

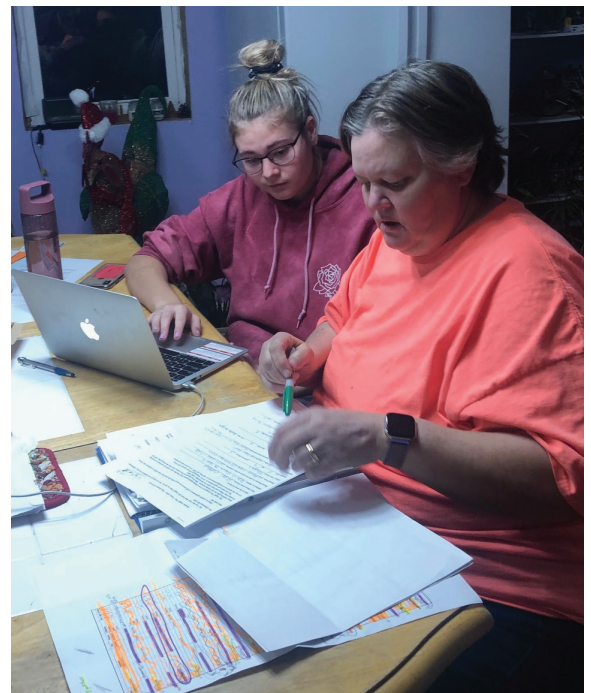
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**Julianna Kosel is helping her mom, Tina, put the Angel Tree list together. The cards will be available this week.**



**OPEN:** Recycling Trailer in Groton

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

## Dementia Affects the Family

I was very young when my grandfather suffered his first stroke and began his battle with vascular dementia. I grew up understanding that he was not like the other adults in my life. He would take me on long walks around the neighborhood, but it was never entirely clear who was supervising who. He rarely had much to say, and when he did, it did not make sense. He communicated mostly through gestures, and sometimes unnerved my cousins and I with his uncertain temper.



**By Debra Johnston, M.D ~ Prairie Doc® Perspectives**

With the benefit of age and experience, I appreciate now how frustrated he was, and what a herculean task my grandmother took on.

Medicine has made progress in the nearly 40 years since my grandfather's death. We are better at preventing strokes and mitigating the aftereffects. We are better at distinguishing between the diseases that cause dementia. We have treatments for some of those causes, however disappointing those treatments are. We are better at addressing related challenges, such as sleep disruption and depression. We are better at guiding families as they struggle with difficult decisions, like when to stop driving.

Families struggle when they know Dad is not safe behind the wheel or at home, but Dad thinks everything is fine. One of the many things that dementia robs from people is the ability to grasp their condition. Some patients are skilled at hiding the extent of their impairment. Sometimes spouses fill in the gaps, so problems are less noticeable to the rest of the family. Patients can hide troubles from their doctors, too, so it is critically important that families and care teams maintain communication.

Just like many fully capable adults, dementia patients may fiercely resist the involvement of others in their business and many suffer for it. One of my patients hid her impairment until she was conned out of her entire savings. Another minimized his symptoms, until the family got a call from a stranger saying their father had gotten lost behind the wheel. Overruling the wishes of your adult parent can be difficult. But, when we recognize their vanishing judgement, intervening is the loving, and sometimes the lifesaving, thing to do.

Through much of my lifetime, I've watched my father worry about his own memory. This is a common concern for people who have seen a loved one struggle with dementia. I hope that someday, we will have more to offer, but there is no magic pill. For now, the best we can do is to give the same advice you hear from us on virtually every other topic: Eat a healthy diet. Get exercise. Keep your brain active. And welcome support from those who love you.

Debra Johnston, M.D. is part of The Prairie Doc® team of physicians and currently practices family medicine in Brookings, South Dakota. For free and easy access to the entire Prairie Doc® library, visit [www.prairiedoc.org](http://www.prairiedoc.org) and follow Prairie Doc® on Facebook featuring On Call with the Prairie Doc® a medical Q&A show streaming on Facebook and broadcast on SDPB most Thursdays at 7 p.m. central.

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#266 in a series

## Covid-19 Update: by Marie Miller

Sunday reporting runs low, and thank goodness this one did that: We needed a break. We are not in a good place, but at least it's not worse than yesterday. The first thing I am having trouble absorbing is that we hit 11 million cases today, exactly one week after we broke 10 million. The fastest we've added a million so far was 10 days; we blew past that in seven this time and with no sign things are abating. Here's how we got to each million thus far:

April 28 – 1 million – 98 days  
June 11 – 2 million – 44 days  
July 8 – 3 million – 27 days  
July 23 – 4 million – 15 days  
August 9 – 5 million – 17 days  
August 31 – 6 million – 22 days  
September 24 – 7 million – 24 days  
October 15 – 8 million – 21 days  
October 29 – 9 million – 14 days  
November 8 – 10 million – 10 days  
November 15 – 11 million – 7 days

I said last Sunday that I was concerned how much faster we would reach that next million, but I did not anticipate it would be just a week. This really needs to slow down; but that's not happening soon. For today, we're at 11,108,600 cases reported in the US so far in the pandemic. There were 135,600 new case reports today, a 1.2% increase from yesterday and only our sixth-worst day. I would not have believed we'd ever look at 135,000 new cases as a relief, but here we are. We've been over 100,000 daily new cases for 12 days running. We've been over 90,000 cases for a solid two weeks and over 70,000 for three weeks. This pandemic is so out of hand that previously unimaginably-bad numbers are looking pretty good today. I don't know where this ends, but it doesn't seem like it will be anywhere good.

Almost nowhere is untouched, and the rate of growth continues to accelerate. We are seeing increasing rates of growth in many more states than last week. One-week increase in total cases was 772,900 (8.3%) last week and is 1,057,300 (10.5%) this week. Two-week increase was 1,351,200 (15.5%) last week and is 1,830,200 (19.7%) this week. Who knew we'd ever approach two million in 14 days? I have us at a one-week daily average new-case number of 151,042, which is in you-can't-see-it-from-here territory from last week's 110,414. Everything's going to hell, and I don't see a way back at the moment.

I track 54 states and US territories, including the District of Columbia; and the number of these showing two-week rates of increase greater than 25% has increased from 19 last week to 29 this week. Here are the states and territories with the greatest rate of growth in cases over 14 days with their percentage increase in that time: Maryland (81.6% - a huge increase), Wyoming (63.91% - big increase), Indiana (54.43% - huge increase), Colorado (48.92% - huge increase), Minnesota 48.37% - big increase), Alaska (42.72%), Iowa (42.05% - big increase), North Dakota (41.63%), Montana (40.79%), Michigan (39.69% - big increase), South Dakota (38.16 - increased), Connecticut (38.00%), Nebraska (36.90 - increased), Wisconsin (36.66%), Ohio (36.12% - increased), New Mexico (35.93% - increased), Kansas (27.51% - increase), Illinois (35.27% - increase), West Virginia (35.27% - increase), Maine (33.19%), Utah (32.01% - increased), Vermont (31.56 - big increase), New Hampshire (30.83% - big increase), Missouri (29.64% - increased), Kentucky (26.82%), Idaho (26.46%), Rhode Island (26.33% - increased), Pennsylvania (25.43% - increased), and Oregon (25.23% - increased). No one left the list this week, but we've added 10 states: Oregon, Idaho, Missouri, Kentucky, Maine, Vermont, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, Pennsylvania, and Maryland. We have 32 states and territories with growth rates above the US growth rate, which tells us the spread has widened.

Fastest spread is, as it has been for some time, in the Great Lakes, Great Plains, and Mountain West. Highest per capita new-case numbers have for weeks been in North Dakota, South Dakota, Iowa, Wyoming, Wisconsin, Nebraska, and Minnesota.

There were 569 deaths reported today, a 0.2% increase to 246,013. Average daily deaths are holding over 1000 at 1141.4.

The middle of the country continues to suffer, and there are no signs things are improving. Illinois added

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more cases last week than any other state, almost twice as many as California which has more than three times as many people. The highest per capita rates of infection are still centered in the Dakotas, Wisconsin, Iowa, and Nebraska. Wisconsin's seven-day average exceeds New York's at the height of their outbreak last spring. Utah, Texas, and Montana are all being pummeled.

Unfortunately, the Northeast, the South, and the West, where the virus has been fairly well in check for months, are starting to see growth too. Daily cases in the Northeast have almost doubled in two weeks; there are serious attempts to stem this growth before it gets out of hand. I hope they work. Likewise, new cases have doubled in the last couple of weeks in Washington, with Oregon following closely behind. California shows mixed growth with particular trouble spots in the Bay and San Diego areas; but still, nationwide, rural and suburban counties are far ahead of metro counties.

The health care system is teetering in many places. Metro areas with lower per capita increases are suffering under the load of patients transferred in from more rural areas. One in 1600 South Dakotans is not just sick, but hospitalized right now with Covid-19; no other state comes close. North Dakota had just nine intensive care unit beds on Friday. Nine. Mortality rates remain higher in these rural areas than in more populated ones. No wonder.

Deaths have plateaued for a long time, but that appears to be over as the numbers steadily tick upward. The Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation (IHME) at the University of Washington predicts we'll be losing 2000 people per day by mid-January and we'll be at 440,000 lost by March if behaviors do not change.

I need to point out that the Dakotas lead the country in all categories: new infections per capita, hospitalizations per capita, and deaths per capita: That's the trifecta for a plague. These two states have become the poster child for what you don't want to be. I cannot tell you how many times lately I've read quotes from this or that state official or hospital spokesperson in one or another state, saying basically, "We don't want to become North Dakota," or "We're trying not to meet the fate of South Dakota." As a person who lives where I do, this is pretty sad and thoroughly embarrassing. We have not acquitted ourselves well at all for all our clean living and high moral standing. Early in this pandemic when New York City and other East Coast areas were on fire, there was a sense of complacency and smug superiority around here, sometimes mentioned aloud, about how we are not like the Sodom and Gomorrah of those big cities, about how we live right—all the while dancing through life unencumbered by silly old rules and nasty old masks. And yet here we are, having learned not one single blessed thing from watching them burn, carrying on in the same way, disdainful of rules and masks, only now we're dropping like flies because, it turns out, moral virtue doesn't impress a virus and it's easier than you think to lead the nation in death.

Picture this: You've been traveling all day, and you're tired; you just want to get home. You're at the airport to check in for your next flight. All's well until you arrive at the gate and discover you must pay a fee for your carry-on bag, something you did not anticipate. It's going to cost you \$50. You're disgruntled, but if you want to take your bag on the plane, you're going to have to pay, so you pull out your credit card. And it's not being accepted, probably because you were in Europe and the credit card company is declining a charge in a new location. You could call them, but your flight is boarding and there's really not time. So you pull cash out of your pocket. Which seems like a good idea except that they cannot accept cash, only a card. You could have \$5000 in your pocket, and you're still not going to get that bag on the flight.

What do you do? The attendant tells you your only choice is to return to the ticketing counter to sort things out there, which means, of course, that you're going to miss your flight. It's boarding now, remember? You can beg, but that's all you've got.

Until a guy walks up from behind you and says, "How much is it?" They tell him it's \$50, and he says, "I got it," and hands over his card, tells you to have a great flight, and boards the plane.

This really happened to a woman a few days ago. I don't know where the airport was or the purpose of her trip, but I do know what happened next. She got on the plane, pretty emotional by this time. She sees the guy sitting in first class and stops to give him \$50 in cash to repay him. He shook her off and told her to pay it forward. And that was that.

She later figured out by means I'm not completely clear on that the guy was former NFL player, Jermaine Gresham. Just a guy who happened to see a fellow human having a bad day and decided to do something about that. We can all do that, can't we? Let's try.

And take care. I'll be back tomorrow.

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## Area COVID-19 Cases

	Nov. 4	Nov. 5	Nov. 6	Nov. 7	Nov. 8	Nov. 9	Nov. 10
Minnesota	156,313	160,070	164,865	170,307	174,954	180,862	184,788
Nebraska	74,060	75,888	78,012	80,693	82,395	83,969	85,551
Montana	35,159	35,955	36,968	37,947	38,948	39,679	40,053
Colorado	114,709	117,637	121,006	124,469	127,967	130,984	134,537
Wyoming	12,399	12,675	12,954	13,871	14,045	14,691	15,311
North Dakota	47,187	48,301	49,837	51,602	53,204	54,305	55,458
South Dakota	48,854	49,791	51,151	52,639	53,978	55,404	56,311
United States	9,385,324	9,488,591	9,610,965	9,744,491	9,861,898	9,972,333	10,110,552
US Deaths	232,635	233,734	234,944	236,155	237,123	237,584	238,251

Minnesota	3,379	3,757	+4,795	+5,442	+4,647	+5,908	+3,926
Nebraska	1,440	1,828	+2,124	+2,681	+1,702	+1,574	1,582
Montana	+907	+796	+1,013	+979	+1,001	+731	+374
Colorado	+2,562	+2,928	+3,369	+3,463	+3,498	+3,017	+3,553
Wyoming	+340	+276	+279	+917	+174	+646	+620
North Dakota	+1,172	1,114	+1,536	+1,765	+1,602	+1,101	+1,153
South Dakota	+1,004	+937	+1,360	+1,488	+1,339	+1,426	+907
United States	+92,043	+103,267	+122,374	+133,526	+117,407	+110,435	+138,219
US Deaths	+1,069	+1,099	+1,210	+1,211	+968	+461	+667

	Nov. 11	Nov. 12	Nov. 13	Nov. 14	Nov. 15	Nov. 16
Minnesota	189,681	194,570	201,795	207,339	213,582	223,581
Nebraska	87,733	89,942	92,553	94,922	96,834	98,161
Montana	41,151	42,070	43,031	44,244	45,886	47,158
Colorado	138,427	142,042	147,599	154,038	159,234	163,417
Wyoming	16,442	16,518	17,442	18,243	18,726	19,298
North Dakota	56,342	57,373	59,173	60,602	62,872	63,796
South Dakota	57,334	58,696	60,716	62,327	64,182	65,381
United States	10,258,090	10,402,273	10,557,451	10,746,996	10,905,597	11,038,312
US Deaths	239,695	241,808	242,436	244,366	245,614	246,224

Minnesota	+4,893	+4,889	+7,225	+5,554	+6,243	+9,999
Nebraska	+2,182	+2,209	+2,611	+2,369	+1,912	+1,327
Montana	+1,098	+919	+961	+1,213	+1,642	+1,272
Colorado	+3,890	+3,615	+5,557	+6,439	+5,196	+4,183
Wyoming	+1,131	+76	+924	+801	+483	+572
North Dakota	+894	+1,031	+1,801	+1,429	+2,270	+924
South Dakota	+1,024	+1,362	+2,019	+1,611	+1,855	+1,199
United States	+147,538	+144,183	+155,178	+189,545	+158,601	+132,715
US Deaths	+1,444	+2,113	+628	+1,930	+1,248	+610

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## November 15th COVID-19 UPDATE

### Groton Daily Independent from State Health Lab Reports

Another 23 people died according to today's report from COVID-19 in South Dakota, bringing the total to 644. North Dakota had 10 more recorded deaths, making its total now at 736. South Dakota has 19,360 active cases while North Dakota has 11,124 active cases.

In South Dakota, there 11 females and 12 males that died with 17 in the 80+ age group and 3 in each their 70s and 60s. Counties affected were: Beadle-1, Bon Homme-1, Brown-1, Codington-4, Davison-1, Day-2, Gregory-1, Hutchinson-1, Lawrence-1, Lincoln-3, Minnehaha-2, Oglala Lakota-1, Spink-2, Sully had its first death, Turner-1.

Glacial Lakes hospital beds being occupied by COVID-19 patients as well as Minnehaha and Pennington counties: Walworth: 5 (+2) Occupied Beds; Potter: 5 (+0) Occupied Beds; Hughes: 10 (-1) Occupied Beds, 4 (+0) ICU Beds, 0 (-1) Ventilation; Hand: 4 (-1) Occupied Beds (-1); Faulk: 2 (+1) Occupied Beds; Edmunds: 1 (-1) Occupied Bed; Brown: 34 (-2) Occupied Beds, 1 (-0) ICU, 0 (-0) Ventilation; Spink: 3 (-2) Occupied Beds; Day: 0 (-1) Occupied Beds; Marshall: 4 (+0) Occupied Beds; Grant: 2 (+1) Occupied Beds; Codington: 17 (-0) Occupied Beds, 3 (+0) ICU, 2 (+0) Ventilation; None (some counties have no hospitals): Clark, Hyde, Stanley, Sully, Campbell, McPherson, Roberts; Minnehaha: 274 (+12) Occupied Beds, 64 (+6) ICU, 35 (+3) Ventilation; Pennington: 70 (+2) Occupied Beds, 12 (-2) ICU, 12 (+1) Ventilation

Total COVID-19 Occupied Beds: 553 (+4), Black Hills Region 100 (+3), Glacial Lakes Region 87 (-4) Sioux Empire Region 293 (+11), South Central Plains 73 (-6).

ICU Units: Total 100 (+8), BH 16 (+0), GL 8 (-0), SE 65 (+6), SCP 11 (+2).

