump's favor, and this week expressed his desire to see him win reelection.

His son, Eduardo Bolsonaro, a lawmaker, was photographed wearing a TRUMP 2020 hat, and the Ameri-

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Oct. 22, 2020 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 111 ~ 29 of 97

can flag has become a fixture at pro-Bolsonaro rallies.

The Brazilian president took office with pledges to cut environmental red tape and facilitate development, particularly in the Amazon. Trump has kept silent regarding man-made fires in the Amazon rainforest, in contrast with some of his European counterparts.

Already there are signs Biden would be more proactive on pushing Brazil to protect its environment.

Jon Gambrell and Aya Batrawy in Dubai, United Arab Emirates; Christiana Sciaudone and David Biller in Sao Paulo; Scott Smith in Caracas, Venezuela; Sheikh Saaliq in New Delhi; Jill Lawless in London; Christopher Bodeen in Beijing; and Jim Gomez in Manila, Philippines contributed reporting.

Election 2020 Today: Trump, Biden face off; spoofed emails

By The Associated Press undefined

Here's what's happening Thursday in Election 2020, 12 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 and Democratic challenger Joe Biden will be in Nashville, Tennessee. Vice President Mike Pence will be in Michigan and Indiana.

TODAY'S TOP STORIES:

FACE TO FACE: Trump and Biden are set to square off in their final debate. It's one of the last high-profile opportunities for the trailing president to change the trajectory of an increasingly contentious campaign. Some Trump advisers are urging him to trade his aggressive demeanor for a lower-key style, hoping Biden will get himself in trouble with verbal gaffes. In an effort to curtail interruptions, Trump and Biden will each have his microphone cut off while his rival delivers an opening two-minute answer to each of the six debate topics.

SPOOFED EMAILS: U.S. officials have accused Iran of being behind a flurry of emails sent to Democratic voters in multiple battleground states that appeared to be aimed at intimidating them into voting for the Republican president. The officials did not lay out specific evidence for how they came to pinpoint Iran, but the activities attributed to Tehran would mark a significant escalation for a country some cybersecurity experts regard as a second-rate player in online espionage.

BARRETT PUSH: Despite a Democratic boycott, Republicans are powering ahead to confirm Judge Amy Coney Barrett to the Supreme Court by Election Day. The Senate Judiciary Committee is set to vote to recommend Trump's nominee to the full Senate. Never before has the Senate confirmed a high court pick so close to a presidential election. The Senate is planning a rare weekend session to push the Indiana judge's nomination forward. Final confirmation by the Senate is expected Monday.

PATH TO 270: Trump still has a path to the 270 Electoral College votes he needs to win reelection. But it requires everything to break in his direction again. His most likely route would be to win two crucial states: Pennsylvania and Florida. If he can win there and hold onto North Carolina and Arizona — while playing defense in Georgia and Ohio — he will win.

ANXIOUS LEADERS: While the world will be closely watching the U.S. election, some countries will be watching more closely than others. A number of prominent world leaders have a personal stake in the outcome of the race, with their fortunes depending heavily on the success — or failure — of Trump. Perhaps none has so much riding on a Trump victory as Israel's prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu. The Israeli leader, who had a rocky relationship with President Barack Obama, has praised Trump as "the greatest friend" Israel has ever had in the White House.

ALABAMA VOTING: The Supreme Court has put on hold a lower court order that would have permitted curbside voting in Alabama in November. The justices' vote was 5-3, with the court's three liberals dissenting. It was unclear how many counties might have offered curbside voting, allowing people to vote from their car by handing their ballot to a poll worker.

QUOTABLE: "You should be confident that your vote counts. Early, unverified claims to the contrary should be viewed with a healthy dose of skepticism." — FBI Director Chris Wray, insisting that the integrity of the

2020 U.S. election is still sound.

ICYMI:

AP-NORC/USAFacts poll: Many in US distrust campaign info

In pitch for Biden, Obama urges voters to cast Trump out

Biden's lessons learned: spending time, money in Midwest

Trump the dancer? His moves to 'YMCA' at rallies are a hit

US officials link Iran to emails meant to intimidate voters

By ERIC TUCKER and FRANK BAJAK Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — U.S. officials have accused Iran of being behind a flurry of emails sent to Democratic voters in multiple battleground states that appeared to be aimed at intimidating them into voting for President Donald Trump.

The officials did not lay out specific evidence for how they came to pinpoint Iran, but the activities attributed to Tehran would mark a significant escalation for a country some cybersecurity experts regard as a second-rate player in online espionage. The announcement was made late Wednesday at a hastily called news conference 13 days before the election.

The allegations underscored the U.S. government's concern about efforts by foreign countries to influence the election by spreading false information meant to suppress voter turnout and undermine American confidence in the vote. Such direct attempts to sway public opinion are more commonly associated with Moscow, which conducted a covert social media campaign in 2016 aimed at sowing discord and is again interfering this year, but the idea that Iran could be responsible suggested that those tactics have been adopted by other nations, too.

"These actions are desperate attempts by desperate adversaries," said John Ratcliffe, the government's top intelligence official, who, along with FBI Director Chris Wray, insisted that the U.S. would impose costs on any foreign countries that interfere in the 2020 U.S. election and that the integrity of the election is still sound.

"You should be confident that your vote counts," Wray said. "Early, unverified claims to the contrary should be viewed with a healthy dose of skepticism."

The two officials called out Russia and Iran for having obtained voter registration information, though such data is sometimes easily accessible and there was no allegation either country had hacked a database for it. Iran used the information to push out spoofed emails, officials said, and created a video that Ratcliffe said falsely suggested that voters could cast fraudulent ballots from overseas.

Wray and Ratcliffe did not describe the emails linked to Iran, but officials familiar with the matter said the U.S. has linked Tehran to messages sent to Democratic voters in at least four states, including battleground locations like Pennsylvania, Florida and Arizona. The emails falsely purported to be from the far-right group Proud Boys and warned that "we will come after you" if the recipients didn't vote for Trump.

Though Democratic voters were targeted, Ratcliffe said the spoofed emails were intended to hurt Trump in the contest against Democrat Joe Biden, though he did not elaborate on how. It would not be the first time that the Trump administration has said Tehran is working against the Republican president.

An intelligence assessment released in August said: "Iran seeks to undermine U.S. democratic institutions, President Trump, and to divide the country in advance of the 2020 elections. Iran's efforts along these lines probably will focus on online influence, such as spreading disinformation on social media and recirculating anti-U.S. content."

A spokesman for Iran's mission to the United Nations, Alireza Miryousefi, denied Tehran had anything to do with the alleged voter intimidation.

"Unlike the U.S., Iran does not interfere in other country's elections," Miryousefi wrote on Twitter. "The world has been witnessing U.S.' own desperate public attempts to question the outcome of its own elections at the highest level."

Iran's Foreign Ministry summoned the Swiss ambassador on Thursday over the allegations. The Swiss

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Oct. 22, 2020 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 111 ~ 31 of 97

Embassy has overseen America's interests in Tehran since the aftermath of the 1979 hostage crisis.

"The Islamic Republic of Iran, while rejecting the allegations and the fake reports, again emphasizes that there's no difference for Tehran which candidate goes to the White House," the ministry said in a statement.

Trump, speaking at a rally in North Carolina, made no reference to the announcement, but he repeated a familiar campaign assertion that Iran is opposed to his reelection. He promised that if he wins another term he will swiftly reach a new accord with Iran over its nuclear program.

"Iran doesn't want to let me win. China doesn't want to let me win," Trump said. "The first call I'll get after we win, the first call I'll get will be from Iran saying, 'Let's make a deal.'"

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and Rep. Adam Schiff, the Democratic chairman of the House intelligence committee, said the "disturbing" threats cut to the heart of the right to vote.

"We cannot allow voter intimidation or interference efforts, either foreign or domestic, to silence voters' voices and take away that right," they said in a statement.

Asked about the emails during an online forum earlier Wednesday, Pennsylvania Secretary of State Kathy Boockvar said she lacked specific information. "I am aware that they were sent to voters in multiple swing states and we are working closely with the attorney general on these types of things and others," she said.

While state-backed Russian hackers are known to have infiltrated U.S. election infrastructure in 2016, there is no evidence that Iran has ever done so, and it was not clear how officials were able to identify Iran so quickly.

The operation represented something of a departure in cyber-ops for Iran, which sought for the first time on record to undermine voter confidence. Iran's previous operations have been mostly propaganda and espionage.

A top cyberthreat analyst, John Hultquist of FireEye, said the striking development marked "a fundamental shift in our understanding of Iran's willingness to interfere in the democratic process. While many of their operations have been focused on promoting propaganda in pursuit of Iran's interests, this incident is clearly aimed at undermining voter confidence."

The voter intimidation operation apparently used email addresses obtained from state voter registration lists, which include party affiliation and home addresses and can include email addresses and phone numbers. Those addresses were then used in an apparently widespread targeted spamming operation. The senders claimed they would know which candidate the recipient was voting for in the Nov. 3 election, for which early voting is ongoing.

Federal officials have long warned about the possibility of this type of operation, as such registration lists are not difficult to obtain.

"These emails are meant to intimidate and undermine American voters' confidence in our elections," Christopher Krebs, the top election security official at the Department of Homeland Security, tweeted Tuesday night after reports of the emails first surfaced.

Bajak reported from Boston. Associated Press writers Christina A. Cassidy in Atlanta; Michael Balsamo, Colleen Long and Zeke Miller in Washington; Amir Vahdat in Tehran, Iran; and Jon Gambrell in Dubai, United Arab Emirates, contributed.

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/>.

Mixed Philippine reaction on pope nod on gay civil unions

MANILA, Philippines (AP) — Pope Francis' endorsement of same-sex civil unions drew mixed reactions Thursday in the Philippines, Asia's bastion of Catholicism, with a retired bishop saying he was scandalized by it while an LGBT group welcomed the pontiff's remarks with relief.

President Rodrigo Duterte's spokesman said the Philippine leader has long expressed support to same-

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Oct. 22, 2020 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 111 ~ 32 of 97

sex civil unions but added it needed to pass through Congress.

Retired Sorsogon Bishop Arturo Bastes said he "had very serious doubts about the moral correctness" of the pontiff's position. He said it ran against long-standing church teachings, which explicitly permit only the union of man and woman whether in civil, legal or church sacramental unions.

"This is a shocking statement coming from the pope," Bastes told reporters in a cellphone message. "I am really scandalized by his defense of homosexual union, which surely leads to immoral acts."

At least three other bishops expressed disbelief, saying they would verify if it's the Vatican's official position and if the pontiff was accurately quoted in context in a documentary, where he made the remarks.

"It is just a documentary film so it is not official and should first be verified," Balanga Bishop Ruperto Santos said, adding there could have been editing alterations or the documentary was "just for propaganda so that it could be talked about or patronized."

The Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines, the largest group of bishops in the predominantly Roman Catholic nation, has yet to issue any reaction.

LGBTQ group Bahaghari told ABS CBN News that the pontiff's position was a "huge thing" and should lead to changes in the Philippine family code to recognize such unions.

Presidential spokesman Harry Roque said Duterte has long supported same-sex civil unions and the papal endorsement may finally convince legislators to give their approval. In the past, such proposals have been opposed or avoided by conservative legislators or those who feared earning the ire of influential church leaders.

"With no less than the pope supporting it, I think even the most conservative of all Catholics in Congress should no longer have a basis for objecting," Roque said.

Czechs enter 2nd lockdown to avoid health system collapse

By KAREL JANICEK Associated Press

PRAGUE (AP) — Czechs had been assured it wouldn't happen again.

But amid a record surge of coronavirus infections that's threatening the entire health system with collapse, the Czech Republic is adopting on Thursday exactly the same massive restrictions it slapped on citizens in the spring. Prime Minister Andrej Babis had repeatedly said these measures would never return.

"We have no time to wait," Babis explained Wednesday. "The surge is enormous."

Babis apologized for the huge impact the restrictions will have on everyday life but said if they were not taken "our health system would collapse between Nov 7-11."

"I apologize even for the fact that I ruled out this option in the past because I was not able to imagine it might happen," he added. "Unfortunately, it has happened and now, above all, we have to protect the lives of our citizens."

The measures include limits on free movement and the closure of many stores, shopping malls and hotels. They will remain in place until at least Nov 3.

The Czech Republic had initially set an example with its effective and fast response when the pandemic first struck, but failed to learn from other countries' subsequent experiences and now faces the consequences.

As the pandemic struck slightly later than in western Europe, Czech authorities gained some breathing space. They used it to impose sweeping restrictions on daily life in March, and — unlike most other European countries — made mask-wearing obligatory in all public areas.

In April, the country was the first, with Austria, to start to ease restrictions and — again unlike most other European countries — almost completely abandoned them in the summer.

In June, thousands declared victory over the coronavirus at a big party on Prague's medieval Charles Bridge. Babis, considered a populist leader, was jubilant and told an international conference in August that his country was the "best in COVID," despite already growing numbers of infected people.

The atmosphere at Wednesday's news conference, as Babis announced the new measures, was more sober.

"What happened was somehow predicted but nobody expected its scope," Babis said.

Some experts had called much earlier for strict steps.

“(Even) yesterday (would have been) late, there’s a danger at every corner,” Jaroslav Flegr, a professor of evolutionary biology who predicted the surge a while ago, told Czech public television.

Many still remember when Babis’ then health minister, Adam Vojtech, and his team proposed in August a mandatory return of masks in schools. Babis dismissed that option and fired the minister weeks later when the numbers of new infections started to grow rapidly in September.

They still are.

The daily figure for new confirmed cases was a record of almost 15,000 on Wednesday. That was almost 3,000 more than the previous record, set on Tuesday.

Since the start of the pandemic, the Czech Republic has registered 208,915 confirmed infections, about one third of them in the past seven days, and 1,739 people have died — with a record 100 deaths registered Monday.

The seven-day rolling average of daily new cases has risen over the past two weeks from 32.81 new cases per 100,000 people on Oct. 7 to 92.88 new cases per 100,000 people on Wednesday.

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

Thailand cancels emergency decree in bid to calm protests

By GRANT PECK Associated Press

BANGKOK (AP) — Thailand’s government on Thursday canceled a state of emergency it had declared last week for Bangkok in a gesture offered by the embattled prime minister to cool massive student-led protests seeking democracy reforms.

The decree had banned public gatherings of more than four people and allowed censorship of the media, among other provisions. It was challenged in court by an opposition party and a group of university students.

The revocation of the emergency decree, effective at noon Thursday, declared that the situation had been mitigated and could now be dealt with by existing laws.

Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-ocha went on national television on Wednesday night to appeal to pro-democracy protesters to reduce political tensions and promised to lift the emergency measure.

“I will make the first move to deescalate this situation,” he said. “I am currently preparing to lift the state of severe emergency in Bangkok and will do so promptly if there are no violent incidents.”

As he was speaking, protesters marched near Government House, his office, to demand he step down. They also asked for the release of their colleagues who were arrested in connection with earlier protests.

They said that if their demands were not met, they would return in three days. Although the protesters pushed their way through police lines, neither side resorted to violence.

The protesters are pressing for a more democratic constitution and reforms to the monarchy. The implicit criticism of the royal institution has stirred controversy because it traditionally has been treated as sacrosanct and a pillar of national identity.

On Wednesday, royalists held rallies in several cities, in many cases led by local civil servants, in what they said was defense of the monarchy. At a small rally in Bangkok, there were fights between anti-government protesters and palace supporters.

Wednesday also marked the eighth straight day of demonstrations by the pro-democracy movement that was launched in March, even though many top protest leaders have been detained.

Prayuth, in the taped speech, pleaded with his countrymen to resolve their political differences through Parliament.

“The only way to a lasting solution for all sides that is fair for those on the streets as well as for the many millions who choose not to go on the streets is to discuss and resolve these differences through the parliamentary process,” he said.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Oct. 22, 2020 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 111 ~ 34 of 97

The government on Tuesday approved a request to recall Parliament to deal with the political crisis in a special session next Monday to Wednesday.

"I am appealing to all sides that we must heal injuries now before they become too deep," Prayuth said.

The cancellation of the state of emergency came as Bangkok Civil Court was preparing to rule on motions to revoke the decree on the basis that it illegally abridged freedom of assembly.

The leader of the opposition Pheu Thai party's team at the court said Wednesday that he was not impressed that Prayuth had lifted the decree.

"He's really doing it to protect himself. Why? Because if he didn't lift the emergency decree today, and the court ordered the temporary protection of the protesters, it would mean all his orders and announcement relating to this were illegal," said lawmaker Cholanan Srikaew.

Separately, the official committee supervising the fight against the coronavirus said the government is renewing for the seventh time a national state of emergency that had been imposed in March to contain the disease. It gives provincial governors powers to restrict gatherings, movement and media reports.

Authorities on Wednesday suffered a legal setback when a judge barred them from implementing orders banning several media outlets because they failed to follow proper procedures.

Police sought to impose censorship on media reporting of the protests, citing what they called "distorted information" that could cause unrest and confusion.

They want to block access to the online sites of four Thai news organizations and one activist group that broadcast live coverage of the protests. They had also proposed a ban on over-the-air digital television coverage of one of the broadcasters, Voice TV.

Analysis: Racial inequity in who takes career, tech courses

By SARAH BUTRYMOWICZ of The Hechinger Report and JEFF AMY and LARRY FENN of The Associated Press undefined

Alphina Kamara wonders what might have happened if she'd been introduced to science and engineering careers at her high school in Wilmington, Delaware.

Kamara, who is Black, was enrolled in an "audio engineering" course that taught her how to make music tracks and videos instead of a regular engineering course that she recalls was mostly filled with white students.

When she asked an administrator at Mount Pleasant High School about this apparent disparity, she said she was told that the audio engineering course was created for "regular students."

"They thought we would be more interested in audio engineering than engineering," said Kamara, now a junior at Wesleyan University studying English and sociology. "That was a hard pill to swallow."

Historically, career and technical education (CTE) was seen as a dumping ground for students who weren't considered college material. A two-tier educational system tracked predominantly low-income students and students of color into career and technical classes, then known as vocational education. But in recent years, schools have revamped these courses to prepare students for higher education and lucrative work in fields such as technology, health care and engineering.

A Hechinger Report/Associated Press analysis of CTE enrollment data from 40 states reveals deep racial disparities in who takes these career-oriented courses. Black and Latino students were often less likely than their white peers to enroll in science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) and information technology classes, according to the analysis, which was based primarily on 2017-18 data. Meanwhile, they were more likely to enroll in courses in hospitality and, in the case of Black students in particular, human services.

The analysis offers a comprehensive look at data that states will be required to report to the federal government at the end of this year under the Carl D. Perkins Act. The \$1.2 billion law that oversees career and technical education at the federal level was reauthorized in 2018 with an increased focus on equity. Previously, such data was only required to be reported by gender, where large disparities are also seen.

In some states, the differences in CTE participation are striking. In South Carolina, for instance, Black

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Oct. 22, 2020 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 111 ~ 35 of 97

and Latino students made up 43% of the overall student body, yet just over one-quarter of those enrolled in multiple STEM classes and less than one-third of students enrolled in information technology. Black and Latino students accounted for nearly 60% of students specializing in hospitality and human services, which include classes such as "parenting education" and "family life education" that have no clear link to the job market.

In an email, South Carolina's CTE director, Angel Malone, wrote that the state recognizes the need to increase equity in STEM and has begun a number of initiatives to do so.

The reasons for these racial inequities are multiple, ranging from the courses that students of color are steered to enroll in to the availability of the STEM and IT courses at their school. Young people may also select courses in fields such as culinary arts because those professions are familiar and employ people who look like them.

The CTE classes students take in high school don't necessarily shape which careers they choose. Still, Prudence Carter, dean of University of California, Berkeley's Graduate School of Education, said the findings fit into a larger pattern of Black and Latino students being denied equal opportunities in school, which has implications for their social mobility and economic equality.

"This is how wealth gaps become reproduced," she said.

The median annual salary for cooks is \$27,500, while chefs and head cooks earn \$56,000, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics. The typical engineer makes \$100,000. For computer programmers, annual earnings are \$92,000.

Since Kamara's experience at Mount Pleasant, the school has made strides in diversifying its CTE programs, according to the school principal, Curi Calderon-Lacy. This year, enrollment in its engineering courses was 44% Black and 44% white, compared with 31% Black and 63% white in 2016.

Calderon-Lacy said all students have always had the option of taking the engineering course or any CTE class through the school's open enrollment policy. Still, she acknowledged that enrollment in the engineering courses has not always reflected the composition of the student body. She added that the school received a grant from a nonprofit in 2018 to work on the issue.

"We've made a very strong effort to address inclusion and address equity," she said. "And it's still a work in progress."

Kamara said she didn't remember requesting the audio engineering class. At the same time, she was never encouraged by counselors or teachers to explore options such as the engineering course, which might have opened up new possibilities for her. "I feel like the reason I'm not attracted to things like STEM and math is because of this deterrence," Kamara said.

Michael Dawson, who runs Innovators for Purpose, an afterschool STEM program based in Cambridge, Massachusetts, said schools don't do enough to expose students to different careers or nurture those with a passion in STEM. One of his former students, who loved math and science, was placed in carpentry classes, Dawson said. "I'm not sure if there's a lot of people that are really guiding these students into the types of classes that they really need to get to," Dawson said. "The counselors are busy."

Nationwide, counselors serve an average of 430 students each. Yet encouragement from teachers and other school personnel can make a difference.

Eva Oleita, a senior at Cass Technical High School in Detroit, was interested in a medical career from a young age. Her middle school science teacher recognized her talents and provided a recommendation for the screened admission, STEM-oriented high school.

Oleita, who is Black, said had she attended a different high school, "my life would be completely different." She said the exposure she's receiving in high school has helped prepare her for earning a STEM degree.

Even so, she still struggles with the lack of science role models she can relate to. "It's hard to see yourself doing something where you do not see anybody who looks like you," she said.

In some school districts, disparities in CTE enrollment come down to the classes high schools offer. In Mississippi, public school enrollment was 49% Black and 44% white. But Black students made up only 43% of students enrolled in schools that offer STEM classes, compared with 49% of white students. For

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Oct. 22, 2020 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 111 ~ 36 of 97

IT, it was 40% and 52%, respectively.

Although some districts have career tech centers that enroll students from across the school district, educators say scheduling and transportation challenges can discourage many students from signing up.

Joe Greenberg sees the gaps firsthand in rural Mississippi. He teaches a technology class at J.W. Stampley 9th Grade Academy in the Clarksdale school district, which serves 2,300 students, 97% of whom are Black.

"I think they're feeling some sort of sense of pride to be able to learn about coding and learning about what's inside of a computer," he said.

The other electives available to freshmen at Greenberg's school are family and consumer science courses, which cover topics such as adolescent development and family responsibilities. The district also offers culinary arts, sports medicine, health science, teaching and simulation and animation classes.

Shirlaurence Fair, CTE director for Clarksdale school district, said it's hard not to envy other districts that offer a dozen or more career-technical programs. "We would like to be able to offer welding or engineering and manufacturing next year," Fair said. "It's just a struggle to get the teacher."

Starting teacher salaries are low in Mississippi, especially compared with what people can make in the private sector, and it can be a challenge to get teachers certified.

In contrast, the Madison County district, in the most affluent area of the state, has the money to hire experienced faculty with a background in technical fields. "We can find teachers who are highly trained and highly skilled to teach all of the subjects that we offer," said Blaise King, director of career and technical education for the 13,000-student district in suburban Jackson, Mississippi.

Each of the high schools in the district, which is about 50% white and 40% Black, offers courses in at least 10 career pathways. Two have a four-year engineering program and the district's career-technical center has a two-year program in engineering. The center also offers courses in health care, automotive technology, construction, teaching, digital media, and simulation and design.

Ricardo Romanillos, director of professional learning for the National Alliance for Partnerships in Equity, has advocated for greater transparency around access to career and technical education. "A lot of what we're confronting in education is an unspoken idea that the system treats all students equally," he said. "We know that it doesn't."

Kamara, the Delaware student, learned this lesson in high school. She didn't dislike the audio engineering class, but eventually dropped it to make room in her schedule for Advanced Placement classes.

"It wasn't anything that was particularly challenging," she said. "I wanted to take higher level classes."

This story was produced by The Associated Press and The Hechinger Report, a nonprofit, independent news organization focused on inequality and innovation in education.

Stressing freedom, vaccine opponents rebranding in virus era

By BEATRICE DUPUY Associated Press

Years before this year's anti-mask and reopening demonstrations, vaccine opponents were working on reinventing their image around a rallying cry of civil liberties and medical freedom.

Now, boosted by the pandemic and the political climate, their rebranding is appealing to a different subset of society invested in civil liberties — and, some health officials say, undercutting public health efforts during a critical moment for vaccines.

A new analysis from several institutions has found that between 2009 to 2019, conversations around civil liberties in the anti-vaccine community had increased, with Facebook pages framing vaccines as an issue of values and civil rights.

Researchers reviewed over 200 Facebook pages supporting vaccine refusal for their paper published in the American Journal of Public Health this month. David A. Broniatowski, the paper's lead author, said current protests against government lockdowns and masks took their pages directly from the anti-vaccine playbook.

"We could've seen it coming," said Broniatowski, an associate professor at George Washington Univer-

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Oct. 22, 2020 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 111 ~ 37 of 97

city's School of Engineering and Applied Science. "This was all happening right under our noses, and it's continuing to happen."

In recent weeks, protesters gathered in Massachusetts to demonstrate against the governor's mandate requiring schoolchildren to receive the influenza vaccine. In Facebook pages and groups touting medical freedom and vaccine choice, the protesters have called the mandate unconstitutional and say it infringes on their rights.

Anita Garcia has been protesting vaccines for years and recently took part in protests against the flu mandate in Massachusetts, where she is from. Garcia is a member of an 866-member Facebook group called "Massachusetts for Medical Freedom." She said that with the flu mandate demonstrations, she is seeing protesters turn out to object to what they consider government overreach.

"All you can do is try to fight for your freedom," Garcia said. "We are for medical freedom, bodily autonomy. Our bodies are ours, not for someone else to govern."

Vaccines, though, save lives — 2 to 3 million a year, according to World Health Organization estimates. And vaccines have all but eliminated from American life such childhood diseases as measles, which regularly infected 3 to 4 million people a year in the United States before a vaccine was developed. It was declared eliminated from the United States in 2000, though low vaccination rates in some communities have led to outbreaks in recent years.

Vaccines are encouraged, or in some cases required, because they have been proven safe and protect not only those vaccinated but also others who can't be by slowing the spread of preventable diseases.

Historically, the anti-vaccine community has been known for its concerns around vaccine safety and the debunked theory that vaccines cause autism. Broniatowski and researchers found, though, that civil liberties have emerged as a common narrative among vaccine refusal pages on Facebook, including those who also supported alternative medicine and conspiracy theories about the pharmaceutical industry and billionaire philanthropist Bill Gates.

The rebranding to emphasize liberties is allowing vaccine opponents to exploit American reactions to the pandemic, said Dorit Reiss, a University of California Hastings law professor who specializes in policy issues related to vaccines.

"I do think we are seeing an increase in people in support of them just because more people are vulnerable, upset and distrustful," Reiss said. "And the anti-vaccine movement knows exactly what to say."

"Medical freedom" advocates are moving quickly on social media to capitalize around the frustration around the pandemic. During this month's vice presidential debate, Democratic Sen. Kamala Harris was asked if she would take a coronavirus vaccine. Harris responded by saying she'd take the vaccine if public health professionals recommend it — but that "if Donald Trump tells us we should take it, I'm not taking it."