Ventilation: Total 49 (+4), BH 12 (+1), GL 2 (-0), SE 35 (+3), SCP 0 (-0).

Staffed Hospital Bed Capacity: 20% Covid, 43% Non-Covid, 36% Available

ICU Bed Capacity: 33% Covid, 33% Non-Covid, 34% Available

Ventilator Capacity: 12% Covid, 15% Non-Covid, 74% Available

Beadle (22) +31 positive, +9 recovered (593 active cases)

Brown (10): +59 positive, +20 recovered (721 active cases)

Clark (1): +3 positive, +0 recovered (64 active cases)

Clay (8): +17 positive, +6 recovered (277 active cases)

Codington (30): +53 positive, +19 recovered (552 active cases)

Davison (15): +67 positive, +7 recovered (838 active cases)

Day (5): +7 positive, +1 recovered (90 active cases)

Edmunds (1): +5 positive, +1 recovered (63 active cases)

### **Brown County:**

Total Positive: +59 (2,906) Positivity Rate: 17.6%

Total Tests: +335 (22,641)

Total Individuals Tested: +8 (12,163)

Recovered: +20 (2,175)

Active Cases: +38 (721)

Ever Hospitalized: +5 (163)

Deaths: +1 (10)

Percent Recovered: 74.8%

Hospital Reports:

Avera St. Luke's: Covid-19 Occupied 23 (-0); ICU 1 (-0), Ventilation 0 (0).

Sanford Aberdeen: Covid-19 Occupied 11 (-2); ICU 0 (-0), Ventilation 0 (-0)

Sanford Webster: Covid-19 Occupied 0 (-1).

Marshall County Healthcare: Covid-19 Occupied: 4 (+0).

### **South Dakota:**

Positive: +1199 (65,381 total) Positivity Rate: 22.5%

Total Tests: 5323 (518,158 total)

Total Individuals Tested: 2291 (294,114)

Hospitalized: +46 (3,644 total). 553 currently hospitalized +4)

Deaths: +23 (644 total)

Recovered: +563 (45,377 total)

Active Cases: +613 (19,360)

Percent Recovered: 69.4%

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Faulk (6): +2 positive, +0 recovered (43 active cases)

Grant (5): +13 positive, +3 recovered (145 active cases)

Hanson (1): +8 positive, +5 recovered (78 active cases)

Hughes (8): +22 positive, +10 recovered (379 active cases)

Lawrence (9): +37 positive, +24 recovered (557 active cases)

Lincoln (40): +73 positive, +35 recovered (1423 active cases)

Marshall (3): +4 positive, +3 recovered (35 active cases)

McCook (9): +15 positive, +7 recovered (197 active cases)

McPherson (1): +9 positive, +0 recovery (35 active case)

Minnehaha (139): +247 positive, +143 recovered (4859 active cases)

Potter: +2 positive, +4 recovered (63 active cases)

Roberts (13): +4 positive, +2 recovered (181 active cases)

Spink (8): +5 positive, +11 recovered (147 active cases)

Walworth (10): +3 positive, +5 recovered (93 active cases)

## NORTH DAKOTA

COVID-19 Daily Report, Nov. 15:

- 15.8% rolling 14-day positivity
- 935 new positives
- 7,455 susceptible test encounters
- 322 currently hospitalized (+17)
- 11,124 active cases (+187)
- 736 total deaths (+10)

## Yesterday

Global Cases
<b>54,027,785</b>
10,905,597 US
8,814,579 India
5,848,959 Brazil
1,915,713 France
1,910,149 Russia
1,458,591 Spain
1,347,907 United Kingdom
1,304,846 Argentina
1,191,634 Colombia
1,144,552 Italy
1,003,253 Mexico
934,899 Peru

## Today

Global Cases
<b>54,482,449</b>
11,038,312 US
8,845,127 India
5,863,093 Brazil
1,932,711 Russia
1,915,713 France
1,458,591 Spain
1,372,884 United Kingdom
1,310,491 Argentina
1,198,746 Colombia
1,178,529 Italy
1,006,522 Mexico
934,899 Peru

## Global Deaths

**1,312,918**

245,614 deaths  
US

165,658 deaths  
Brazil

129,635 deaths  
India

98,259 deaths  
Mexico

51,858 deaths  
United Kingdom

44,683 deaths  
Italy

42,600 deaths  
France

## Global Deaths

**1,318,613**

246,224 deaths  
US

165,798 deaths  
Brazil

130,070 deaths  
India

98,542 deaths  
Mexico

52,026 deaths  
United Kingdom

45,229 deaths  
Italy

42,601 deaths  
France

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County	Positive Cases	Recovered Cases	Negative Persons	Deceased	Community Spread	% RT-PCR Test Positivity
Aurora	297	185	744	2	Substantial	34.78%
Beadle	1924	1309	4372	22	Substantial	37.74%
Bennett	269	192	1007	5	Substantial	24.32%
Bon Homme	1213	1037	1684	7	Substantial	45.28%
Brookings	2063	1500	7377	13	Substantial	21.62%
Brown	2906	2175	9257	10	Substantial	27.17%
Brule	467	315	1476	5	Substantial	32.74%
Buffalo	331	290	801	5	Substantial	44.32%
Butte	608	398	2299	8	Substantial	27.31%
Campbell	93	77	175	1	Moderate	31.25%
Charles Mix	632	429	3188	1	Substantial	22.85%
Clark	186	121	723	1	Substantial	13.83%
Clay	1117	832	3679	8	Substantial	28.67%
Codington	2227	1645	6935	30	Substantial	34.77%
Corson	319	244	810	3	Substantial	51.39%
Custer	436	328	1893	4	Substantial	22.75%
Davison	1870	1017	4945	15	Substantial	34.85%
Day	267	172	1276	5	Substantial	30.38%
Deuel	254	197	844	2	Substantial	32.88%
Dewey	693	292	3412	2	Substantial	31.33%
Douglas	252	175	726	5	Substantial	22.78%
Edmunds	208	144	784	1	Substantial	10.50%
Fall River	317	218	1932	7	Substantial	10.34%
Faulk	260	211	541	6	Substantial	20.00%
Grant	475	325	1624	5	Substantial	27.09%
Gregory	362	246	910	13	Substantial	33.13%
Haakon	118	88	435	3	Substantial	3.06%
Hamlin	331	217	1308	0	Substantial	10.37%
Hand	237	143	617	1	Substantial	33.88%
Hanson	189	110	496	1	Substantial	36.56%
Harding	65	55	120	0	Moderate	60.00%
Hughes	1298	911	4098	8	Substantial	21.84%
Hutchinson	420	242	1711	3	Substantial	20.62%



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Hyde	99	51	309	0	Substantial	45.95%
Jackson	180	123	788	5	Substantial	33.96%
Jerauld	213	152	413	13	Substantial	16.67%
Jones	46	38	138	0	Moderate	28.57%
Kingsbury	340	202	1155	5	Substantial	20.11%
Lake	688	441	2069	9	Substantial	40.26%
Lawrence	1644	1078	6181	9	Substantial	29.19%
Lincoln	4466	3003	14424	40	Substantial	32.07%
Lyman	372	293	1483	7	Substantial	22.94%
Marshall	113	75	822	3	Substantial	30.77%
McCook	490	284	1174	9	Substantial	32.50%
McPherson	101	65	428	1	Moderate	1.53%
Meade	1419	1047	5589	11	Substantial	19.72%
Mellette	129	98	581	1	Substantial	22.22%
Miner	176	132	440	3	Substantial	18.75%
Minnehaha	17017	12019	57253	139	Substantial	30.27%
Moody	336	222	1427	6	Substantial	7.20%
Oglala Lakota	1397	958	5795	13	Substantial	34.52%
Pennington	6993	4787	27474	60	Substantial	23.76%
Perkins	109	78	509	0	Substantial	37.78%
Potter	210	147	626	0	Substantial	19.14%
Roberts	561	367	3430	13	Substantial	29.58%
Sanborn	200	99	500	1	Substantial	42.86%
Spink	461	306	1696	8	Substantial	11.55%
Stanley	163	105	586	0	Substantial	26.37%
Sully	75	49	183	1	Moderate	39.13%
Todd	701	549	3524	10	Substantial	29.33%
Tripp	407	294	1195	2	Substantial	42.48%
Turner	705	475	1995	34	Substantial	31.50%
Union	1032	774	4469	18	Substantial	29.39%
Walworth	374	271	1369	10	Substantial	26.14%
Yankton	1311	871	6665	8	Substantial	16.49%
Ziebach	149	84	593	3	Substantial	30.38%
Unassigned	0	0	1251	0		

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## South Dakota



### AGE GROUP OF SOUTH DAKOTA COVID-19 CASES

Age Range	# of Cases	# of Deaths
0-9 years	2112	0
10-19 years	6987	0
20-29 years	12854	2
30-39 years	11062	9
40-49 years	9357	15
50-59 years	9246	42
60-69 years	7226	85
70-79 years	3700	129
80+ years	2837	362

### SEX OF SOUTH DAKOTA COVID-19 CASES

Sex	# of Cases	# of Deaths
Female	34011	314
Male	31370	330

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## Brown County

New Confirmed Cases

59

New Probable Cases

0

Active Cases

721

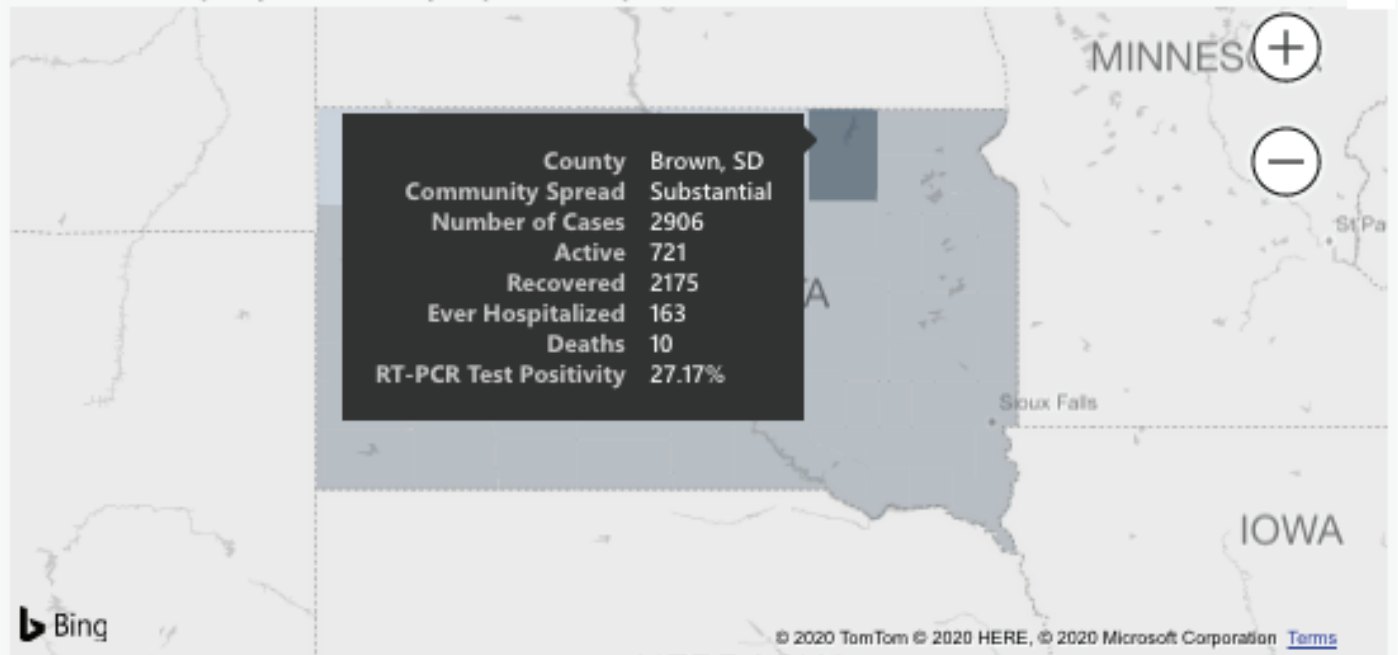
Recovered Cases

2,175

Currently Hospitalized

553

### Community Spread Map by County of Residence



Community Spread ● Moderate ● Substantial

Hover over a county to see its details, or click county to update the orange boxes.

Total Confirmed Cases

2,845

Total Probable Cases

61

Total Persons Tested

12,163

Total Tests

22,641

Ever Hospitalized

163

Deaths

10

% Progress (October Goal: 44,233 Tests)

328%

% Progress (November Goal: 44,233 Tests)

178%

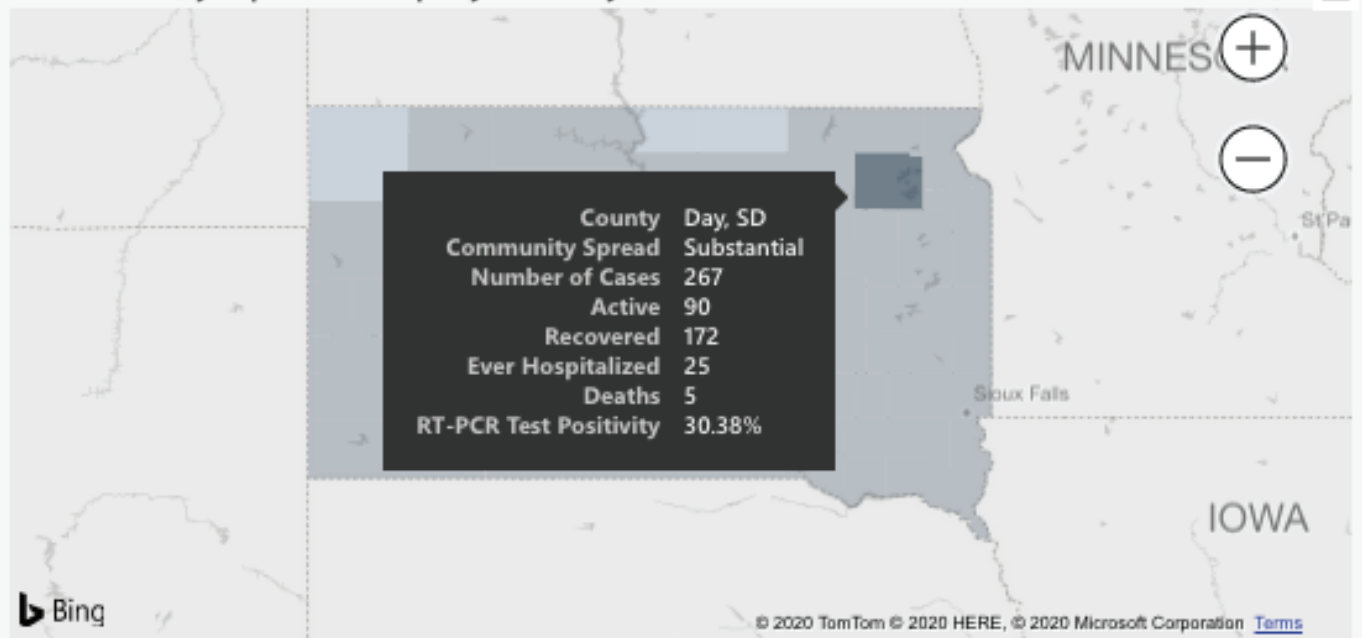
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## Day County

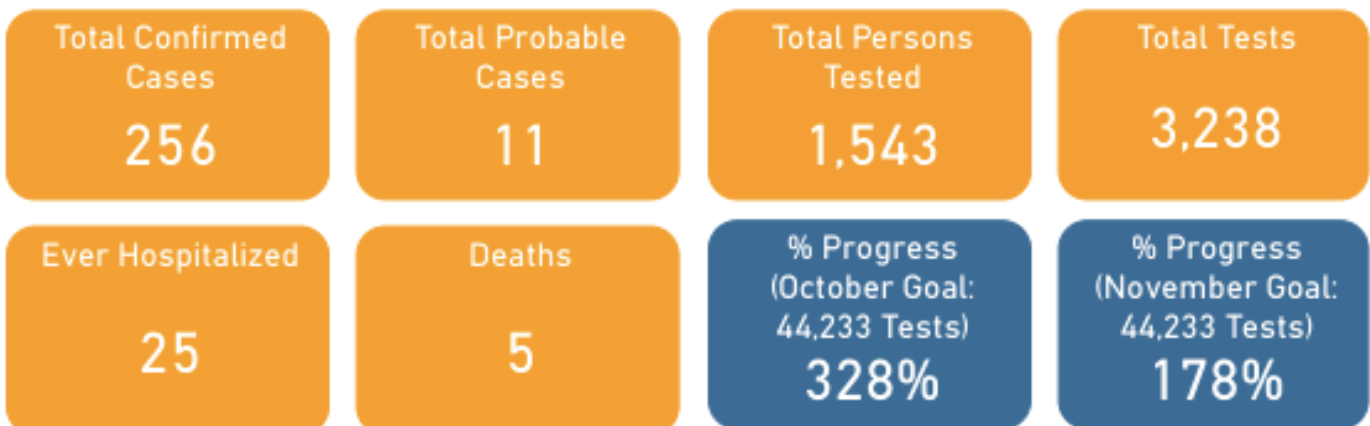


### Community Spread Map by County of Residence



Community Spread ● Moderate ● Substantial

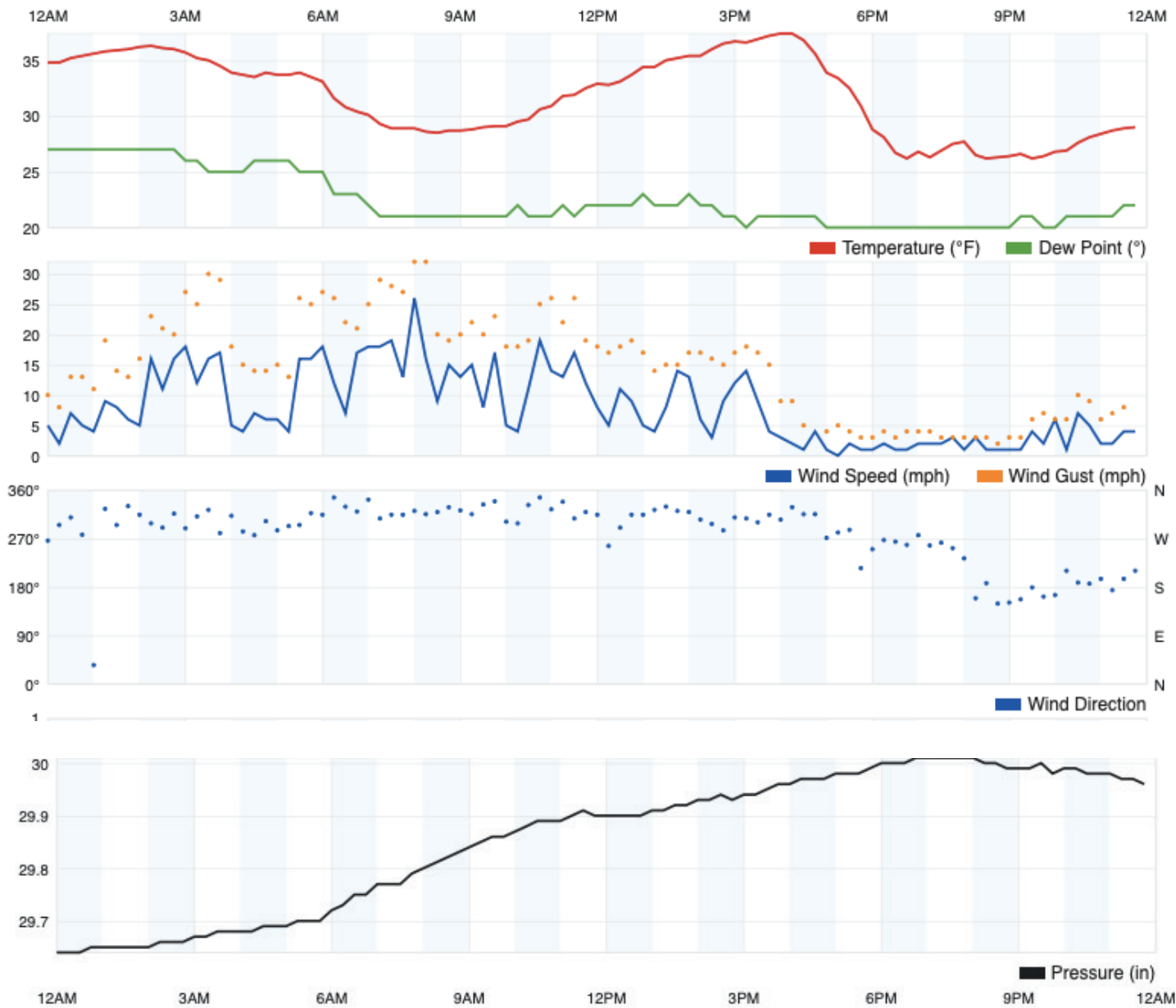
Hover over a county to see its details, or click county to update the orange boxes.



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## Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Today

Tonight

Tuesday

Tuesday  
Night

Wednesday



Sunny then  
Sunny and  
Breezy

High: 51 °F



Mostly Clear

Low: 19 °F



Mostly Sunny

High: 47 °F



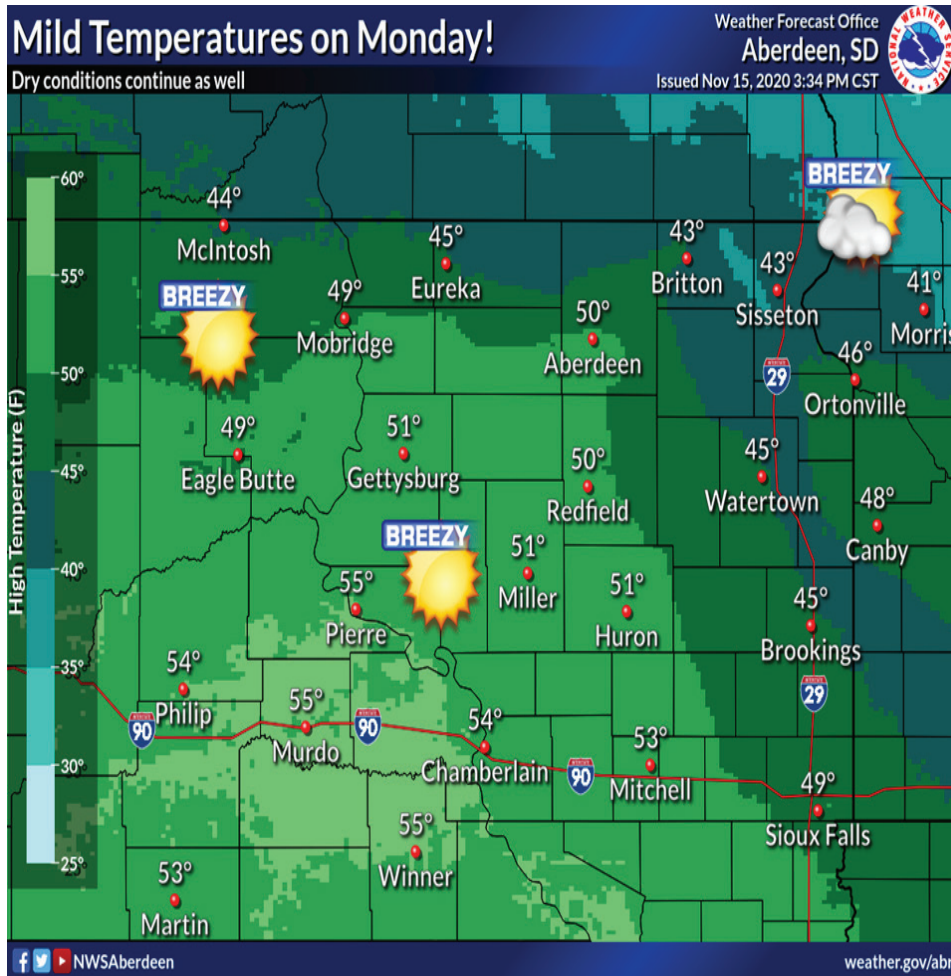
Partly Cloudy

Low: 30 °F



Mostly Sunny

High: 59 °F



Breezy and gusty winds will continue on Monday, although temperatures will be a bit warmer, with highs rising into the 40s and 50s. Dry conditions are expected. Overall, look for a mild week ahead!

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## Today in Weather History

November 16, 1996: An area of low pressure brought 6 to 9 inches of snowfall to most of central and parts of north-central South Dakota on the 16th, while widespread freezing rain associated with the warm front of the system, along with 4 to 10 inches of snow, fell in northeast South Dakota. Travel was significantly affected, and a few minor accidents occurred during the storm. Several sporting events and activities were postponed or canceled. Strong north winds late on the 16th into early the 17th resulted in near-blizzard conditions across northeast South Dakota. Some storm total snowfall amounts include, 9.0 inches 12SSW of Harrold; 8.5 inches near Highmore; 8.2 inches in Roscoe; 8.0 in Eureka; 7.9 inches near Mellette; 7.0 inches in Waubay; 6.5 inches in Murdo and Redfield; 6.0 inches in Kennebec and Miller; 5.5 inches near Victor; and 5.3 inches in Sisseton.

1958 - More than six inches of snow fell at Tucson, AZ. (David Ludlum) (The Weather Channel)

1959 - The most severe November cold wave in U.S. history was in progress. A weather observing station located 14 miles northeast of Lincoln MT reported a reading of 53 degrees below zero, which established an all-time record low temperature for the nation for the month of November. Their high that day was one degree above zero. (David Ludlum) (The Weather Channel)

1987 - High winds and heavy snow created blizzard conditions across parts of eastern Colorado. Wind gusts reached 68 mph at Pueblo, and snowfall totals ranged up to 37 inches at Echo Lake. In Wyoming, the temperature dipped to 14 degrees below zero at Laramie. Strong thunderstorms in Louisiana drenched Alexandria with 16.65 inches of rain in thirty hours, with an unofficial total of 21.21 inches north of Olla. Flash flooding in Louisiana caused five to six million dollars damage. (15th-16th) (Storm Data) (The National Weather Summary)

1988 - A powerful low pressure system in the north central U.S. produced high winds across the Great Lakes Region, with wind gusts to 60 mph reported at Chicago IL. Heavy snow blanketed much of Minnesota, with eleven inches reported at International Falls. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 - Snow and gusty winds invaded the north central U.S. Winds gusting to 40 mph produced wind chill readings as cold as 25 degrees below zero, and blizzard conditions were reported in Nebraska during the late morning hours. High winds around a powerful low pressure system produced squalls in the Great Lakes Region. Winds gusted to 63 mph at Whitefish Point MI, and snowfall totals in Michigan ranged up to 19 inches at Hart, north of Muskegon. (15th-16th) (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

2006 - An F-3 tornado strikes Riegelwood, NC causing eight deaths and twenty injuries

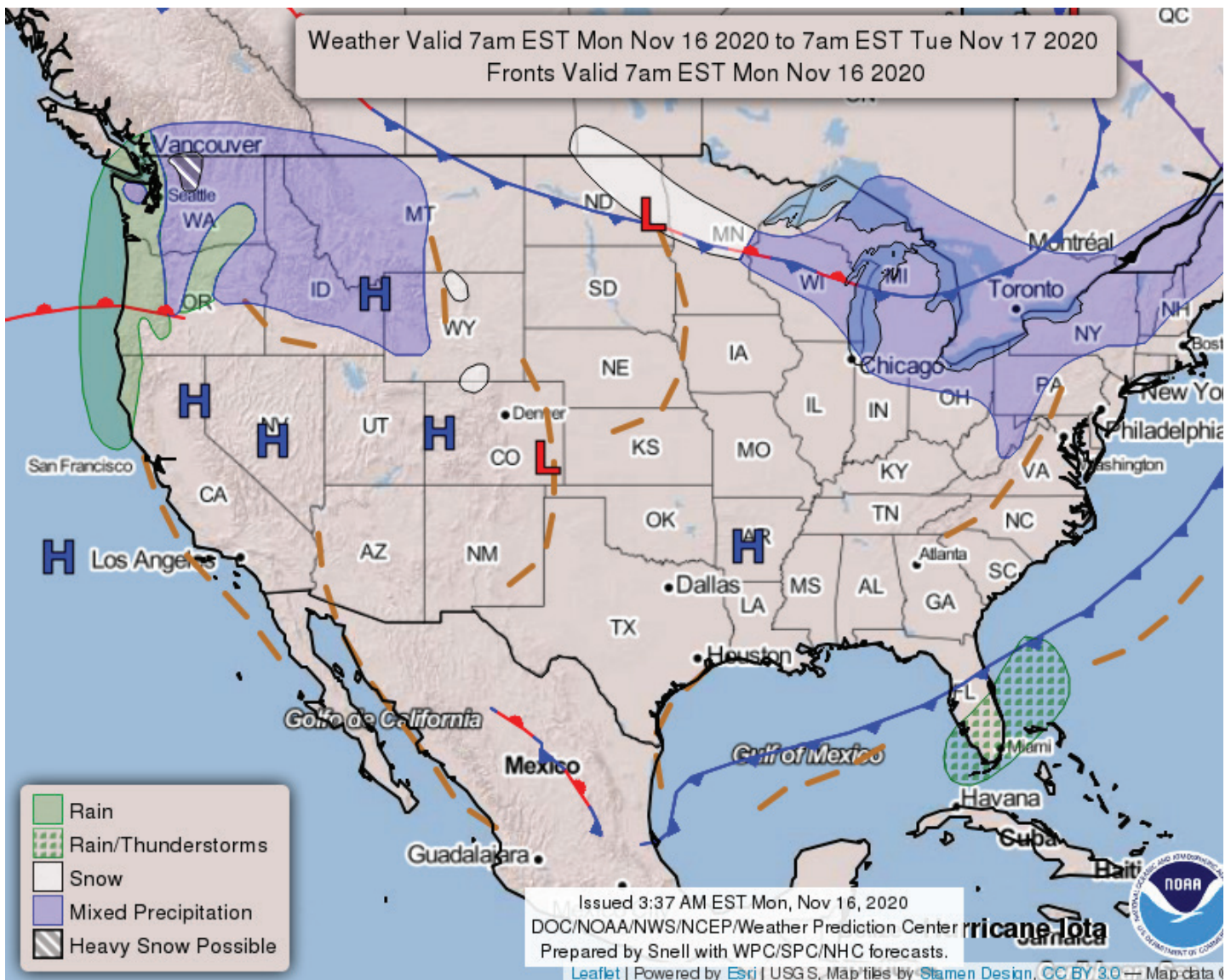
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## Yesterday's Groton Weather Today's Info

**High Temp: 38 °F at 3:59 PM**  
**Low Temp: 26 °F at 6:50 PM**  
**Wind: 32 mph at 6:06 AM**  
**Precip: .00**

**Record High: 71° in 2001**  
**Record Low: -12° in 1955**  
**Average High: 39°F**  
**Average Low: 19°F**  
**Average Precip in Nov.: 0.41**  
**Precip to date in Nov.: 0.06**  
**Average Precip to date: 20.88**  
**Precip Year to Date: 16.40**  
**Sunset Tonight: 5:02 p.m.**  
**Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:36 a.m.**





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## TRYING TO ESCAPE GOD

God seems to appear when we least expect Him. He certainly will not be confined within the walls of a church or restrained within the rituals of a religion. He is, after all, God the Creator, Sustainer, and Savior. He makes Himself known when and where and how as He pleases.

Once, during the transatlantic crossing of a large ocean liner, a major storm erupted, breaking the silence of calm seas. A huge wave swept over the bow of the ship and swept a sailor into the raging waters. His cry for help went unheard.

But in Philadelphia, his Christian mother, who was sound asleep, suddenly awoke with an urgent desire to pray for him. Even though she was not aware of what had happened or his life-threatening situation, she prayed for his safety with urgency, intensity, and trust. She then returned to bed and fell asleep with peace in her heart.

Weeks later her son returned home, opened the door, and shouted, "Mother, I'm saved!" Then he described what had happened and how he had been swept overboard. "As I was sinking in the swirling waves, I remembered thinking, 'I'm lost forever!' Then I remembered a hymn we sang in church about looking to Jesus to be saved and cried out, "O God, I look to Jesus to be saved, and another wave swept me back onto the ship."

When he finished his story, his mother told her story. They then thanked God for the storm that saved his soul. As the Psalmist wrote, "Pursue them with Your tempest and terrify them with your storm." Our God is amazing. Our God does the unexplainable.

Prayer: Thank You, God, for what You can and are willing to do to save the lost. We will never understand Your love but gratefully accept it. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: Pursue them with Your tempest and terrify them with your storm. Psalm 83:15

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## 2020 Groton SD Community Events

- **CANCELLED** Groton Lions Club Easter Egg Hunt - City Park (Saturday a week before Easter Weekend)
- **CANCELLED** Dueling Piano's Baseball Fundraiser at the American Legion
- **CANCELLED** Fireman's Fun Night (Same Saturday as GHS Prom)
- **POSTPONED** Front Porch 605 Rural Route Road Trip
- **CANCELLED** Father/Daughter dance.
- **CANCELLED** Spring City-Wide Rummage Sales, (1st Saturday in May)
- **CANCELLED** Girls High School Golf Meet at Olive Grove Golf Course
- 05/25/2020 Groton American Legion Post #39 Memorial Day Services
- 07/04/2020 Firecracker Golf Tourney at Olive Grove Golf Course
- 07/12/2020 Summer Fest/Car Show
- 07/16/2020 Olive Grove Golf Course Pro Am Golf Tourney
- 07/24/2020 Olive Grove Golf Course Ferney Open Golf Tourney
- 07/25/2020 City-Wide Rummage Sales
- **CANCELLED** State American Legion Baseball Tournament in Groton
- 08/07/2020 Wine on Nine Event at Olive Grove Golf Course
- 09/12-13/2020 Groton Fly-In/Drive-In at the Groton Airport north of Groton
- 09/12/2020 Fall City-Wide Rummage Sales (1st Sat. after Labor Day)
- 09/13/2020 Olive Grove Golf Course Couples Sunflower Classic
- 10/09/2020 Lake Region Marching Band Festival (2nd Friday in October)
- 10/10/2020 Pumpkin Fest (Saturday before Columbus Day)
- 10/30/2020 Downtown Trick or Treat
- 10/30/2020 Groton United Methodist Trunk or Treat
- **CANCELLED** Groton Legion Annual Turkey Party (Saturday closest to Veteran's Day)
- 11/26/2020 Community Thanksgiving at the Community Center
- 12/05/2020 Olive Grove Golf Course Tour of Homes & Holiday Party
- 12/05/2020 Santa Claus Day at Professional Management Services
- 01/--/2021 83rd Annual Carnival of Silver Skates

## News from the Associated Press

### Americans across party lines, regions embrace marijuana

By AMY BETH HANSON Associated Press

HELENA, Mont. (AP) — Bill Stocker could be considered the archetype of a conservative voter: He's a retired Marine and former police officer who voted for President Donald Trump. But he's also among the majority of South Dakota voters who broadly legalized marijuana this month.