Shortly after her remark, accounts and pages on Facebook and Twitter that support medical freedom began circulating a text post that said "Kamala won't take a vaccine that DJT pushed. Imagine being forced to take a mandated vaccine from a leader you disagree with!! The irony. Do you NOW understand what Medical Freedom means?"

"You can see the consequences to these groups sowing distrust around vaccines. And they really matter, and they are going to come out in this pandemic," said Mark Dredze, associate professor of computer science at Johns Hopkins University and one of the paper's authors.

In May, a poll from The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research found that 31 percent of Americans were unsure if they would get the COVID-19 vaccine once released.

Medical freedom supporters are pushing out their message to a significant portion of Americans who are not anti-vaccine but who are witnessing the politicization of the virus and have concerns about the vaccine, said Dr. Peter Hotez, dean of the National School of Tropical Medicine at Baylor College of Medicine in Houston.

"Children have a fundamental right to access to vaccines," said Hotez, who is also co-director of the Texas Children's Hospital Center for Vaccine Development. "You need a high percentage of vaccine coverage in order to achieve herd immunity to protect all children."

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Oct. 22, 2020 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 111 ~ 38 of 97

As public health officials fight the pandemic and groups push for the economy to reopen, one expert suggests that health professionals trying to find common ground are going to have to meet people where they are.

"You can't have a system that will result in us no longer being able to protect our communities from measles because we allow so much of the choice to occur that vaccine rates plummet," said Ross D. Silberman, professor of health policy and management at Indiana University. "There is an alchemy there."

Beatrice Dupuy is a journalist on The Associated Press' news verification team. Follow her on Twitter at http://twitter.com/Beatrice_Dupuy

Lowe homers twice, Rays hold off Dodgers 6-4 to even Series

By STEPHEN HAWKINS AP Baseball Writer

ARLINGTON, Texas (AP) — Brandon Lowe kept finding his name near the top of Tampa Bay's lineup even as his offensive struggles continued to mount this postseason.

After Lowe finally busted out in Game 2 of the World Series, the Rays and Dodgers are tied deep in the heart of Texas.

"Sometimes guys, you've got to allow them to go through some tough patches," manager Kevin Cash said. "He will go quiet for a little while, but he can get as hot as anybody in baseball."

Lowe hit two home runs to the opposite field, Tampa Bay's bullpen held on late and the Rays beat Los Angeles 6-4 on Wednesday night.

"Yeah, those felt really good," said Lowe, a 2019 All-Star who led the Rays with 14 homers and 37 RBIs this season. "It felt great to kind of get back and contribute to the team. They've been doing so well for the past month — it felt really good to get back and actually start doing stuff again."

Blake Snell struck out nine in 4 2/3 innings for the Rays and didn't allow a hit until Chris Taylor's two-run homer trimmed it to 5-2 in the fifth. The Dodgers threatened to complete a big comeback in the eighth, but Tampa Bay's relievers held firm.

Lowe and Joey Wendle each had three RBIs for the Rays, whose six runs and 10 hits were their most over the past 11 postseason games.

"I think today was a little bit better indicator of the kind of team that we are," said Wendle, who had a two-run double and a sacrifice fly. "Just a complete win, complete team win."

Nick Anderson got four outs for the victory. Diego Castillo earned the save when he struck out Taylor, the only batter he faced.

Pete Fairbanks went 1 2/3 innings and left-hander Aaron Loup threw a called third strike past slugger Cody Bellinger with a runner on second to end the eighth. Loup also retired the first two hitters in the ninth.

"They've got some really good pitchers. They got out to that early lead and we just weren't able to overcome it," Taylor said. "We did a pretty good job of fighting to the end and we just weren't able to come up with the big hit we needed."

After an off day, Game 3 in the best-of-seven Series matches two big-game pitchers starting on extra rest Friday night. Charlie Morton goes for the Rays against Walker Buehler.

Los Angeles was the "home team" for the first two games but will bat first in the next three.

Lowe hit a solo shot to left-center in the first off rookie Tony Gonsolin, putting the American League champion Rays ahead for the first time at this neutral-site World Series with their 27th homer of the post-season — matching a major league record. The second baseman was hitting .107 this postseason, and in an even worse 4-for-48 slide (.083) the past 13 games since the start of the AL Division Series.

"You've got to be able to be tough-minded and Brandon is. A lot of our guys are," Cash said. "We owe it to our guys to stick with them."

"Brandon, go ahead and get hot now, feel good about yourself."

By the time Lowe went deep again in the fifth, his second opposite-field homer of the game — and the entire season — it was 5-0. That one bounced off the top of the left-field wall with a runner on against

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Oct. 22, 2020 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 111 ~ 39 of 97

Dustin May, already the fourth Los Angeles pitcher.

Will Smith and NLCS MVP Corey Seager also homered for the Dodgers. Seager's solo shot in the eighth was his seventh homer and 16th RBI, extending the franchise records he had already set this postseason. It's the most homers by a shortstop in any MLB postseason.

Snell, the 2018 AL Cy Young Award winner, retired 10 straight before walking Kiké Hernández with two outs in the fifth and Taylor, the No. 9 batter, homered on his 80th pitch. Tampa Bay's ace was out of the game two batters later, after Mookie Betts walked and Seager singled.

"He was outstanding," Cash said. "He was awesome. Gave us everything that we needed."

Anderson got out of the jam with a strikeout of Justin Turner, then gave up a solo homer to Smith in the sixth.

The Dodgers knew it would be primarily a bullpen game using various arms, instead of bringing back Buehler on short rest after ace lefty Clayton Kershaw threw six strong innings in their 8-3 win Tuesday night in Game 1.

"We didn't have anybody that was on regular rest," manager Dave Roberts said afterward, though he said he felt great with Buehler going in Game 3.

Roberts also said Julio Urías, who is 4-0 in four appearances this postseason after getting the last nine outs in the NLCS clincher, will start Game 4. Kershaw would then be ready on regular rest for Game 5.

Los Angeles used seven pitchers, and four of the first five allowed runs. The Dodgers were the first team to use four pitchers within the first four innings of a World Series game since Oakland against Cincinnati in 1990.

Gonsolin gave up Lowe's first homer and was done after 1 1/3 innings. That was the shortest start in a World Series game since San Francisco's Jake Peavy gave up five runs in 1 1/3 innings of a 10-0 loss at Kansas City in Game 6 of the 2014 World Series.

Snell attacked with breaking pitches in the strike zone, not his usual pattern, against a Dodgers team that doesn't often chase. But less than a week after an aggressive hook by Cash to take Snell out of Game 6 of the ALCS after four innings, the left-hander still hasn't completed six innings since July 2019.

"I'm not going to get mad at Cash. He's got to manage, I've got to play. I've got to make it harder for him to come out and pull me," Snell said. "I made it easy with the walk and the homer and then the walk. You can't blame him. He's trying to win a World Series game."

BIG MISTAKE

A bobble by Hernández at second base proved costly, taking away a potential inning-ending double play in the fourth before the Dodgers changed pitchers again and gave up two runs. With one out and Randy Arozarena at first, Ji-Man Choi hit a grounder to Hernández, and by time the second baseman gathered the ball to get the force, Seager's relay throw was late. Manuel Margot then greeted May, the third reliever, with a single before Wendle's two-run double into the right-center gap for a 3-0 lead.

SHORT HOPS

Snell's nine strikeouts were the most in a World Series game by a pitcher who didn't last five innings. ... Lowe became the second player to have a multi-homer game in the World Series after entering with a sub-.200 batting average in that postseason, according to STATS. The other was Orioles slugger Eddie Murray in the 1983 clincher against Philadelphia.

UP NEXT

Rays: Morton has won all three of his starts this postseason, including 5 2/3 scoreless innings in the deciding Game 7 of the ALCS against Houston. He faces the Dodgers for the first time since the 2017 World Series, when he pitched the final four innings for the Astros to win Game 7 in relief. The veteran right-hander also pitched in Game 4 of that Series, limiting LA to one run and three hits while striking out seven over 6 1/3 innings.

Dodgers: Buehler threw six shutout innings to win Game 6 of the NL Championship Series against Atlanta and force Game 7. His only previous World Series start was Game 3 against Boston in 2018, when he fired seven scoreless innings in the only game the Dodgers won.

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

US officials link Iran to emails meant to intimidate voters

By ERIC TUCKER and FRANK BAJAK Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — U.S. officials have accused Iran of being behind a flurry of emails sent to Democratic voters in multiple battleground states that appeared to be aimed at intimidating them into voting for President Donald Trump.

The officials did not lay out specific evidence for how they came to pinpoint Iran, but the activities attributed to Tehran would mark a significant escalation for a country some cybersecurity experts regard as a second-rate player in online espionage. The Wednesday announcement was made at a hastily called news conference 13 days before the election.

The allegations underscored the U.S. government's concern about efforts by foreign countries to influence the election by spreading false information meant to suppress voter turnout and undermine American confidence in the vote. Such direct attempts to sway public opinion are more commonly associated with Moscow, which conducted a covert social media campaign in 2016 aimed at sowing discord and is again interfering this year, but the idea that Iran could be responsible suggested that those tactics have been adopted by other nations, too.

"These actions are desperate attempts by desperate adversaries," said John Ratcliffe, the government's national intelligence director, who, along with FBI Director Chris Wray, insisted the U.S. would impose costs on foreign countries that interfere in the U.S. election and that the integrity of the vote remains sound.

"You should be confident that your vote counts," Wray said. "Early, unverified claims to the contrary should be viewed with a healthy dose of skepticism."

The two officials called out both Russia and Iran for having obtained voter registration information, though such data is sometimes easily accessible and there was no allegation either country had hacked a database for it. Iran sent spoofed emails designed to intimidate voters and sow unrest and also distributed a video that falsely suggested voters could cast fraudulent ballots from overseas, Ratcliffe said.

Wray and Ratcliffe did not describe the emails, but officials familiar with the matter said the U.S. has linked Tehran to messages sent to Democratic voters in at least four states, including battleground locations like Pennsylvania and Florida. The emails falsely purported to be from the far-right group Proud Boys and warned that "we will come after you" if the recipients didn't vote for Trump.

Though Democratic voters were targeted, Ratcliffe said the spoofed emails were intended to harm Trump, though he did not elaborate how. One possibility is the messages may have been intended to align Trump in the minds of voters with the Proud Boys after he was criticized for failing to unequivocally denounce the group during the first presidential debate.

It would not be the first time that the Trump administration has said Tehran is working against the president.

An intelligence assessment in August said: "Iran seeks to undermine U.S. democratic institutions, President Trump, and to divide the country in advance of the 2020 elections." It said the country would probably continue to focus on "spreading disinformation on social media and recirculating anti-U.S. content."

Alireza Miryousefi, a spokesman for Iran's mission to the United Nations, denied Tehran's involvement.

"Unlike the U.S., Iran does not interfere in other country's elections," Miryousefi wrote on Twitter. "The world has been witnessing U.S.' own desperate public attempts to question the outcome of its own elections at the highest level."

Trump, speaking at a rally in North Carolina, made no reference to the intelligence announcement, but repeated a familiar campaign assertion that Iran is opposed to his reelection. He promised that if he wins another term he will reach a new accord with Iran over its nuclear program.

"Iran doesn't want to let me win. China doesn't want to let me win," Trump said. "The first call I'll get after we win, the first call I'll get will be from Iran saying let's make a deal."

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and Rep. Adam Schiff, Democratic chairman of the House intelligence com-

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Oct. 22, 2020 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 111 ~ 41 of 97

mittee, said the “disturbing” threats cut to the heart of the right to vote.

“We cannot allow voter intimidation or interference efforts, either foreign or domestic, to silence voters’ voices and take away that right,” they said in a statement.

While state-backed Russian hackers are known to have infiltrated U.S. election infrastructure in 2016, there is no evidence that Iran has ever done so. It was also not clear how officials were able to identify Iran so quickly.

The operation represented something of a departure in cyber-ops for Iran, which sought for the first time on record to undermine voter confidence. Iran’s previous operations have been mostly propaganda and espionage.

A top cyberthreat analyst, John Hultquist of FireEye, said the development marked “a fundamental shift in our understanding of Iran’s willingness to interfere in the democratic process. While many of their operations have been focused on promoting propaganda in pursuit of Iran’s interests, this incident is clearly aimed at undermining voter confidence.”

The voter intimidation operation apparently used email addresses obtained from state voter registration lists, which include party affiliation and home addresses and can include email addresses and phone numbers.

Those addresses were then used in an apparently widespread targeted spamming operation. The senders claimed they would know which candidate the recipient was voting for in the Nov. 3 election, for which early voting is ongoing.

Asked about the emails during an online forum earlier Wednesday, Pennsylvania Secretary of State Kathy Boockvar said she lacked specifics. “I am aware that they were sent to voters in multiple swing states and we are working closely with the attorney general on these types of things and others,” she said.

Federal officials have long warned about the possibility of this type of operation, as such registration lists are not difficult to obtain.

“These emails are meant to intimidate and undermine American voters’ confidence in our elections,” Christopher Krebs, the top election security official at the Department of Homeland Security, tweeted Tuesday night after reports of the emails first surfaced.

Bajak reported from Boston. Associated Press writers Christina A. Cassidy in Atlanta and Michael Balsamo, Colleen Long and Zeke Miller in Washington contributed to this report.

Sent from Gitmo to UAE, detainees fear final stop: Yemen

By MAGGIE MICHAEL Associated Press

The Guantanamo detainees were promised they were being sent to a Muslim country for rehabilitation that would help integrate them into society, opening the way to jobs, money, and marriage, according to their lawyers and families.

It was a lie.

Instead, the detainees -- 18 Yemenis and one Russian, swept up from Afghanistan and Pakistan after the Sept. 11 attacks -- have languished in custody in the United Arab Emirates for as long as five years, their families and lawyers tell The Associated Press.

In short, sporadic phone calls from undisclosed locations in the UAE — including a notorious prison rife with torture — several whispered to their families that as bad as life in Guantanamo was, they wish they could return there.

When one complained of “pressures” three years ago, the call was cut off; he has not been heard from since. When the Russian staged a hunger strike, he was dumped in solitary confinement and roughed up.

Now there are plans to send them to Yemen, where their families fear their treatment will be even worse.

A senior Yemeni government official confirmed the plans, pending security arrangements; a State Department official indicated the U.S. government was aware that it was happening. Both officials spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to speak to the press. The UAE didn’t respond

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Oct. 22, 2020 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 111 ~ 42 of 97

to AP questions.

United Nations rights experts described the men's upcoming repatriation as a "forced return," warning that it violates international laws.

Their destination is a poor Arab country wracked by a grinding civil war for the past six years. Torture and arbitrary detention are widespread in networks of secret and formal prisons run by various factions controlling different parts of the country.

"Here the legitimate government itself is not safe. Who will be in charge of them?" said Hussien, a brother of Bir, one of the detainees.

The family of a second detainee, Salem, said: "We fear they will be gunned down or rounded up as soon as they put a foot in Yemen."

And if they survive, they may be prime recruits for terrorists in Yemen. Ibrahim al-Qosi, is a former Guantanamo detainee who was transferred to Sudan in 2012 before surfacing as an al-Qaida group leader in Yemen two years later.

The lingering confinement of these men violates promises made by U.S. officials when they were sent to the UAE in 2015-17. It underscores flaws in the transfer program and the failure of President Donald Trump's administration to ensure their humane treatment.

President Barack Obama pressed to close the Guantanamo facility amid opposition from Congress. The plan was to prosecute some detainees and to continue to hold others without charges while their cases were evaluated by review boards. Those no longer deemed dangerous were to be transferred to their homelands or third countries.

Trump had other plans. Before taking office, he declared on Twitter that there would be "no further releases from GITMO." His administration dismantled an entire office tasked with closing the Guantanamo facility, overseeing transfers, and following up on the resettled detainees.

Terms of the agreements the U.S. struck with the UAE and dozens of other countries that received Guantanamo detainees weren't made public. But Ian Moss, a former chief of staff for the State Department's Guantanamo envoy, insisted that, "We wanted these individuals after they were released to have a fresh start in life. It wasn't part of the deal that they be incarcerated. That was never part of the deal."

Moss blamed the current administration for lack of engagement, saying that "the Emiratis knew that the Trump administration didn't care about what they did with these people or how they treated them. This is disgraceful."

Lee Wolosky was the special envoy for Guantanamo closure from 2015 to 2017, the period when the Yemenis were transferred to the UAE. "I can categorically deny that there was a plan to keep the men in detention following their transfer from U.S. custody," he said in an email.

Under Trump, only one prisoner, a Saudi, was transferred to Saudi Arabia to serve the remainder of his sentence after he agreed to a plea bargain.

Under Obama, a total of 197 were transferred to other countries, while 500 were transferred by George W. Bush. The U.S. base now has 40 detainees; most are being held without charges and a third are Yemenis.

Katie Taylor is deputy director of the United Kingdom-based group Reprieve and coordinator of the group's Life After Guantanamo project. She told the AP that after documenting the lives of nearly 60 former detainees in 25 countries, "I have to say that the situation facing the men resettled in the UAE is among the worst and most troubling."

It is not clear whether there are now 17 or 18 detainees in UAE hands; unconfirmed reports suggest one Yemeni left prison because of medical complications.

One detainee is represented by lawyer Patricia Bronte. (His name and the full names of all the Yemeni detainees are being withheld for fear that they might face retribution.) She recalled that State Department officials had told her and the detainees that they would be held from six to 12 months in a rehabilitation facility, and then they would be allowed to reunite with their families in the UAE.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Oct. 22, 2020 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 111 ~ 43 of 97

"From early on, the assurances I have been given weren't lived up to," she said.

She has had no contact with her client since his arrival in the UAE in 2016. Families of the detainees say their communication with their loved ones has been infrequent, and troubling:

--Abdo, 41, told his brother that he spent 70 days in solitary confinement -- blindfolded, handcuffed, and with hands and feet chained to the ground -- upon his arrival. There was no rehabilitation or "de-radicalization sessions," his brother Ahmed told the AP. Abdo and other detainees moved to a "filthy and dark prison" for 16 months.

"It was just terrible there," the brother quoted Abdo as saying. He was later moved to al-Razin prison, located nearly 200 kilometers (125 miles) from Dubai, where human rights groups have documented abuses and torture.

In the spring of 2019, Abdo was brought back to the "filthy" prison, where he remains.

The brother quoted Abdo as saying, "It's not what I thought. I wish I return to Guantanamo ... it's 1,000 times worse here." Then the phone call was cut off.

--Bir, a 41-year-old nurse, was identified by Guantanamo's Periodic Review Board in 2015 as a "low-level Yemeni militant" who was arrested in Pakistani raids in Sept 2002 and transferred to Guantanamo.

His brother, Hussein, told the AP that despite earlier promises of a new life, his brother ended up in "mysterious conditions. We know nothing."

"He continues to live behind bars with other Yemeni detainees, they are facing the most brutal injustice in the history," Hussein said. In phone calls every 10 days, he said, "He says nothing except for, 'How are you?' He can't speak. They are banned."

--Rival Mingazov, a former ballet dancer and an ex-member of the military, was the only Russian left in Guantanamo when he was sent to the UAE. He was accused of fighting with the Taliban. A Pentagon profile also alleged he had links to an Islamic group in Uzbekistan with ties to al-Qaida, and said he was captured in Pakistan at a safe house associated with Abu Zubaydah, a "facilitator" for the terrorist organization.

He has never physically met his 19-year-old son Yusuf, who lives in London. But they have talked: Yusuf said his father complained that he had been humiliated by his captors and had been deprived of food and medicine.

Mingazov's mother, Zoria Valiullina, said her son wanted to return to Guantanamo. "It's better there."

--The family of Abdel-Rab, 44, said he disappeared three years ago after two phone calls during which he complained about conditions, and nervously said, "I am under pressure ... Guantanamo was much better. One billion times."

The call was cut off; he never called again. His family members said they have no clue if he is alive.

According to records, Abdel-Rab had told interrogators that he worked as a house painter in Yemen before he left for Afghanistan in 2000 to study and teach Quran. He was captured in a crackdown on those suspected of links to al-Qaida leader Osama bin Laden and landed in Guantanamo in 2002.

In June, a man pretending to be Abdel-Rab called the family. "It wasn't his voice. He wasn't the same," said his brother.

Hamidullah, another detainee, lived to tell about the conditions of his imprisonment in the UAE, though only barely. He spent 3½ years in UAE prisons before he was returned to Afghanistan in December.

Hamidullah's private counsel wrote that his client was a "model detainee" a "peaceful man" who had never been a member of the Taliban, and "in fact, he was imprisoned by the Taliban in late 1990s."

Surviving a decade in Guantanamo, pictures in official documents showed a cheerful man with salt-and-pepper, curly hair.

He and the other Afghani detainees were sent to the UAE in 2015. His son Ahmed recalled in labored English the first time he visited his father there, how he was "brought with chains in hands and feet, covered eyes with black cloth, and was also tighten with chains in the seat."

After his return to Afghanistan, Hamidullah shared more details of his imprisonment. Guards forced him to strip naked every time he went to the bathroom. They would harshly clutch his shoulders and put his head down while leading him out of the cell.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Oct. 22, 2020 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 111 ~ 44 of 97

"It was mental torture," he said.

Hamidullah died in May, having enjoyed just four months of freedom after nearly 20 years in detention. His family believes that the conditions he endured in UAE prisons contributed to his death.

Final debate could thrust foreign policy back into campaign

By BILL BARROW Associated Press

As Joe Biden hopscotched through Iowa and New Hampshire in late 2019, he also name-dropped his way across the globe.

China's Xi Jinping. German Chancellor Angela Merkel. Vladimir Putin of Russia.

"I've met every major world leader for the last 40 years," the former vice president and eventual Democratic presidential nominee said.

Behind the braggadocio was something Biden saw as a chief selling point for his third White House bid: His decades as a leading senator and two-term vice president make him "ready on day one" to restore a world order he believes President Donald Trump has destabilized.

Biden's foreign policy credentials have largely been overshadowed by questions about how he would lead the U.S. through the worst pandemic in a century. But the issue could reemerge Thursday as Trump and Biden take the stage for a final debate, with a topic list including national security.

Both campaigns believe their competing approaches — Trump's "America First" doctrine that he says ended an era of other nations taking advantage of the United States; Biden's pledge to reinvigorate a network of Western democracies — can sway voters.

"The 800-pound gorilla that will be making its presence felt on Jan. 21 is still going to be COVID-19," said Tony Blinken, Biden's top foreign policy adviser, describing the pandemic as "the first big national security challenge" that would require Biden to make good on his promise of better coordination among the U.S. and its allies.

But, Blinken said, "The world doesn't stop just because we have this COVID crisis. ... We would have to walk and chew a lot of gum at the same time."

Biden blisters Trump on everything from his hard-line immigration policies and dismissing the climate crisis to criticizing NATO allies and "embracing" Putin and North Korea's authoritarian leader Kim Jong Un.

In an ABC News town hall last week, Biden credited Trump for recently cementing diplomatic ties between Israel and two Arab neighbors: Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates. But, Biden said, the president still has "no coherent plan for foreign policy" beyond "America alone."

Trump counters that "America First" is more than sloganeering. He won a rewrite of the North American Free Trade Agreement, curtailed legal immigration, wielded tariff powers and insists he's staring down Beijing's Xi on trade — efforts he frames as benefiting American workers.

Yet heading into the final debate, Trump's loudest foreign policy pitch isn't about his record. It's casting Biden as corrupt because of his son Hunter's business associations in Ukraine and China.

The president has promoted an unconfirmed New York Post report published last week that cites an email in which an official from Ukrainian gas company Burisma thanked Hunter Biden, who served on the company's board, for arranging for him to meet Joe Biden during a 2015 visit to Washington. The Biden campaign has rejected Trump's assertion of wrongdoing and noted that Biden's schedule did not show a meeting with the Burisma official.

Once the chair of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Biden hails from the bipartisan establishment that shaped U.S. international policy from World War II's end until Trump's election.

Biden sees the international order established over that span — NATO, the United Nations, the World Health Organization, the World Trade Organization — as anchoring global stability, with the U.S. leading as the world's democratic superpower, rivaled only by one-party China.

Trump eschews those institutions and their multilateral efforts. He's withdrawn the U.S. from the World Health Organization, the Paris accords to reduce carbon pollution worldwide and a multinational deal that limited Iran's nuclear program. He's pledged to withdraw thousands of troops from Germany, a notable

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Oct. 22, 2020 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 111 ~ 45 of 97

retreat from the post-WWII framework.

To Biden, those moves invite Russian aggression in Europe and an unchecked Beijing.

Trump undoubtedly has been an international force. His NAFTA overhaul drew bipartisan support on Capitol Hill. The latest Middle East deal is a historic step, though it doesn't address the region's biggest unresolved matters: the Syrian civil war, Iran's nuclear ambitions and the land dispute between Israel and the Palestinians.

Biden has promised immediate changes.

He'd recommit to the Paris accords while rejoining WHO and restoring its U.S. financial support. He's pledged to reverse Trump's executive actions limiting travel from certain Muslim nations and curtailing the U.S. asylum program for refugees.

He'd restore foreign aid programs to other Western Hemisphere nations, especially in Central America, where economic and political instability drive migration patterns to the U.S. Aides said Biden would likely halt troop reductions in Europe, believing those postings are fundamental to the U.S. commitment to NATO and containment of Russian ambitions on the continent.

Biden also promises to confront Putin, whom he describes as a "thug," over interference in U.S. elections via social media and other means. Trump has publicly rejected U.S. intelligence findings that Russia interfered in 2016 and is doing so again in 2020 in ways intended to help Trump.

In the Middle East, Biden has said he'd recommit to an Iran nuclear deal if Tehran would again accept inspections and halt weapons-grade nuclear activities. Biden wouldn't reverse Trump's move of the U.S. embassy in Israel from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, though he criticized the move as giving away leverage in the push for a two-state solution between the Palestinians and Israel. Biden has pledged to open a U.S. consulate in occupied East Jerusalem to engage with the Palestinians.

Perhaps the biggest shift under Biden would be philosophical, Blinken said, not tactical.

"Our friends know that Joe Biden knows who they are. So do our adversaries," he said. "That difference would be felt on day one."

Associated Press writer Jonathan Lemire contributed to this report from New York.

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Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Oct. 22, 2020 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 111 ~ 46 of 97

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Road to 270: Trump's best path to victory hinges on FL, PA

By JILL COLVIN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump still has a path to the 270 Electoral College votes he needs to win reelection. But it requires everything to break in his direction a second time.

Persuadable voters in battleground states will need to overwhelmingly swing in his favor. He'll have to win back crucial voting blocs. And his turnout operation will need to dramatically outperform Democrat Joe Biden's in an extraordinarily turbulent year.

"In 2016, his chances of winning the election were those of drawing an inside straight in poker. ... The question this year is whether he can draw an inside straight two hands in a row," said Whit Ayres a veteran Republican pollster. "It is theoretically possible but practically difficult."

While Trump has multiple roads to victory, his most likely route hinges on winning two crucial battleground states: Florida and Pennsylvania. If he can claim both and hold onto other Sun Belt states he narrowly carried in 2016 — North Carolina and Arizona — while playing defense in Georgia and Ohio, which he won handily in 2016 but where Biden is now competitive, he will win.

Trump's campaign is also continuing to pour time and money into Wisconsin and Michigan, longtime Democratic strongholds he flipped his way by the slimmest of margins four years ago, while trying to defend Iowa and Maine's second congressional district and grab Nevada and Minnesota, two states his 2016 rival Hillary Clinton narrowly won.