Stocker, 61, said enforcing marijuana laws gets in the way of pursuing other drug crimes and called warnings about the ills of marijuana "a bunch of baloney" that even people in a Republican stronghold like South Dakota no longer believe.

South Dakota's values of "personal responsibility and freedom" won out, said Stocker, who lives in Sioux Falls.

The 2020 election helped prove how broadly accepted marijuana has become throughout the United States, with measures to legalize recreational pot also breezing to victory in progressive New Jersey, moderate Arizona and conservative Montana. Fifteen states have now broadly legalized it, while 36 states allow medical marijuana.

Voters in Mississippi overwhelmingly approved medical marijuana this month, giving the drug another foothold in the South.

A Gallup Poll released Nov. 9 indicated that 68% of Americans favor legalizing marijuana — double the approval rate in 2003. That wide margin was evident in the election, with marijuana measures passing with strong bipartisan support.

In South Dakota and Montana — where Republicans swept to victory in the key races — recreational marijuana passed with at least 16 percentage points more support than Democratic President-elect Joe Biden received. South Dakota also approved medical pot, which outpolled Biden by 34 percentage points.

"We've waged a war against this plant for a century and by any reasonable metric, that war has been an abject failure," said Matthew Schweich, deputy director of the Marijuana Policy Project, which favors legalization. "All it's done is incarcerate millions of Americans, it has perpetuated racism in this country, and perhaps the worst injustice of all is that it's deprived us of medical marijuana research."

Marijuana is still illegal at the federal level, hurting veterans who can't be prescribed medical pot at Veterans Affairs clinics, he said.

They "come home with chronic pain and we're pushing them to opioids," Schweich said. "That's crazy. That's unpatriotic and it's a disgrace."

Support for legalization was around 25% in 1992 when then-presidential candidate Bill Clinton tried to avoid answering questions about whether he had used marijuana before finally saying in a television interview that he had experimented with the drug, didn't like it and "didn't inhale."

In early 2019, Kamala Harris — now the vice president-elect — was asked about her prior marijuana use during a radio interview and acknowledged: "I did inhale."

Brendan Johnson, a former U.S. attorney in South Dakota who supported the state's marijuana initiatives, said the campaign focused on the fact that in recent years 10% of arrests in the state were for marijuana, and most were small amounts.

"We have a real problem here where we have criminalized an entire generation of South Dakotans, and we're paying a price," Johnson said.

The owner of a chain of medical marijuana dispensaries in Billings, Montana, credited passage of the recreational marijuana initiative to a yearslong campaign by medical marijuana supporters to educate the public about the benefits of cannabis.

"There has been a considerable change in the political demographic because people are educated, because they know Aunt Margaret tried it for her cancer and she can eat," said Richard Abromeit, owner of Montana Advanced Caregivers.

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Advocates' next goal is to get marijuana removed from a federal list of illegal drugs with no accepted medical use and high potential for abuse. The listing prevents labs from researching potential medical remedies using marijuana.

House Majority Leader Steny Hoyer told lawmakers last week that he would hold a vote in December on a bill that would decriminalize cannabis, create a process to expunge nonviolent pot convictions and remove the drug from the Controlled Substances Act. It's not clear if the bill could pass both chambers.

The outcome of two runoff elections in Georgia could determine how the issue might fare in the Senate, where Republican Majority Leader Mitch McConnell has impeded its progress.

Other states are expected to consider marijuana legislation next year, which could put more pressure on Congress to act.

Supporters argue that the industry creates jobs and raises tax money to help prop up governments that are hurting because of business closures tied to the COVID-19 pandemic.

But some oppose broad legalization.

Republican Gov. Kristi Noem of South Dakota argued that marijuana leads people to use other, more-addictive drugs, while law enforcement officers and prosecutors in Montana asserted that legal pot would lead to more drugged driving and other crimes, while exacerbating mental health issues.

The Gallup Poll says just under half of Republicans, people who identify as politically conservative and those who attend church on a weekly basis say they think marijuana should be legal.

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, widely known as the Mormon church, strongly opposed Arizona's broad legalization measure despite supporting medical marijuana in Utah.

Chris Nylen, 50, of Flagstaff, Arizona, is a Trump supporter who voted to legalize recreational marijuana. She said her feelings evolved after a CBD pill, made from hemp and prescribed by a veterinarian, eased her dog's anxiety and arthritis.

"I'm so old school," she said. "I personally don't have a desire for it, but (I'm) seeing the benefits for my dog."

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Associated Press reporters Matthew Brown in Billings, Montana; Steven Groves in Sioux Falls, South Dakota; Felicia Fonseca in Flagstaff, Arizona; and video journalist Haven Daley in San Francisco contributed to this report.

## Rivals unite to support football player fighting rare cancer

By MATT CASE Rapid City Journal

RAPID CITY, S.D. (AP) — On a warm Friday evening in early October, the Rapid City Central and Rapid City Stevens football teams were gearing up to face off in another annual clash at O'Harra Stadium.

The anticipation of the rivalry game lived up to the hype, as the Cobblers overcame a fourth-quarter deficit to edge the Raiders 32-28.

But as fans on both sides of the bleachers cheered, chanted and clapped for their respective schools, divided by the fire engine red and royal blue garments they wore, a unifying message connected the two crowds, was displayed on the north end zone video scoreboard, and even made its way to those competing on the field.

Rapid City was Jalon Strong.

Back in July, 11-year-old Jalon Janke, a student at West Middle School, began complaining of knee pain. His family initially thought of it as an injury related to his baseball season, which had recently concluded. They iced his knee and after the pain failed to let up, saw a doctor, who said it was growing pains, the Rapid City Journal reported.

The Broncos, a sixth- and seventh-grade youth team in the Rapid City Midget Football Association, started physical fitness testing a few days later ahead of their season, which is where Jalon, still experiencing discomfort, caught the eye of head coach Shane Lillebo, who said Jalon was among the first to return from a run.

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Lillebo chose Jalon to be one of the team's leaders, selecting him to help lead stretches and other team activities.

"During that first day of testing, I knew there was something wrong with his knee, but he was out there pushing as hard as he could," Lillebo said. "He was doing everything he could, and quite frankly, he tested really well even with his knee bothering him."

Emily Delzer, Jalon's mother, told Lillebo her son might not be able to play this year, and when Jalon showed up to a later practice, Lillebo inquired about his knee. Jalon told him he had cancer.

An MRI at Black Hills Orthopedic and Spine Center revealed a mass on Jalon's knee. He then spent a week undergoing tests at the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minn. The results came back Aug. 28, diagnosing him with osteosarcoma, a rare form of bone cancer found in legs that can spread to other parts of the body.

"It was pretty depleting because we were still very hopeful it was possibly benign," Delzer said. "The only thing you can do is hope, and he was very hopeful, so when we found out that that's what it was, it was pretty disappointing and really scary as a parent, not knowing what the treatment was going to look like and not having any experience with that before."

The MRI and bone scan revealed the cancer had not spread beyond the knee, and a treatment plan was formed. Jalon would undergo 10 weeks of chemotherapy and surgery in November, followed by 19 more weeks of chemo.

Jalon started out strong during the first three weeks, Delzer said, but the treatment proved to be rough on his body. During a recent two-week period off of chemo and at home, Jalon had a fever, mouth sores and was readmitted to the hospital for a blood transfusion.

"He's still fighting, but he's pretty upset right now," Delzer said a couple weeks ago. "He's just frustrated and in pain."

Even when he's home, Jalon can't have friends over due to COVID-19 and his compromised immune system. He has, however, been visited by Lillebo, who has been a supportive figure from the start.

Lillebo's daughter, Shelby, died of cancer in February after two years of treatment, and during that time, Lillebo and his wife discovered tips that made treatment a little bit easier. While he was previously unsure why he even agreed to coach a football team this year and that the news of Jalon's cancer was a "gut punch," he said he eventually realized he was meant to meet Jalon and his family.

Lillebo told Delzer about organizations that help with childhood cancer, such as Alex's Lemonade Stand Foundation and the Make-A-Wish Foundation, gave her gift cards for food and travel and provided Jalon with gift cards for his own use.

He also knew that the port used for chemotherapy gets flushed with a saline solution that forms a poor taste in the mouth, so he bought Jalon a Sam's Club bag of 500 Dum Dum lollipops for relief.

"It lets people know they're thinking about you, that they care and they want to help. Knowing you have so many people around who do want to help is really comforting," Lillebo said. "For (my wife and I) personally, it's a way of not letting my daughter's experience go to waste. To help the next situation going along be any bit easier that we can make it is important for us."

Laurie Sobczak befriended Delzer when she worked at Pinedale Elementary School, where Delzer is a teacher. Her son and daughter, Rapid City Stevens juniors Cade and Bailee Sobczak, were former students of Delzer's, and used to babysit Jalon.

When the two learned of Jalon's diagnosis, they wanted to see what they could do at Stevens to help. They initially came up with the idea of conducting a 50/50 raffle at the Central-Stevens football game Oct. 2, but Cade inquired about making and selling t-shirts at the game, and after Laurie made a few phone calls, they had a design made with #Jalonstrong on the front.

It was then Bailee who offered the idea of extending beyond Stevens and making the evening a community event, dedicating the game to Jalon. The Sobczak's decided to make blue shirts and red shirts for both schools.

"This came up in a matter of minutes. It all just kept snowballing. They just wanted to do something," Laurie said. "I don't know that they thought it was going to turn out to be such a big event."

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Cade and Bailee created an online store for the shirts and sold 150 before kickoff. Laurie said they didn't have a specific goal in mind for the amount of money they wanted to raise, but received around \$3,000, all for Jalon and his family. They even received a single \$500 donation that night.

"I was shocked at how the schools came together to support him. I knew we'd get support from Stevens, and not that I didn't think we'd get support from Central, but that was very impressive, just to see the community come together," Laurie said. "We had checks written to us, and they didn't even ask for a t-shirt. That's what's really heartwarming; just to see the community come together and support him when they don't even know who he is."

For Delzer, it was her first night out since her son was diagnosed, and she cried when she walked in the gate. Jalon was unable to attend, as he was in a hospital in Sioux Falls, but Delzer FaceTimed him from the stands to show him all those in attendance wearing #Jalonstrong shirts, including coaches for both Stevens and Central. Even his Broncos teammates were there.

"I think he was bummed he couldn't be there, but he thought it was pretty amazing that all those people were rooting for him," Delzer said. "Sitting in those stands, looking out at all those cheerleaders having his name on their shirts, and then you stand back and look at the stands, and so many people have a shirt on that have his name on it, it helps me be stronger too, just knowing that all these people support our family."

Delzer said it's crucial that Jalon knows he's not alone.

"Especially in a time like we're in right now where you can see so much unkindness and so much conflict in the world, people coming together for someone they don't even know," she said. "I was just so happy for Jalon to see the community support for him, and that's really important for him to see that, especially now because he's so weak and sick. He needs to see that all these people are fighting for him."

Jalon's GoFundMe site has raised more than \$16,500 with a goal of reaching \$18,000.

## North Dakota nurses worry about working with sick colleagues

By JAMES MacPHERSON and STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press

BISMARCK, N.D. (AP) — Like many medical workers around the world, Fargo emergency room nurse Adam Johnston can't escape the grim reality of the coronavirus pandemic. It follows him everywhere: at work, where people die every shift; at the grocery store, where people rail against his city's mask requirement; and at home, where he struggles to sleep.

He's gotten through the long months, including North Dakota's current virus wave that is among the worst in the U.S., by finding solace with fellow nurses during brief breaks where they can swap tips on beating insomnia or just vent frustrations. But he and many other nurses fear things are about to get even harder now that Gov. Doug Burgum has allowed the state's beleaguered hospitals to use infected but asymptomatic workers to treat COVID-19 patients.

"It's going to make you question every time you want to sit down and grab a five-minute snack with one of your co-workers," said Johnston, who is the president of the state's Emergency Nurses Association. "You're always going to think, 'Am I 6 feet away from them? Am I safe? Am I not?'"

Burgum said his decision could help North Dakota's hospitals, which are at or near capacity after a surge in cases that began over the summer and has only gotten worse. But Johnston and many other nurses feel he's saddling them with yet another burden while resisting imposing common safeguards to stanch the spread of the virus that might be less politically palatable in the conservative state.

Like some of his Republican counterparts in other states that have had big spikes in COVID-19 cases, Burgum for months took a business-friendly approach that puts the responsibility for slowing the virus on individuals rather than government mandates, so as to protect "both lives and livelihoods." It wasn't until Friday that he finally relented and ordered a statewide mask mandate and certain restrictions on businesses and gatherings.

The hands-off approach didn't work. After avoiding the explosion of cases that many other states experienced early in the pandemic, the virus has run rampant in North Dakota, which now regularly breaks its

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daily record highs for cases and deaths.

Burgum's move, which is permitted under Centers for Disease Control and Prevention guidelines, reflects the scarcity of medical workers in one of the hardest-hit regions of the country, said Dr. Thomas Tsai, an assistant professor at Harvard's School of Public Health. He said hospitals across the country are weighing such options as case numbers soar.

That's the case in South Dakota, which allows the practice but where none of the major hospitals are currently using infected workers.

In the spring and early summer in places like New York, medical workers from around the country were able to fly in and volunteer, providing relief for hospitals. But Tsai said the virus is now so widespread that there is little hope for such relief in North Dakota.

The state's major hospitals pushed Burgum's administration to allow them to have infected but asymptomatic staffers treat COVID-19 patients.

"We applaud the governor for another tool we can use," said Michael LeBeau, the head of Sanford Health Bismarck, which is developing protocols to allow such employees to work in a dedicated COVID-19 unit after it's found to be safe for its employees and patients. He said he expects his hospital's hundreds of health care workers to support the move once adequate safeguards are in place.

But Tessa Johnson, who heads the North Dakota Nurses Association, said the group surveyed hundreds of its members this week and "we are not at all thrilled" with the decision.

"I know nurses who leave work every day and cry in their car before they go home to see their kids," said Johnson. "I don't know how much more we can take."

Under the CDC guidelines, asymptomatic infected medical workers who intend to treat COVID-19 patients must take their temperatures before every shift and confirm that they don't have any symptoms. Workers with even mild symptoms aren't allowed to treat patients.

Dr. Marcus Plescia, the chief medical officer with the Association of State and Territorial Health Officials, pointed out that hospitals will have to determine if naming employees with infections is a violation of HIPAA laws, though he said that rigorous use of protective equipment in COVID units should prevent infections from spreading between hospital staff, even if co-workers don't know who is infected.

But the rule change also could place internal and external pressure on infected staff members to work when they should be home recovering, Plescia said.

Many nurses say they're already at a breaking point, and some are starting to feel hopeless.

"We're getting stretched so thin and there is no end in sight," said Kami Lehn, a nurse at a hospital in Fargo, which is North Dakota's largest city and which last month adopted its own mask requirement, though it doesn't penalize non-compliance. "We don't know how long this is going to last, or if it's at its peak or if it's going to get worse."

The grief is the toughest part, she said.

"There is a lot of loss that is hard to take," she said. "Families drop off a loved one at the door thinking things are going to be OK, and sometimes they're not."

Health workers worry that even if asymptomatic infected colleagues are limited to COVID-19 units, they could still spread the disease in break rooms, cafeterias, restrooms and other shared areas.

Kristin Roers, a hospital administrator and Republican state senator from Fargo, said Burgum's move will help hospitals continue to care for patients. But she also acknowledged that it presents a dilemma for hospital staff. Roers, who is also a registered nurse, has increasingly been working with patients because staffing has gotten so thin.

"I can totally understand the trepidation," she said. "But I mean, what do you do when there is nobody left to care for patients?"

—Groves reported from Sioux Falls, S.D.

**Deaths due to COVID-19 in South Dakota reach 219 in 15 days**

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SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — South Dakota health officials on Sunday reported 23 deaths due to the coronavirus in the last day, increasing the total number of fatalities to 219 in the last 15 days.

The deaths included 11 women and 12 men. Seventeen of the fatalities were residents over 80 years old. The death count is 21st highest per capita in the country at about 70 deaths per 100,000 people, according to figures compiled Saturday by John Hopkins University researchers.

South Dakota officials confirmed 1,199 new COVID-19 cases in the last day, lifting the total to 65,381 since the start of the pandemic.

The COVID Tracking Project said there were nearly 2,062 new cases per 100,000 people in South Dakota over the past two weeks, which ranks second in the country behind North Dakota for new cases per capita. One in every 86 people in South Dakota tested positive in the past week.

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

## Hurricane Iota powers up in new threat to Central America

By GABRIELA SELSER Associated Press

MANAGUA, Nicaragua (AP) — A fast-strengthening Hurricane Iota became a very dangerous Category 4 storm as it swept over the western Caribbean early Monday, approaching the same part of Central America battered by a similarly powerful Hurricane Eta just over a week ago.

Forecasters said Iota's maximum sustained winds had reached 155 mph (245 kph), and were growing stronger, potentially making for a catastrophic Category 5 hurricane by the time it reaches the coast.

Authorities warned that Iota would probably come ashore over areas where Eta's torrential rains saturated the soil, leaving it prone to new landslides and floods, and that the storm surge could reach a shocking 12 to 18 feet (3.6 to 5.5 meters) above normal tides.

Evacuations were being conducted from low-lying areas in Nicaragua and Honduras near their shared border, which appeared to be Iota's likely landfall. Winds and rain were already being felt on the Nicaraguan coast Sunday night.

Iota became a hurricane early Sunday and rapidly gained more power. It was expected to pass over or near Colombia's Providencia island during the night, and the U.S. National Hurricane Center warned it would probably reach the Central America mainland late Monday.

The hurricane center said Iota was centered about 20 miles (35 km) off Isla de Providencia, Colombia, and 145 miles (235 km) southeast of Cabo Gracias a Dios on the Nicaragua-Honduras border, and moving westward at 10 mph (17 kph).

Iota is the record 30th named storm of this year's extraordinarily busy Atlantic hurricane season. Such activity has focused attention on climate change, which scientists say is causing wetter, stronger and more destructive storms.

All of Honduras was on high alert, with compulsory evacuations that began before the weekend. By Sunday evening 63,500 people were reported to be in 379 shelters just in the northern coastal region.

Nicaraguan officials said that by late Sunday afternoon about 1,500 people, nearly half of them children, had been evacuated from low-lying areas in the country's northeast, including all the inhabitants of Cayo Misquitos. Authorities said 83,000 people in that region were in danger.

Wind and rain were beginning to be felt Sunday night in Bilwi, a coastal Nicaraguan city where people crowded markets and hardware stores during the day in search of plastic sheeting, nails and other materials to reinforce their homes, just as they did when Hurricane Eta hit on Nov. 3.

Several residents of Bilwi expressed concern that their homes would not stand up to Iota, so soon after Eta. Local television showed people being evacuated in wooden boats, carrying young children as well as dogs and chickens.

Eta already wreaked havoc. It hit Nicaragua as a Category 4 hurricane, killing at least 120 people as torrential rains caused flash floods and mudslides in parts of Central America and Mexico. Then it meandered



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across Cuba, the Florida Keys and around the Gulf of Mexico before slogging ashore again near Cedar Key, Florida, and dashing across Florida and the Carolinas.

Iota was forecast to drop 8 to 16 inches (200-400 millimeters) of rain in northern Nicaragua, Honduras, Guatemala and southern Belize, with as much as 30 inches (750 millimeters) in isolated spots. Costa Rica and Panama could also experience heavy rain and possible flooding, the hurricane center said.

Eta was this year's 28th named storm, tying the 2005 record. Remnants of Theta, the 29th, dissipated Sunday in the eastern Atlantic Ocean.

The official end of hurricane season is Nov. 30.

Associated Press writer Marlon González in Tegucigalpa, Honduras, contributed to this report.

## 2nd coronavirus vaccine shows early success in U.S. tests

By LAURAN NEERGAARD AP Medical Writer

For the second time this month, there's promising news from a COVID-19 vaccine candidate: Moderna said Monday its shots provide strong protection, a dash of hope against the grim backdrop of coronavirus surges in the U.S. and around the world.

Moderna said its vaccine appears to be 94.5% effective, according to preliminary data from the company's still ongoing study. A week ago, competitor Pfizer Inc. announced its own COVID-19 vaccine appeared similarly effective — news that puts both companies on track to seek permission within weeks for emergency use in the U.S.

Dr. Stephen Hoge, Moderna's president, welcomed the "really important milestone" but said having similar results from two different companies is what's most reassuring.

"That should give us all hope that actually a vaccine is going to be able to stop this pandemic and hopefully get us back to our lives," Hoge told The Associated Press.

"It won't be Moderna alone that solves this problem. It's going to require many vaccines" to meet the global demand, he added.

A vaccine can't come fast enough, as virus cases topped 11 million in the U.S. over the weekend — 1 million of them recorded in just the past week. The pandemic has killed more than 1.3 million people worldwide, more than 245,000 of them in the U.S.

Still, if the Food and Drug Administration allows emergency use of Moderna's or Pfizer's candidates, there will be limited, rationed supplies before the end of the year. Both require people to get two shots, several weeks apart. Moderna expects to have about 20 million doses, earmarked for the U.S., by the end of 2020. Pfizer and its German partner BioNTech expect to have about 50 million doses globally by year's end.

Moderna's vaccine, created with the National Institutes of Health, is being studied in 30,000 volunteers who received either the real vaccination or a dummy shot. On Sunday, an independent monitoring board broke the code to examine 95 infections that were recorded starting two weeks after volunteers' second dose — and discovered all but five illnesses occurred in participants who got the placebo.

The study is continuing, and Moderna acknowledged the protection rate might change as more COVID-19 infections are detected and added to the calculations. Also, it's too soon to know how long protection lasts. Both cautions apply to Pfizer's vaccine as well.

But Moderna's independent monitors reported some additional, promising tidbits: All 11 severe COVID-19 cases were among placebo recipients, and there were no significant safety concerns.

The main side effects were fatigue, muscle aches and injection-site pain after the vaccine's second dose, at rates that Hoge characterized as more common than with flu shots but on par with others such as shingles vaccine.

Moderna shares rocketed higher on the announcement and appeared to be headed for an all-time high Monday. The Cambridge, Massachusetts, company's vaccine is among 11 candidates in late-stage testing around the world, four of them in huge studies in the U.S.

Both Moderna's shots and the Pfizer-BioNTech candidate are so-called mRNA vaccines, a brand-new

technology. They aren't made with the coronavirus itself, meaning there's no chance anyone could catch it from the shots. Instead, the vaccine contains a piece of genetic code that trains the immune system to recognize the spiked protein on the surface of the virus.

The strong results were a surprise. Scientists have warned for months that any COVID-19 shot may be only as good as flu vaccines, which are about 50% effective.

Another steep challenge: distributing doses that must be kept very cold. Both the Moderna and Pfizer shots are frozen but at different temperatures. Moderna announced Monday that once thawed, its doses can last longer in a refrigerator than initially thought, up to 30 days. Pfizer's shots require long-term storage at ultra-cold temperatures.

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

## **Bach: Tokyo Olympic 'participants' encouraged to get vaccine**

By STEPHEN WADE AP Sports Writer

TOKYO (AP) — Olympic "participants" and fans arriving for next year's postponed Tokyo Games will be encouraged to be vaccinated to protect the Japanese public, IOC President Thomas Bach said Monday.

Bach said it won't be mandatory, but he left no doubt it will be strongly pushed.

Bach campaigned across Tokyo on Monday, his first visit to Japan since the Olympics were postponed almost eight months ago amid the coronavirus pandemic. He met support at all stops; from Japanese Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga, Tokyo Governor Yuriko Koike, former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, and Yoshiro Mori, the head of the local organizing committee and also a former prime minister.

"In order to protect the Japanese people and out of respect for the Japanese people, the IOC will undertake great effort so that as many (people) as possible — Olympic participants and visitors will arrive here (with a) vaccine, if by then a vaccine is available," Bach said after talks with Suga.

"We want to convince as many foreign participants as possible to accept a vaccine," Bach added later after meeting with Mori. "This makes us all very confident that we can have spectators in the Olympic stadia next year and that spectators will enjoy a safe environment."

Bach lauded new advances in rapid testing as a boost to hold the games. He said Olympic participants would not be a priority for a vaccine ahead of "nurses and doctors and people who keep our society alive." And he repeated several times that next year's Olympics would be the "light at the end of this dark tunnel."

Bach suggested the IOC would cover at least some of the costs of vaccination. But he said he did not yet know how much the one-year delay would cost. Reports in Japan estimate it will be \$2 billion to \$3 billion.

"This will take time," he said. "It's impossible now to have a sound figure."

The most pointed question at a news conference with Bach went to Mori concerning a reported \$1 million payment from the Tokyo bid committee — which landed the Olympics in 2013 — to the Jigoro Kano Memorial International Sports Institute. Mori heads the body.

Sitting next to Bach, Mori said he did not know about the body's finances.

"That is not something that I directly oversee," he replied.

French authorities have been investigating a bribery scandal linked to Tokyo's winning bid. Last year, Japanese Olympic Committee president Tsunekazu Takeda was forced to resign after he acknowledged signing off on a \$2 million payment to a consulting company based in Singapore. The consultant is believed to have channeled money to influence IOC votes.

Takeda denied any wrongdoing.

Monday was the first of two days of non-stop meetings for Bach in Tokyo; photo opportunities and meetings with politicians and organizers aimed at persuading a skeptical Japanese public that it's safe to hold the Olympics during a pandemic.

The Olympics are scheduled to open on July 23, 2021, and Bach said he hoped to have a "reasonable number" of spectators at the venues. How many and from where is a decision that is still down the road.

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A possible vaccine was announced last week by Pfizer Inc., which could greatly help the IOC and local organizers stage the Olympics. There have also been advances in rapid testing.

All of this is taking place as cases around the world surge heading into the Northern Hemisphere winter. Bach traveled to Tokyo on a chartered flight. He called off a trip last month to South Korea because of the virus' spread in Europe.

Some athletes and fans from abroad may oppose any suggestion to take the vaccine, which Bach has hinted previously could be key for Olympic "solidarity."

Japan has held baseball games recently with near-capacity crowds of 30,000 fans at some stadiums. It has also held an exhibition gymnastics meet with 22 athletes entering from abroad, attended by several thousand fans.

Japan has been largely spared during the pandemic with about 1,900 deaths attributed to COVID-19. It has also sealed off its borders until recently, and has almost 100% mask-wearing by the public.

Several polls have shown the Japanese public is ambivalent about the games, facing larger concerns like a slumping economy.

"Our determination is to realize the Tokyo Games next summer as proof that humanity has defeated the virus," Suga said.

The Olympics and Paralympics involve 15,400 Olympic and Paralympic athletes, and tens of thousands of coaches, officials, judges, VIPs, sponsors, media and broadcasters entering Japan.

The IOC gets 73% of its income from television, which is a critical factor in its drive to hold the Olympics. American network NBC pays well over \$1 billion for every Olympics.

Costs are also an issue with the Japanese public. A government audit report last year said the bill for preparing the Olympics could reach \$25 billion. All but \$5.6 billion is public money.

More AP sports: <https://apnews.com/apf-sports> and [https://twitter.com/AP\\_Sports](https://twitter.com/AP_Sports)

## Report: Belgian nursing homes failed patients amid pandemic

By SAMUEL PETREQUIN Associated Press

BRUSSELS (AP) — Belgian authorities "abandoned" thousands of elderly people who died in nursing homes during the coronavirus pandemic and did not seek hospital treatment for many who were infected, violating their human rights, Amnesty International said in an investigation published Monday.

One of the hardest-hit countries in Europe, Belgium has reported more than 531,000 confirmed virus cases and more than 14,400 deaths linked to the coronavirus. During the first wave of the pandemic last spring, the European nation of 11.5 million people recorded a majority of its COVID-19-related deaths in nursing homes.

Between March and October, Amnesty International said "a staggering" 61.3% of all COVID-19 deaths in Belgium took place in nursing homes. The group said authorities weren't quick enough in implementing measures to protect nursing home residents and staff during this period, failing to protect their human rights.

Amnesty International said one of the reasons so many people died in nursing homes is because infected residents weren't transferred to hospitals to receive treatment.

"The results of our investigation allow us to affirm that (care homes) and their residents were abandoned by our authorities until this tragedy was publicly denounced and the worst of the first phase of the pandemic was over," said Philippe Hensmans, the director of Amnesty International Belgium.

When the virus struck Europe hard in March, Belgium was caught off guard and unprepared, faced with a critical shortage of personal protective equipment. As infections surged across the country, nursing homes were quickly overwhelmed by the frenetic pace of contamination as local authorities even requested the help of Belgian armed forces to cope.

Belgium had one of the highest death rates worldwide during the first wave. But while nursing home

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staff was overwhelmed, the country's hospitals weathered the crisis, as their intensive care units never reached their 2,000-bed capacity. Vincent Fredericq, the general secretary of the care homes federation Femarbel, told Amnesty International that many residents in need of medical assistance were left behind.

"Everyone was struck by the images of the Italian and Spanish hospitals," he said. "These situations had a great impact on our federal decision-makers, who said from the outset that it was absolutely necessary to avoid overloading intensive care. Nursing homes have been relegated to second line and residents and staff have been the victims."

Amnesty International based its investigation on testimonies from nursing home residents and staff, employees of non-governmental organizations defending residents' rights and directors of nursing homes. The group also spoke with families of elderly people currently living in homes or who died during the pandemic. Most of the people interviewed asked to remain anonymous so that they could speak freely.

Quoting figures released by Doctors Without Borders, the group said only 57% of serious cases in care homes were transferred to hospitals because of "a harmful interpretation of sorting guidelines."

"Some older people have probably died prematurely as a result," Amnesty International said. "It took months before a circular explicitly stated that transfer to hospital was still possible, if it was in accordance with the patient's interests and wishes, regardless of age."

Maggie De Block, the former Belgian health minister in charge during the early months of the pandemic, refuted last month accusations that access to hospitals was denied to nursing home residents.

"There has never been a message either from the federal government or from my regional colleagues saying that we should not hospitalize people who need it, or that we can refuse elderly or disabled people," she told local media RTBF.

The prime minister's office didn't immediately respond to a request for comment from The Associated Press.

More than half of the care providers quizzed during the group's investigation said they didn't receive training on how to use protective equipment and weren't sufficiently informed about the virus. Amnesty International said systematic testing of nursing home employees in Belgium wasn't introduced before August, with only one test per month.

One nursing home resident identified as Henriette told Amnesty International that she was afraid every time a care worker came in that they would bring the virus in with them.

The group also noted that the restrictive measures limiting family visits had negative repercussions on many residents' health. Some relatives told Amnesty International that when they were allowed back, they realized their loved ones had been neglected because staffers were overwhelmed.

"It was very difficult for my husband to eat alone. As time went by, he lost weight," the wife of one resident said. "When I asked the staff about it, a care worker told me: 'We can't feed everyone every day.'"

Follow AP pandemic coverage at <https://apnews.com/hub/coronavirus-pandemic> and <https://apnews.com/UnderstandingtheOutbreak>

## Trump tweets words 'he won'; says vote rigged, not conceding

By KEVIN FREKING Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump worked to take back an apparent acknowledgment that Joe Biden won the White House and was making clear he would keep trying to overturn the election result.

Trump's earlier comments Sunday had given some critics and supporters hope that the White House was ready to begin working on a transition with Biden's team. Not so fast, Trump soon assured.

Trump, without using Biden's name, said that "He won" as part of a tweet that made baseless claims about a "rigged" election. But as the Republican president saw how his comments were being interpreted as his first public acknowledgment of a Biden victory, he quickly reversed course.

"He only won in the eyes of the FAKE NEWS MEDIA," Trump subsequently tweeted. "I concede NOTHING! We have a long way to go. This was a RIGGED ELECTION!"

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There was no widespread fraud in the 2020 election. In fact, election officials from both political parties stated publicly that the election went well, and international observers confirmed there were no serious irregularities. Trump's campaign has tried to mount legal challenges across the country, but many of the lawsuits have been thrown out and none has included any evidence that the outcome might be reversed.

Biden, a Democrat, defeated Trump by winning back a trio of battleground states: Michigan, Wisconsin and Pennsylvania, and topped the 270 electoral vote threshold to clinch the presidency. Biden so far has 78.8 million votes, the most ever by a winning candidate, to Trump's 73.1 million.

"If the president's prepared to begin to recognize that reality, that's positive," Biden's incoming chief of staff, Ron Klain, told NBC's "Meet the Press." Still, Klain said, "Donald Trump's Twitter feed doesn't make Joe Biden president or not president. The American people did that."

A Republican governor, Arkansas' Asa Hutchinson, said "it was good, actually" to see Trump's tweet that Biden won. "I think that's the start of an acknowledgment. ... We want to make sure that there is a smooth transition," Hutchinson said on NBC.

Nearly two weeks after Election Day, Trump has neither called Biden nor made a formal concession, and White House officials have insisted that they are preparing for a second term.

Former President Barack Obama, in an interview conducted and aired Sunday on CBS' "60 Minutes," said he would remind Trump that, as president, he is a public servant and a temporary occupant of the office.