Trump's campaign points to other factors pointing in their favor: The campaign and the Republican Party have spent years investing in a powerful voter outreach operation and have 2.5 million volunteers knocking on millions of doors each week. They have seen spikes in GOP voter registration in several key states. And Trump voters are more enthusiastic about their candidate than Democrats are about Biden. The Democrats are driven more by their hate for Trump.

"We feel better about our pathway to victory right now than we have at any point in the campaign this year," Trump's campaign manager, Bill Stepien, told staff on a conference call this week. "And this optimism is based on numbers and data, not feel, not sense."

But polling shows Trump trailing or closely matched in nearly every state he needs to win to reach 270 Electoral College votes. Barring some kind of major upset, Trump needs to hold onto at least one of the three rustbelt states he won in 2016: Pennsylvania Wisconsin or Michigan, said Paul Maslin, a longtime Democratic pollster based in Wisconsin.

"I don't see any other way for Trump to do this," he said.

Fox News polls released Wednesday show Biden with a clear advantage in Michigan and a slight one in Wisconsin. In Pennsylvania, recent polls show Biden ahead but vary on the size of his lead.

For all of that, though, Trump's team can draw comfort from this historical footnote: In all three states, Clinton led in the polls in the final weeks of 2016.

But Trump's "fundamental problem," said Ayres "is that a large number of states that he won comfortably last time" are currently close.

While Trump's upset win in 2016 still haunts Democrats and has left many voters deeply distrustful of public polls, close watchers of the race stress that 2020 is not 2016.

Biden is better liked than Clinton and polls suggest there are now fewer undecided voters, who broke for Trump in the race's final weeks four years ago. And Clinton was hobbled in the final weeks by a series of setbacks including the late reopening of an FBI investigation into her emails. The impact of any additional "October surprise" this time would be limited by the record number of voters who have already cast their ballots.

Trump's team, for its part, has been working to repair his standing with suburban women and older voters soured by his handling of the pandemic, while trying to boost enthusiasm among targeted groups like Catholic and Second Amendment voters as well as aiming to build support among Black and Latino voters.

"He's again at the thread-the-needle stage," said Lee M. Miringoff, director of the Marist College Institute

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Oct. 22, 2020 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 111 ~ 48 of 97

for Public Opinion. He noted that because Trump won key states by so few votes last time around, he has very little margin for error.

Still, Miringoff stressed that while many polls may favor Biden, they do not account for "cataclysmic events," such as potential voter suppression, election interference, or court challenges that could halt votes from being counted. Democrats are expected to cast far more ballots by mail, which are rejected at higher rates than in-person ballots, even in normal years.

"The polls could both be right and wrong at the same time," he said, "because they could poll those who think they voted" but whose votes end up not counted.

With 29 electoral votes, Florida is arguably the most crucial state for Trump. A loss there would make it nearly impossible for him to retain the White House. But the state, which has sided with the winner of nearly every presidential race for decades, is also known for razor-tight elections — most notably in 2000 when Republican George W. Bush defeated Al Gore by 537 votes after a recount.

Both sides point to signs of promise in the state, with Republicans saying they see growing support among Hispanics while Democrats focus on seniors. While polling in early October showed Biden with a slight advantage, two recent polls have the two candidates neck and neck.

"From everything I can see, it's a statistical tie," said Jennifer Krantz, a Tampa native and Republican strategist who has worked on multiple state races. If that's the case, she said, ground game could make the difference.

In 2016, Clinton won more votes in the state than Barack Obama in both his races, with commanding leads in Democratic strongholds like Miami-Dade. But Trump ran up the the score with stunning turnout in smaller counties, including across the Florida Panhandle.

Trump's campaign expects do even better this time thanks to a robust turnout operation. Indeed, Republicans say they have registered 146,000 more voters than Democrats since the pandemic hit in March, leaving Democrats with their smallest lead since the state began tracking.

Democrats, meanwhile, hope to run the table when it comes to early voting and vote by mail — though some remain cautious after 2016.

"I think we're all in this collective PTSD panic," said Democratic strategist Steve Schale, who runs the pro-Biden super PAC "Unite The Country."

It's a similar story in Pennsylvania, where two recent polls show Biden maintaining a clear lead and another suggests a narrow one. Trump won the state by just over 44,000 votes last time, powered by an overwhelming showing in rural areas and small towns and cities.

Trump's team is counting on those trends to hold this time around.

"It's déjà vu all over again," said Robert Gleason, the former chair of Pennsylvania's Republican Party who lives in the city and has been helping Trump's campaign "There's a tremendous amount of enthusiasm."

Just as in Florida, while Democrats hold a substantial voter registration edge, Republicans have narrowed their gap by about 200,000 from four years ago, thanks in part to Democratic party-switchers. Trump campaign aides stress that number is five times Trump's 2016 vote margin.

But Trump's campaign is also facing grimmer prospects in areas like the vote-rich Philadelphia suburbs. And Biden is not Clinton, an historically unpopular candidate who particularly turned off white, working class men. Biden not only comes from the working class bastion of Scranton, but has built his political persona as a champion of those voters and their ideals.

AP writers Emily Swanson and Hannah Fingerhut in Washington, Jonathan Lemire in New York and Marc Levy in Harrisburg contributed to this report.

AP Road Trip: In Mississippi, Black voters face many hurdles

By TIM SULLIVAN Associated Press

Meridian, Miss. (AP) — The old civil rights worker was sure the struggle would be over by now.

He'd fought so hard back in the '60s. He'd seen the wreckage of burned churches, and the injuries of

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Oct. 22, 2020 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 111 ~ 49 of 97

people who had been beaten. He'd seen men in white hoods. At its worst, he'd mourned three young men who were fighting for Black Mississippians to gain the right to vote, and who were kidnapped and executed on a country road just north of here.

But Charles Johnson, sitting inside the neat brick church in Meridian where he's been pastor for over 60 years, worries that Mississippi is drifting into its past.

"I would never have thought we'd be where we're at now, with Blacks still fighting for the vote," said Johnson, 83, who was close to two of the murdered men, especially the New Yorker everyone called Mickey. "I would have never believed it."

The opposition to Black voters in Mississippi has changed since the 1960s, but it hasn't ended. There are no poll taxes anymore, no tests on the state constitution. But on the eve of the most divisive presidential election in decades, voters face obstacles such as state-mandated ID laws that mostly affect poor and minority communities and the disenfranchisement of tens of thousands of former prisoners.

By at least one measure, it's harder to vote in Mississippi than any other state. And despite Mississippi having the largest percentage of Black people of any state in the nation, a Jim Crow-era election law has ensured a Black person hasn't been elected to statewide office in 130 years. After years of being shut out of state races, Democrats hope mobilizing Black voters and recruiting Black candidates can eventually give them a path back to relevance in one of the reddest of red states.

But sometimes, it can seem that voting rights in Mississippi are like its small towns and dirt roads, which can appear frozen in the past.

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Decades after the murders, the narrow county road where they happened still turns pitch black after dark. Pine forests press in from both sides. The only light comes from a couple distant houses and the ocean of stars overhead.

One night in early October we stopped the car along the road and I stepped out. The songs of crickets filled the air. In the distance, I could hear the occasional truck driving past on Highway 19.

The killers who traveled that road in 1964 were local men - Ku Klux Klan members, a deputy sheriff, a few others. The victims were three young civil rights workers - the oldest just 24 - who had joined a mass campaign that over the coming years helped bring voting rights to Black Mississippi. The men, one Black and two white, were shot at close range. Their bodies were found in an earthen dam 44 days later.

Today, with the presidential election weeks away, three of us on a reporting trip across America wanted to see what things were like in a state where the simple act of voting was impossible for nearly every Black person well into the 1960s. In a year when America has been marked by so many convulsions - a pandemic, an economic crisis, countless protests for racial justice, a virulent political divide - the road trip has been a way to look more deeply at a country struggling to define itself.

We came to Mississippi because what happened here in 1964 was also about elections, and because of the three men murdered on that little road outside the little town of Philadelphia.

The case grabbed attention all the way to the White House. Along with such seminal events as the 1963 murder in Mississippi of Black civil rights activist Medgar Evers, it helped lead to the passage of the landmark Voting Rights Act of 1965, which prohibited racial discrimination in voting.

Eventually, so much changed for Black voters in Mississippi.
And yet so much didn't.

Today, voters in Mississippi face a series of government-created barriers that make it, according to a study in the Election Law Journal in 2018, far and away the most difficult state in which to vote.

Mississippi has broad restrictions on absentee voting, no early voting or online registration, absentee ballots that must be witnessed by notaries and voter ID laws that overwhelmingly affect the poor and minorities, since they are less likely to have state-approved identification. The restrictions have grown even

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Oct. 22, 2020 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 111 ~ 50 of 97

tighter since a 2013 Supreme Court decision blocked many voting rights protections.

"Anything that increases the 'costs' of voting - the time it takes, the effort it takes - that tends to decrease voter turnout," said Conor Dowling, a professor of political science at the University of Mississippi. "And there is evidence that some of these burdens are disproportionately felt by minority voters."

Mississippi also has widespread poverty. Nearly one-third of Black people here live below the poverty line, more than double the rate for white people, which means taking a day off work to vote can be too expensive.

Then there are the felony voting restrictions, which in Mississippi have disenfranchised almost 16% of the Black population, researchers say — compared to just 5% in nearby Missouri, another deeply Republican state. The Southern Poverty Law Center calls Mississippi's restrictions a holdover from an old state constitution designed specifically to disenfranchise Black voters.

Demarkio Pritchett, who said he was convicted as a teenager of drug possession "and some other stuff," understands that.

A lanky 29-year-old Black man now out of prison, he lives with his grandmother in Jackson, the state capital, in a poor neighborhood of battered houses with peeling paint, small well-kept homes and empty lots overgrown with trees and kudzu. His grandmother's house, which manages to be both neat and battered, has an election sign out front for Mike Espy, a Black Democrat running for the U.S. Senate.

Democrats here see hope in candidates like Espy, a former congressman and the first Black Agriculture Secretary, who is focused on registering Black voters. Their long-term strategy hinges on mobilizing Black voters and recruiting Black candidates.

Pritchett's grandmother is zealous about voting. But her grandson can't vote in Mississippi for the rest of his life. Anyone convicted here of one of 22 crimes, from murder to felony shoplifting, has their voting rights permanently revoked. Pritchett's only chance: getting a pardon from the governor, or convincing two-thirds of the state's lawmakers to pass a bill written just for him.

"I want to vote, but they make it so I can't," he said, sitting on the front porch with a friend on a recent afternoon. "We just can't beat the government. We just can't."

Distrust of the government runs deep in the Black community in Mississippi, where harsh voter suppression tactics - voting fees, tests on the state constitution, even guessing the number of beans in a jar - kept all but about 6% of Black residents from voting into the 1960s. A Black person who even tried to register to vote could find themselves fired from their job and evicted from their home.

As a result, Black politicians have long been fighting an apathy born of generations of frustration.

Anthony Boggan sometimes votes, but is sitting it out this year, disgusted at the choices.

"They're all going to tell you the same thing," he said. "Anything to get elected."

A 49-year-old Black Jackson resident with a small moving company, Boggan likes how the economy boomed during the Trump years, but can't bring himself to vote for a man known for his insults and name-calling.

"He's a butthole," Boggan said, as a group of Black friends, including one who planned to vote for Trump, laughed and nodded in agreement. "Everybody knows he's a butthole."

As for Biden: He and Trump both "got dementia," Boggan said, and he hates how the former vice president tries to curry favor in the Black community.

"Why does everything he says got to be about the Black? 'I did more of this for the Black. I'm going to do all of this for the Black,'" he said, angrily mimicking Biden. "Just have them do all this for the American people!"

One man in the group, which was doing construction on a friend's house on a recent morning, simply refuses to vote.

"Most of the presidents that got in there, they lied all the way," said Clyde Lewis, a 59-year-old mechanic. "They hurt us more than they help us."

That kind of talk is painful for Kim Houston.

"Sometimes I think we beat ourselves," said Houston, the president of the Meridian City Council, the

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Oct. 22, 2020 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 111 ~ 51 of 97

frustration clear in her voice. "There's this mindset that (voting) doesn't matter, that nothing is going to change, that the election system is rigged."

It adds up to a state where plenty of Black people have reached office - by some estimates it has the highest number of Black officials in the country - but many of them are local: mayors, city council members, city officials.

With those officials came significant infrastructure improvements, such as roads paved in Black neighborhoods and sewage systems installed that allowed Black homeowners to finally abandon their outhouses. But in Mississippi, a Black politician can rise only so high, they say, and are kept from those statewide offices.

"When it comes to the positions that really matter, we're not sitting at that table," said Houston, a Black woman who also runs an insurance company.

This is why people like Houston, Johnson and countless pastors and activists push so hard to get more Black people to the polls.

Black registration and turnout rates are actually reasonably high in Mississippi. In 2016, for example, 81% of Black Mississippians were registered and 69% turned out to vote.

Roshunda Osby is one of those voters. A 37-year-old certified nursing assistant, she goes to the polls in every election, she said, including local ones.

"If you don't get out and vote you shouldn't even have an opinion about what's going on," said Osby, who detests Trump for his racism.

"I don't know much about Joe Biden, but we only have two options, and he's going to be the better candidate than Trump," she said, sighing.

Black women are, in many ways, the electoral bedrock of the Democratic Party, a fiercely partisan community known for turning out in force.

But Black women are not enough in a state where politics and race are so tightly interwoven. Mississippi, which is 38% Black, has very few Black Republican voters and relatively few white Democratic voters.

"It almost doesn't matter if (Black voter turnout rates) are comparable to other states," said Dowling, the political science professor. "It's not enough for them to win elections unless it gets better."

Johnson, the civil rights worker, remembers well how things used to be in Mississippi.

Mississippi could seem like a different country in the years leading up to the civil rights movement. It was far poorer than most of America, it barely bothered to fund some Black schools, it openly treated Black people as third-class citizens.

And Mississippi fought bitterly to deny the vote to Black residents, fearing their numbers would give them political power.

The racism was not subtle.

"I call on every red-blooded white man to use any means to keep the (Black people) away from the polls," Mississippi Sen. Theodore Bilbo told a group of supporters during his 1946 election campaign, using a virulently racist term. "If you don't understand what that means you are just plain dumb."

Johnson was repeatedly refused the right to register to vote. But his anger pushed him to try again and again.

"It made me feel like whatever they try, I was going to knock it down," he said.

As the civil rights movement took hold, Johnson focused on organizing boycotts of businesses that wouldn't hire Black people. In 1964, he joined with activist groups who were busing in hundreds of out-of-state volunteers to help organize Black voter registration drives and set up "Freedom Schools" for Black children.

That was when he met Michael Schwerner, a charismatic white 24-year-old who ran a small community center in Meridian with his wife. Schwerner often worked with James Chaney, a quiet 21-year-old Black plasterer and rights activist who sometimes attended Johnson's church. Chaney and Schwerner traveled to meeting after meeting in this part of Mississippi, encouraging and cajoling people to try to register.

Sometimes, the two would sleep in a car in front of Johnson's church, fearing it would be targeted in the wave of Black church burnings that swept Mississippi that year.

Then, on June 21, Schwerner, Chaney and a newly arrived volunteer - 20-year-old white New Yorker Andrew Goodman - drove to a little Black church on the outer edges of the town of Philadelphia to meet with witnesses to a KKK attack. The Mt. Zion United Methodist Church, where Schwerner and Chaney had spoken a couple months earlier, had been burned down and its parishioners beaten by a group of Klansmen.

Over the coming hours, the men would be briefly jailed in Philadelphia on trumped-up charges, released and then forced to stop on the highway as they tried to drive home to Meridian. The kidnapers, led by a deputy sheriff and local Klansmen, drove Chaney, Schwerner and Goodman to that narrow country road and shot them at close range.

Johnson was heading to a church meeting in Portland, Oregon on the day of the killing. He stepped off a train to see newspaper front pages declaring the three were missing.

"I knew they were dead," he said. "If they went that far to take two white boys and a Black boy, I knew somebody was going to die."

"It looked like there was no good that existed."

He's driven down the road a couple times since then, and it reminds him of the continued difficulties that Black people face in Mississippi when it comes to voting.

"I'm afraid the road is just as crooked now as it was then," he said.

In video classes teachers parse clues to student wellbeing

By CAROLYN THOMPSON Associated Press

Christi Brouder had finally gotten her 10-year-old daughter settled on the hallway floor with a laptop and signed into a video class on Google Meet when the girl's 6-year-old brother leaped over computer the screen "in his birthday suit" to get a juice box.

To Brouder's surprise, a social worker from the Massachusetts Department of Children and Families called her later that day; someone had reported an adult male exposing himself during the class. That was followed by a visit from a police detective sent by the school to do an in-person wellness check.

Brouder explained that her son has epilepsy and autism and sometimes takes his clothes off to feel more comfortable and the inquiry ended there.

But the experience left the mother in the city of Haverhill incensed, and underscores the challenge on educators to make judgments based on fleeting scenes or sounds from a webcam.

"The teachers never asked to speak to me. Nobody said anything" during the class, Brouder said.

Child protection laws require school personnel, along with health care workers and other professionals, to report any suspicions of neglect or abuse. The coronavirus pandemic and virtual instruction have only raised the stakes; in the absence of daily in-person school and extracurriculars, a teacher's video contact may offer the only window to spot potential problems in students' lives.

Many school districts that are still providing classes online have asked teachers to be on the lookout in students' backdrops for objects such as drug paraphernalia, caregivers who appear to be under the influence of drugs or alcohol, and children with injuries or poor hygiene or who are being demeaned regularly by adults.

It can be a difficult call.

"Do I look at that child and say, 'Oh, he looks underfed?'" Jennifer Ryan, a middle school teacher in the Connetquot Central School district in New York, said. "Do I look at that child and say, 'You know, that room looks much more sparse than a kid should really live in?'"

"I'm making an assumption based on the tiny square that I have in view," said Ryan, who teaches half her students in person while the other half tune in remotely.

Ryan said her colleagues have encountered loud, profane arguments in students' homes that are audible not only to teachers, but classmates. Some of the children attending school only remotely already were on the radar of child protection agencies, she said.

"We are mandated reporters, but observing anything at this distance is nearly impossible," she said.

Advocates worried about a sharp drop in reported cases of possible child endangerment when the

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Oct. 22, 2020 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 111 ~ 53 of 97

coronavirus shut down schools in the spring. Teachers and other professionals who came into contact with a child through their jobs made about two-thirds of the 4.3 million reports that U.S. child protection agencies received in 2018, federal data shows.

"We can view this as a real negative while kids aren't in school, and that is true, but we can also look at it from the perspective of, we've never had this much inside access into a student's home life," said Chris Newlin, executive director of the National Children's Advocacy Center.

The NCAC and others have issued guidelines to help teachers identify warning signs in unfamiliar settings, advising them to be alert for students who appear to be unsupervised and to pay attention to how students interact with others in the home.

"There's an opportunity for teachers to still see their kids and see if they have any injuries, very obvious things," Newlin said, "but also what's in the background."

In some cases, it's what teachers don't see that is alarming, particularly when students repeatedly miss virtual school.

The school system in Tulsa, Oklahoma asked local police to check on two girls, ages 5 and 8, who were given laptops but not logging in at class time. Officers found the sisters home alone and were there when the mother returned home intoxicated, police said. She was charged with child neglect.

Elsewhere, including in New York City and Massachusetts, parents have pushed back at educational neglect allegations reported against them because students have missed class too many times.

Educators should be reasonable but not shy away from reporting things that make them uneasy, said Wendy Rock, a former school counselor who now teaches at Southeastern Louisiana University.

"A parent yelling at a child is not abuse....This is a stressful time," Rock said. "But if a teacher sees something that gives them the feeling that the child is in danger, at the very least they need to consult with the school counselor."

An elementary school teacher in Warwick County, Florida didn't have time to sound a warning on the first day of school in August. Behind a 10-year-old girl attending class online, the teacher and other students heard a commotion unnerving enough that the teacher muted the girl's audio.

The teacher saw the girl cover her ears before the child's video window went blank. Investigators would later explain that a bullet had struck the student's computer when her mother was fatally shot in front of the girl, her three siblings and her two cousins. The mother's ex-boyfriend was charged with murder.

In Louisiana, it was a BB gun that caught the attention of fourth grader Ka Mauri Harrison's teacher. He was suspended him for six days after a report that he was holding "what appeared to be a full-sized rifle." Ka Mauri had picked up the BB gun after his younger brother tripped on it, his parents said. He was suspended for violating an in-class instruction policy.

"They are treating it as if he brought a weapon to school," Nyron Harrison, one of Ka Mauri's parents, said.

The Beau Biden Foundation in Delaware developed new training to help educators adjust to the two-dimensional, thumbnail view, emphasizing "the totality of the observations or circumstances," program director Claudine Wiant said.

"There may be a resonable explanation or there may be something that's easy to dismiss" on its own, she said, but merits a call in the context of behavioral clues or comments.

She pointed to the case of a first- or second-grade student who was in the dark during video classes.

"The teacher just asked, 'Can you turn on the lights?' And the student's response was 'well, my parents are working and we have to keep the lights off while we're home alone,'" she said, "and so that was a referral to services."

Edith Pride, an elementary school teacher in Boca Raton, Florida vented her frustration with the changing landscape during a recent school board meeting, drawing laughs even as she delivered a serious message.

"Parents, please make sure that you have on proper clothing when you are walking behind your child's computer, because we've seen them in their drawers, their bras and everything else," Pride said at the meeting. "Parents, when you are helping your children at their computer, please do not appear with big joints in your hands and cigarettes. Those joints be as big as cigars. Oh yeah, we've seen it all."

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Oct. 22, 2020 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 111 ~ 54 of 97

"Teachers are feeling overwhelmed," Pride said later by phone. "They're feeling pressure. They're feeling stressed out of their mind because you have so many different components to look at."

Some parents say that even though their children never were in harm's way, there were repercussions from teachers misinterpreting what they thought they had seen. (do we know of anyone else besides Brouder? even if we haven't interviewed them, could be good to give a sense of the kinds of things teachers have reported/maybe misunderstood.)

Brouder said she is working on her young son's behavior as she raises four children with special needs, but the police detective's visit left her daughter unwilling to sign back in for online school out of fear someone in the family would get in trouble.

"There has to be open communication, where if a teacher has a concern or if they think something or they think they saw something that they normally wouldn't have seen because they're not in a parent's home, talk to the parents," she said. "Don't just assume the worst."

The Haverhill school district did not immediately respond to emailed requests for comment.

Face to face: Trump and Biden to meet for final debate

By JONATHAN LEMIRE, BILL BARROW and STEVE PEOPLES Associated Press

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (AP) — President Donald Trump and his Democratic challenger, Joe Biden, are set to square off in their final debate Thursday, one of the last high-profile opportunities for the trailing incumbent to change the trajectory of an increasingly contentious campaign.

Worried about losing the White House, some advisers are urging Trump to trade his aggressive demeanor from the first debate for a lower-key style that puts Biden more squarely in the spotlight. But it's unclear whether the president will listen.

Biden, who has stepped off the campaign trail in favor of debate prep, expects Trump to get intensely personal. The former vice president and his inner circle see the president's approach chiefly as an effort to distract from the coronavirus, its economic fallout and other crises.

With less than two weeks until Election Day, Biden is leading most national polls and has a narrower advantage in the battleground states that could decide the race. More than 42 million people have already cast their ballots. The debate, moderated by NBC's Kristen Welker, is a final chance for both men to make their case to a television audience of tens of millions of voters.

"The rule is that last debates before the election have a big impact," said presidential historian Michael Beschloss, who made clear the legacy of the candidates' first faceoff: "That was the most out-of-control presidential debate we have seen."

Trump, who staged a remarkable comeback in the closing days of the 2016 campaign, believes he can do it again by using the power of the presidency to attack his rival.

Trump on Tuesday called on Attorney General William Barr to immediately launch an investigation into unverified claims about Biden and his son Hunter, effectively demanding that the Justice Department muddy his political opponent and abandon its historic resistance to getting involved in elections.

The president has promoted an unconfirmed New York Post report published last week that cites an email in which an official from Ukrainian gas company Burisma thanked Hunter Biden, who served on the company's board, for arranging for him to meet Joe Biden during a 2015 visit to Washington. The Biden campaign has rejected Trump's assertion of wrongdoing and noted that Biden's schedule did not show a meeting with the Burisma official.

Some former national security officials and other experts said the episode raised multiple red flags of a possible foreign disinformation effort, especially given the involvement of Rudy Giuliani, Trump's personal attorney, and Giuliani's active role in promoting an anti-Biden narrative on Ukraine.

But John Ratcliffe, the director of national intelligence, dismissed that disinformation theory. And the FBI appeared to endorse Ratcliffe's position in a letter to a Senate committee that had requested information on a laptop purportedly belonging to Hunter Biden.

Trump's attacks on the Biden family have been relentless, including his efforts to get Ukraine to investigate

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Oct. 22, 2020 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 111 ~ 55 of 97

Joe Biden, which led to Trump's impeachment. It's part of a determined, yet so-far-unsuccessful effort to drive up his opponent's negatives, as he did with Hillary Clinton four years ago.

Trump campaign communications director Tim Murtaugh said, "Trump is still the political outsider, while Biden is the ultimate insider. We now know that Biden allowed his son to sell access to him while he was vice president."

While Biden will defend his own record and his son, aides have said, he hopes to focus on making the case that Trump is unfit for office and let the nation down during a confluence of crises.

"He knows that people want to hear about how we're going to help working families get through the end of the month and pay the rent," his running mate, Sen. Kamala Harris, said Wednesday in North Carolina. "That's what people care about, and one of the things I love about Joe Biden — he doesn't take on or talk about other people's kids."

The one-two punch of the first debate and the president's three-day hospital stint after contracting COVID-19 rattled his base of support and triggered alarm among Republicans who fear the White House and Senate could be slipping away.

The initial debate was the most tumultuous in modern history, with a belligerent tone that was persistent and somehow fitting for what has been an extraordinarily ugly campaign. Amid heated clashes over the pandemic, the Supreme Court and the integrity of the election itself, Trump refused to condemn white supremacists who have supported him, telling one such group known as the Proud Boys to "stand back and stand by."

The two men frequently talked over each other with Trump interrupting, nearly shouting, so often that Biden eventually snapped at him, "Will you shut up, man?"

Aides have urged Trump, who has skipped debate prep, to show some restraint this time, allowing Biden to speak more and get himself in trouble with verbal gaffes and lapses. But the president has made no promises.

"Some people think, 'Let him talk,' because he loses his train (of thought), he just loses it and he doesn't speak the train of thought," Trump said in a town hall discussion taped at the White House Rose Garden and aired by Sinclair Broadcast Group on Wednesday evening. "But we'll see what happens. I mean, you will have to be there."

It was two days after the first debate in Cleveland when Trump tested positive for the coronavirus. The White House has refused to reveal when the president had last tested negative before the debate, raising questions as to whether he was already infected when he took the stage.

After the diagnosis, the Commission on Presidential Debates ruled that the second debate, which was to have been held last week, be virtual. Trump balked, leading to the cancellation of the debate and the two men holding dueling town halls instead, speaking at the same time more than 1,000 miles (1,600 kilometers) apart.

On the debate stage Wednesday, two large plexiglass shields had been put in place in front of the candidates' lecterns.

On Thursday night, in an effort to curtail interruptions, Trump and Biden will each have his microphone cut off while his rival delivers an opening two-minute answer to each of the six debate topics, the commission announced. The mute button won't figure in the open discussion portion of the debate, but has drawn criticism from Trump.

"The mute is very unfair," he said Wednesday as he left the White House for a campaign rally.