"And when your time is up then it is your job to put the country first and think beyond your own ego, and your own interests, and your own disappointments," Obama said. "My advice to President Trump is, if you want at this late stage in the game to be remembered as somebody who put country first, it's time for you to do the same thing."

Obama also criticized those Republicans going along with Trump's false claims of widespread voter fraud.

"I'm more troubled by the fact that other Republican officials who clearly know better are going along with this, are humoring him in this fashion. It is one more step in delegitimizing not just the incoming Biden administration, but democracy generally. And that's a dangerous path," he said.

In recent days, Trump appeared to be inching closer to acknowledging the reality of his loss. In comments Friday in the Rose Garden about a coronavirus vaccine, Trump said his administration would "not be going to a lockdown" to slow the spread of COVID-19, and added that "whatever happens in the future, who knows which administration it will be? I guess time will tell."

Trump on Sunday renewed his groundless attacks on an election technology firm, Dominion Voting Systems, without evidence of any serious irregularities. Dominion has said it "denies claims about any vote switching or alleged software issues with our voting systems."

The Cybersecurity & Infrastructure Security Agency, a federal agency that oversees U.S. election security, said in a statement last week that the "November 3rd election was the most secure in American history." The agency said, "There is no evidence that any voting system deleted or lost votes, changed votes, or was in any way compromised."

John Bolton, a former Trump national security adviser, said it was important for Republican Party leaders to explain to voters that Trump did lose and that his claims of election fraud are baseless. Bolton left the administration last year. He says he resigned; Trump says he fired Bolton.

"I think as every day goes by, it's clearer and clearer there isn't any evidence. But if the Republican voters are only hearing Donald Trump's misrepresentations, it's not surprising that they believe it," Bolton said on ABC's "This Week." "It's critical for other Republican leaders to stand up and explain what actually happened. Donald Trump lost what by any evidence we have so far was a free and fair election."

Having none of that was Rudy Giuliani, the president's personal attorney who is helping lead Trump's national legal front on the election challenge. In a television appearance that Trump previewed on Twitter after his morning tweets, Giuliani denied Trump was conceding — "No, no, no, far from it."

"I guess," Giuliani told Fox News Channel's "Sunday Morning Futures," "you would call it sarcastic."

Associated Press writers Will Weissert in Wilmington, Delaware, and Zeke Miller in Washington contrib-

uted to this report.

## Trump campaign retreats from key claim in Pennsylvania suit

By MARC LEVY Associated Press

HARRISBURG, Pa. (AP) — President Donald Trump's campaign is withdrawing a central part of its lawsuit seeking to stop the certification of the election results in Pennsylvania, where Democrat Joe Biden beat Trump to capture the state and help win the White House.

Ahead of a Tuesday hearing in the case, Trump's campaign dropped the allegation that hundreds of thousands of mail-in and absentee ballots — 682,479, to be precise — were illegally processed without its representatives watching.

The campaign's slimmed-down lawsuit, filed in federal court on Sunday, maintains the aim of blocking Pennsylvania from certifying a victory for Biden in the state, and it maintains its claim that Democratic voters were treated more favorably than Republican voters.

The Associated Press on Nov. 7 called the presidential contest for Biden after determining that the remaining ballots left to be counted in Pennsylvania would not allow Trump to catch up. Trump has refused to concede.

The remaining claim in the lawsuit centers on disqualifying ballots cast by voters who were given an opportunity to fix mail-in ballots that were going to be disqualified for a technicality.

The lawsuit charges that "Democratic-heavy counties" violated the law by identifying mail-in ballots before Election Day that had defects — such as lacking an inner "secrecy envelope" or lacking a voter's signature on the outside envelope — so that the voter could fix it and ensure that the vote would count, called "curing."

Republican-heavy counties "followed the law and did not provide a notice and cure process, disenfranchising many," the lawsuit said.

Cliff Levine, a lawyer representing the Democratic National Committee, which is seeking to intervene, said it's unclear how many voters were given the chance to fix their ballot.

But, he said, it is minimal and certainly fewer than the margin — almost 70,000 — that separates Biden and Trump.

"The numbers aren't even close to the margin between the two candidates, not even close," Levine said.

In any case, there is no provision in state law preventing counties from helping voters to fix a ballot that contains a technical deficiency. Levine said the lawsuit does not contain any allegation that somebody voted illegally.

"They really should be suing the counties that didn't allow (voters) to make corrections," Levine said. "The goal should be making sure every vote counts."

Pennsylvania's top election official, Secretary of State Kathy Boockvar, a Democrat, responded in court on Sunday, asking the judge to dismiss the case. State courts are the proper jurisdiction for the subject, and the lawsuit contains no "plausible claim for relief on any legal theory," the state's lawyers wrote.

More than 2.6 million mail-in ballots were reported received by counties, and there has been no report by state or county election officials or a prosecutor of fraud or any other problem with the accuracy of the count.

A key theme of Trump and his supporters has been their claim that Philadelphia — a Democratic bastion where Trump lost badly — had not allowed Trump's campaign representatives to watch mail-in and absentee ballots processed and tabulated.

However, Republican lawyers have acknowledged in a separate federal court proceeding that they had certified observers watching mail-in ballots being processed in Philadelphia. Gov. Tom Wolf's administration has said that ballot watchers from all parties had observers throughout the process and that "any insinuation otherwise is a lie."

## Women crucial to Biden's win, even as gender gap held steady

By JOCELYN NOVECK AP National Writer

Ask Virginia voter Mary Hayes why Joe Biden defeated Donald Trump, and she does not hesitate.

"Women won this election!" says Hayes, 56, a mother of three and Biden supporter from Leesburg, Virginia. In particular, she credits two categories of voters that she herself is part of: Black women and suburban women. Trump had begged the latter group — some of whom he'd alienated by referring to them as "housewives" — to "please, please" like him. But that plea rang hollow, she says.

"We showed America that suburban women are diverse, and are a beautiful collection of ethnicity, race, marital status, occupations and many other categories," Hayes says. "Suburban women mobilized, determined to remove Trump from office." And, she says, they succeeded.

From nearly the moment Trump took the presidential oath, it was women who were the face of the resistance — marching in enormous numbers in their pussyhats, and fueling Democratic gains in the 2018 midterm elections.

So in 2020, the year women celebrated the centennial of the 19th Amendment guaranteeing their right to vote, many had expected — and some polls suggested — a dramatic repudiation of Trump with a widened gender gap. The results were a bit more complicated.

Hayes is correct that women were crucial to Biden's victory — simply stated, if only men had voted, Trump would have won. Black women and suburban women, in particular, proved to be pillars of Biden's coalition. But the election also delivered a reminder of Republicans' strength with other groups of women.

Trump had a modest advantage among white women, and a much wider share of white women without college degrees, according to AP VoteCast, a survey of more than 110,000 voters. And despite expectations that the much-analyzed gender gap would expand, it remained essentially the same from previous elections, including 2016.

In Congress, the big news was significant gains for Republican women, and overall a record number of women will serve in the 117th Congress — at least 141, including 105 Democrats and 36 Republicans, according to current numbers from the Center for American Women in Politics at Rutgers University.

Overall, the results are "a moving target," says Debbie Walsh, director of the center. But it was in sum "a good year," she says, "both for the election of women candidates on both sides, and for the participation of women voters." And of course, a huge glass ceiling was shattered with the election of the first female vice president, Kamala Harris.

AP VoteCast showed a 9 percentage point difference between men and women in support for Biden and Harris: 55% of women and 46% of men. That was essentially unchanged from the 2018 midterms, when VoteCast found a 10-point gender gap, with 58% of women and 48% of men backing Democrats in congressional races.

Contrary to some expectations, "this was a very average gender gap," says Susan J. Carroll, professor of political science and women's and gender studies at Rutgers.

The gender gap in support for Democratic candidates has averaged about 8 percentage points in the last 10 presidential elections, according to data from the American National Election Studies.

So for anyone who'd been looking for a wave election on either side, there was "barely a ripple," Carroll says. Still, Republican women in Congress, who have long lagged behind their Democratic counterparts, made notable gains: At minimum, a record 36 GOP women will serve in Congress next year, and they've already more than doubled their representation in the House.

Among newly elected GOP women who flipped seats: Stephanie Bice in Oklahoma, Michelle Fischbach in Minnesota, Yvette Herrell in New Mexico, Ashley Hinson in Iowa, Young Kim in California, Nancy Mace in South Carolina, Nicole Malliotakis in New York, Maria Elvira Salazar in Florida, Michelle Steel in California.

"That's been the story of this cycle," says Walsh of Republican women. "They made up all the ground they lost in 2018." Yet there remains a sizable gap with their Democratic colleagues; at least 89 Democratic women will be serving in the House.

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Feminist leader Eleanor Smeal says that's an important gain, even though she herself doesn't agree with the GOP platform. "If we're going to get to half of Congress, we're going to have to have more Republicans as well as more Democrats," says Smeal, president of the Feminist Majority.

Smeal adds that the gender gap, while perhaps smaller than she'd hoped, was still crucial in the presidential race. "It helped Biden and Harris carry the suburbs," she says, noting in particular the suburbs of Philadelphia and Pittsburgh in the crucial state of Pennsylvania, which Biden won.

VoteCast showed that Trump narrowly beat Biden among white women, largely on the strength of support in rural areas and small towns. But Biden dominated with women in the suburbs, winning 59% to Trump's 40% of a group that makes up around a quarter of the electorate nationwide. Biden won overwhelmingly among Black women, 93% to Trump's 6%, according to VoteCast.

Trump won handily among white women without college degrees — 60% to 39% — while Biden won white women with college degrees by roughly the same margin.

The results show yet again that despite a steady overall gender gap, "there are different groups of women that made a difference for each camp," Walsh says.

Hayes is one of the suburban women who mobilized early, dismayed at what she called the president's dog whistles in trying to stoke fears among suburban women that low-income housing would invite crime and ruin their neighborhoods. She formed a Facebook group, "The Real Suburban Housewives for Biden/Harris," which drew over 5,000 members, including "a few brave men."

"Some (of us) are housewives, some are career women, some are mothers and some are not," Hayes says. "Suburban women are thinkers, business owners, and we fight for our families. America should work together like suburban women — maybe they could get something done in the government."

A key element of the gender gap this year, some advocates have noted, is not about women but men: Men appeared to be somewhat more likely to back Biden in this election than they were to back Hillary Clinton in 2016. VoteCast shows 46% of men supported Biden. In 2016, 41% supported Clinton, according to a Pew Research Center analysis.

That, say advocates like Smeal, may be at least in part due to discomfort among some men — or misogynistic attitudes — about Clinton.

"There's no question that in 2016 there had been a massive negative campaign against Hillary Clinton, and some of that was against her sex," Smeal says. "There were so many sexist things thrown at her and it was for a long period of time."

There was obviously one major gender barrier broken this election — the ascension of a woman to the second highest office in the land.

"It is just spectacular that you have not only women running for these high offices but you now have the first one to win, and a Black Asian woman to boot," Smeal says. "As she said, she might be the first woman, but she won't be the last."

Says Hayes: "It will feel good to have someone in the White House with shared experiences. She gives all women and little girls hope that in a male-dominated government, no level is off limits."

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Associated Press writer Hannah Fingerhut in Washington contributed to this report.

## The Latest: UK virus tests to increase nursing home visits

By The Associated Press undefined

LONDON — British Health Secretary Matt Hancock says he hopes that all nursing homes in England will be able to test visitors for coronavirus to allow them to see their loved ones "by Christmas."

A pilot program in 20 nursing homes in the southern counties of Cornwall, Devon and Hampshire began Monday. Under it, regular testing will be offered to one family member or friend per resident, which the government hopes will support visits when combined with other COVID-prevention measures such as wearing masks and social distancing.

Hancock told BBC radio that the rollout will be "a challenge but we've got to make sure the right rules



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and protocols are in place so that the testing keeps people safe.”

Around 20,000 people are thought to have died in Britain’s nursing homes during the first wave of the pandemic. Most of the country’s nursing homes are run by the private sector.

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

- President-elect Joe Biden seeks information on US vaccine plans as Trump stalls handoff
- Amnesty International says Belgium violated the human rights of nursing home patients by not taking infected elderly patients to the hospital for treatment
- Michigan and Washington state announce new virus restrictions as U.S. cases hit 11 million
- Pandemic fuels steep drop in foreign college students in U.S.
- Many African students are missing out on the new term in school as the pandemic impoverishes families
- British PM Boris Johnson is self-quarantining but insists he’s working and is ‘fit as a butcher’s dog’

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HERE’S WHAT ELSE IS HAPPENING:

BRUSSELS — Amnesty International said Belgium authorities “abandoned” thousands of elderly people who died in nursing homes during the coronavirus pandemic following an investigation published Monday that described the situation as “human rights violations.”

One of the hardest-hit countries in Europe, Belgium has reported more than 531,000 confirmed virus cases and more than 14,400 deaths linked to the coronavirus. During the first wave of the pandemic last spring, the European nation of 11.5 million people recorded a majority of its COVID-19-related deaths in nursing homes.

Between March and October, Amnesty International said “a staggering” 61.3% of all COVID-19 deaths in Belgium took place in nursing homes. The group said authorities weren’t quick enough in implementing measures to protect nursing home residents and staff during this period, failing to protect their human rights.

Amnesty International said one of the reasons so many people died in homes is because infected residents weren’t transferred to hospitals to receive treatment.

—  
BERLIN — German Chancellor Angela Merkel will assess the effects of a nearly two-week-long partial lockdown with state governors in a video conference Monday.

Germany went into a partial lockdown at the beginning of November that included closing restaurants, cafes and cultural institutions, but left open schools and stores after virus figures spiked exponentially in October.

The rise of new infections has since slowed down, but on Friday the country still registered a new record of 23,542 cases. On Monday, 10,824 new cases were reported by the country’s disease control center. However, virus figures are usually lower at the beginning of the week because there’s less testing on weekends.

Merkel and the 16 state governors will begin their evaluation of the country’s coronavirus situation in the afternoon. Local media reported that possible new measures could include recommendations to further reduce social contacts and to cut school classes in half and have elementary school children wear masks too. So far, only high school students have to wear masks in class.

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LONDON — British Prime Minister Boris Johnson says he is as “fit as a butcher’s dog” after being instructed to self-isolate for 14 days because he recently came in contact with someone who has since contracted coronavirus.

In a video message posted Monday on Twitter from his London apartment at Downing Street, Johnson

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said it didn't matter that he has already endured COVID-19 and is "bursting with antibodies."

The quarantine requirement comes at the start of a crucial week for Johnson's Conservative government that includes discussions over a post-Brexit trade deal with the European Union. Negotiators are meeting in Brussels this week with time on a deal fast running out.

Johnson, who contracted the virus in April and spent three days in intensive care as his symptoms worsened, met with a small group of lawmakers for about a half-hour on Thursday, including one, Lee Anderson, who subsequently developed symptoms and tested positive.

Health Secretary Matt Hancock said it was right that the prime minister goes into self-isolation even though he's already had coronavirus as people "can catch it twice."

**KAMPALA, Uganda** — Many parents in African countries, unable to pay in cash or kind, say their children will have to miss the new term as classes resume after months of delay caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Mike Ssekaggo, headmaster of Wampeewo Ntakke Secondary School on the outskirts of Uganda's capital, Kampala, has fielded complaints from parents scrambling to have their children enrolled for the first time since March.

One cash-strapped parent asked to pay her child's school tuition fees with bags of the rice she grows. Ssekaggo requested a sample before he would agree but eventually did.

Relief over the gradual reopening of schools is matched by anxiety over the financial strain caused by the pandemic and over how to protect students in often crowded classrooms from the coronavirus. Only about half of 430 students had reported the day after he began admitting students for the new term, Ssekaggo told The Associated Press.

**NEW DELHI** — India has registered 30,548 new coronavirus cases, the fewest in the last four months but amid growing concerns about the latest surge in the capital, New Delhi.

India has now recorded a total of 8.84 million cases, second behind the U.S.

The Health Ministry said Monday that the country was showing a trend of declining average daily cases over the last two months. The ministry also reported 435 new fatalities, raising the death toll to 130,070.

India's daily cases have seen a steady decline since the middle of September, but New Delhi is now recording more new infections than any other state.

**WELLINGTON, New Zealand** — From Thursday, New Zealanders will be legally required to wear masks on public transport in Auckland and on planes nationwide.

Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern and Virus Response Minister Chris Hipkins announced the new rules on Monday after meeting with senior lawmakers.

The country has been largely successful in eliminating the virus but has experienced several small outbreaks in Auckland, the latest one after a military worker at a hotel where travelers returning from abroad are being quarantined got infected.

Ardern said the new rules were precautionary. "New Zealand remains in a unique position globally. We have economic and personal freedoms that few other countries enjoy," Ardern said. "But these freedoms are under increased threat as COVID surges in the world around us." The rules don't apply to children under age 12 or passengers taking taxis or Ubers, although their drivers will be required to wear masks.

**SEOUL, South Korea** — South Korea's daily coronavirus tally has stayed above 200 for a third consecutive day, as authorities consider raising the country's social distancing rules.

The 223 additional cases recorded Monday by the Korea Disease Control and Prevention Agency took the country's total to 28,769 with 494 deaths. The agency says 193 of them are locally transmitted cases while the rest was associated with international arrivals.

South Korea has seen a steady increase in various cluster infections as it eased its social distancing guidelines last month amid then a viral slowdown.

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Health Minister Park Neung-hoo calls the latest uptick in new infections "grave" and says authorities are "at the crossroads of adjusting the physical distancing rules."

**BALTIMORE** — More than 11 million cases of the coronavirus have now been reported in the United States, with the most recent million coming in less than a week.

Johns Hopkins University's coronavirus tracker reached 11 million on Sunday. It had topped 10 million cases on Nov. 9. It took 300 days for the U.S. to hit the 11 million mark since the first case was diagnosed in Washington state on Jan. 20.

COVID-19 is spreading more rapidly across the U.S. than it has at any time since the pandemic started. Deaths are also on the rise, though not at the record high numbers reached in the spring. The seven-day rolling average for daily new deaths was more than 1,080 as of Saturday, more than 30% higher than it was two weeks earlier.

COVID-19 has now killed more than 246,000 people in the U.S., according to Johns Hopkins.

Worldwide, more than 54 million coronavirus cases have been reported with more than 1.3 million deaths. The U.S. has about 4% of the world's population, but about a fifth of all reported cases.

**OLYMPIA, Wash.** — Washington Gov. Jay Inslee has announced new restrictions on businesses and social gatherings for the next four weeks as part of the state's efforts to slow the spread of the coronavirus.

Starting at 12:01 a.m. Tuesday, a host of businesses must close their indoor services, including fitness facilities and gyms, bowling centers, and movie theaters.

Retail stores, including grocery stores, must limit indoor capacity to 25%. Indoor social gatherings with people from more than one household are also prohibited unless attendees have either quarantined for 14 days before the gathering or tested negative for COVID-19 and have quarantined for seven days.

By Wednesday, restaurants and bars will be limited to outdoor dining and to-go service.

**CHARLESTON, W.Va.** — West Virginia has set another weekly record for the number of confirmed coronavirus cases, even with one day left to count.

Health statistics released Sunday show there were 3,718 positive cases reported statewide from Nov. 9 through Saturday. That six-day mark broke the record of 2,696 cases set for the seven days in the previous week.

The state set three daily marks for confirmed cases in the past week, including a record 821 cases on Friday.

Gov. Jim Justice on Friday announced that face coverings will be required at all times in businesses and other indoor spaces.

## **Trial in France for extremist foiled by 3 Americans on train**

By ELAINE GANLEY and NICOLAS VAUX-MONTAGNY Associated Press

**PARIS (AP)** — An Islamic State operative went on trial Monday in Paris on terror charges for swaggering bare-chested through a train in 2015 with an arsenal of weapons and shooting one passenger. He was brought down by three American vacationers in an electrifying capture that Clint Eastwood turned into a Hollywood thriller.

The scene five years ago on the fast train from Amsterdam to Paris is the focus of the month-long trial of Ayoub El Khazzani, with testimony expected from the two U.S. servicemen and their friend, who have been hailed as heroes.

With El Khazzani in court and watched by security officers, the trial opening Monday was largely taken up with procedural issues including whether Eastwood's presence is needed. That question was not immediately resolved. The actor-director has so far not responded to a summons. Eastwood turned Aug. 21, 2015, drama in car No. 12 into a movie "The 15:17 to Paris."

El Khazzani, a 31-year-old Moroccan, spent several months in Syria and boarded the train in Brussels

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armed to the hilt, authorities say. He is charged with attempted terrorist murder for the foiled attack. If convicted, he faces a maximum sentence of life in prison.

Three others, who weren't on the train, also are being tried for their roles as alleged accomplices.

Bilal Chatra, 24, an Algerian member of the Islamic State group, would have been the second man on the train but dropped out of the plot a week earlier. He had left Syria for Europe a week before to set up the exit route.

Mohamed Bakkali allegedly took in the Europe-bound attackers in Budapest, Hungary, which he denies. The two were arrested in Germany in 2016. A third man, Redouane El Amrani Ezzerrifi, allegedly piloted a boat to help in their return to Europe.

The trial serves as a bridge to the massacre of 130 people in Paris three months later, on Nov. 13, 2015, at the Bataclan music hall and restaurants and cafes. The man considered the likely mastermind of those attacks, Abdel Hamid Abaaoud, was the behind-the-scenes force in the train attack, planned in Syria, according to the prosecution.

Abaaoud traveled from Syria to Belgium with El Khazzani to organize attacks in Europe, and was holed up with him and Chatra in a Brussels apartment, according to the prosecution. Abaaoud was killed by French special forces days after the Bataclan attack. But before his death, his macabre organizational skills were at work in a failed plan to attack a church south of Paris in April 2015 that left a young woman dead. Sid Ahmed Ghlam was convicted earlier this month and sentenced to life in prison.

The train attacker, El Khazzani, "knowingly followed Abaaoud, but it's been years since he was in a jihadi mindset," his lawyer, Sarah Mauger-Poliak, said in a phone interview. "He is very affected and regrets having allowed himself to become indoctrinated in propaganda."

The propaganda evolved into a plot to allegedly kill trapped passengers.

El Khazzani bought a train ticket at the Brussels station on Aug. 21, 2015 for a 5:13 p.m. departure. He was armed with a Kalashnikov, nine clips with 30 rounds each, an automatic pistol and a cutter, according to investigators.

Once on the train, he lingered in a restroom between cars and emerged bare-chested with a Kalashnikov. One waiting passenger struggled with the attacker, then a French-American, Mark Magoolian, wrestled the Kalashnikov away — before being shot himself by a pistol as he headed to car No. 12 to warn his wife. Magoolian said in interviews later that the attacker recovered the Kalashnikov.

Spencer Stone, a then-23-year-old U.S. airman, said days after the attack that he was coming out of a deep sleep when the gunman appeared. Alek Skarlatos, then a 22-year-old U.S. National Guardsman recently back from Afghanistan, "just hit me on the shoulder and said 'Let's go.'"

The three men, all from California, snapped into action out of what Skarlatos said at a news conference days later was "gut instinct." Stone and Skarlatos moved in to tackle the gunman and take his gun. The third friend, Anthony Sadler, 23, then a student, helped subdue the assailant. Stone said he choked El Khazzani unconscious. A British businessman then joined in the fray.

Stone, whose hand was injured by the cutter, is also credited with saving the French-American teacher whose neck was squirting blood. Stone said he "just stuck two of my fingers in his hole and found what I thought to be the artery, pushed down and the bleeding stopped."

The train rerouted to Arras, in northern France, where El Khazzani was arrested.

El-Khazzani had left Morocco at age 18 to join his family in Spain. In 2012, he established links with radicals. He went to Brussels before heading to Turkey, a gateway to Syria. A watch list signal "sounded" on May 10, 2015, in Berlin, where El-Khazzani was flying to Turkey, then-French Interior Minister Bernard Cazeneuve had said.

El Khazzani told investigators that Abaaoud wanted him to kill only the American military men, a line he was likely to maintain during the trial. The investigating judges consider it a dubious claim, in part because their presence in the train couldn't be known in advance and they were in civilian clothes.

That defense also fails to jibe with Abaaoud's goal of killing a maximum number of people during attacks.

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Nicolas Vaux-Montagny reported from Lyon, France.

## Virus quarantine complicates a big week for Boris Johnson

By PAN PYLAS and JILL LAWLESS Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — British Prime Minister Boris Johnson said Monday he is “fit as a butcher’s dog” and firmly in control of the government, despite having to self-isolate because a contact has tested positive for the coronavirus.

Johnson, who is trying to suppress a new surge in U.K. coronavirus infections, quell turmoil within his Conservative Party and secure a trade deal with the European Union, said in a video message on Twitter that he had no COVID-19 symptoms. He said he would continue to govern using “Zoom and other forms of electronic communication.”

Johnson met with a small group of Conservative lawmakers for about 35 minutes on Thursday. One, Lee Anderson, subsequently developed coronavirus symptoms and tested positive.

Johnson said he was contacted by the national test-and-trace system Sunday and was following its order to self-isolate for 14 days even though he is “bursting with antibodies” after recovering from the virus earlier in the year.

“It doesn’t matter that we were all doing social distancing, it doesn’t matter that I’m fit as a butcher’s dog, feel great — so many people do in my circumstances,” he said.

Johnson said the fact he had been “pinged” by the test-and-trace network was evidence the much-criticized system was working. The system routinely fails to contact more than a third of infected people’s contacts.

Britain has recorded almost 52,000 deaths of people who tested positive for the virus, the highest toll in Europe.

Johnson spent a week in hospital with the coronavirus in April, including three nights in intensive care. He later thanked medics for saving his life when it “could have gone either way.”

Several other government ministers, officials and Downing Street staff also became sick with COVID-19 in the spring, including Chief Medical Officer Chris Whitty and Health Secretary Matt Hancock.

Officials say Downing Street is now a “COVID-secure workplace,” with staff observing social distancing measures and some working from home. But a photo released of Johnson’s meeting with Anderson shows the two did not wear masks and appear to be less than the recommended 2 meters (6 ½ feet) apart.

People who recover from the virus are thought to have a level of immunity, but it’s unclear how long it lasts.

Danny Altmann, professor of immunology at Imperial College London, said there have been more than 25 confirmed cases of COVID-19 reinfection globally, and that the actual reinfection rate is “quite a lot higher than that, but not enormous.”

Johnson had planned a series of meetings and announcements this week intended to reboot his premiership after losing two top aides in messy circumstances.

Chief adviser Dominic Cummings and communications director Lee Cain quit last week amid reports of power struggles inside Downing Street. Cummings and Cain were key players in the 2016 campaign to take Britain out of the European Union, and helped Johnson win a decisive election victory in December 2019.

But their combative style toward civil servants, lawmakers and the media made many enemies, and Johnson is likely to use their departure as a chance to rebuild relations.

He was also due to lead meetings to decide the next steps in Britain’s response to the coronavirus. A four-week nationwide lockdown for England is due to end Dec. 2, but it’s unclear whether it will have been enough to curb a surge in infections.

Meanwhile, U.K. and EU negotiators are meeting in Brussels try to seal a last-minute trade deal before Britain makes a financial break from the bloc on Dec. 31. The two sides have said a deal needs to be sealed within days if it is to be ratified by year’s end, but big differences remain on issues including fishing rights and competition rules.

If there is no deal, businesses on both sides of the English Channel will face tariffs and other barriers to

trade starting Jan. 1. That would hurt economies on both sides, with the impact falling most heavily on the U.K., which does almost half of its trade with the 27-nation bloc.

Johnson had also planned this week to lead a televised news conference, announce new environmental policies including a ban on sales of new petrol and diesel cars by 2030, and meet with restive Conservative lawmakers from northern England, who want to see progress on promises to close the north-south economic divide.

Follow AP's coverage at <https://apnews.com/hub/coronavirus-pandemic> and <https://apnews.com/UnderstandingtheOutbreak>

## Syria's longtime Foreign Minister al-Moallem dies at age 79

By BASSEM MROUE Associated Press

BEIRUT (AP) — Syria's longtime Foreign Minister Walid al-Moallem, a career diplomat who became one of the country's most prominent faces to the outside world during the uprising against President Bashar Assad, died on Monday. He was 79.

Al-Moallem, who served as ambassador to Washington for nine years, starting in 1990 during Syria's on-and-off peace talks with Israel, was a close confidant of Assad known for his loyalty and hard-line position against the opposition.

A soft spoken, jovial man with a dry sense of humor, al-Moallem was also known for his ability to defuse tensions with a joke.

During the current crisis, he often held news conferences in Damascus detailing the Syrian government's position. Unwavering in the face of international criticism, he repeatedly vowed that the opposition, which he said was part of a Western conspiracy against Syria for its anti-Israel stances, would be crushed.

A short and portly man with white hair, his health was said to be deteriorating in recent years with heart problems. The state-run SANA news agency reported his death, without immediately offering a cause.

Born to a Sunni Muslim family in Damascus in 1941, al-Moallem attended public schools in Syria and later traveled to Egypt, where he studied at Cairo University, graduating in 1963 with a bachelor's degree in economics.

He returned to Syria and began working at the foreign ministry in 1964, rising to the top post in 2006.

His first mission outside the country as a diplomat in the 1960s was to open the Syrian Embassy in the African nation of Tanzania. In 1966 he moved to work in the Syrian Embassy in the Saudi city of Jiddah and a year later he moved to the Syrian Embassy in Madrid.

In 1972, he headed the Syrian mission to London and in 1975 moved to Romania, where he spent five years as ambassador. He then returned to Damascus, where he headed the ministry's documentation office until 1984, when he was named as the head of the foreign minister's office.

He was appointed as Syria's ambassador to Washington in 1990, spending nine years in the U.S. During that time Syria held several rounds of peace talks with Israel.

In 2006, he was appointed foreign minister at a time when Damascus was isolated by Arab and Western nations following the assassination of former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik Hariri a year earlier.

Many Lebanese, Arabs and Western governments blamed Syria for the massive blast that killed Hariri — accusations that Damascus repeatedly denied. Syria was forced to end nearly three decades of domination and military presence in its smaller neighbor and pulled out its troops in April that year.

Al-Moallem became the most senior politician to visit Lebanon in 2006, after Syrian troops withdrew. He attended an Arab foreign ministers meeting during the 34-day war between Israel and Lebanon's militant Hezbollah group, a strong ally of Syria.

"I wish I were a fighter with the resistance," al-Moallem said in Beirut at the time, triggering criticism from anti-Syrian Lebanese activists who poked fun at him as being unfit to fight.

After the uprising against Assad began in March 2011, al-Moallem was tasked with holding news conferences in Damascus to defend the government's position. He traveled regularly to Moscow and Iran, key

backers of the Syrian government, to meet with officials there.

During a news conference a year after the conflict began, al-Moallem was asked to comment about then French Foreign Minister Alain Juppe's comment that the regime's days were numbered.

Al-Moallem answered with a smile on his face: "If Mr. Juppe believes that the days of the regime are numbered I tell him, wait and you will see."

"This is if God gives him a long age," al-Moallem said.

In February 2013, he was the first Syrian official to say during a visit to Moscow that the government was ready to hold talks even with those "who carried arms."

In early 2014, he headed Syria's negotiating team during two rounds of peace talks with the opposition in Switzerland. The talks, which eventually collapsed, marked the first time that members of the Syrian government sat face-to-face with Syrian opposition figures.

Al-Moallem was widely criticized for a rambling speech he gave at the start of Syria's peace conference in Montreux, Switzerland. Then U.N. chief Ban Ki-moon repeatedly asked him to step away from the podium when he exceeded his time limit.

Al-Moallem ignored Ban's pleas, setting off an exchange that showed the tensions in trying to resolve Syria's bloody conflict.

"You live in New York. I live in Syria," al-Moallem snapped. "I have the right to give the Syrian version here in this forum. After three years of suffering, this is my right."

Al-Moallem then proceeded with his speech, saying he had a few minutes left. Ban asked him to keep his promise.

"Syria always keeps its promises," al-Moallem replied, triggering approving laughter from the Syrian government delegation behind him and a grin from Ban.

Al-Moallem's last public appearance was at the opening of an international refugee conference last Wednesday in Damascus, when he appeared to be in ill health. The following day, he did not attend the closing ceremony of the event, which was co-hosted with Russia.

Al-Moallem is survived by his wife, Sawsan Khayat and three children, Tarek, Shatha and Khaled. He will be buried on Monday afternoon and prayers will be held at a mosque in Damascus.

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Associated Press writer Albert Aji in Damascus, Syria, contributed to this report.

## As schools reopen in Africa, relief is matched by anxiety

By RODNEY MUHUMUZA and TOM ODULA Associated Press

KAMPALA, Uganda (AP) — One cash-strapped parent asked to pay her child's school tuition fees with bags of the rice she grows, leading headmaster Mike Ssekaggo to request a sample before he would agree. Eventually he did.

Many other parents in African countries, unable to pay in cash or kind, say their children will have to miss the new term as classes resume after months of delay caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Ssekaggo, headmaster of Wampeewo Ntakke Secondary School on the outskirts of Uganda's capital, Kampala, has fielded complaints from parents scrambling to have their children enrolled for the first time since March.

Relief over the gradual reopening of schools is matched by anxiety over the financial strain caused by the pandemic and over how to protect students in often crowded classrooms from the coronavirus.

Only about half of 430 students had reported the day after he began admitting students for the new term, Ssekaggo told The Associated Press.

School officials worry some children might not return to class because their parents have not been working, Ssekaggo said.

In Uganda, authorities have set standards that schools must meet before they can admit students, most of whom could remain at home until as late as next year. Schools must have enough handwashing stations and enough room in classrooms and dorms for social distancing.

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Although the pandemic has disrupted education around the world, the crisis is more acute in Africa, where up to 80% of students don't have access to the internet and distance learning is out of reach for many.

Sub-Saharan Africa already had the highest rates of children out of school anywhere in the world, with nearly one-fifth of children between 6 and 11 and more than one-third of youths between 12 and 14 not in school, according to the U.N. culture and education agency.