Lemire reported from Washington. Barrow reported from Atlanta. Additional reporting by Alexandra Jaffe and Zeke Miller in Washington and Amer Madhani in Chicago.

Regulators, experts take up thorny vaccine study issues

By LAURAN NEERGAARD and MATTHEW PERRONE Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The U.S. regulators who will decide the fate of COVID-19 vaccines are taking an

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Oct. 22, 2020 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 111 ~ 56 of 97

unusual step: Asking outside scientists if their standards are high enough.

The Food and Drug Administration may have to decide by year's end whether to allow use of the first vaccines against the virus. Thursday, a federal advisory committee pulls back the curtain on that decision process, debating whether the guidelines FDA has set for vaccine developers are rigorous enough.

"We will not cut corners, and we will only use science and data to make that determination," FDA Commissioner Stephen Hahn pledged at a meeting of the Milken Institute Wednesday.

Exactly how much data his agency needs to be sure a vaccine is safe and effective is a key question for the advisers. An even bigger one: If the FDA allows emergency use of a vaccine before final testing is finished, will that destroy chances of ever learning just how well that shot -- and maybe competitors still being studied -- really work?

"We can't lose sight of the fact that it is in our societal interest to see these trials to completion," said Dr. Luciana Borio, a former FDA acting chief scientist who will be watching the advisers' debate.

Plus, multiple vaccines are being studied -- shots made with different technologies that each have pros and cons.

"The first vaccine is not necessarily the best vaccine," cautioned Dr. M. Miles Braun, a former FDA scientist now with Georgetown University School of Medicine. If the trials aren't allowed to finish, it may be difficult or impossible to ever know for sure.

It's a critical moment in FDA's 114-year history. The government has spent billions to race a vaccine through a research process that usually takes years, and FDA faces unprecedented pressure from the Trump administration, fueling public skepticism that politics could overrule science.

Interest is so high, FDA is airing the meeting on YouTube. Here are some key issues the committee will discuss:

HOW MUCH EVIDENCE IS NEEDED?

FDA is requiring manufacturers to do studies of at least 30,000 people to prove if a vaccine protects and how safe it is. Those studies must include adequate numbers of people at highest risk from COVID-19 -- older adults, minorities and anyone with underlying health problems.

FDA has made clear that any vaccine must be at least 50% effective. And while the studies are designed to run for two years, companies may get enough evidence the shots are protective -- in at least some people -- to stop the trials early and seek what's called an "emergency use authorization" for wider vaccinations.

Despite White House objections, the FDA told vaccine makers earlier this month not to seek that speedier review until they've tracked at least half their trial participants for two months. With other vaccines, that's about the amount of time when major side effects crop up.

That's not long enough, said the head of the non-profit ECRI Institute, which reviews medical technology for hospitals and insurers. In comments submitted to the advisory committee, ECRI's Dr. Marcus Schabacker said FDA should require six months of follow-up.

"Doing any less would simply risk too much, and the consequences may be severe," he wrote. "A weak vaccine that loses public trust could poison the well for epidemic control for many years."

WOULD EMERGENCY USE DERAILED FULL ANSWERS ABOUT VACCINES?

Normally when a study ends because of evidence that a vaccine is working, the participants who got dummy shots are offered the real thing.

But if FDA allows emergency use of a COVID-19 vaccine, that's not the same as having full proof the shot works, Borio cautioned.

And if the participants in the placebo group are immediately offered the real shot, researchers may not be able to get answers about all the high-risk groups in the study -- or tell how long the vaccine's protection lasts, a process expected to take many more months.

But Pfizer Inc., which with Germany's BioNTech is developing one of the leading candidates, told FDA that if it's granted emergency use authorization, it "would have an ethical obligation" to alert study participants who got a placebo and allow them vaccine access. The company wants FDA to look into "other scientifically and statistically sound methods" to determine long-term safety and effectiveness.

Pfizer's stance is likely to face pushback. The Infectious Diseases Society of America states that FDA's

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Oct. 22, 2020 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 111 ~ 57 of 97

panelists "should insist" that vaccine developers "present a compelling case" for how they will complete their trials if FDA grants early authorization of their vaccine.

Clearing a vaccine based on premature or faulty data "could cause more harm" by "further eroding public confidence in all vaccines," the group said.

It's an unprecedented dilemma. The FDA has previously allowed emergency use of only one vaccine, a decades-old shot that in 2005 was authorized to prevent anthrax poisoning.

This time around, multiple COVID-19 vaccines are in the pipeline. Pfizer competitor Johnson & Johnson cautioned that early FDA clearance of one vaccine could "jeopardize integrity" of other ongoing trials if patients decide to drop out to seek the first cleared shot instead.

The company asked regulators to explain what options are available to ensure completion of all ongoing COVID-19 vaccine trials.

WHAT ABOUT LONG-TERM SAFETY MONITORING?

Even a study of 30,000 people cannot spot a side effect that only strikes 1 in 100,000. So the government is planning extra scrutiny of every COVID-19 vaccine to hit the market.

At first there will be limited doses given to just certain high-risk people -- and those early recipients are to get text messages daily for the first week after vaccination, and then weekly out to six weeks, asking how they're feeling.

FDA also will be checking databases of electronic health records and insurance claims, looking for any red flags.

"There's a kind of tracking that has to take place here on a massive basis that hasn't taken place before," said Dr. Jesse Goodman of Georgetown University, a former director of the FDA's vaccine and biologics center.

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5 questions as Trump and Biden prepare for final debate

By STEVE PEOPLES AP National Political Writer

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (AP) — President Donald Trump and his Democratic rival, Joe Biden, meet on the debate stage for the second and final time Thursday night in Tennessee. The 90-minute prime-time meeting comes just 12 days before Election Day.

Some key questions heading into the debate:

CAN TRUMP CHANGE THE TRAJECTORY OF THE RACE?

Trump cannot afford a status quo debate. National polls show him losing to Biden, and while some battleground state polls are tighter, even some of Trump's own allies are worrying aloud about the prospect of a serious defeat. This debate represents his best, and perhaps last, opportunity to change the contours of the race while tens of millions of Americans are watching.

The president fumbled his chance in the opening debate last month, when his attack-all-the-time approach backfired. Trump missed another opportunity when he refused to participate in the second debate after organizers decided the candidates would face each other virtually because of concerns about the president's coronavirus infection.

Trump needs to find a way to focus the debate — and the election more broadly — on Biden and his liabilities. But to do that, he needs to avoid making himself the center of attention, something that doesn't come naturally to the president.

WILL THE MUTE BUTTON KEEP THINGS CIVIL?

The mute button has gotten a lot of attention leading up to the debate, but its impact may be overstated.

Given Trump's unrelenting interruptions in the first debate, the Commission on Presidential Debates added a new rule for Thursday's affair that will keep each candidate muted while the other delivers his two-minute remarks at the outset of each of the six debate topics. The remainder of each 15-minute block

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Oct. 22, 2020 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 111 ~ 58 of 97

will be open discussion, without any muting, the commission says.

The change will ensure the candidates have at least some time to answer questions without interference. Ultimately, however, the mute button can only be used for a combined total of 24 minutes of the 90-minute debate. That's plenty of time for the candidates to mix it up.

DOES TRUMP HAVE A BETTER ANSWER FOR THE PANDEMIC?

Whether he wants to or not, the president will have to talk about the coronavirus at length. And he has to come up with a better answer than he did during the first debate to convince persuadable voters that he has the situation under control.

It won't be easy.

Coronavirus infections are surging to their highest levels in months. More than 220,000 Americans are dead. And rather than working on a comprehensive plan to stop the spread based on science, Trump has spent recent days attacking the nation's most respected infectious-disease expert, Dr. Anthony Fauci, while undermining his own administration's recommendation to wear masks.

In the first debate, Trump pointed to his months-old decision to institute a partial travel ban on China as evidence he was doing a good job. He's also highlighted carefully selected statistics that downplayed the extent of the crisis. He'll have to come with something better than that if he's going to convince anyone but his most loyal base that he hasn't completely surrendered to the deadliest U.S. health crisis in a century.

HOW WILL BIDEN HANDLE ATTACKS AGAINST HIS SON?

Trump and his allies in the conservative media have ramped up their focus on alleged maleficence by Biden's son Hunter in recent days. Biden's team expects Trump to make those allegations a centerpiece of his debate strategy.

The president tried to make an issue in the first debate of Hunter Biden and his drug use, which the younger Biden has publicly acknowledged. But Trump's attack may have backfired when Biden declared that he was proud of his son, who, like many Americans, had fought to overcome an addiction.

Trump believes he has more ammunition this time around, however, following the publication of a tabloid report offering a bizarre twist to familiar concerns about Hunter Biden's work overseas. The report centers on data allegedly recovered from Hunter Biden's laptop, though the data has not been verified and, if it is legitimate, does not tie candidate Biden to any corruption.

Biden's team considers the issue a distraction from much more pressing concerns — namely, the pandemic — but Biden will certainly have to defend himself and his family again on Thursday night.

CAN BIDEN AVOID PLAYING INTO GOP NARRATIVE?

Biden's greatest foe Thursday night may be himself.

Trump has struggled to find an effective line of attack against the 77-year-old Democrat, but the lifetime politician has a well-established history of gaffes that has made him the butt of Republican jokes for years.

To that end, the 74-year-old Trump and his allies spent much of the year questioning Biden's mental and physical health. While Biden quieted those questions with a solid performance in the first debate, they have not gone away. He needs to avoid any embarrassing missteps on stage that would play into the broader Republican narrative that he's ill-equipped to lead the free world.

Biden will certainly be prepared. He spent four of the last five days with no public events so he could focus almost exclusively on debate prep.

Still, Biden's history of self-imposed stumbles raises the distinct possibility that he could hurt his campaign, with or without Trump's help. It doesn't help Biden that expectations will be higher after Trump's weak performance in the first debate.

US officials link Iran to emails meant to intimidate voters

By ERIC TUCKER and FRANK BAJAK Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — U.S. officials accused Iran on Wednesday of being behind a flurry of emails sent to Democratic voters in multiple battleground states that appeared to be aimed at intimidating them into voting for President Donald Trump.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Oct. 22, 2020 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 111 ~ 59 of 97

The officials did not lay out specific evidence for how they came to pinpoint Iran, but the activities attributed to Tehran would mark a significant escalation for a country some cybersecurity experts regard as a second-rate player in online espionage. The announcement was made at a hastily called news conference 13 days before the election.

The allegations underscored the U.S. government's concern about efforts by foreign countries to influence the election by spreading false information meant to suppress voter turnout and undermine American confidence in the vote. Such direct attempts to sway public opinion are more commonly associated with Moscow, which conducted a covert social media campaign in 2016 aimed at sowing discord and is again interfering this year, but the idea that Iran could be responsible suggested that those tactics have been adopted by other nations, too.

"These actions are desperate attempts by desperate adversaries," said John Ratcliffe, the government's national intelligence director, who, along with FBI Director Chris Wray, insisted the U.S. would impose costs on foreign countries that interfere in the U.S. election and that the integrity of the vote remains sound.

"You should be confident that your vote counts," Wray said. "Early, unverified claims to the contrary should be viewed with a healthy dose of skepticism."

The two officials called out both Russia and Iran for having obtained voter registration information, though such data is sometimes easily accessible and there was no allegation either country had hacked a database for it. Iran sent spoofed emails designed to intimidate voters and sow unrest and also distributed a video that falsely suggested voters could cast fraudulent ballots from overseas, Ratcliffe said.

Wray and Ratcliffe did not describe the emails, but officials familiar with the matter said the U.S. has linked Tehran to messages sent to Democratic voters in at least four states, including battleground locations like Pennsylvania and Florida. The emails falsely purported to be from the far-right group Proud Boys and warned that "we will come after you" if the recipients didn't vote for Trump.

Though Democratic voters were targeted, Ratcliffe said the spoofed emails were intended to harm Trump, though he did not elaborate how. One possibility is the messages may have been intended to align Trump in the minds of voters with the Proud Boys after he was criticized for failing to unequivocally denounce the group during the first presidential debate.

It would not be the first time that the Trump administration has said Tehran is working against the president.

An intelligence assessment in August said: "Iran seeks to undermine U.S. democratic institutions, President Trump, and to divide the country in advance of the 2020 elections." It said the country would probably continue to focus on "spreading disinformation on social media and recirculating anti-U.S. content."

Alireza Miryousefi, a spokesman for Iran's mission to the United Nations, denied Tehran's involvement.

"Unlike the U.S., Iran does not interfere in other country's elections," Miryousefi wrote on Twitter. "The world has been witnessing U.S.' own desperate public attempts to question the outcome of its own elections at the highest level."

Trump, speaking at a rally in North Carolina, made no reference to the intelligence announcement, but repeated a familiar campaign assertion that Iran is opposed to his reelection. He promised that if he wins another term he will reach a new accord with Iran over its nuclear program.

"Iran doesn't want to let me win. China doesn't want to let me win," Trump said. "The first call I'll get after we win, the first call I'll get will be from Iran saying let's make a deal."

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and Rep. Adam Schiff, Democratic chairman of the House intelligence committee, said the "disturbing" threats cut to the heart of the right to vote.

"We cannot allow voter intimidation or interference efforts, either foreign or domestic, to silence voters' voices and take away that right," they said in a statement.

While state-backed Russian hackers are known to have infiltrated U.S. election infrastructure in 2016, there is no evidence that Iran has ever done so. It was also not clear how officials were able to identify Iran so quickly.

The operation represented something of a departure in cyber-ops for Iran, which sought for the first time on record to undermine voter confidence. Iran's previous operations have been mostly propaganda and espionage.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Oct. 22, 2020 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 111 ~ 60 of 97

A top cyberthreat analyst, John Hultquist of FireEye, said the development marked "a fundamental shift in our understanding of Iran's willingness to interfere in the democratic process. While many of their operations have been focused on promoting propaganda in pursuit of Iran's interests, this incident is clearly aimed at undermining voter confidence."

The voter intimidation operation apparently used email addresses obtained from state voter registration lists, which include party affiliation and home addresses and can include email addresses and phone numbers.

Those addresses were then used in an apparently widespread targeted spamming operation. The senders claimed they would know which candidate the recipient was voting for in the Nov. 3 election, for which early voting is ongoing.

Asked about the emails during an online forum earlier Wednesday, Pennsylvania Secretary of State Kathy Boockvar said she lacked specifics. "I am aware that they were sent to voters in multiple swing states and we are working closely with the attorney general on these types of things and others," she said.

Federal officials have long warned about the possibility of this type of operation, as such registration lists are not difficult to obtain.

"These emails are meant to intimidate and undermine American voters' confidence in our elections," Christopher Krebs, the top election security official at the Department of Homeland Security, tweeted Tuesday night after reports of the emails first surfaced.

Bajak reported from Boston. Associated Press writers Christina A. Cassidy in Atlanta and Michael Balsamo, Colleen Long and Zeke Miller in Washington contributed to this report.

Face to face: Trump and Biden to meet for final debate

By JONATHAN LEMIRE, BILL BARROW and STEVE PEOPLES Associated Press
NASHVILLE, Tenn. (AP) — President Donald Trump and his Democratic challenger, Joe Biden, are set to square off in their final debate Thursday, one of the last high-profile opportunities for the trailing incumbent to change the trajectory of an increasingly contentious campaign.

Worried about losing the White House, some advisers are urging Trump to trade his aggressive demeanor from the first debate for a lower-key style that puts Biden more squarely in the spotlight. But it's unclear whether the president will listen.

Biden, who has stepped off the campaign trail in favor of debate prep, expects Trump to get intensely personal. The former vice president and his inner circle see the president's approach chiefly as an effort to distract from the coronavirus, its economic fallout and other crises.

With less than two weeks until Election Day, Biden is leading most national polls and has a narrower advantage in the battleground states that could decide the race. More than 42 million people have already cast their ballots. The debate, moderated by NBC's Kristen Welker, is a final chance for both men to make their case to a television audience of tens of millions of voters.

"The rule is that last debates before the election have a big impact," said presidential historian Michael Beschloss, who made clear the legacy of the candidates' first faceoff: "That was the most out-of-control presidential debate we have seen."

Trump, who staged a remarkable comeback in the closing days of the 2016 campaign, believes he can do it again by using the power of the presidency to attack his rival.

Trump on Tuesday called on Attorney General William Barr to immediately launch an investigation into unverified claims about Biden and his son Hunter, effectively demanding that the Justice Department muddy his political opponent and abandon its historic resistance to getting involved in elections.

The president has promoted an unconfirmed New York Post report published last week that cites an email in which an official from Ukrainian gas company Burisma thanked Hunter Biden, who served on the company's board, for arranging for him to meet Joe Biden during a 2015 visit to Washington. The Biden campaign has rejected Trump's assertion of wrongdoing and noted that Biden's schedule did not show a

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Oct. 22, 2020 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 111 ~ 61 of 97

meeting with the Burisma official.

Some former national security officials and other experts said the episode raised multiple red flags of a possible foreign disinformation effort, especially given the involvement of Rudy Giuliani, Trump's personal attorney, and Giuliani's active role in promoting an anti-Biden narrative on Ukraine.

But John Ratcliffe, the director of national intelligence, dismissed that disinformation theory. And the FBI appeared to endorse Ratcliffe's position in a letter to a Senate committee that had requested information on a laptop purportedly belonging to Hunter Biden.

Trump's attacks on the Biden family have been relentless, including his efforts to get Ukraine to investigate Joe Biden, which led to Trump's impeachment. It's part of a determined, yet so-far-unsuccessful effort to drive up his opponent's negatives, as he did with Hillary Clinton four years ago.

Trump campaign communications director Tim Murtaugh said, "Trump is still the political outsider, while Biden is the ultimate insider. We now know that Biden allowed his son to sell access to him while he was vice president."

While Biden will defend his own record and his son, aides have said, he hopes to focus on making the case that Trump is unfit for office and let the nation down during a confluence of crises.

"He knows that people want to hear about how we're going to help working families get through the end of the month and pay the rent," his running mate, Sen. Kamala Harris, said Wednesday in North Carolina. "That's what people care about, and one of the things I love about Joe Biden — he doesn't take on or talk about other people's kids."

The one-two punch of the first debate and the president's three-day hospital stint after contracting COVID-19 rattled his base of support and triggered alarm among Republicans who fear the White House and Senate could be slipping away.

The initial debate was the most tumultuous in modern history, with a belligerent tone that was persistent and somehow fitting for what has been an extraordinarily ugly campaign. Amid heated clashes over the pandemic, the Supreme Court and the integrity of the election itself, Trump refused to condemn white supremacists who have supported him, telling one such group known as the Proud Boys to "stand back and stand by."

The two men frequently talked over each other with Trump interrupting, nearly shouting, so often that Biden eventually snapped at him, "Will you shut up, man?"

Aides have urged Trump, who has skipped debate prep, to show some restraint this time, allowing Biden to speak more and get himself in trouble with verbal gaffes and lapses. But the president has made no promises.

"Some people think, 'Let him talk,' because he loses his train (of thought), he just loses it and he doesn't speak the train of thought," Trump said in a town hall discussion taped at the White House Rose Garden and aired by Sinclair Broadcast Group on Wednesday evening. "But we'll see what happens. I mean, you will have to be there."

It was two days after the first debate in Cleveland when Trump tested positive for the coronavirus. The White House has refused to reveal when the president had last tested negative before the debate, raising questions as to whether he was already infected when he took the stage.

After the diagnosis, the Commission on Presidential Debates ruled that the second debate, which was to have been held last week, be virtual. Trump balked, leading to the cancellation of the debate and the two men holding dueling town halls instead, speaking at the same time more than 1,000 miles (1,600 kilometers) apart.

On the debate stage Wednesday, two large plexiglass shields had been put in place in front of the candidates' lecterns.

On Thursday night, in an effort to curtail interruptions, Trump and Biden will each have his microphone cut off while his rival delivers an opening two-minute answer to each of the six debate topics, the commission announced. The mute button won't figure in the open discussion portion of the debate, but has drawn criticism from Trump.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Oct. 22, 2020 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 111 ~ 62 of 97

"The mute is very unfair," he said Wednesday as he left the White House for a campaign rally.

Lemire reported from Washington. Barrow reported from Atlanta. Additional reporting by Alexandra Jaffe and Zeke Miller in Washington and Aamer Madhani in Chicago.

In pitch for Biden, Obama urges voters to cast Trump out

By ALEXANDRA JAFFE and BILL BARROW Associated Press

PHILADELPHIA (AP) — Former President Barack Obama blasted President Donald Trump's handling of the coronavirus, his culpability in national discord and his overall fitness for the job on Wednesday as he made his first in-person campaign pitch for his former vice president, Joe Biden.

With less than two weeks before Election Day, Obama used a drive-in campaign rally in Philadelphia to assure voters that Biden and his running mate, Kamala Harris, can mend a fractured country. He lauded the merits of democracy and citizenship as "human values" that the United States must again embrace.

"America is a good and decent place, but we've just seen so much nonsense and noise that sometimes it's hard to remember," Obama said, after spending much of his 35-minute speech upbraiding Trump as "incapable of taking the job seriously" and interested only in himself.

"I'm asking you to remember what this country can be," Obama said. "I'm asking you to believe in Joe's ability and Kamala's ability to lead this country out of these dark times and help us build it back better."

Obama's visit to Philadelphia underscores the significance of Pennsylvania, the Rust Belt state that helped deliver Trump the White House four years ago. Pennsylvania is the battleground state that Biden has visited the most this campaign season. Trump has prioritized the state as well, aware that his path to victory would narrow considerably without the state's 20 electoral votes. The president on Wednesday was in Erie, one of a handful of Pennsylvania counties that Obama won twice before it flipped to Trump.

Obama paid heed especially to disillusioned voters, including Black men and progressives wary of Biden. He urged them not to sit out the Nov. 3 election, warning that complacency from some liberal voters is what helped Trump get elected four years ago.

"What we do these next 13 days will matter for decades to come," Obama said. "The fact that we don't get 100% of what we want right away is not a good reason not to vote."

As with his Democratic National Convention speech two months ago, Obama pulled no punches on his successor. This time, though, he employed humor, sarcasm and outright incredulity befitting the trappings of a campaign rally. Tieless and with his sleeves rolled up, Obama stood on a stage facing car-bound supporters watching him on screen and rewarding his attack lines with a cacophony of honking horns.

Beneath the scorn was a defense of his own record.

"I never thought Donald Trump would embrace my vision or continue my policies, but I did hope for the sake of the country that he might show some interest in taking the job seriously," Obama said. Trump "wants full credit for the economy he inherited and no blame for the pandemic he ignored."

He disparaged the GOP's "shameful" attempts to gut the 2010 Affordable Care Act while always promising a replacement. "It's been 'coming in two weeks' for the last 10 years. Where is it? Where is this great plan to replace Obamacare?" he asked. "There is no plan. They've never had one."

Noting Trump's penchant for insulting "anybody who doesn't support him," Obama vouched for Biden's "empathy (and) decency," and he argued the distinction matters beyond style.

"Why would we accept this from the president of the United States, and why are folks making excuses for that?" Obama said. "There are consequences to these actions. They embolden other people to be cruel and divisive and racist."

Four years ago, Obama delivered Hillary Clinton's closing argument in Philadelphia — at a rally for thousands the night before Election Day on Independence Mall. With his reprisal for Biden, Obama reminded voters of 2016, when Trump upset Clinton narrowly in Pennsylvania, Michigan and Wisconsin to forge an Electoral College majority despite losing the popular vote nationally.

"I don't care about the polls," Obama said. "There were a whole bunch of polls last time. Didn't work

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Oct. 22, 2020 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 111 ~ 63 of 97

out because a whole bunch of folks stayed at home and got lazy and complacent. Not this time. Not this election.”

The roundtable was a personalized version of the same message, with the nation’s first Black president urging Black men not to give into apathy. The host city, Philadelphia, is among the Democratic bastions in key battleground states where Black turnout four years ago fell off from Obama’s 2012 reelection in large enough numbers to tip the election in Trump’s favor.

Obama said he understood young voters’ skepticism and disinterest. “I’ll confess, when I was 20 years old, I wasn’t all that woke,” he said, adding that young Black men are “not involved because they’re young and they’re distracted.”

But he said not voting gives away power because politicians respond to and reflect the citizens who cast votes.

“One of the biggest tricks that’s perpetrated on the American people is this idea that the government is separate from you,” Obama said. “The government’s us. Of, by and for the people. It wasn’t always for all of us, but the way it’s designed, it works based on who’s at the table.”

Despite the smaller scale, Democrats say Obama remains perhaps the party’s greatest campaign asset, including for Biden, given their personal ties.

Obama already had hosted virtual events geared to younger voters and lent his name to texts and emails encouraging supporters to register to vote and donate money to the campaign. He has also been a big money draw for the campaign. One virtual fundraiser he headlined with Biden in June brought in \$7.6 million, and he’s raised money and appeared in ads for down-ballot Democrats.

He is also planning to campaign for Biden in Miami on Saturday.

Obama said the future of the country is at stake.

“We’ve got to vote like never before,” he said in Philadelphia, “and leave no doubt.”

Barrow reported from Atlanta.

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/>

James Randi, dazzling magician and skeptic, dies at 92

By MATT SEDENSKY AP National Writer

James Randi, a magician who later challenged spoon benders, mind readers and faith healers with such voracity that he became regarded as the country’s foremost skeptic, has died, his foundation announced. He was 92.

The James Randi Educational Foundation confirmed the death, saying simply that its founder succumbed to “age-related causes” on Tuesday.

Entertainer, genius, debunker, atheist—Randi was them all. He began gaining attention not long after dropping out of high school to join the carnival. As the Amazing Randi, he escaped from a locked coffin submerged in water and from a straitjacket as he dangled over Niagara Falls.

Magical as his feats seemed, Randi concluded his shows around the globe with a simple statement, insisting no otherworldly powers were at play.

“Everything you have seen here is tricks,” he would say. “There is nothing supernatural involved.”

The magician’s transparency gave a glimpse of what would become his longest-running act, as the country’s skeptic-in-chief. In that role, his first widely seen exploit was also his most enduring.

On a 1972 episode of “The Tonight Show,” he helped Johnny Carson set up Uri Geller, the Israeli performer who claimed to bend spoons with his mind. Randi ensured the spoons and other props were kept from Geller’s hands until showtime to prevent any tampering.

The result was an agonizing 22 minutes in which Geller was unable to perform any tricks.

Randi had bushy white eyebrows and beard, a bald head, and gold-rimmed glasses, and bounced his

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Oct. 22, 2020 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 111 ~ 64 of 97

5-foot-6 (1.6 meter) frame energetically, even in his final years. He sought to disprove not just those who read palms and minds, but chiropractors, homeopaths and others he saw as predators seeking innocent people's money.

Randi targeted those he saw as frauds with a tenacity and dedication he admitted was an obsession. His efforts were reminiscent of those of his great predecessor Harry Houdini, who devoted large portions of his time to debunking spiritualists and their seances.

"I see people being swindled every day by medical quackery, frauds of every sort, psychics and their hot lines, people who claim to be able to find lost children or to help them invest their money," Randi told The Associated Press in 1998. "I know they are being swindled because I know the methods being used."

Once, awaiting the chance to sift through the trash of a faith healer, Randi spent days in his car, eating Twinkies and drinking Pepsi.

"I suffer from this obsession that I have something important to do," he explained in a 2007 interview with The AP.

There were other coups for Randi: He once showed the messages television faith healer Peter Popoff claimed to be getting from God about his audience were actually coming from his wife through an ear-piece. But the vast majority of those he aimed to show were frauds were lesser known, lured to prove their abilities by the James Randi Educational Foundation.

Through that organization, Randi was guardian of a \$1 million prize he promised to give anyone who could prove either their own supernatural powers or the presence of a supernatural being.

His loudest detractors said they didn't believe the money even existed, but Randi had the bank documentation. No one ever came close to collecting.

Randi gave up the day-to-day operation of his foundation in 2009 and retired in 2015.

Born Randall James Hamilton Zwinge in Toronto on Aug. 7, 1928, Randi—known by everyone simply by that surname—had a nagging desire to question from a young age. Academically, he said he was bored in school and teachers acknowledged he was prodigy far ahead of his peers. He never earned a high school diploma or went to college but in 1986 was awarded a prestigious MacArthur fellowship, often known simply as a "genius grant."

He spoke with certainty. While he said he never really questioned his beliefs, he acknowledged there was always a chance he was wrong.

"I am probably right. But I'm always only probably right," he said. "Absolutes are very hard to find."

For all the analysis Randi put into seemingly everything, he still found delight in observing magic he knew was a stunt or watching a film that was just fantasy. He talked about the crushing feelings of watching a friend die and spoke of the magic of love. In 2010, he announced he was gay. In 2013, he married his longtime partner, Deyvi Pena, at a ceremony in Washington, D.C. He was the subject of a 2014 documentary, "An Honest Liar."

Penn Jillette, a magician in the mold of Randi, mourned his friend on Twitter on Wednesday night, writing: "We will never forget that without Randi, there would not be Penn & Teller. It's really that simple."

Randi said he couldn't help feeling angry that his targets always seemed to perform escape acts of their own, continuing to win new followers and earn checks he said were cashed at reality's expense. He wanted to see frauds punished, but he recognized most people wanted to believe.

"The true believers," he said, "will not pay any attention to evidence that does not show that they believe to be untrue."

It was frustrating to Randi and fueled an underlying anger toward those he labeled frauds. When he let his displeasure slip out, though, it often was mixed with wit, as when asked about his final wishes and how he'd like his ashes disposed.

"My best friend is instructed to throw them in Uri Geller's eyes," he said. "I'd like him to get an eyeful of my ashes. I think that would be appropriate."

The day of death has been corrected to Tuesday, not Monday.

Pandemic relief faces uncertainty in postelection session

By ANDREW TAYLOR Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Negotiations on a COVID-19 relief bill are inching forward, but it's clear the window for action before the Nov. 3 election is closing and the issue will be tossed to a postelection lame-duck session of Congress.

The only thing that seems certain beyond that is uncertainty, with Capitol Hill veterans cautioning against expecting a quick and smooth resolution for an aid package that has tied Washington in knots for months.

Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin and House Speaker Nancy Pelosi spoke again Wednesday but her office signaled no real progress, and she acknowledged for the first time publicly that the measure won't pass before the election.

President Donald Trump's chief of staff, Mark Meadows, accused Pelosi of slow-walking the talks. Trump's most powerful Senate GOP ally, Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, is warning against a costly deal that could drive a wedge between the president and his fellow Republicans.

No one knows whether Election Day will bring much more clarity.

"I'm never very optimistic about the lame duck and I've never been surprised," said Sen. Roy Blunt, R-Mo. "You don't get near as much done as you think you're going to get done."

Those Republicans willing to speculate about a Trump loss in two weeks say not to expect much, either.

"I think Democrats would want to wait until the new president is sworn in and do it then and I think Republicans probably would say ... the economy's taking care of it," said Sen. Chuck Grassley, R-Iowa.

At issue is a huge virus relief bill that would send another \$1,200 direct payment to most Americans, restart bonus unemployment benefits, fund additional testing and vaccines, provide aid to schools and allocate money to states and local governments, a Democratic priority.

A \$1.8 trillion rescue plan in March passed virtually unanimously. The Pelosi-pushed package today is even larger but has run into resolute opposition from Republicans. Taking care of the issue would clear the decks for a fresh start on the congressional agenda next year.

Pelosi remains optimistic, even after Washington was blanketed with media reports that McConnell, R-Ky., has warned the White House against sealing a \$2 trillion or so relief deal with Pelosi before the election.

"Let's keep working so that we can do it after the election," Pelosi said Wednesday on MSNBC.

"We obviously want to have a deal by Nov. 3," Pelosi told SiriusXM radio. "That really is going to be up to whether the president can convince Mitch McConnell to do so."

McConnell says the GOP-controlled Senate is not buying the need for legislation as large as Trump wanted. And Meadows told reporters that Pelosi is still too uncompromising.

"We haven't seen a lot of action from Speaker Pelosi," Meadows said. "Most of the progress we've made have been concessions that the president has made."

Senate Democrats blocked a Senate GOP plan that McConnell brought to a vote Wednesday. The measure contained more than \$100 billion for schools, a \$300 per week supplemental unemployment insurance benefit, and more subsidies for businesses especially hard hit by pandemic-related downturns and closures. It does not include the \$1,200 direct payments that are so important to Trump.

Trump says that if he wins reelection, aid will flow immediately. When former President Barack Obama won reelection in 2012, for instance, he went on to prevail in "fiscal cliff" negotiations on taxes.

If he loses, it's unclear whether Trump's enthusiasm for delivering it will be as strong. Lame-duck sessions during White House changeovers in 2008 and 2016 didn't deliver much.

But Pelosi said she believes McConnell "might not mind doing it after the election."

Sen. Patrick Leahy, D-Vt., acknowledged that lame-duck sessions typically aren't very productive, but he added, "Normally they don't have this kind of emergency, either."

Virus spikes have officials looking to shore up hospitals

By LISA MARIE PANE, CARLA K. JOHNSON and DANIELLA PETERS Associated Press

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Oct. 22, 2020 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 111 ~ 66 of 97

BOISE, Idaho (AP) — Hospitals across the United States are starting to buckle from a resurgence of COVID-19 cases, with several states setting records for the number of people hospitalized and leaders scrambling to find extra beds and staff. New highs in cases have been reported in states big and small — from Idaho to Ohio — in recent days.

The rise in cases and hospitalizations was alarming to medical experts.

Around the world, disease trackers have seen a pattern: First, the number of cases rises, then hospitalizations and finally there are increases in deaths. Seeing hospitals struggling is alarming because it may already be too late to stop a crippling surge.

“By the time we see hospitalizations rise, it means we’re really struggling,” said Saskia Popescu, an epidemiologist at George Mason University.

Dr. Jay Butler, deputy director for infectious diseases for the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, said Wednesday the United States is seeing a “distressing trend” with COVID-19 cases growing in nearly three-quarters of the country.

“We’re seeing cases increase in really all parts of the country — in the Midwest, particularly — likely in part because people are moving indoors with the arrival of cooler temperatures,” Butler told reporters at a briefing at CDC headquarters in Atlanta.

“Another factor is that smaller, more intimate gatherings of family, friends and neighbors may be driving infections as well, especially as these gatherings move indoors and adherence to face coverings and social distancing may not be optimal.”

Surges in coronavirus cases have led hospitals in Rocky Mountain states to raise concerns as their intensive care bed space dwindles. Utah, Montana and Wyoming have all reported record highs this week for the number of people hospitalized with COVID-19. Seven of 10 intensive care beds were filled in Utah hospitals and about six in 10 in Montana.

In Nevada, where the economy relies heavily on the tourism industry, officials have stressed the need to maintain steady trends to bring back concerts and conventions that employ thousands on the Las Vegas Strip.

When Gov. Steve Sisolak, a Democrat, lifted the 50-person cap on gatherings on Oct. 1, he said he hoped to ensure safety while “preventing a rollercoaster of up and down cases that leads to uncertainty for meeting and convention and event planners.”

Now, amid an autumn surge in new cases, Nevada is among seven states with more than 8% of hospital capacity taken up by COVID-19 patients. Due to competing demands, particularly from flu season, 71% of the state’s hospital beds are occupied, the Nevada Hospital Association reported.

State officials worry that hospital beds will fill up if trends continue. Nevada reported 535 confirmed and suspected COVID-19 hospitalizations on Wednesday, up 19% from Oct. 1.

“One day is fine and you’re not at the capacity. A week later, you can be bumping up against your capacity for beds and for ICU units. Hospitals can then be teetering on the edge of having to turn patients away. We have to avoid that,” Sisolak said.

More than 40 million people around the globe have contracted the virus and more than 1.1 million people have died. In the United States, there have been more than 8 million confirmed cases and more than 220,000 deaths. The seven-day rolling average for daily new cases has reached nearly 60,000 — the highest since July.

The spikes come as President Donald Trump has sounded an optimistic tone that the virus is rounding the corner and that a vaccine is imminent. But public health experts maintain the virus will continue to persist and that a vaccine is several months away.

In some cases, spikes are happening as schools reopen and as Americans grow weary of wearing masks and practicing social distancing.

“At this point in the pandemic, everybody’s tired. Everybody’s craving human interaction,” Popescu, the epidemiologist, said.

Winter is a busy season for hospitals as influenza and other respiratory illnesses ramp up with more people congregating indoors. “I worry a COVID wave that causes a heavy surge on hospitals that are

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Oct. 22, 2020 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 111 ~ 67 of 97

already very busy will further add stress to a system that is exhausted," Popescu said.

Selin Bert's mother-in-law is among those who had to be hospitalized in recent weeks. The Mesquite, Nevada, woman had symptoms at home for a few days but her health deteriorated so much that she had to be rushed to the hospital after a family member found her on the bathroom floor.

She ended up in the ICU in Las Vegas and has since been released, but remains severely fatigued.

Bert suspects her mother-in-law was infected during a visit from her grandchildren, who traveled from Montana. But the topic of how she got infected is a delicate one in the family given how serious her illness was.

"We don't want to even ask because now it's become a very touchy subject. Because if someone says to you, 'Hey, you potentially killed your mom, or could have killed your mom,' it doesn't really bode well for the family reunion."

Coronavirus cases are rising so fast in North Dakota that it's taking officials up to three days to notify people after they test positive, and as a result the state has fallen way behind on tracing their close contacts who might have been exposed.

Republican Gov. Doug Burgum and the North Dakota Department of Health said they're shifting 50 National Guard members from contact tracing to simply notifying people who test positive. And public health officials will no longer notify close contacts of people who tested positive; instead people will be instructed to self-notify their close contacts and direct them to the department's website.

Nebraska began imposing new coronavirus restrictions Wednesday, after the number of people hospitalized remained at a record level of 380 for two straight days and the state reported 11 new deaths from the virus.

Cliff Robertson, CEO of CHI Health, said his hospital group is working to bring in nurses from other parts of the country to handle the additional cases.

Over the past seven days, Nebraska has reported an average of 854 new cases per day, up significantly from two weeks ago when the state was reporting an average 525 cases per day, according to data from Johns Hopkins University.

The trend led Republican Gov. Pete Ricketts to announce new restrictions that took effect Wednesday. Hospitals now must keep 10% of their beds free for COVID-19 patients, and customers at restaurants and bars must remain seated at tables with no more than eight people.

Meanwhile, deaths were on the rise in some states. Minnesota reported 35 confirmed new COVID-19 deaths on Wednesday, tying a single-day record set on May 28. And the Iowa Department of Public Health reported 31 new deaths, the most confirmed in a 24-hour period since the beginning of the pandemic.

Despite having some of the strictest rules in the country, New Mexico Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham, a Democrat, has been struggling in recent weeks with a surge in cases and increases in transmission and positivity rates. The governor said she believes the increases are the result of people letting their guard down.

She's imposing more restrictions on businesses in hopes of curbing the surge, saying her goal is to limit pressure on hospitals.

"We don't have much time," she said. "If we don't attack and snuff out the virus right now by working collectively with businesses and each other, then the virus will win and it leaves us very little opportunity to save lives and to keep our health systems from being overrun."

Peters reported from Milwaukee and Johnson reported from Washington state. AP journalists from around the United States contributed to this report.

Divided reactions in US as pope backs same-sex civil unions

By DAVID CRARY and ELANA SCHOR Associated Press

LGBTQ Catholics and their allies in the U.S. welcomed Pope Francis' endorsement of same-sex civil unions, the first time he's done so as pontiff, while some prominent members including a bishop said Wednesday that he was blatantly contradicting church teaching.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Oct. 22, 2020 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 111 ~ 68 of 97

Bishop Thomas Tobin of Providence, Rhode Island, was one of the first conservative Catholic leaders to go public with criticism.

"The Pope's statement clearly contradicts what has been the long-standing teaching of the Church about same-sex unions," Tobin said in a statement. "The Church cannot support the acceptance of objectively immoral relationships."

In contrast, Francis DeBernardo of New Ways Ministry, which represents LGBTQ Catholics, hailed the pope's comments as a "historic" shift for a church that has a record of persecuting gays.

"It is no overstatement to say that with this statement not only has the pope protected LGBTQ couples and families, but he also will save many LGBTQ lives," DeBernardo said.

The pope's comments came midway through a feature-length documentary, "Francesco," that premiered Wednesday at the Rome Film Festival.

"Homosexual people have the right to be in a family. They are children of God," Francis says in the film. "You can't kick someone out of a family, nor make their life miserable for this. What we have to have is a civil union law; that way they are legally covered."

The comment came in the final lap of a U.S. election campaign in which both President Donald Trump and Democratic nominee Joe Biden have avidly courted Catholic voters. It's not yet clear whether it could indirectly benefit Biden, whose team has run ads spotlighting his lifelong Catholicism, but some liberal-leaning faith advocates saw plenty of shared values to highlight with Francis' message of inclusion.

"Pope Francis' words will highlight the inclusive, accepting essence of Christianity that so many people care about," said Guthrie Graves-Fitzsimmons, a fellow with the faith initiative at the liberal Center for American Progress think tank.

"The way conservative Christians ... distort this message of love and justice that Jesus proclaimed" can have an alienating effect, he said.

Carolyn Woo, former president of Catholic Relief Services and a co-chair of Catholics for Biden, said Francis' emphasis on the "dignity of people," without any conditions, aligns well with values Democrats espouse.

"Overall the Democratic platform is: We've got to help people where they are at. We've got to protect their rights, we've got to help them flourish," she said, emphasizing the importance of Catholics using "prudential judgment in how we honor life."

That view holds little sway, however, with more conservative Catholics who already take a dim view of Biden over his support for abortion rights in stark contrast with a fundamental teaching of their faith.

Another teaching confines the institution of marriage to a man and a woman — and that remains intact regardless of the pope's remarks on same-sex unions, said Brian Burch, president of the conservative group CatholicVote.

Francis "has no ability to change that teaching about the permanence and exclusivity of marriage," Burch said, adding that he doesn't see the comments having "explosive relevance" in the current U.S. political climate.

"Catholics who live in communion with what the church teaches understand that marriage is written into the law of nature," Burch said. "Nothing can change that."

Previously, when he was Archbishop Jorge Mario Bergoglio of Buenos Aires, Francis endorsed civil unions for same-sex couples as an alternative to marriage, but he had never come out publicly in favor of such unions as pope, nor had any previous pontiff.

The Rev. James Martin, a prominent Jesuit priest who has advocated for greater LGBTQ inclusion in the church, called the remarks momentous.

"First, he is saying them as Pope, not Archbishop of Buenos Aires," Martin tweeted. "Second, he is clearly supporting, not simply tolerating, civil unions. Third, he is saying it on camera, not privately. Historic."

But the Rev. Donald Paul Sullins, a conservative sociology professor at the Catholic University of America, said they "directly contradict the Catholic Church's most recent teaching on this matter."

He cited a 2003 Vatican document, approved by St. John Paul II, which says, "The Church teaches that respect for homosexual persons cannot lead in any way to approval of homosexual behavior or to legal recognition of homosexual unions."

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Oct. 22, 2020 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 111 ~ 69 of 97

However polls indicate that many lay Catholics are more accepting of LGBTQ rights despite such teachings. About 6 in 10 Catholics supported government protections that would bar discrimination against LGBTQ people in workplaces, housing and schools, according to a December poll from The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research.

"These words from the pope will inflame many on the Catholic right ... but they will be a balm to the vast majority of Catholics and, I daresay, pastors," said David Gibson, director of Fordham University's Center on Religion and Culture. "They don't want to engage in these ugly culture war battles, especially because gay Catholics are not abstractions — they are in their homes, part of their families, and part of their parishes."

Francis' remarks seem to undercut the policies of some Catholic institutions prohibiting employees from entering into same-sex marriages.

Natalia Imperatori-Lee, a religious studies professor at Manhattan College, expressed hope that the pope's remarks "will prompt Catholic institutions to stop firing teachers, catechists, music ministers and others who are part of the LGBTQ community and a vital part of the Catholic community as well."

The largest Protestant denomination in the U.S., the Southern Baptist Convention, shares the Catholic Church's official opposition to same-sex marriage and civil unions, and several of its leaders also criticized Francis.

The comments "reveal another sign of the recklessness of this papacy and demonstrates the undermining of the truth, doctrine, and moral logic of his own church," said the Rev. Al Mohler, president of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary.

"Given the influence of that church worldwide," Mohler continued, "it will weaken Christian witness to marriage and sexuality and gender according to God's will and God's Word."

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Francis becomes 1st pope to endorse same-sex civil unions

By NICOLE WINFIELD Associated Press

ROME (AP) — Pope Francis became the first pontiff to endorse same-sex civil unions in comments for a documentary that premiered Wednesday, sparking cheers from gay Catholics and demands for clarification from conservatives, given the Vatican's official teaching on the issue.

The papal thumbs-up came midway through the feature-length documentary "Francesco," which premiered at the Rome Film Festival. The film, which features fresh interviews with the pope, delves into issues Francis cares about most, including the environment, poverty, migration, racial and income inequality, and the people most affected by discrimination.

"Homosexual people have the right to be in a family. They are children of God," Francis said. "You can't kick someone out of a family, nor make their life miserable for this. What we have to have is a civil union law; that way they are legally covered."

While serving as archbishop of Buenos Aires, Francis endorsed civil unions for gay couples as an alternative to same-sex marriages. However, he had never come out publicly in favor of civil unions as pope, and no pontiff before him had, either.

The Rev. James Martin, a Jesuit who has sought to build bridges with gay Catholics, praised the comments as "a major step forward in the church's support for LGBT people."

"The pope's speaking positively about civil unions also sends a strong message to places where the church has opposed such laws," Martin said in a statement.

However, conservative Bishop Thomas Tobin of Providence, Rhode Island, called for clarification. "The pope's statement clearly contradicts what has been the long-standing teaching of the church about same-sex unions," he said in a statement. "The church cannot support the acceptance of objectively immoral relationships."

And Ed Mechmann, director of public policy at the Archdiocese of New York, said in a blog post that the

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Oct. 22, 2020 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 111 ~ 70 of 97

pope had simply "made a serious mistake."

Catholic teaching holds that gay people must be treated with dignity and respect but that homosexual acts are "intrinsically disordered." A 2003 document from the Vatican's doctrine office stated the church's respect for gay people "cannot lead in any way to approval of homosexual behavior or to legal recognition of homosexual unions."

Doing so, the Vatican reasoned, would not only condone "deviant behavior," but create an equivalence to marriage, which the church holds is an indissoluble union between man and woman.

That document was signed by the then-prefect of the office, Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, the future Pope Benedict XVI and Francis' predecessor.

Later Wednesday, questions arose about when Francis first made the remarks. The scene of his interview is identical to one from 2019 with Mexican broadcaster Televisa, but his comments about the need for legal protections for civil unions apparently never aired until the documentary.

Director Evgeny Afineevsky, who is gay, expressed surprise after the premiere that the pope's comments had created such a firestorm, saying Francis wasn't trying to change doctrine but was merely expressing his belief gay people should enjoy the same rights as heterosexuals. He insisted the pope made the comments to him directly, through a translator, but declined to say when.

"The world needs positivity right now, the world needs to care about climate change, care about refugees and migration, borders, walls, family separation," Afineevsky said, urging attention to the main issues covered by the film.

One main character in the documentary is Juan Carlos Cruz, the Chilean survivor of clergy sexual abuse whom Francis initially discredited during a 2018 visit to Chile.

Cruz, who is gay, said that during his first meetings with the pope in May 2018 after they patched things up, Francis assured him that God made Cruz gay. Cruz tells his own story throughout the film, chronicling both Francis' evolution on understanding sexual abuse as well as to document the pope's views on gay people.

Afineevsky had remarkable access to cardinals, the Vatican television archives and the pope himself. He said he negotiated his way in through persistence, and deliveries of Argentine mate tea and Alfajores cookies that he got to the pope via well-connected Argentines in Rome.

"Listen, when you are in the Vatican, the only way to achieve something is to break the rule and then to say, 'I'm sorry,'" Afineevsky said in an interview.

The director worked official and unofficial channels starting in 2018, and ended up so close to Francis by the end of the project that he showed him the movie on his iPad in August. The two recently exchanged Yom Kippur greetings; Afineevsky is a Russian-born, Israeli-raised Jew now based in Los Angeles. On Wednesday, Afineevsky's 48th birthday, the director said Francis presented him with a birthday cake at the Vatican.

But "Francesco" is more than a biopic about the pope. Wim Wenders did that in the 2018 film "Pope Francis: A Man of His Word."

"Francesco," is more a visual survey of the world's crises and tragedies, with audio from the pope providing possible solutions.

Afineevsky, who was nominated for an Oscar for his 2015 documentary "Winter on Fire: Ukraine's Fight for Freedom," traveled the world to document the film: at Cox's Bazaar in Bangladesh, where Myanmar's Rohingya sought refuge; the U.S.-Mexico border; and Francis' native Argentina.

"The film tells the story of the pope by reversing the cameras," said Vatican communications director Paolo Ruffini, one of Afineevsky's closest Vatican-based collaborators.

Ruffini said that when Afineevsky approached him about a documentary, he tried to tamp down his hopes for interviewing the pope. "I told him it wasn't going to be easy," he said.

But Ruffini suggested Afineevsky find the people who had been impacted by the pope, even after just a brief meeting: refugees, prisoners and gay people to whom he has ministered.

"I told him that many of those encounters had certainly been filmed by the Vatican cameras, and that there he would find a veritable gold mine of stories that told a story," Ruffini said. "He would be able to

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Oct. 22, 2020 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 111 ~ 71 of 97

tell story of the pope through the eyes of all and not just his own.”

Francis’ outreach dates to his first foreign trip in 2013, when he uttered the now-famous words “Who am I to judge,” when asked during an airborne news conference returning from Rio de Janeiro about a purportedly gay priest.

Since then, he has ministered to gays and transsexual prostitutes, and welcomed people in gay partnerships into his inner circle. One of them was his former student, Yayo Grassi, who along with his partner visited Francis at the Vatican Embassy in Washington D.C., during a 2015 visit to the U.S.

The Vatican publicized that encounter, making video and photos of it available, after Francis was ambushed during that same visit by his then-ambassador, Archbishop Carlo Maria Vigano, who invited the Kentucky anti-gay marriage activist Kim Davis to meet with the pope.

News of the Davis audience made headlines and was viewed by conservatives as a papal stamp of approval for Davis, who was jailed for refusing to issue same-sex marriage licenses. The Vatican vigorously sought to downplay it, with a spokesman saying the meeting by no means indicated Francis’ support for her or her position on gay marriage.

Francis, the former Cardinal Jorge Mario Bergoglio, was fervently opposed to gay marriage when he was archbishop of Buenos Aires. Then, he launched what gay activists remember as a “war of God” against Argentina’s move to approve same-sex marriage.

The pope’s authorized biographer, Sergio Rubin, said at the time of his 2013 election that Bergoglio was politically wise enough to know the church couldn’t win a fight against gay marriage. Instead, Rubin said, Bergoglio urged his fellow bishops to lobby for gay civil unions.

It wasn’t until Bergoglio’s proposal was shot down by the conservative bishops’ conference that he publicly declared his opposition, and the church lost the issue altogether.

In the documentary, Francis essentially confirms Rubin’s account of what transpired. Of his belief in the need for legislation to protect gay couples in civil relationships, he said: “I stood up for that.”

Francis DeBernardo, executive director of New Ways Ministry, an organization of LGBT Catholics, praised Francis’ comments as a “historic” shift for a church that has a record of persecuting gays.

“At the same time, we urge Pope Francis to apply the same kind of reasoning to recognize and bless these same unions of love and support within the Catholic Church, too,” he said in a statement.

More conservative commentators sought to play down Francis’ words and said that while secular civil unions are one thing, a church blessing of them is quite another.

In a tweet, conservative U.S. author and commentator Ryan Anderson noted that he and some colleagues had gone on record a decade ago saying they would support federal civil unions for any two adults who commit to sharing domestic responsibilities. Such an arrangement, Anderson said, would leave churches the option of refusing to recognize these unions as marriage.

Next up in hunt for COVID-19 vaccine: Testing shots in kids

By LAURAN NEERGAARD AP Medical Writer

The global hunt for a COVID-19 vaccine for kids is only just beginning — a lagging start that has some U.S. pediatricians worried they may not know if any shots work for young children in time for the next school year.

Older adults may be most vulnerable to the coronavirus, but ending the pandemic will require vaccinating children, too. Last week, Pfizer Inc. received permission to test its vaccine in U.S. kids as young as 12, one of only a handful of attempts around the world to start exploring if any experimental shots being pushed for adults also can protect children.

“I just figured the more people they have to do tests on, the quicker they can put out a vaccine and people can be safe and healthy,” said 16-year-old Katelyn Evans, who became the first teen to get an injection in the Pfizer study at Cincinnati Children’s Hospital.

Multiple vaccine candidates are in final-stage studies in tens of thousands of adults, and scientists are hopeful that the next few months will bring evidence that at least some of them are safe and effective

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Oct. 22, 2020 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 111 ~ 72 of 97

enough for widespread use.

But when the first shots arrive, they're unlikely to be recommended for children. Vaccines can't be given to youngsters unless they've been tested in their age group -- a major hurdle in efforts to reopen schools and resume more normal activities that are critical to families' well-being.

"The public doesn't understand that," said Dr. Evan Anderson of Emory University, who has been pushing for pediatric testing of COVID-19 vaccines. While he's encouraged by Pfizer's study in adolescents, he finds it "very concerning" that children younger than 12 may not have a vaccine by next fall.

Children represent about 10% of COVID-19 cases documented in the U.S. And while children are far less likely than adults to get seriously ill, about 120 have died in the U.S. alone, according to a tally by the American Academy of Pediatrics. That's about how many U.S. children die from flu in an average year. Additionally, a small number have developed a serious inflammatory condition linked to the coronavirus.

Overall, Anderson says COVID-19's impact on children is greater than some other diseases that require routine pediatric vaccinations.

Aside from their own health risks is the still unanswered question about how easily children can infect others. In a letter to federal health officials, the AAP cited recent evidence that those over age 10 may spread the virus just as easily as adults do.

Add missing school and other factors unique to children, and it's unethical "to allow children to take on great burdens during this pandemic but not have the opportunity to benefit from a vaccine," Dr. Sara Goza, president of the pediatrics academy, wrote.

Globally, pediatric studies are only hesitantly emerging. In China, Sinovac and SinoPharm have opened studies that can test children as young as 3.

A British study of a vaccine by AstraZeneca allows for testing of a low dose in certain children but the company says it won't be recruiting youngsters until it has "sufficient" safety data in adults.

In the U.S., Moderna Inc., Johnson & Johnson and Novavax all hope to begin some pediatric research later in the year, in varying age groups.

Doing so is critical, said Dr. Robert Frenck, who directs the Vaccine Research Center at Cincinnati Children's.

"If we immunize adolescents -- and potentially move down into younger children -- we're going to have the effect of keeping those children from getting infected. But then also they don't bring the infection home to parents and grandparents," he said.

Frenck is finding lots of interest in Pfizer's adolescent testing, with 90 families seeking more information in just a week after his team issued a call for 16- and 17-year-old volunteers. The researchers plan to enroll 12- to 15-year-olds soon.

Katelyn, the suburban Cincinnati volunteer, doesn't know if she got a dummy shot or the real vaccine. But the high school junior is excited to be part of the study. And with science class still fresh, she grasped the researchers' explanation of how Pfizer's vaccine works -- using a piece of genetic code to train the body to recognize if the coronavirus comes along.

"I've learned about DNA and RNA and all that stuff in biology in freshman year. And I guess I didn't really know, like, how it applied to the real world until now," she said.

It makes sense to start pediatric testing in teenagers and gradually work down in age, Frenck said, because adolescents usually receive adult-sized doses of other vaccines -- and so far with Pfizer's shots, serious safety problems haven't emerged in adult testing.

Assuming Pfizer's shot is proven to work in adults, Frenck said the key will be if the vaccine revs up adolescents' immune systems the same way -- without different side effects. He said if all goes well, it's possible scientists may have an answer about the 12-and-older group by spring.

But younger children need their own testing. Anderson, a pediatric infectious disease specialist at Children's Healthcare of Atlanta, said those studies may be more complex because smaller tots may need different doses or, because of their typically more robust immune systems, show different reactions to the shots.

"It is quite important for us to begin the process because this will take some time to do the studies the right way," he said.

AP video journalist Kathy Young contributed to this report.

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OxyContin maker Purdue Pharma to plead to 3 criminal charges

By MICHAEL BALSAMO and GEOFF MULVIHILL Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Drugmaker Purdue Pharma, the company behind the powerful prescription painkiller OxyContin that experts say helped touch off an opioid epidemic, will plead guilty to federal criminal charges as part of a settlement of more than \$8 billion, the Justice Department announced Wednesday.

The deal does not release any of the company's executives or owners — members of the wealthy Sackler family — from criminal liability, and a criminal investigation is ongoing. Family members said they acted "ethically and lawfully," but some state attorneys general said the agreement fails to hold the Sacklers accountable.

The company will plead guilty to three counts, including conspiracy to defraud the United States and violating federal anti-kickback laws, the officials said, and the agreement will be detailed in a bankruptcy court filing in federal court.

The Sacklers will lose all control over their company, a move already in the works, and Purdue will become a public benefit company, meaning it will be governed by a trust that has to balance the trust's interests against those of the American public and public health, officials said.

The settlement is the highest-profile display yet of the federal government seeking to hold a major drugmaker responsible for an opioid addiction and overdose crisis linked to more than 470,000 deaths in the country since 2000.

It comes less than two weeks before a presidential election where the opioid epidemic has taken a political back seat to the coronavirus pandemic and other issues, and gives President Donald Trump's administration an example of action on the addiction crisis, which he promised early on in his term.

Ed Bisch, who lost his 18-year-old son to an overdose nearly 20 years ago, said he wants to see people associated with Purdue prosecuted and was glad the Sackler family wasn't granted immunity.

He blames the company and Sacklers for thousands for deaths. "If it was sold for severe pain only from the beginning, none of this would have happened," said Bisch, who now lives in Westampton, New Jersey. "But they got greedy."

Brooke Feldman, a 39-year-old Philadelphia resident who is in recovery from opioid use disorder and is a social worker, said she is glad to see Purdue admit wrongdoing. She said the company had acted for years as "a drug cartel."

Democratic attorneys general criticized the agreement as a "mere mirage" of justice for victims.

"The federal government had the power here to put the Sacklers in jail, and they didn't," Connecticut Attorney General William Tong said in a statement. "Instead, they took fines and penalties that Purdue likely will never fully pay."

But members of the Sackler family, once listed as one of the nation's wealthiest by Forbes magazine, said they had acted "ethically and lawfully" and that company documents required under the settlement to be made public will show that.

"Purdue deeply regrets and accepts responsibility for the misconduct detailed by the Department of Justice in the agreed statement of facts," Steve Miller, who became chairman of the company's board in 2018, said in a statement. No members of the Sackler family remain on that board, though they still own the company.

Family members, in a statement, expressed "deep compassion for people who suffer from opioid addiction and abuse and hope the proposal will be implemented as swiftly as possible to help address their critical needs."

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Oct. 22, 2020 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 111 ~ 74 of 97

As part of the resolution, Purdue is admitting that it impeded the Drug Enforcement Administration by falsely representing that it had maintained an effective program to avoid drug diversion and by reporting misleading information to the agency to boost the company's manufacturing quotas, the officials said.

Purdue is also admitting to violating federal anti-kickback laws by paying doctors, through a speaking program, to induce them to write more prescriptions for the company's opioids and for using electronic health records software to influence the prescription of pain medication, according to the officials.

Purdue will make a direct payment to the government of \$225 million, which is part of a larger \$2 billion criminal forfeiture. In addition to that forfeiture, Purdue also faces a \$3.54 billion criminal fine, though that money probably will not be fully collected because it will be taken through a bankruptcy, which includes a large number of other creditors, including thousands of state and local governments. Purdue will also agree to \$2.8 billion in damages to resolve its civil liability.

Part of the money from the settlement would go to aid in medication-assisted treatment and other drug programs to combat the opioid epidemic. That part of the arrangement echoes the plan the company is pushing in bankruptcy court and which about half the states oppose.

As part of the plea deal, the company admits it violated federal law and "knowingly and intentionally conspired and agreed with others to aid and abet" the dispensing of medication from doctors "without a legitimate medical purpose and outside the usual course of professional practice," according to the plea agreement.

While some state attorneys general opposed the prospect of Purdue becoming a public benefit company, the lead lawyers representing 2,800 local governments in lawsuits against Purdue and other drugmakers, distributors and pharmacies put out a statement supporting the principle but saying more work needs to be done.

The Sackler family has already pledged to hand over the company itself plus at least \$3 billion to resolve thousands of suits against the Stamford, Connecticut-based drugmaker. The company declared bankruptcy as a way to work out that plan, which could be worth \$10 billion to \$12 billion over time. In their statement, family members said that is "more than double all Purdue profits the Sackler family retained since the introduction of OxyContin."

"Both the company and the shareholders are paying a very steep price for what occurred here," Deputy U.S. Attorney General Jeffrey Rosen said Wednesday.

While there are conflicting views of whether it's enough, it's clear the Sacklers' reputation has taken a hit.

Until recently, the Sackler name was on museum galleries and educational programs around the world because of gifts from family members. But under pressure from activists, institutions from the Louvre in Paris to Tufts University in Massachusetts have dissociated themselves from the family in the last few years.

Mulvihill reported from Davenport, Iowa.

If Google's a monopoly, who is harmed by its market power?

By MATT O'BRIEN AP Technology Writer

Google has long defended itself against charges of monopoly by stressing that its products are free and that no one has to use them.

And it's avoided tough government scrutiny for years based in part on the idea that people searching the internet are not Google's true customers.

We're its product. Advertisers are its real customers. That complicates the question of who, if anyone, is hurt by Google's dominance in selling ads off the world's search queries and through its array of affiliated businesses, from its Android phone software to its YouTube video platform and digital maps.

The U.S. Justice Department's new antitrust lawsuit against Google argues that both advertisers and regular people are harmed by the tech giant's position as "the unchallenged gateway to the internet for billions of users worldwide."

"As a consequence, countless advertisers must pay a toll to Google's search advertising and general

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Oct. 22, 2020 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 111 ~ 75 of 97

search text advertising monopolies," the government wrote in Tuesday's landmark complaint, which asks a federal court to intervene to protect competition. "American consumers are forced to accept Google's policies, privacy practices, and use of personal data; and new companies with innovative business models cannot emerge from Google's long shadow."

The government argues that Google has abused its monopoly power through agreements with other companies that promote Google's apps and place its "search access points" as a default on browsers, phones and other devices. All of this drives more searches of Google at the expense of its rivals, the complaint alleges.

Google's critics have been making similar arguments for years in calls to break up the tech giant or curtail its behavior, but U.S. antitrust enforcers have long relied on a traditional standard of judging a monopoly by whether it's making consumers pay too high a price for its products.

Google controls about 90% of global web searches and dominates search-based advertising, but it holds a smaller share of the overall digital advertising market.

"This is an argument we can expect Google to make a lot and make it loudly, that its customers are the advertisers," said Rebecca Allensworth, a law professor at Vanderbilt University.

"But there are a lot of antitrust law professors who would say that consumers pay a real price for something like a search engine," Allensworth said. "There's a real cost to us, in terms of privacy, attention and data. It may not be dollars and cents. But it's that price we should be concerned about."

Google's business works by scooping up personal data from billions of people who are searching online, watching YouTube videos, following digital map routes, talking to its voice assistant or using its phone software. That data helps feed the advertising machine that has turned Google into a behemoth.

The assistant U.S. attorney general in charge of antitrust enforcement, Makan Delrahim, has repeatedly said that zero-price business models — Google and Facebook are the best-known examples — should not get "a free pass" from antitrust scrutiny because it's not just about ensuring price competition. It's about promoting "consumer welfare in all its forms, including consumer choice, quality, and innovation," he said in a speech at Harvard Law School last November.

Delrahim recused himself from the Google probe because he represented the company as a lobbyist in 2007 when it faced antitrust scrutiny over its acquisition of DoubleClick, then a competitor in digital advertising.

Google has long denied claims of unfair competition and is expected to fiercely oppose any attempt to force it to spin off its services into separate businesses. The company argues that although its businesses are large, they are useful and beneficial to consumers.

"People use Google because they choose to -- not because they're forced to or because they can't find alternatives," the company said in a Tuesday tweet that called the lawsuit "deeply flawed."

But the Justice Department argues that Google "deprives rivals of the quality, reach, and financial position necessary to mount any meaningful competition to Google's longstanding monopolies," and that foreclosing competition has reduced the quality of search services.

The complaint mentions loss of privacy and the use of consumers' data as quality issues, although without elaborating.

While Google dominates search advertising, it's likely to point to tighter competition in the broader market for online advertising. Google takes in about 29% of all digital ad spending, according to a June report from eMarketer, and faces growing competition from rivals such as Facebook and Amazon — each of which holds about 23% of the digital ad market and is also under antitrust scrutiny.

Rivals that run more specialized search businesses, such as Yelp, Expedia and TripAdvisor, have been among the most vocal in arguing that they're harmed by Google's business practices.

Seth Kalvert, TripAdvisor's senior vice president and general counsel, said that the antitrust charges are good for consumers and could help preserve a vision of the internet as a place of transparency, "the wisdom of crowds" and vibrant competition.

"They provide the framework for meaningful action to stop Google from leveraging its gatekeeper posi-

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Oct. 22, 2020 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 111 ~ 76 of 97

tion to benefit its owned services and increase its profits at the expense of competition and consumers," Kalvert said in a statement.

At the same time, it's never been certain how much the average American cares about the impacts of Google's market dominance and the way it uses people's information. The company has historically ranked high in surveys of user trust, though growing public awareness about the loss of digital privacy and President Donald Trump's repeated and unfounded claims of tech industry bias have left some dents in its reputation.

The lawsuit is in some ways a repeat of the Justice Department's last big antitrust case against a tech giant. The government sued Microsoft more than 20 years ago accusing it of leveraging a monopoly position to lock customers into its products so they wouldn't be tempted by potentially superior options from smaller rivals.

AP technology writers Frank Bajak and Michael Liedtke contributed to this report.

Pandemic World Series draws smallest crowd in over century

By RONALD BLUM AP Baseball Writer

ARLINGTON, Texas (AP) — Julie and Lance Smith walked through the mostly empty concourse of Globe Life Field.

Tampa Bay infielder Joey Wendle is married to one of their cousins, and they weren't going to miss his World Series debut.

"It's so weird," said Julie Smith, 38, from Gadsden, Alabama.

"It's kind of nice in a way, too," Lance, 39, said before they headed to their seats in the first deck behind home plate.

They wore masks, but many fans ignored the requirement for facial coverings except while eating or drinking at their ticketed seats.

A crowd of 11,388 attended the Los Angeles Dodgers' 8-3 win over the Tampa Bay Rays in Tuesday night's World Series opener, spread in groups of up to four, mostly in alternate rows and none directly behind each other among the forest green seats.

That was the smallest Series crowd since 10,535 attended Game 6 in 1909 between the Tigers and Pittsburgh at Detroit's Bennett Park, according to the Elias Sports Bureau.

Major League Baseball planned to make about 28% available of the 40,518 capacity at the retractable-roof stadium of the Texas Rangers. The new \$1.2 billion venue opened this year and replaced Globe Life Park, the team's open-air home from 1994 through 2019. During batting practice, through the new stadium's glass walls, the sun glistened off the red brick of the old stadium across the street beyond left field, a field now used for high school football.

Behind home plate, the Dallas Cowboys' AT&T Stadium gleamed like a spaceship.

World Series games are usually festive, packed early with fans celebrating the dual accomplishments of their team making it to baseball's ultimate stage and of their snagging hard-to-find tickets, usually displayed in plastic hanging from lanyard draped around their necks.

But this World Series had a surreal, at times somber feel caused by the novel coronavirus pandemic. The small crowd was supplemented with fan audio from stadium speakers.

No fans were allowed into any of the 898 regular-season games this season, which were played in mostly empty ballparks due to governmental health restrictions.

Players' families were allowed starting for the 18 first-round playoff games, the 15 Division Series games and the AL Championship Series between Tampa Bay and Houston in San Diego, with fans added for the Dodgers' matchup against Atlanta in the NL Championship Series in Arlington, an average of 10,835 for the seven games. Roughly the same amount of tickets were sold for each World Series game.

Behind third base, a group of fans in Dodgers gear watched after flying in.

Brian Casey, a 29-year-old from Glendale, California, booked a plane ticket ahead of Sunday night's

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Oct. 22, 2020 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 111 ~ 77 of 97

win over the Braves, knowing he had 24 hours to cancel without penalty, then made a decision after the Dodgers rallied for a 4-3 win. He was at Dodger Stadium when they played Boston in 2018 and watched Tuesday with Ryan Radenbaugh, 37, from Burbank.

"We just went to buy souvenirs and it was all Rangers stuff," Radenbaugh said.

Noah Garden, MLB's chief revenue officer, said the pandemic made it difficult to get gear shipped in the short time after teams won pennants last weekend.

MLB made the decision to play with the roof open. It was closed until the Dodgers started to warm up about 3 1/2 hours ahead of first pitch, then slid open as the public address system played Strauss' "Also Sprach Zarathustra," known to many as the opening music from Stanley Kubrick's "2001: A Space Odyssey."

The usual pregame introductions of teams were dispensed with. When the a cappella group Pentatonix sang a recorded version of "The Star-Spangled Banner" played on the 58x150-foot video board in right field and the 40-x111-foot board in the left-field corner, about 18 Dodgers were in front of the first base dugout and on the right field line, and roughly a dozen Rays were by the third base dugout and on the left-field line.

A live flyover of four jets followed, and ceremonial first pitches were thrown by medical personnel who assisted during the pandemic: Brittney Burns, a nurse practitioner from San Antonio; Erika Combs, an oncology and kidney transplant nurse at a Dallas hospital; and Jamie Edens and Ryan Ward, nurses from Tulsa, Oklahoma, who are a married couple.

Texas Gov. Greg Abbott, who was on hand, yelled "Play Ball!" into a microphone and retired Dodgers announcer Vin Scully delivered by video recording: "It's time for Dodger baseball!" just before Clayton Kershaw walked to the mound.

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

Barrett was trustee at private school with anti-gay policies

By MICHELLE R. SMITH and MICHAEL BIESECKER Associated Press

Supreme Court nominee Amy Coney Barrett served for nearly three years on the board of private Christian schools that effectively barred admission to children of same-sex parents and made it plain that openly gay and lesbian teachers weren't welcome in the classroom.

The policies that discriminated against LGBTQ people and their children were in place for years at Trinity Schools Inc., both before Barrett joined the board in 2015 and during the time she served.

The three schools, in Indiana, Minnesota and Virginia, are affiliated with People of Praise, an insular community rooted in its own interpretation of the Bible, of which Barrett and her husband have been longtime members. At least three of the couple's seven children have attended the Trinity School at Greenlawn, in South Bend, Indiana.

The AP spoke with more than two dozen people who attended or worked at Trinity Schools, or former members of People of Praise. They said the community's teachings have been consistent for decades: Homosexuality is an abomination against God, sex should occur only within marriage and marriage should only be between a man and a woman.

Interviewees told the AP that Trinity's leadership communicated anti-LGBTQ policies and positions in meetings, one-on-one conversations, enrollment agreements, employment agreements, handbooks and written policies — including those in place when Barrett was an active member of the board. Trinity Schools Inc. is a tax-exempt non-profit organization that receives some financial support from government-funded tuition voucher programs, according to its federal tax returns.

"Trinity Schools does not unlawfully discriminate with respect to race, color, gender, national origin, age, disability, or other legally protected classifications under applicable law, with respect to the administration of its programs," said Jon Balsbaugh, president of Trinity Schools Inc., which runs the three campuses, in an email.

The actions are probably legal, experts said. Scholars said the school's and organization's teachings on

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Oct. 22, 2020 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 111 ~ 78 of 97

homosexuality and treatment of LGBTQ people are harsher than those of the mainstream Catholic church. In a documentary released Wednesday, Pope Francis endorsed civil unions for the first time as pope, and said in an interview for the film that, "Homosexual people have the right to be in a family. They are children of God."

Barrett's views on whether LGBTQ people should have the same constitutional rights as other Americans became a focus last week in her Senate confirmation hearing. But her longtime membership in People of Praise and her leadership position at Trinity Schools were not discussed, even though most of the people the AP spoke with said her deep and decades-long involvement in the community signals she would be hostile to gay rights if confirmed.

Suzanne B. Goldberg, a professor at Columbia Law School who studies sexuality and gender law, said private schools have wide legal latitude to set admissions criteria. And, she said, Trinity probably isn't covered by recent Supreme Court rulings outlawing employment discrimination against LGBTQ people because of its affiliation with a religious community. But, she added, cases addressing those questions are likely to come before the high court in the near future, and Barrett's past oversight of Trinity's discriminatory policies raises concerns.

"When any member of the judiciary affiliates themselves with an institution that is committed to discrimination on any ground, it is important to look more closely at how that affects the individual's ability to give all cases a fair hearing," Goldberg said.

The AP sent detailed questions for Barrett to the White House press office. Rather than providing direct answers, White House spokesman Judd Deere instead accused AP of attacking the nominee.

"Because Democrats and the media are unable to attack Judge Barrett's sterling qualifications, they have instead turned to pathetic personal attacks on her children's Christian school, even though the Supreme Court has repeatedly reaffirmed that religious schools are protected by the First Amendment," Deere said in an email.

Nearly all the people interviewed for this story are gay or said they have gay family members. They used words such as "terrified," "petrified" and "frightening" to describe the prospect of Barrett on the high court. Some of them know Barrett, have mutual friends with her or even have been in her home dozens of times. They describe her as "nice" or "a kind person," but told the AP they feared others would suffer if Barrett tries to implement People of Praise's views on homosexuality on the Supreme Court.

About half of the people asked not to be identified for fear of retaliation against themselves or their families from other members of People of Praise, or because they had not come out to everyone in their lives. Among those interviewed were people who attended all three of its schools and who had been active in several of its 22 branches. Their experiences stretched back as far as the 1970s, and as recently as 2020.

NOT WELCOME

Tom Henry was a senior at Trinity School in Eagan, Minnesota, serving as a student ambassador, providing tours to prospective families, when Barrett was an active member of the board.

In early 2017, a lesbian parent asked him whether Trinity was open to gay people and expressed concern about how her child would be treated.

Henry, who is gay, said he didn't know what to say. He had been instructed not to answer questions about People of Praise or Trinity's "politics."

The next day, Henry recalled, he asked the school's then-headmaster, Jon Balsbaugh, how he should have answered. Henry said Balsbaugh pulled a document out of his desk drawer that condemned gay marriage, and explained it was a new policy from People of Praise that was going into the handbook.

"He looked me right in the eye and said, the next time that happens, you tell them they would not be welcome here," Henry recounted. "And he said to me that trans families, gay families, gay students, trans students would not feel welcome at Trinity Schools. And then he said, 'Do we understand each other?' And I said, yes. And I left. And then I quit the student ambassadors that day."

Balsbaugh, who has since been promoted to president of Trinity Schools Inc., says his recollection of the conversation "differs considerably," but declined to give details. He said it is likely he shared the school's

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Oct. 22, 2020 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 111 ~ 79 of 97

guidelines that at that time "had long been published in the parent handbook."

Balsbaugh told the AP in an email that Barrett was not involved in the formulation or passage of any policies pertaining to homosexuality. He said Barrett served on the Trinity board from July 2015 to March 2017, and denied that the school's leadership considered or formulated any new policy related to homosexuality during that time. He didn't say whether the policy as described by Henry was ever adopted.

The school's parent handbook says the board is the highest decision-making body, responsible for hiring the president and developing "broad institutional policies."

THE COMMUNITY

People of Praise is not a church but is a community in which people sign a "covenant" pledging love and service to fellow community members and to God. It has 1,700 members and grew out of the Catholic charismatic movement rooted in Pentecostalism that began in the late 1960s. It emphasizes a personal relationship with Jesus and can include baptism in the Holy Spirit, speaking in tongues and prophecy, according to former members, experts who have studied the movement, and its own publications. Most members are Roman Catholic.

Barrett has declined to say whether she is still an active member.

More than half of the people AP interviewed were involved with Trinity or People of Praise within the last decade. The AP verified the identities of everyone interviewed for this story through posts on the People of Praise and Trinity websites, published athletics results, school and membership directories, past listed addresses, or through other people verified by the AP as Trinity alumni or former members.

SCHOOL POLICIES

Multiple people who spoke with the AP detailed how Trinity's leadership articulated and put in place policies that effectively barred gay families and employees.

A 2018-19 enrollment agreement obtained by the AP says "the only proper place for human sexual activity is marriage, where marriage is a legal and committed relationship between one man and one woman." It goes on to say that activities such as "fornication, pornography, adultery and homosexual acts, and advocating or modeling any of these behaviors" are at odds with the school's core beliefs.

In 2014, the year before Barrett joined the board, the school's trustees voted to limit admissions to the children of legally married couples or single parents. At the time, gay marriage was not legal in Indiana or Virginia. The wording was softened slightly after the 2015 Supreme Court ruling that effectively legalized same-sex marriage nationwide, though it still explicitly opposes LGBTQ relationships.

"The reason was not any desire to judge or punish, but to avoid potential confusion for our students regarding our consistent position that sexual activity is meant to be only within marriage, understood as the union of one man and one woman," Balsbaugh said.

Balsbaugh said families and students don't have to agree with the school's positions, but it's important that parents "understand and be able to support the culture that we are establishing."

In addition to the written policies, school administrators made clear verbally they did not want to admit children of gay families, multiple people told the AP.

One described a faculty meeting at the Trinity School in Minnesota, where Balsbaugh, who was then headmaster, said in response to a question that people who subscribed to a religion other than Christianity would be welcome at the school because they were still "seeking truth." Children of gay couples, on the other hand, would not be accepted, "because their life is so contrary to our beliefs, and essentially that it was a choice," the person recalled Balsbaugh saying.

Balsbaugh said his recollection of the faculty meeting differed, but declined to give details. He denied this was the position of Trinity Schools, but declined to say whether children of gay couples would be admitted. He instead highlighted the school's harassment policy against bullying or other abuse "based upon a student's sex, race, ethnicity, religion, sexuality or perceived sexuality."

"Such behaviors are considered major violations of our code of conduct for students and faculty alike," the policy states.

A faculty employment agreement in place for the 2014-15 school year, obtained by the AP, states that

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Oct. 22, 2020 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 111 ~ 80 of 97

"Blatant sexual immorality (for example, fornication, adultery, homosexual acts, etc.) has no place in the culture of Trinity Schools."

Several people told the AP they were unaware of any openly gay employees and said it was understood that they were not welcome. One gay man spoke with the AP on condition of anonymity for fear of being ousted from his position at the school.

Balsbaugh told the AP many religious schools and faith-based groups have similar faculty agreements. He would not say whether the school has any LGBTQ teachers.

Research by GLSEN, a national LGBTQ education advocacy group, determined that at least 14% of U.S. religious schools have policies that actively discriminate against gay and lesbian students.

"Amy Coney Barrett helped lead schools that taught children and educators to hate themselves in the name of religion," said Eliza Byard, GLSEN's executive director.

SCHOOL TEACHINGS

Many former students described a controlling and repressive environment where even a friendly hug could earn a detention. Michael Leehan spent six years at Trinity School in Minnesota, graduating in 2015. Leehan, who is gay and had come out to his friends at school, recalled being reprimanded by a dean for hugging a platonic male friend.

"I don't know how else to describe it. He just got a kind of a mean look in his eye and venom in his voice," Leehan said, recalling that the dean told him, "Don't do that stuff here." Leehan remembered a surge of anger — "the feeling of I'm dirty, in the context of this school."

Several former students of varying ages who attended all three Trinity schools separately described being taught a vivid reading from Dante's "Inferno" that depicts the eternal suffering of Sodomites condemned to hell for their sins. Four of them said teachers made clear the passage referred to gay men who were rightly suffering in hell. Some more recent graduates of the Minnesota school, however, said their teacher did not dwell on the passage.

Balsbaugh said Trinity teaches Dante "as a work of imaginative literature, not as a collection of moral or theological statements."

Cara Wood, 28, attended Trinity School at Meadow View in Falls Church, a Virginia suburb of the nation's capital, and recalled the only time the school addressed homosexuality was when students read the "Inferno" and learned about gay men being in hell. Wood, who is bisexual, graduated in 2010.

"They called it sexual preference rather than ... sexual orientation and typically we just wouldn't address it at all," Wood told the AP.

During her confirmation hearing last week, Barrett also framed sexuality as a "preference." That wording is rejected by LGBTQ advocates because it suggests sexual orientation is a choice.

"I have no agenda, and I do want to be clear that I have never discriminated on the basis of sexual preference and would not ever discriminate on the basis of sexual preference," Barrett said during the Oct. 13 hearing.

After some Democratic senators seized on her use of the term, Barrett apologized, saying she "did not mean any offense or to make any statement by that."

Andrea Turpin-King transferred to the South Bend school in 1990, in the middle of her 7th grade year, after her father was struck and killed by a drunken driver after leaving a well-known gay bar. Her mother hoped she could get a fresh start after she was bullied at another school. The teachers at Trinity were told about what had happened, she said.

Turpin-King recalled that during 9th grade one of her teachers told the class that all gay people go to hell.

"When she said that, all I could picture was my dad's face, and all I could think about was how much I missed his hugs," Turpin-King told the AP. "And so, I said, I don't think that's true. And she said that I was going to go to hell, too."

Turpin-King said: "It felt like a request for me to disavow my father's humanity. Even in death. And I couldn't do that."

LIFE IN PEOPLE OF PRAISE

Many former members told the AP they struggled to reconcile People of Praise's and Trinity Schools'

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Oct. 22, 2020 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 111 ~ 81 of 97

religious teachings with their sexual identity, and suffered fear, anxiety and trauma. Many felt they had to leave, even at the risk of being shunned by friends and family.

One 2015 Trinity graduate who grew up in People of Praise recalled members requesting that the community pray that their gay loved ones would "recover" from their homosexuality.

Another Trinity graduate, who spoke to the AP on condition of anonymity because his parents are still in People of Praise and his sexuality remains a sensitive topic for them, was forced to undergo conversion therapy after Trinity administrators learned he was gay at age 16. He also recounted being counseled by a senior People of Praise leader that same-sex attraction was "changeable" with treatment and prayer. The widely discredited practice has been condemned by mental health organizations and LGBTQ advocacy groups as pseudoscientific, unethical and psychologically harmful.

People of Praise spokesman Sean Connolly said the group had no knowledge of LGBTQ youths being referred for conversion therapy.

"People of Praise neither advocates for nor pays for such programs," he said.

While some former members said they knew of no explicit People of Praise teaching against gay members, or said gay members could remain as long as they never acted on their sexual desires, most of those who spoke with the AP said it was clear gay people were not welcome.

Asked directly if a married same-sex couple or someone who is openly gay would be welcome within the community, Connolly responded, "People of Praise holds the standard Christian teaching, based on the New Testament, that sexual activity is meant for marriage, understood as the union of a man and a woman."

Camellia Pisegna's family was expelled from the community they had been a part of for 15 years in South Bend when she came out as a lesbian around 1990, she and others told the AP. Pisegna's children were shunned, even from lifelong friends. Even now, Pisegna said, no one has apologized, even though she still lives in the area.

"Any one of these hundreds of people could very easily find me," Pisegna said. "But that's never happened in 30 years."

Connolly said that account of what happened was "not accurate," though he declined to provide details "out of respect for all parties involved."

"We believe that harassing or persecuting gays and lesbians is contrary to the Gospel and that everyone should be treated with dignity and respect," Connolly said in an email.

Massimo Faggioli, a theology professor at Villanova University, said some of the community's teachings are more in keeping with pre-1960s Catholicism than the modern church.

"It comes from a very literalist reading of scripture," Faggioli said. "It's no longer the official language used by the official teaching of the Catholic Church. It's no longer used by the pope. It's no longer used by official documents that still have a negative view of same-sex marriage."

"Even John Paul II, even Pope Benedict, who had more conservative views on these things, they were very careful in never sounding (like) homophobes," Faggioli said.

LEGAL RAMIFICATIONS

Barrett, in her hearing last week, refused to say whether she agreed with the Supreme Court's ruling in *Lawrence v. Texas*, which in 2003 struck down state laws criminalizing sex acts between those of the same gender. She also repeatedly refused to say whether she agreed with the high court's ruling in *Obergefell v. Hodges*, the landmark 5-to-4 decision in 2015 that effectively legalized same-sex marriage nationwide.

Barrett stressed that she did not intend to signal any opinion one way or another. If confirmed, she insisted, she would keep an open mind about how she might rule in any future cases.

Barrett's position on gay rights is particularly crucial after two of the high court's conservative justices, Clarence Thomas and Samuel Alito, this month wrote a dissenting opinion that appeared to call for the court to reconsider its 2015 same-sex marriage decision. Both Thomas and Alito were in the minority in that decision, as was deceased Justice Antonin Scalia, whose judicial philosophy Barrett has said mirrors her own.

Alphonso David, president of the Human Rights Campaign, an LGBTQ advocacy group that opposes Barrett's confirmation, said his group fears "a far-right Supreme Court that could undermine the rights of

marginalized communities and the LGBTQ community for decades.”

“Our love is valid, our love is equal, and our rights must be,” David said.

Turpin-King said she has briefly met Barrett, and they share mutual friends. Some of her husband’s family members are still members of the People of Praise community, and she loves and respects them. Many of Trinity’s teachers were wonderful to her. But the thought of Barrett sitting on the Supreme Court scares her.

“I am deeply concerned about my queer friends. I’m concerned about my own children,” Turpin-King said. “From what I experienced in People of Praise, as a student of one of their schools, everyone needs to be petrified, frankly.”

Smith reported from Providence, Rhode Island, and Biesecker from Washington.

Follow Smith at <http://twitter.com/MRSmithAP> and AP Investigative Reporter Michael Biesecker at <http://twitter.com/mbieseck>

Contact AP’s global investigative team at Investigative@ap.org

AP-NORC/USAFacts poll: Many in US distrust campaign info

By DAVID KLEPPER Associated Press

In a presidential election year that has thrown the country’s divisions into stark relief, Americans can agree on this: Misinformation about government and politics is a major problem.

A new survey by The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Opinion Research and USAFacts finds that while voters say it’s pretty easy to find accurate information about voting, they have a harder time knowing whether there’s any factual basis for the information they’re getting from and about the candidates.

“The misinformation, it’s just blossomed to the point where it’s unmanageable,” said nurse Liana Price, 34, of Tampa Bay, Florida, who supports Democrat Joe Biden in the contest against President Donald Trump and worries misinformation about the election could sway voters. “You try to explain and provide facts and actual research, but people don’t believe it.”

Among the poll’s findings: More than 8 in 10 rated the spread of misinformation about government a “major problem.”

The deluge in political misinformation and conspiracy theories has fueled distrust in institutions and threatens to undermine confidence in elections, democracy and the nation itself, according to Cindy Otis, a former CIA officer and now vice president of analysis at Alethea Group, a company that helps combat disinformation.

“We are living today in the biggest period of false information in history, and we Americans are largely doing it to ourselves,” Otis said last week during a hearing focused on election-related misinformation. “Americans are losing trust in what they read and see online. We are desperate for information, but certain groups feel they cannot trust the traditional institutions upon which they used to rely.”

The poll found the candidates and their campaigns are themselves seen as not credible by many Americans, with less than a third of Americans saying campaign messages from either Biden or Trump are often or always based on facts.

Roughly half of respondents said Trump’s campaign messages are rarely or never based in fact, while about 4 in 10 respondents say that of Biden’s campaign.

Not surprisingly, Democrats and Republicans disagree about which candidate has the bigger problem with the facts. But Trump scores lower even among his own party, with nearly a quarter of Republicans saying his campaign messages are rarely or never based in fact compared with only about 1 in 10 Democrats who say the same about Biden.

While partisan disagreement is nothing new, the battles used to be more about policies or ideas rather than disagreements about fundamental facts or whether the other side is even telling the truth.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Oct. 22, 2020 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 111 ~ 83 of 97

"I've voted for 40 years, and I've never seen it like this," said 60-year-old Kevin Wollersheim, of St. Paul, Minnesota, who supports Biden for president. "There are no alternative facts. There's the truth, and the truth is important."

Bonita Sergent, 68, a Trump supporter from southern Ohio, agreed.

"People don't trust what they hear like they used to," she said.

When Americans do try to verify news about the campaign, internet searches are the preferred way, the survey found, with 35% saying they turn to the web to see if news about the contest is true.

Traditional news sources fared worse: 13% said they turn to cable news networks, 8% said national news networks and only 3% went with newspapers or online news sites, reflecting a broader loss of trust in news organizations.

"I think somewhere between 95 and 98% of the press are what I would call deep state liars," said 75-year-old Trump supporter Colleen McDonald, of San Diego. "They make stuff up. I wouldn't believe anything that they said."

Social media received similarly poor marks, with only 5% saying it's where they go to verify whether election-related news is true. Nevertheless, social media remains a leading source of news for many, with 37% saying they get news from platforms like Facebook or Twitter at least once a day.

"Social media is a cesspool," said Jeff Kemble, 50, a self-described liberal from Massachusetts who supports Biden. "The only information you get is the information you go looking for. And that certainly doesn't mean it's true."

One silver lining in the poll? At least 6 in 10 Americans say it's easy to find factual information about registering to vote and casting their ballot. That's especially good news during a pandemic year election in which many voters will vote by mail for the first time.

Eric Amundsen, 31, of Manhattan, said he's pleased to see social media platforms like Facebook promote resources and information about voting. It helps to repair the company's reputation, he said, after its role in spreading such misinformation.

He said he hopes the fact that so many Americans are in agreement about the dangers posed by misinformation means they will act to address the problem — on Election Day and beyond.

"Maybe I'm too optimistic," he said. "But I think maybe people are just tired of the noise."

The AP-NORC/USAFacts poll of 1,121 adults was conducted Sept. 15-25 using a sample drawn from NORC's probability-based AmeriSpeak Panel, which is designed to be representative of the U.S. population. The margin of sampling error for all respondents is plus or minus 4.1 percentage points.

Online:

AP-NORC Center: <http://www.apnorc.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/>.

Review: Borat is back, and this time he fits right in

By JAKE COYLE AP Film Writer

Since Sacha Baron Cohen first appeared as his Kazakh journalist on "Da Ali G Show," Borat Sagdiyev has been remarkably consistent. The accent is the same. The gray suit is still rumpled. "Nahce" and "Mah Wahfe" regularly exude from him with a mangled melody. Borat hasn't changed in the last 20 years. But America has.

When Baron Cohen last traipsed across the country as Borat, in 2006's "Borat: Cultural Learnings of America for Make Benefit Glorious Nation of Kazakhstan," his character's unapologetic anti-Semitism, misogyny and racism teased prejudices out from all kinds of dark and not-so-dark corners. His comedy revealed a more disturbing, hidden America that was often happy to go along with Baron Cohen's gonzo

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Oct. 22, 2020 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 111 ~ 84 of 97

act. Fourteen years later, those prejudices aren't so hard to find. Borat fits right in.

In "Borat Subsequent Moviefilm: Delivery of Prodigious Bribe to American Regime for Make Benefit Once Glorious Nation of Kazakhstan" — Baron Cohen's October surprise, shot secretly earlier this year and debuting Friday on Amazon Prime Video — Borat returns to the U.S., like a deranged Alexis de Tocqueville, for another look.

It takes a little while to get going. Borat doesn't have the free rein he once did, and not just because of the restrictions of the pandemic. He's hounded on the streets by cell phone-waving fans asking for a picture, and has to resort to a coterie of disguises. His trail of fiascos this time is a little more limited but no less damning. The "Borat" sequel will make you laugh and squirm as much as it will send shudders down your spine.

Jason Woliner, a TV veteran and frequent collaborator with Aziz Ansari taking over as director for Larry Charles, begins by catching us up on Borat. Locked away in the gulag for bringing shame on Kazakhstan with the first movie, Borat is temporarily freed for a mission to deliver a gift to Trump (Borat refers to him, admiringly, as "McDonald Trump"). Given his past encounters with the president (Baron Cohen's Ali G interviewed him; Borat previously defecated in front of a Trump building), it's judged best to instead seek out who Borat calls "America's most famous ladies man," Vice President Mike Pence.

Borat arrives via shipping container in Galveston, Texas, only to find that the monkey meant for Pence is dead and his daughter Tutor (played by Bulgarian actress Maria Bakalova), last seen chained alongside farm animals, has stowed away. They'll remain paired throughout the film in a journey through America and Borat's own over-the-top sexism. This "Borat" is, in its own absurd way, a #MeToo movie.

There are stopovers with an Instagram influencer for a lesson on sugar-baby submissiveness, a debutant coach, a plastic surgeon and an anti-abortion clinic where a pastor maintains his stance despite being given the impression Tutor has been impregnated by her father. "God doesn't make accidents," he says.

Borat, however, does, and in the film's second half, he launches his most audacious stunts. They include a trip, with Borat dressed as Trump, to the Conservative Political Action Conference, where he shouts at Pence from the crowd before being rapidly removed; and a "March for Our Rights Rally" in which he leads a crowd of Trump supporters in a sing-along not unlike Borat's famed "Throw the Jew Down the Well" ditty. This time, mentions of Barack Obama and Anthony Fauci are followed by choruses of "Inject him with the Wuhan flu" and "Gas him up like the Germans." The film's piece-de-resistance is an exceedingly awkward sit-down interview with Rudy Giuliani and Tutor that ends with Borat (disguised as the boom-mic holder) rushing in on the two of them in a charged moment alongside a hotel bed.

Borat's adventures are often followed by a raft of lawsuits, and that could well be the case again. Some have already been filed. But I suspect there won't be a lot of apologies or public contrition this time around. There isn't anything that Borat uncovers that can't be found on the airwaves, in social-media posts and across newspaper front pages. In the movie's most compelling section, Borat appeals to a pair of guys for a place to stay, and despite it being a pandemic, they warmly welcome him in. How long Borat stays there isn't clear but it seems like several days. They're friendly hosts who happily discuss political views they've gleaned partly from the internet, like that Hillary Clinton drinks the blood of children. When Borat shares some of his wild ideas about Jews, they correct him. That's not true, they say. "That's a conspiracy theory."

"Borat Subsequent Moviefilm: Delivery of Prodigious Bribe to American Regime for Make Benefit Once Glorious Nation of Kazakhstan," an Amazon Studios release, is rated R by the Motion Picture Association of America for pervasive strong crude and sexual content, graphic nudity, and language. Running time: 94 minutes. Three stars out of four.

Follow AP Film Writer Jake Coyle on Twitter at: <http://twitter.com/jakecoyleAP>

Judge slams DeVos for rejecting 94% of loan relief claims

By COLLIN BINKLEY AP Education Writer

Months after vowing to process a backlog of 160,000 requests for loan forgiveness from students who

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Oct. 22, 2020 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 111 ~ 85 of 97

say they were defrauded by their schools, the U.S. Education Department has rejected 94% of claims it has reviewed, according to a federal judge who is demanding justification for the "blistering pace" of denials.

In a biting decision issued Monday in California, U.S. District Judge William Alsup said the department has been denying claims using template letters that are "alarmingly curt." Alsup threatened to suspend the agency from rejecting further requests, saying its approach "hangs borrowers out to dry."

He said that although Education Secretary Betsy DeVos blamed the backlog on the hard work that goes into processing claims, she has now "charged out of the gate, issuing perfunctory denial notices utterly devoid of meaningful explanation at a blistering pace."

The Education Department said it is studying the ruling. Spokesperson Angela Morabito said many claims were submitted by borrowers who attended ineligible programs or who failed to make a valid claim for loan forgiveness.

"Just because a claim was filed does not make it valid and eligible for taxpayer-funded relief," she said in a statement. "The Department is following the publicly available process for resolving claims as quickly as possible, so those students who are eligible and were harmed get the relief they deserve."

The dispute stems from a 2019 lawsuit brought by 160,000 borrowers who say the Education Department illegally stalled their claims for loan relief. The claims were filed through a program known as borrower defense, which forgives federal student loans for borrowers who are cheated by their colleges. It's most often used by students who attended for-profit colleges.

In a proposed settlement in April, the Education Department agreed to process the backlog of claims within 18 months. But Alsup scrapped the deal Monday, saying it was undermined by the recent spate of rejections. Instead, he called on the lawsuit to proceed and he authorized the deposition of up to five department officials to explain the denials.

"We need to know what is really going on," wrote Alsup, who was appointed to the court by President Bill Clinton. He said DeVos will not be required to appear for deposition "at this time," but he suggested it may be necessary later.

DeVos set out to overhaul the loan forgiveness program in 2017 and last year released new rules making it more difficult for borrowers to get loans erased. In the meantime, claims were piling up. When the lawsuit was filed, it had been a year since the department issued a final decision on any claim.

The program had been expanded by President Barack Obama to erase loans for students who attended the Corinthian Colleges chain and other for-profit colleges found to have lied about the success of their graduates. DeVos opposed the expansion, saying it made it too easy for students to get their loans erased at the expense of taxpayers.

Alsup's decision was based on the department's latest update on its work to clear the backlog. As of August, he wrote, the agency had denied 74,000 claims linked to the lawsuit while granting 4,400, amounting to a 94% rejection rate.

Rejections were delivered through standardized letters that included information on how to appeal the decision, but Alsup said the letters fail to explain the decision. It leaves borrowers in a "disturbingly Kafkaesque" situation, he wrote.

Alsup said he is considering whether to forbid the department from issuing any further rejections until the case is decided. He has asked both sides to submit arguments around the question.

Harvard Law School's Project on Predatory Student Lending, which represents borrowers in the suit, said it looks forward to deposing agency officials to get an explanation for their actions.

"The class members in this case have suffered harm at every turn, but in this court order they are finally seeing a change in the tides after years of waiting for justice," said Eileen Connor, the group's legal director.

Spain 1st in western Europe to hit 1 million virus cases

By JOSEPH WILSON Associated Press

BARCELONA, Spain (AP) — Spain became the first country in western Europe to accumulate more than 1 million confirmed COVID-19 infections on Wednesday as the nation of 47 million struggles to contain a

resurgence of the virus.

The health ministry said that its accumulative case load since the start of the pandemic reached 1,005,295 after reporting 16,973 more cases in the past 24 hours.

The ministry attributes 34,366 deaths to COVID-19. Experts say that, as in most countries, the real numbers of infections and deaths are probably much higher because insufficient testing, asymptomatic cases and other issues impede authorities from capturing the true scale of the outbreak.

As the numbers rise, authorities in charge of health policy in Spain's regions are tightening restrictions. They want to stem the surge that has been building in recent months while avoiding a second total lockdown of home confinements that stemmed the first wave of the virus but left the economy reeling.

The regional government of northern Aragón announced Wednesday they have closed the city limits of Zaragoza, Huesca and Teruel. Neighboring Navarra, which leads Spain in infections per 100,000 over 14 days, is preparing to become the first Spanish region to close its borders on Thursday. La Rioja will also close its regional borders on Friday.

Spain's Health Minister Salvador Illa and regional heads of health will meet on Thursday to discuss their virus strategies and consider employing nightly curfews to target late-night partying as a source of contagion.

"I want to be very clear," Illa said Tuesday. "Some very hard weeks are coming."

France is not far behind in western Europe with over 930,000 reported cases. Russia has reported over 1.4 million cases. The U.S. leads the world with over 8 million reported cases, according to the Johns Hopkins tally that is considered a global standard for charting the progress of the pandemic.

Spain's cases per 100,000 inhabitants over 14 days, which is a more reliable indicator of the evolution of the virus, has decreased in recent days. It currently sits at 332 cases per 100,000, a figure that is still worrying but now lower than the Czech Republic, Belgium, Netherlands, France and Britain.

Despite the higher number of asymptomatic cases found through improved testing, the pressure is being felt in Spain's hospitals. Over 3,900 patients have required hospitalization over the past week, with 274 needing intensive care, the ministry said. Almost 40% of Madrid's ICU units are occupied by COVID-19 patients.

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

Trump the dancer? His moves to 'YMCA' at rallies are a hit

By JILL COLVIN Associated Press

TUCSON, Ariz. (AP) — He adjusts his coat. He gazes out at the crowd. And then he goes for it.

President Donald Trump, a man who is famously particular about his appearance, is fully embracing doing a dad dance to the Village People's "YMCA" as the finale to his rallies in the campaign's closing stretch.

He starts with the arms, clenched fists pumping back and forth — sometimes to the beat — as though he's on an elliptical trainer. He claps. He waves. And then he starts to bop his head and move his knees. On some nights, he sticks mostly to pointing and clapping. But on others, he lurches from side to side and jerks his body as the crowd cheers.

Backstage, top staff and campaign aides often join in with the more traditional take, using their bodies to spell out Y-M-C-A to the strains of the cheesy '70s anthem.

Trump's rally dance has become a rare moment of levity in an otherwise miserable campaign year marked by a deadly pandemic, an economic recession and racial turmoil. And while Trump has largely been shunned by pop culture, the dance has spawned a viral TikTok video challenge (even though he's threatened to ban the site in the U.S.) and a parody on "The Late Show with Stephen Colbert."

"Do you want to shake your groove thing but don't know the steps? Then order 'Dancing with The Don' and let President Trump teach you all the hottest moves!" Colbert's show advertised in a parody infomercial.

Trump's campaign staff and family members have also been promoting clips and copycats as the presi-

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Oct. 22, 2020 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 111 ~ 87 of 97

dent trails in most national polls and in many battleground states just two weeks out from Election Day. "Love it!" the president's daughter and senior adviser, Ivanka Trump, wrote as she retweeted a video posted by a young woman replicating the president's moves.

When a reporter tweeted a video showing some of Trump's campaign aides dancing along — but not Ivanka Trump's husband, Jared Kushner, a top White House adviser — Ivanka tweeted back: "Party Foul!" Added Trump senior advisor Steve Cortes: "President Beast Mode can boogie..."

The efforts to make the dance "a thing" come as the president has been trying to demonstrate his vigor after returning to the campaign trail following his infection with the coronavirus, which put him in the hospital for three nights.

It has drawn a scowl from others, including CNN's Don Lemon, who criticized Trump for dancing to the song during a pandemic that has killed so many.

"That can't be taken away no matter how many times he goes to rallies and dances to the Village People," Lemon said. "He is having fun and dancing on the graves of 215,000 Americans. Dancing."

"YMCA," widely considered a gay anthem, is a relatively new addition to Trump's rally playlist. It was swapped in this year after the Rolling Stones threatened in June to sue if Trump didn't stop using their song "You Can't Always Get What You Want" as his rally closer.

Trump's eclectic rally soundtrack — an integral part of the events — has sparked numerous threats of legal action, along with group sing-alongs, crowd dance sessions, confused stares and even boos.

In the early days, the list was heavy on the Rolling Stones and Aerosmith (until they also threatened legal action), along with Trump favorites like Adele (until she objected) and the late tenor Luciano Pavarotti's "Nessun Dorma" (until his wife objected, too.)

Throughout much of 2016, the Backstreet Boys and 'N Sync were rally staples, as have been ballads from Broadway musicals including "The Phantom of the Opera," "Cats," and "Les Misérables."

"Macho Man," also by the Village People, is another recent add.

The Village People have said they are OK with Trump's use of their songs.

"Since our music is not being used for a specific endorsement, the President's use is "perfect(ly)" legal," they wrote on Facebook in February. "Like millions of Village People fans worldwide, the President and his supporters have shown a genuine like for our music. Our music is all-inclusive and certainly everyone is entitled to do the YMCA dance, regardless of their political affiliation."

"Having said that," they added, "we certainly don't endorse his use as we'd prefer our music be kept out of politics."

Trump's campaign declined to say who had the idea to use "YMCA" as his closing song — though members of his traveling entourage have jokingly tried to take credit.

Trump campaign adviser Jason Miller agreed to reveal the secret to an AP reporter "only if we first get a clip of you singing YMCA."

AP's Jill Colvin declined.

UK-EU trade talks back on after bloc offers olive branch

By RAF CASERT and JILL LAWLESS Associated Press

BRUSSELS (AP) — Britain and the European Union will resume their stalled trade negotiations at an "intensified" pace, the British government said Wednesday, in hope of striking a deal within weeks to avoid a messy economic breakup at the end of the year.

The announcement came five days after Prime Minister Boris Johnson declared that the talks were over unless the bloc made a "fundamental" change of policy,

There is little sign that has happened. But Britain seized on conciliatory comments by EU chief negotiator Michel Barnier, saying they offered the chance of a breakthrough.

Barnier has already agreed to "intensify" talks — a key U.K. demand — and to discuss the legal text of an agreement. On Wednesday he said compromise would be needed from both sides to get a deal.

That turned out to be the key. Britain has long complained that the EU expects it to make all the con-

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Oct. 22, 2020 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 111 ~ 88 of 97

cessions.

Johnson's office said that on the basis of Barnier's words it was "ready to welcome the EU team to London to resume negotiations later this week" for "intensified" talks.

"It is clear that significant gaps remain between our positions in the most difficult areas, but we are ready, with the EU, to see if it is possible to bridge them in intensive talks," Downing St. said in a statement.

Barnier spokesman Daniel Ferrie said EU negotiators would travel to London on Thursday. The first chunk of negotiations is due to run through the weekend.

Barnier told the European Parliament that "despite the difficulties we've faced, an agreement is within reach if both sides are willing to work constructively, if they are willing to compromise."

He also said that "the European Union's attitude in this negotiation has in no way shifted and it will not shift."

But Downing Street focused on Barnier's words about compromise and his acknowledgement that a deal would have to respect the U.K.'s "sovereignty," a key term for British Brexit supporters.

The two sides have been trying to strike a trade deal since the U.K. left the EU on Jan. 31. They must do so within weeks if an agreement is to be ratified by the end of the year, when a post-Brexit transition period ends.

Johnson's about-face will reinforce suspicions that his walkout was a gesture designed to inject momentum into the sluggish talks.

The two sides have come close to agreement in many areas during months of fraught negotiations, though big gaps remain over fishing rights — highly symbolic for maritime nations on both sides — and rules to ensure common regulatory standards and fair competition.

The EU fears the U.K. will gain an unfair advantage by slashing food, workplace and environmental standards and pumping state money into businesses once it is free of the bloc's rules.

The bloc also accuses Britain of seeking the kind of unfettered access to its markets usually reserved for EU members.

"The U.K. wants access to a single market while at the same time being able to diverge from our standards and regulations when it suits them," European Council President Charles Michel told the European Parliament on Wednesday. "You can't have your cake and eat it too."

Britain accuses the bloc of seeking to impose demands that it has not placed on other countries it has free trade deals with, such as Canada.

If there is no deal, businesses on both sides of the English Channel face tariffs and other obstacles to trade starting Jan. 1. British business groups warn that could mean border delays, soaring prices and shortages of some goods.

Barnier's emollient tone contrasted with the combative stance of Michel, who said that if Britain wants vast access to the 27-member bloc's markets, it will have to keep its waters open to EU fishermen, something the U.K. is refusing to do.

"Yes, we want to keep access to U.K. waters for our fishermen," Michel said. "Exactly like the U.K., too, (wants) to keep access to our huge and diversified markets for its companies."

EU leaders also remain angry over the U.K.'s plans to disregard some parts of the legally binding withdrawal agreement it signed with the bloc.

If passed, the Internal Market Bill will allow the British government to override parts agreement relating to trade with Northern Ireland, the only part of the U.K. to share a border with the EU.

Johnson's government says it needs the legislation as an insurance policy in case the EU behaves unreasonably after a post-Brexit transition period ends on Dec. 31 and tries to impede the flow of goods between Northern Ireland and the rest of the U.K.

The bloc sees it as a flagrant breach of an international treaty that could undermine the delicate foundations of Northern Ireland's peace settlement, created by the 1998 Good Friday accord.

Jill Lawless reported from London.

Follow all AP stories about Brexit at <https://apnews.com/hub/brexit>

Will voting in a non-battleground state make a difference?

By The Associated Press undefined

HOW DOES MY VOTE MATTER IF I DON'T LIVE IN A PRESIDENTIAL BATTLEGROUND STATE?

There are still plenty of other races where your vote makes a difference. In fact, voters in almost every state will have a chance to influence both national and local decisions through down-ballot races.

Voters in two-thirds of the states will be electing a U.S. senator. Each one of those races matters for control of the chamber, because Republicans currently hold only a slim majority of 53 of the 100 seats.

The importance of controlling the Senate is evident in the confirmation hearings for President Donald Trump's nominee to the U.S. Supreme Court, Amy Coney Barrett. Because they control the Senate, Republicans are pressing to quickly confirm the conservative jurist. She would replace the late liberal icon, Ruth Bader Ginsberg, and Democrats are virtually powerless to stop it.

Voters in 11 states also will be electing governors, who will shape the state's response to the coronavirus pandemic and other contentious issues, including abortion, crime, climate change and racial inequalities.

And voters in almost all states will be electing state lawmakers who will determine spending for such things as public schools and colleges, infrastructure and health care for low-income residents.

This year's legislative elections are even more important than usual. That's because they are the last before new round of redistricting based on the results of the 2020 census. There are more than 5,000 legislative races in 35 states where the winners will have a role in redrawing U.S. House and state legislative districts for the next decade. How they draw those voting districts could determine which party has an advantage in future elections, and thus which policies are pursued.

This story is part of 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.

Mission impossible? Welker on tap to moderate second debate

By DAVID BAUDER AP Media Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — This fall's presidential debates have chewed up moderators.

President Donald Trump steamrolled Chris Wallace with constant interruptions in the first one, a performance that cost the Republican incumbent support in the polls. Susan Page struggled to make the vice presidential candidates adhere to time limits their campaigns had agreed to in advance.

Next up: Kristen Welker.

The NBC News White House correspondent is scheduled to moderate Thursday's second and last session between Trump and Democrat Joe Biden. It's hard not to feel trepidation for her.

Both of her predecessors came into the assignments with more experience. While Welker was one of four questioners at a Democratic presidential debate last fall, this is by far the 44-year-old journalist's biggest stage. Trump and his supporters have already tried to get in her head by attacking her in advance.

Colleague Savannah Guthrie's well-received (except by Trump) town hall with the president last week offered Welker a roadmap to success, but also may have ratcheted up the pressure.

"Kristen represents the best of NBC News and of journalism generally," said her boss, NBC News President Noah Oppenheim. "She's fair, she's deeply prepared, she's well-versed in the issues and she's going to do a great job."

The Philadelphia-born Welker has been with NBC News since 2010, after local news stints in Redding, California; Providence, Rhode Island; and her home city. A former intern at the "Today" show, she now hosts the program's weekend edition.

She's the first Black woman to moderate a presidential debate since Carole Simpson in 1992.

Earlier this month, Trump aide Jason Miller said on Fox News that he has "a very high opinion" of Welker

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Oct. 22, 2020 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 111 ~ 90 of 97

and suggested she would do an excellent job as moderator. She's "very fair in her approach," Miller said. Yet last weekend, the president tweeted that Welker has "always been terrible and unfair, just like most of the Fake News reporters."

It wasn't clear why she'd earned Trump's disapproval. Trump has questioned why Welker had disabled her Twitter account after C-SPAN's Steve Scully claimed — falsely, he later admitted — that he had been hacked. Scully was to have moderated an earlier debate that was canceled.

NBC said the halt to Welker's Twitter account was temporary and done for security, not to hide anything she may have tweeted in the past.

Some of Trump's supporters also dug up evidence that Welker's parents had contributed to Democratic campaigns in the past as a way of questioning her objectivity. There have been no such accusations levied against Welker, a registered independent.

Andrea Mitchell, the NBC News correspondent who moderated last fall's Democratic debate with Welker, Rachel Maddow and Ashley Parker, doubted her colleague would be intimidated.

"She's got her eye on the prize," said Mitchell, who has been helping Welker with debate prep and praises her hard work. Welker wasn't made available for an interview.

The best defense against such pregame criticism, Mitchell said, "is to know what she's talking about."

Still, after having watched the earlier debates, Mitchell has no illusions about what her colleague is getting into.

"It's a hard challenge," she said. "Chris (Wallace) and Susan (Page) are really experienced journalists. I've worked with both of them. It became impossible. I don't know if anyone could have handled that."

Welker needs "to have the best night of her career," Washington Post media critic Margaret Sullivan wrote this week. She needs to establish control in a way that Wallace and Page never did. Welker will have one potential assist: The debate commission said Monday that microphones for the two candidates will be turned off while their opponent gives a two-minute answer to an initial question.

While Welker can't fact-check everything that is said in the debate, Sullivan said the NBC correspondent "can and must keep the debate from becoming a super-spreader of disinformation."

Oppenheim, who was in Nashville, Tennessee, this week to help with Welker's prep session and mock debates, said he believed no one is better suited to the task.

"She is focused on delivering for the American people a substantive conversation about the issues that voters care about and she's going to do everything in her power to make that happen," he said.

After years grappling with Google, Europe has tips for US

By KELVIN CHAN AP Business Writer

LONDON (AP) — The U.S. antitrust crackdown on Google might seem like déjà vu for European Union regulators.

By U.S. standards, the Justice Department's move to sue Google this week for abusing its dominance in online search and advertising was a bold move. But it treads on ground already broken years before by EU officials in Brussels.

Veterans of Europe's antitrust tech battles welcomed the U.S. investigation and said American authorities should learn from the bloc's experience.

"We hope U.S. authorities have paid attention to two major drawbacks of the EU investigations: the long-drawn-out process and Google's tactics to use any loophole to avoid changing its business model," said BEUC, a European consumer group that was a complainant to one of the EU's Google cases, involving its shopping service.

The EU's competition commissioner, Executive Vice President Margrethe Vestager, has slapped Google with multibillion dollar penalties in three separate competition cases in recent years. The eye-popping fines put Vestager at the forefront of the global movement to rein in Big Tech companies.

But critics say - and Vestager has acknowledged - that they haven't done much to change the company's

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Oct. 22, 2020 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 111 ~ 91 of 97

behavior and have taken too long to be enforced. As a result, EU officials in Brussels are weighing up new rules and tools.

U.S. officials indicated in their lawsuit filed Tuesday that they wanted to go beyond EU-style headline-grabbing fines, which Google can easily afford, and mandating deeper changes to company practices. They asked a court to consider structural relief to remedy any competitive harm - language that suggests a possible break-up of the company.

One key takeaway from the EU's experience is that the slow pace of antitrust investigations, lawsuits and enforcement means a company like Google has time to find ways to maintain its dominance. The first fine on Google, for example, was imposed only after seven years of investigations and negotiations.

To prevent big tech companies from digging deeper moats against competitors during such drawn-out antitrust investigations, the EU Commission has started using "interim measures" as a speedy way to halt anti-competitive behavior.

Last year U.S. chipmaker Broadcom was given such an order, requiring it to halt competition-restricting exclusive contracts with customers. This month the company formally committed to the EU that it would stop its practices.

"If you have taken out a tool of the tool box and you've got some experience in using it, it's more likely you will use it again," Vestager said when asked in a press briefing whether she would use the measures in future investigations.

The EU's executive Commission has also been drawing up proposals for a package of sweeping new regulations aimed at digital companies.

It's "essentially a list of dos and don'ts which would apply to a small set of large gatekeepers," Vestager said in a speech last month. They would, for example, require digital platforms to make some data accessible to other users. They would also prohibit companies from directing users to their own products or services.

Google is appealing its three EU antitrust penalties. The first came in 2017, when officials fined it 2.42 billion euros (currently \$3 billion) for unfairly favoring its own online shopping recommendations in its search results.

The investigation found that Google unfairly directed visitors to its comparison shopping service, Google Shopping, to the detriment of its rivals. Regulators demanded Google change the way it provides search results in Europe.

A year later, the EU commission fined Google 4.34 billion euros for forcing smartphone makers that use its Android operating system to install Google search and browser apps. In response, Google started giving European Android users a choice of browsers and search apps.

European regulators also fined Google 1.49 billion euros last year for freezing out rivals in the online advertising business. By the time the investigation wrapped up, Google had already made some changes so regulators didn't require a specific remedy to restore competition. But Vestager said at the time that it appeared rivals had not been able to catch up, and some were "quite small."

EU regulators are keeping up the pressure on U.S. tech companies. They've opened an investigation into Amazon over whether it uses data from its platform to compete against third-party merchants. They have also opened twin investigations of Apple and its payments platform, as well as of Google's plan to buy wearables maker Fitbit.

For all of AP's tech coverage, visit <https://apnews.com/apf-technology>

Follow Kelvin Chan at www.twitter.com/chanman

Trump tends to his electoral map, Biden eyes Obama boost

By ZEKE MILLER, WILL WEISSERT and JONATHAN LEMIRE Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump is hopping from one must-win stop on the electoral

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Oct. 22, 2020 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 111 ~ 92 of 97

map to the next in the leadup to a final presidential debate that may be his last, best chance to alter the trajectory of the 2020 campaign.

As Democrat Joe Biden holes up for debate prep in advance of Thursday's faceoff in Nashville, Tennessee, he's hoping for a boost from former President Barack Obama, who will be holding his first in-person campaign event for Biden on Wednesday in Philadelphia. Obama, who has become increasingly critical of Trump over the three and a half years since he left office, will address a drive-in rally, where supporters will listen to him over the radio inside their cars.

It comes a day after Trump, trailing in polls in many battleground states, stopped in Pennsylvania on Tuesday. Trump was bound for North Carolina on Wednesday as he delivers what his campaign sees as his closing message.

"This is an election between a Trump super recovery and a Biden depression," the president said in Erie, Pennsylvania. "You will have a depression the likes of which you have never seen." He added: "If you want depression, doom and despair, vote for Sleepy Joe. And boredom."

But the Republican president's pitch that he should lead the rebuilding of an economy ravaged by the coronavirus pandemic has been overshadowed by a series of fights. In the last two days he has attacked the nation's leading infectious disease expert and a venerable TV newsmagazine while suggesting that the country was tired of talking about a virus that has killed more than 221,000 people in the United States.

Before leaving the White House for Pennsylvania on Tuesday, Trump taped part of an interview with CBS' "60 Minutes" that apparently ended acrimoniously. On Twitter, the president declared his interview with Lesley Stahl to be "FAKE and BIASED," and he threatened to release a White House edit of it before its Sunday airtime.

Also trailing in fundraising for campaign ads, Trump is increasingly relying on his signature campaign rallies to maximize turnout among his GOP base. His trip to Pennsylvania on Tuesday was one of what is expected to be several visits to the state in the next two weeks.

"If we win Pennsylvania, we win the whole thing," Trump said in Erie.

Erie County, which includes the aging industrial city in the state's northwest corner, went for Obama by 5 percentage points in 2012 but broke for Trump by 2 in 2016. That swing, fueled by Trump's success with white, working-class, non-college-educated voters, was replicated in small cities and towns and rural areas and helped him overcome Hillary Clinton's victories in the state's big cities.

But Trump will probably need to run up the score by more this time around as his prospects have slipped since 2016 in vote-rich suburban Philadelphia, where he underperformed by past Republican measures. This raises the stakes for his campaign's more aggressive outreach to new rural and small-town voters across the industrial north.

His aides worry that his opponent is uniquely situated to prevent that, as Biden not only hails from Scranton but has built his political persona as a representative of the middle and working classes.

Trump, who spoke for less than an hour, showed the crowd a video of various Biden comments on fracking in a bid to portray the Democrat as opposed to the process. The issue is critical in a state that is the second leading producer of natural gas in the country. Biden's actual position is that he would ban new gas and oil permits, including for fracking, on federal lands only. The vast majority of oil and gas does not come from federal lands.

Three weeks of wrangling over the debate format and structure appeared to have subsided after the Commission on Presidential Debates came out with procedures meant to reduce the chaotic interruptions that plagued the first Trump-Biden encounter last month.

This time, Trump and Biden will each have his microphone cut off while his rival delivers an opening two-minute answer to each of the six debate topics, the commission announced. The mute button won't figure in the open discussion portion of the debate.

Trump was to have been joined in Erie by first lady Melania Trump, in what would have been her first public appearance since she and the president were sickened with COVID-19. But her chief of staff, Stephanie Grisham, said Tuesday that Mrs. Trump has a lingering cough and would not accompany the president.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Oct. 22, 2020 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 111 ~ 93 of 97

As Trump was on the road, Biden was meeting at his lakeside home in Wilmington, Delaware, with senior adviser Ron Klain, who is in charge of debate preparation. Also on hand: a group of aides that the campaign has purposely kept small to reduce the risk of spreading the coronavirus.

Biden, who taped his own interview with "60 Minutes" on Monday at a theater near his home, had no public events Tuesday or Wednesday and wasn't scheduled to travel — except to the debate — on Thursday. His running mate, California Sen. Kamala Harris, was out campaigning.

Biden is now tested about every two days for the coronavirus and has never been found to be positive. He suggested before last week's planned second debate in Miami that the proceedings shouldn't happen if Trump was still testing positive for COVID-19 after contracting the virus earlier in the month.

The candidates instead held dueling town halls on separate networks after the commission said the debate should occur virtually, citing safety concerns, and Trump rejected the idea.

____ Weissert reported from Wilmington, Delaware. Miller reported from Washington. AP writers Jill Colvin, Kevin Freking and Deb Riechmann in Washington 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/>.

'So much work to do': How Biden is planning for transition

By ALEXANDRA JAFFE Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — If Joe Biden defeats President Donald Trump next month, he'll quickly face a new challenge: standing up a new administration to lead a divided nation through a series of historic crises.

After making Trump's handling of the coronavirus pandemic a centerpiece of his campaign, Biden will have to show that his team can better handle the public health calamity. He will also have to contend with what Democrats say is the damage the Trump administration has done to the bureaucratic machinery in Washington, as well as low morale throughout the civil service.

And he'll face pressure from liberals to deliver early wins with personnel and Cabinet picks to ensure their buy-in for his big policy fights to come.

With the election less than two weeks away, Biden and his aides are most focused on maintaining his advantage in polls against Trump. "No decisions, from personnel to policy, will be made until after the election," Biden transition spokesman Cameron French said Wednesday.

Still, some Democrats are beginning to prepare for the challenges that may swiftly unfold once the campaign is over.

"This will be one of the most important, most difficult and yes most costly transitions in modern American history," Chris Korge, the Democratic National Committee's finance chair, warned donors in a recent letter obtained by The Associated Press. "There is so much work to do."

According to the Partnership for Public Service, a nonprofit organization that advises presidential candidates on the transition, Biden will have to name more than 4,000 political appointees to fill out his administration, including more than 1,200 requiring Senate confirmation. There are 700 key executive branch nominations that must go through Senate confirmation, 153 of which are currently vacant.

Chris Lu, executive director of President Barack Obama's 2008 transition, said there are vacancies in some of the departments that will be key to addressing the country's standing globally and the climate crisis.

"There's a lot of expertise that's just gone now — in particular, when you look at places like the State Department and the gutting of the Foreign Service or, you know, in climate agencies like EPA or Interior," he said.

Chief among Biden's priorities would be moving quickly to address the pandemic. He is considering swift announcements of Cabinet picks that would be key in the response, according to people involved in transition planning who spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss private conversations.

Those roles include leaders of the treasury and health and human services departments and the director of the National Economic Council.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Oct. 22, 2020 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 111 ~ 94 of 97

Delaware Sen. Chris Coons, a longtime Biden ally and friend, is seen as a top contender for secretary of state, and he has been increasingly vocal about foreign policy in recent weeks. He wrote an essay in Foreign Affairs and participated in a recent panel discussion on the future of U.S. foreign policy.

Biden is also expected to look to some of his former opponents and those he vetted as his potential running mate for top Cabinet positions.

Rep. Karen Bass of California, whom Biden considered for vice president, is seen as a potential housing and urban development secretary.

Illinois Sen. Tammy Duckworth, who was also included in Biden's vice presidential shortlist, and former South Bend, Indiana, Mayor Pete Buttigieg, a former primary opponent, are discussed for secretary of veterans affairs. One person familiar with the transition planning said Buttigieg could also be an ambassador to the United Nations.

Other news reports have suggested Michèle Flournoy, a top adviser to two secretaries of defense under Obama, is a top contender for defense secretary, and former Michigan Gov. Jennifer Granholm is a possible energy secretary.

Massachusetts Sen. Elizabeth Warren, meanwhile, could be a candidate for treasury secretary, though she could face confirmation challenges, depending on the makeup of the Senate, if she's seen as too progressive.

The Biden team is looking at a few other departments as opportunities to make history: There's never been a female or a Black defense secretary, nor a Black interior secretary or female veterans affairs secretary.

Biden might face his first real fight over possible White House aides.

His team is expected to roll out a chief of staff and director of the National Economic Council within days of the election. He's believed to be considering former chiefs of staff Steve Richetti, Bruce Reed and Ron Klain to reprise their old positions, and Jeff Zeints and Brian Deese, both top officials on the National Economic Council under Obama, to return.

Jeff Hauser, director of the Revolving Door Project, a progressive advocacy group geared toward putting pressure on Democratic administrations to appoint liberal nominees and top officials, said those picks will have potentially pivotal implications for the success of Biden's first 100 days in office.

"The potential honeymoon for a Biden administration with progressives will be very short, if he is making impactful decisions that seem to augur four years of moderation in the face of things believed to be serious, a serious crisis," he said.

Hauser said the left views Richetti and Reed as "really bad" picks because Reed is seen as a moderate and Richetti is a longtime lobbyist.

Zeints and Deese are similarly concerning for progressives; Hauser said they'd prefer Heather Boushey or Jared Bernstein, both of whom are current Biden campaign economic advisers, to lead the National Economic Council.

If Biden wins, it's unclear how closely Trump administration officials would work with the incoming team. Alan Kessler, a prominent Democratic fundraiser, said he worries about the possibility that Trump could direct his top officials to resist sharing key details with the transition.

"When you have the president saying, 'I'm not going quietly, and if I lose, it's because it was rigged and there's fraud,' that's a concern," he said. "Is it going to mean the Biden campaign's not going to be able to conduct the transition? No. But it will be a lot harder if the current administration doesn't cooperate."

Coronavirus spreads in Nagorno-Karabakh amid heavy fighting

STEPANAKERT, Nagorno-Karabakh (AP) — People who are sick with the coronavirus pack into chilly basements alongside the healthy to hide from artillery fire. The local health minister who tested positive keeps working, despite a fever and pneumonia. Doctors with the virus perform surgery on the wounded.

These are the grim realities of the pandemic in Nagorno-Karabakh, a separatist region in the South Caucasus mountains beset by weeks of heavy fighting between Armenian and Azerbaijani forces.

"We just don't have time to think about coronavirus," said Irina Musaelyan, a resident of the regional

capital of Stepanakert who was sheltering in a basement with her neighbors.

Nagorno-Karabakh lies within Azerbaijan but has been under the control of ethnic Armenian forces backed by Armenia for more than a quarter-century. It is facing the largest escalation of fighting since a war there ended in 1994, with hundreds killed since Sept. 27. Two attempts at cease-fires have failed.

The fighting has diverted the region's scarce resources from containing the virus, which spread unchecked amid artillery fire and drone attacks that have people spending many hours in overcrowded bunkers, whether they are sick or healthy. Contact tracing has ground to a halt.

Health care workers have been hit particularly hard.

"Almost everyone got infected. Some had it in a light form and others in a more serious one," Dr. Malvina Badalyan, head of the infectious disease clinic in Stepanakert, said of the region's health workers.

But in the middle of a war, with wounded flooding into hospitals, there's nothing to do but keep working.

"Many doctors and nurses knew that they were infected, but they kept mum about it," said Ararat Ohanjanyan, the health minister for Nagorno-Karabakh's regional government. "They may lie down in a corner to bring the fever down and then get up and continue to perform operations."

"No one has the right now to step aside," he added.

When the the latest escalation of fighting started, medical workers had no time or resources to deal with the outbreak, Ohanjanyan said.

"We didn't have time to track down those infected while Stepanakert came under heavy shelling, and it allowed contagion to spread," he said.

Ohanjanyan himself tested positive for the virus just over a week ago — and he, too, has continued working despite a fever and pneumonia.

In the past week, the shelling of Stepanakert has become less intense and ambulance crews have finally been able to visit shelters and basements to track down the sick, Ohanjanyan said, adding that regular testing and isolation of those infected has resumed.

Patients in the most serious condition have been sent to Armenia, while others have been admitted to hospitals or are treated at home.

Ohanjanyan said authorities still don't have a good handle on how many people are infected.

Armenia, which supports the separatist region via a land corridor, has also seen a sharp increase in cases in recent weeks. The seven-day rolling average of daily new infections has nearly tripled since early October to 44 per 100,000 people on Oct. 20.

As Nagorno-Karabakh's medical system faced the massive challenge, residents and health workers alike volunteered to deliver medicine to people sheltering in basements and to help track down those who are sick.

Dr. Aram Gregorian, who volunteered to visit those hunkered down during the shelling, said the cramped conditions in shelters helped fuel the spread of the virus.

"Constant shelling forces people to stay in tight groups in basements, and they can't self-isolate," he said. "Even those who have a fever and clinical signs of COVID-19 can't get treatment or go to the hospital."

Even coronavirus patients at the infectious disease clinic have been forced to seek shelter in the basement.

Arevik Israelyan, who was visiting her virus-stricken husband at the clinic, said the outbreak is a challenge, but people are mostly worried about the war.

"People get infected, but we will live through it," she said. "The main thing is that there is no war."

Stampede kills 11 Afghans seeking visas to leave country

By TAMEEM AKHGAR Associated Press

KABUL, Afghanistan (AP) — At least 11 women were trampled to death when a stampede broke out Wednesday among thousands of Afghans waiting in a soccer stadium to get visas to leave the country, officials said.

Attaullah Khogyani, the spokesman for the governor of the eastern Nangarhar province, said another 13 people, mostly women, were injured at the stadium, where they were trying to get visas to enter

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Oct. 22, 2020 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 111 ~ 96 of 97

neighboring Pakistan. He said most of those who died were elderly people from across Afghanistan.

Separately, at least 36 Afghan police were killed in an ambush by Taliban militants in northern Afghanistan, officials said.

It was the deadliest attack since the Taliban and the Afghan government began holding long-delayed peace talks last month, part of a process launched under a deal signed between the United States and the insurgents in February. The talks are seen as the country's best chance for peace after decades of war.

Rahim Danish, director of the main hospital in northern Takhar province, confirmed receiving 36 bodies and said another eight security forces were wounded.

An Afghan security official said the forces were in a convoy that was ambushed. The official, who was not authorized to brief media on the event and so spoke on condition of anonymity, said several police Humvees were set ablaze.

Jawad Hijri, a spokesman for the provincial government, said the deputy police chief was among those killed.

Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid claimed responsibility for the attack.

Afghan President Ashraf Ghani, speaking to Parliament, asked "why are the Taliban killing Afghans?"

He said the Taliban still believe in a "false narrative of conquest" following a spate of recent attacks, especially in Helmand province.

The Pakistani Consulate in Nangarhar was closed for almost eight months due to the coronavirus pandemic. Anticipating a large crowd, officials decided to use the stadium and assigned 320 staffers to help manage the process, Khogyani said.

The Pakistani Embassy in Kabul said it has issued more than 19,000 visas in the past week alone after Islamabad approved a friendlier visa policy and reopened the border in September following months of closure.

Millions of Afghans have fled to Pakistan to escape war and economic hardship, while thousands travel back and forth for work and business, or to receive health care.

Also on Wednesday, the U.S. government watchdog known as SIGAR, which monitors the billions of dollars Washington spends in war-ravaged Afghanistan, released a new report.

It said that as of December 2019, Congress had appropriated nearly \$134 billion since 2002 for Afghanistan reconstruction. Of that amount, SIGAR has reviewed approximately \$63 billion and concluded that approximately \$19 billion, or 30%, was lost to waste, fraud and abuse.

Associated Press writer Rahim Faiez contributed.

Today in History

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Thursday, Oct. 22, the 296th day of 2020. There are 70 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On Oct. 22, 1979, the U.S. government allowed the deposed Shah of Iran to travel to New York for medical treatment — a decision that precipitated the Iran hostage crisis.

On this date:

In 1797, French balloonist Andre-Jacques Garnerin (gahr-nayr-AN') made the first parachute descent, landing safely from a height of about 3,000 feet over Paris.

In 1811, composer and piano virtuoso Franz Liszt was born in the Hungarian town of Raiding (RY'-ding) in present-day Austria.

In 1836, Sam Houston was inaugurated as the first constitutionally elected president of the Republic of Texas.

In 1883, the original Metropolitan Opera House in New York held its grand opening with a performance of Gounod's "Faust."

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Oct. 22, 2020 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 111 ~ 97 of 97

In 1906, French post-impressionist painter Paul Cezanne died in Aix-en-Provence at age 67.

In 1934, bank robber Charles "Pretty Boy" Floyd was shot to death by federal agents and local police at a farm near East Liverpool, Ohio.

In 1962, in a nationally broadcast address, President John F. Kennedy revealed the presence of Soviet-built missile bases under construction in Cuba and announced a quarantine of all offensive military equipment being shipped to the Communist island nation.

In 1981, the Professional Air Traffic Controllers Organization was decertified by the federal government for its strike the previous August.

In 1986, President Reagan signed into law sweeping tax-overhaul legislation.

In 2001, a second Washington, D.C., postal worker, Joseph P. Curseen, died of inhalation anthrax.

In 2002, bus driver Conrad Johnson was shot to death in Aspen Hill, Md., in the final attack carried out by the "Beltway Snipers."

In 2014, a gunman shot and killed a soldier standing guard at a war memorial in Ottawa, then stormed the Canadian Parliament before he was shot and killed by the usually ceremonial sergeant-at-arms.

Ten years ago: WikiLeaks released 391,831 purported Iraq war logs that suggested more than 100,000 Iraqi civilians had died in the conflict. A gang attacked a teenager's birthday party in Ciudad Juarez (see-yoo-DAH'D' WAH'-rehz), Mexico, killing 14 people. The Texas Rangers clinched their first pennant with a 6-1 victory over the defending World Series champion New York Yankees in Game 6 of the AL championship series.

Five years ago: Former Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton battled Republican questions in a marathon hearing that revealed little new about the 2012 attacks in Benghazi, Libya. Acting on word of an "imminent mass execution" by Islamic State militants, dozens of U.S. special operations troops and Iraqi forces raided a northern Iraqi compound, freeing approximately 70 Iraqi prisoners but losing one American service member. Rep. Paul Ryan, R-Wis., formally declared his candidacy for speaker of the U.S. House.

One year ago: A top U.S. diplomat, William Taylor, told House investigators that President Donald Trump had held back military aid for Ukraine unless the country agreed to investigate Democrats and a company linked to Joe Biden's family; the testimony provided lawmakers with a detailed new account of a quid-pro-quo central to the impeachment probe. Russia and Turkey reached an agreement to deploy their forces across nearly the entire northeastern border of Syria to fill the void left by the abrupt pullout of U.S. forces. Houston Astros pitcher Gerrit Cole suffered his first loss since May as the Washington Nationals took Game 1 of the World Series, 5-4. Kawhi Leonard scored 30 points in his debut for the Los Angeles Clippers in a season-opening win over LeBron James and the Los Angeles Lakers, 112-102.

Today's Birthdays: Black Panthers co-founder Bobby Seale is 84. Actor Christopher Lloyd is 82. Actor Derek Jacobi is 82. Actor Tony Roberts is 81. Movie director Jan (yahn) de Bont is 77. Actor Catherine Deneuve is 77. Rock singer/musician Eddie Brigati is 75. Rock musician Leslie West (Mountain) is 75. Former Mississippi Gov. Haley Barbour is 73. Actor Jeff Goldblum is 68. Rock musician Greg Hawkes is 68. Movie director Bill Condon is 65. Actor Luis Guzman is 64. Actor-writer-producer Todd Graff is 61. Rock musician Cris Kirkwood is 60. Actor-comedian Bob Odenkirk is 58. Olympic gold medal figure skater Brian Boitano is 57. Christian singer TobyMac is 56. Singer-songwriter John Wesley Harding (Wesley Stace) is 55. Actor Valeria Golino is 54. Comedian Carlos Mencia is 53. Country singer Shelby Lynne is 52. Reggae rapper Shaggy is 52. Movie director Spike Jonze is 51. Rapper Tracey Lee is 50. Actor Saffron Burrows is 48. Actor Carmen Ejogo is 47. Former MLB player Ichiro Suzuki (EE'-cheer-oh soo-ZOO'-kee) is 47. Actor Jesse Tyler Ferguson is 45. Christian rock singer-musician Jon Foreman (Switchfoot) is 44. Actor Michael Fishman is 39. Talk show host Michael Essany is 38. New York Mets infielder Robinson Canó is 38. Rock musician Rickard (correct) Goransson (Carolina Liar) is 37. Rock musician Zac Hanson (Hanson) is 35. Actor Corey Hawkins is 32. Actor Jonathan Lipnicki is 30. Actor Sofia Vassilieva (vas-ihl-lee-A'-vuh) is 28. Actor Elias Harger is 13.