Although schools now have reopened in many African countries that had imposed anti-COVID-19 lockdowns, the pandemic's full impact on education in the world's most youthful continent of over 1.3 billion people remains to be seen.

In some cases, the decision to reopen remains problematic, especially as the level of testing remains low.

"One of the things that we have been discussing is how do we monitor the situation in schools where we have large numbers of students," said Dr. Rashid Aman, Kenya's chief administrative secretary of health. "I think definitely we will require to be doing some level of testing in those populations to see whether there is transmission of asymptomatic cases."

As in Uganda, Kenya is implementing a phased reopening of schools. Students taking exams to move to upper grade school, high school and college reported in October. The rest will return in January, but there is widespread concern that schools were reopened too early as some have reported outbreaks.

Similar challenges are reported in Zimbabwe, the cash-strapped southern African nation where more than 100,000 public teachers have been striking since schools reopened, demanding better pay as well as protective gear.

"Results of the disaster happening with unmonitored school children will be with us for a long time," said Raymond Majongwe, secretary-general of the Progressive Teachers Union of Zimbabwe, warning parents against sending their children to school while teachers are on strike. "Prepare for a baby and drug boom," he added.

The coronavirus had infected more than 1.9 million Africans and killed more than 45,000 as of Nov. 9. But up to 80% of Africa's virus cases are believed to be asymptomatic, the World Health Organization's Africa director said in September, citing preliminary analysis.

Authorities in Uganda and Kenya are not testing students for the virus before enrollment. John Nken-gasong, head of the Africa Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, told reporters Thursday that while his group isn't monitoring schools, "we naturally expect there will be infections."

At Uganda's Wampeewo Ntakke Secondary School, which had 1,800 students before the outbreak, officials at the gates took the temperatures of arriving students, who also were required to bring at least two masks. Later, a nurse briefed them about safety.

"I think we are safe as per now," said student Sylvia Namuyomba, pondering the handwashing stations strategically placed across the green lawns.

A stern-looking teacher wearing a face shield patrolled the compound, rebuking students who even momentarily removed their masks.

In one classroom, the masked students sat one per desk instead of the usual three, a measure of the social distancing that will be hard to maintain when hundreds more report back to school early next year.

"We are just leaving it in prayer that by January there will be no COVID," said Vincent Odoi, a teacher of business studies. "Otherwise we won't manage."

Odula reported from Nairobi, Kenya. Farai Mutsaka in Harare, Zimbabwe, contributed.

## After Trump, will the presidency recede a bit for Americans?

By TED ANTHONY AP National Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — Calvin Coolidge, known by some as "Silent Cal" during his time in the White House, used his autobiography to live up to his nickname. "The words of a president," he wrote in 1929 after leaving office, "have an enormous weight and ought not to be used indiscriminately."

The world is very different now. Communication is instantaneous. Americans — even a president — are



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often measured by the quantity and volume of what is now called their "content." Since he took office in 2017 (and for many years before that), Donald Trump has been a different kind of president when it comes to communication — a more-is-better kind of guy.

You can adore Trump or despise him. But from late-night tweet storms to oft-repeated untruths to provocative statements about everything from the kneeling of pro football players to canned beans to buying Greenland, there's one thing it has been almost impossible to do with the president of the United States these past four years: ignore him.

"No one can get away from it. It's never happened before. I've always cared about the president, but it's never been like this," says Syd Straw, an entertainer and artist who lives in the Vermont woods. "Even people who like him feel that way, I think."

Now, as another administration prepares to take the reins of American power, have the Trump years forever changed the place that the presidency occupies in American life and Americans' lives? Has Calvin Coolidge's statement become woefully outdated in the era of the ever-present presidency, or is it an idea whose time has returned, as voiced by a sign on the fence at Lafayette Square near the White House last week: "Enough!"

The presidency was devised as a combination of two things — a big-time leader and a regular person from our ranks. And the American people have always wanted to interact with it, or at least feel they are. In the 1800s, they actually were: Andrew Jackson's inauguration featured an open house in which people wandered in and out of the White House at will. Access in varying degrees continued for a half century until security concerns ended it.

The TV-friendly Kennedy administration elevated personality to a height nearly on par with competence. And the stature of the office — perched high upon a metaphorical hill, of the people but distant from them — has competed ever since with the desire to bring it down to Earth. Thus did Bill Clinton answer the famous 1994 question on MTV — "Boxers or briefs?" — and George W. Bush gain stature as the candidate you'd "want to sit down and have a beer with."

But none of those leaders was communicating with the American public directly and injecting fresh material on multiple topics into the national conversation multiple times a day. There is simply no precedent for Donald Trump, who — like so many among us — has holed up in his bedroom late at night with his phone and tweeted about things that irritated him. Never before have 280 characters from the planet's most powerful person seemed nearer. Perhaps they never will again.

Former President Barack Obama even deployed the Trump omnipresence as a talking point while stumping for Joe Biden and Kamala Harris.

"Joe and Kamala, when they are in office ... you're not going to have to think about them every single day," Obama told a drive-in rally in Orlando, Florida, in late October. "It just won't be so exhausting. You'll be able to go about your lives."

Many Trump supporters, who beg to differ, have loved this ubiquity. To them, it's transparency: He has brought to the presidency a combination of accessibility and pugnaciousness that floods multiple channels — and is useful even when it's draining, which it sometimes is even for them. "Even Trump's supporters are getting tired of his daily drama," the conservative National Review said in a headline last year.

Put simply, it's another data point in a saga of national exhaustion and media overload — particularly in the can't-get-away-from-it era of the coronavirus pandemic.

"If we are burned out with the presidency, how do we go forward in terms of how we consume media?" wonders Apryl Alexander, an associate professor of psychology at the University of Denver who studies how people and communities meet challenges. "I have a text message from friends the minute I wake up about something (Trump) said. I think Biden and his camp are going to have to navigate this."

In many ways, it transcends Trump. The primacy of the presidency is so deeply embedded in American culture that it's often hard to look away when the occupant is saying, "Look at me."

Though the U.S. government has three branches, the chief executive has come to embody the national psyche, the national mood, the national character. It's hard to imbue a legislative body or a court with the

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personality of a nation. The president, though, is expected to channel all of that — and so, in a society weaned on heroes and outsized figures, commandeers the attention.

"We don't look at the office; we look at the person. And Donald Trump has been the ultimate personality," says Anthony DiMaggio, a political scientist at Lehigh University who teaches media politics and propaganda. "It's not the greatest way to have a nuanced understanding of our political system. But it's easy."

Who knows how a President Joe Biden will communicate? It's probably safe to say that his lack of history as a reality-show staple and a frequently provocative tweeter may limit how much national, moment-to-moment bandwidth he will pursue.

And Trump? When he and the presidency become separate entities, he'll continue to occupy what sociologists call "the attention space." He'll still have a lot to say, and many places to say it, and many people who want to hear it. But unlike now, when he holds the highest office in the land, more Americans will feel they can shut it off.

"What he says may continue to be newsworthy for quite a long time," says Caroline Lee, an associate professor at Lafayette University in Pennsylvania who specializes in the sociology of politics and culture. "But the question is, at some point he will die, and who takes over his attention space at that point? Could anybody command that style of attention or that amount of attention? It's hard to imagine somebody stepping into that role."

Ted Anthony, director of digital innovation for The Associated Press, has been writing about American culture since 1990. Follow him on Twitter at <http://twitter.com/anthonyted>

## SpaceX launches 2nd crew, regular station crew flights begin

By MARCIA DUNN AP Aerospace Writer

CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla. (AP) — SpaceX launched four astronauts to the International Space Station on Sunday on the first full-fledged taxi flight for NASA by a private company.

The Falcon rocket thundered into the night from Kennedy Space Center with three Americans and one Japanese, the second crew to be launched by SpaceX. The Dragon capsule on top — named Resilience by its crew in light of this year's many challenges, most notably COVID-19 — reached orbit nine minutes later. It is due to reach the space station late Monday and remain there until spring.

"By working together through these difficult times, you've inspired the nation, the world, and in no small part the name of this incredible vehicle, Resilience," Commander Mike Hopkins said right before liftoff.

Once reaching orbit, he radioed: "That was one heck of a ride."

Sidelined by the coronavirus himself, SpaceX founder and chief executive Elon Musk was forced to monitor the action from afar. He tweeted that he "most likely" had a moderate case of COVID-19. NASA policy at Kennedy Space Center requires anyone testing positive for coronavirus to quarantine and remain isolated.

Sunday's launch follows by just a few months SpaceX's two-pilot test flight. It kicks off what NASA hopes will be a long series of crew rotations between the U.S. and the space station, after years of delay. More people means more science research at the orbiting lab, according to officials.

Cheers and applause erupted at SpaceX Mission Control in Hawthorne, California, after the capsule reached orbit and the first-stage booster landed on a floating platform in the Atlantic. Musk tweeted a single red heart.

At Kennedy, he was replaced by SpaceX President Gwynne Shotwell. She wouldn't give Musk's whereabouts, but said he was "tied in very closely to the launch."

"I have a series of texts to prove it," Shotwell told reporters.

The flight to the space station — 27 1/2 hours door to door — should be entirely automated, although the crew can take control if needed. SpaceX had to deal with pressure pump spikes once the capsule reached orbit, but quickly resolved the issue.

With COVID-19 still surging, NASA continued the safety precautions put in place for SpaceX's crew launch in May. The astronauts went into quarantine with their families in October. All launch personnel wore masks, and the number of guests at Kennedy was limited. Even the two astronauts on the first SpaceX

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crew flight stayed behind at Johnson Space Center in Houston.

Vice President Mike Pence, chairman of the National Space Council, joined NASA Administrator Jim Bridenstine to watch the launch.

"I didn't start breathing until about a minute after it took off," Pence said during a stop at SpaceX Launch Control to congratulate the workers.

Outside the space center gates, spectators crowded into nearby beaches and towns. NASA worried a weekend liftoff — coupled with a dramatic nighttime launch — could lead to a superspreader event. They urged the crowds to wear masks and maintain safe distances. Similar pleas for SpaceX's first crew launch on May 30 went unheeded.

"In such a crazy year, we have finally some great news," said Sophia Giallanza, who came from Miami with her husband and son to see their first launch. "So it's really wonderful."

The three-men, one-woman crew led by Hopkins, an Air Force colonel, named their capsule Resilience in a nod not only to the pandemic, but also racial injustice and contentious politics. It's about as diverse as space crews come, including physicist Shannon Walker, Navy Cmdr. Victor Glover, the first Black astronaut on a long-term space station mission, and Japan's Soichi Noguchi, who became the first person in almost 40 years to launch on three types of spacecraft.

They rode out to the launch pad in Teslas — another Musk company — after exchanging high-fives and hand embraces with their children and spouses, who huddled at the open car windows.

Besides its sleek design and high-tech features, the Dragon capsule is quite spacious — it can carry up to seven people. Previous space capsules have launched with no more than three. The extra room in this newest capsule was used for science experiments and supplies.

The four astronauts will be joining two Russians and one American who flew to the space station last month from Kazakhstan. The orbiting outpost soared over the launch site a mere half-minute before liftoff.

The first-stage booster is expected to be recycled by SpaceX for the next crew launch. That's currently targeted for the end of March, which would set up the newly launched astronauts for a return to Earth in April.

In the next 15 months, SpaceX should be flying roughly seven Dragon missions for NASA, both crew and cargo, Shotwell said.

While Bridenstine noted it was a beautiful launch, he stressed: "This is a six-month mission and it's the first of many."

"When you're flying into space, there's always risk and we will always be diligent," he added.

SpaceX and NASA wanted the booster recovered so badly that they delayed the launch attempt by a day, to give the floating platform time to reach its position in the Atlantic over the weekend following rough seas.

Boeing, NASA's other contracted crew transporter, is trailing by a year. A repeat of last December's software-plagued test flight without a crew is off until sometime early next year, with the first astronaut flight of the Starliner capsule not expected before summer.

NASA turned to private companies to haul cargo and crew to the space station, after the shuttle fleet retired in 2011. SpaceX qualified for both. With Kennedy back in astronaut-launching action, NASA can stop buying seats on Russian Soyuz rockets. The last one cost \$90 million.

The commander of SpaceX's first crew, Doug Hurley, noted it's not just about saving money or easing the training burdens for crews.

"Bottom line: I think it's just better for us to be flying from the United States if we can do that," he told The Associated Press last week.

AP videojournalist Cody Jackson contributed to this report.

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

**Here comes Santa Claus - with face masks and plexiglass**

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By JOSEPH PISANI AP Retail Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Santa Claus is coming to the mall — just don't try to sit on his lap.

Despite the pandemic — and the fact that Santa's age and weight put him at high risk for severe illness from the coronavirus — mall owners are going ahead with plans to bring him back this year.

But they are doing all they can to keep the jolly old man safe, including banning kids from sitting on his knee, no matter if they've been naughty or nice.

Kids will instead tell Santa what they want for Christmas from six feet away, and sometimes from behind a sheet of plexiglass. Santa and his visitors may need to wear a face mask, even while posing for photos. And some malls will put faux gift boxes and other decorations in front of Saint Nick to block kids from charging toward him.

Other safety measures include online reservations to cut down on lines, workers wiping down holiday-decorated sets, and hand sanitizer aplenty. Santa's hours are also getting cut to give him a break from crowds.

Macy's canceled its in-person visits this year, saying it couldn't provide a safe environment for the more than 250,000 people that show up to see Kriss Kringle at its New York flagship store.

But malls, which have struggled to attract shoppers for years, are not willing to kill a holiday tradition that is one of their biggest ways to lure people during the all-important holiday shopping season.

"You have to give them a reason to come or they'll stay home and shop online," says Michael Brown, who oversees the retail team at consulting firm Kearney.

More than 10 million U.S. households visited Santa in a mall or store last year, according to GlobalData Retail's managing director Neil Saunders. Nearly 73% of them also spent money at nearby restaurants or stores, he says.

"Santa is the magnet that attracts people to malls and without that attraction, malls will struggle more to generate foot traffic," says Saunders.

Mall operator CBL, which filed for bankruptcy earlier this month, plans to bring Santa to nearly 60 malls at the end of November, about three weeks later than last year. The company decided against a plexiglass barrier because it didn't look right in photos. But Santa will be socially distanced and wear a face mask. He may also put on a plastic shield to protect his face.

"We're doing everything possible so that he stays healthy," says Mary Lynn Morse, CBL's marketing vice president.

Mall owner Brookfield started planning in-person Santa visits at 130 of its shopping centers in April, opting for sleighs and gift boxes where visitors can sit away from Santa. At one of its malls, The SoNo Collection in Norwalk, Connecticut, a round piece of plexiglass will be placed in front of Santa so it looks like he's inside a snow globe.

But the precautions may not be enough to convince some shoppers.

"It just seems like such a bad idea, just being in a mall," says Emma Wallace of Alexandria, Virginia, who decided against taking her toddler to his first visit with Santa this year.

"We're just so sad," she says. "We were really looking forward to that picture that seems like every parent has, where they're sort of terrified or just bemused by the whole Santa thing."

Malls realize many people may stay home. Cherry Hill Programs, which will bring Santa to more than 700 malls, is also offering Zoom calls with him for the first time in its 60-year history. And Brookfield teamed up with virtual Santa company JingleRing, giving people a way to chat with Santa from home.

Ed Taylor, a Santa who typically spends several months in Los Angeles filming TV spots and making mall appearances, will stay at home in southern Oregon this year.

"When you think about the high risk profile for COVID, you're kind of drawing a picture of Santa," Taylor says.

He'll be doing video calls with families and has been holding online classes to get other Santas camera-ready. Meeting kids virtually means getting them to speak up more, since the calls usually run seven minutes — about twice as long as mall visits, where the main objective is to snap a good picture.

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Going online gives Santa a chance to experiment with his attire. Some may ditch the formal red suit for vests and rolled up sleeves, since Santa is presumably calling from the North Pole and running a toy workshop full of busy elves.

"Up at home, we're working," says Taylor. "We have presents to make. We've got reindeer to feed."

But there's some parts of Santa's look that can't change. JingleRing, which has signed up more than 400 Santas, held online training sessions on how to use at-home bleaching kits to transform gray hair and beards into Santa's snow white hue. They were also advised to buy teeth whitening strips.

"Santa can't have smoker's teeth," says Walt Geer, who co-founded JingleRing this year after realizing people may need a new way to meet Santa.

Stephanie Soares is sticking to the old way. She brought her daughter, Gia, to a Bass Pro Sports store last week in Bridgeport, Connecticut, to take a picture with Santa, who wore a clear plastic face shield and sat behind a glare-free acrylic barrier that sometimes made it hard to hear what the kids were saying. A worker sprayed down the barrier after each visit.

"Even though we're in a pandemic, it's important that the kids are still able to be kids and still keep up with the regular traditions," says Soares.

Associated Press video journalist Ted Shaffrey and staff writer Anne D'Innocenzio in New York contributed to this report.

Follow Joseph Pisani on Twitter: @josephpisani

## AP FACT CHECK: Trump's bogus claims about Biden win, vaccine

By HOPE YEN, COLLEEN LONG and LAURAN NEERGAARD Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump is rebelling against Democrat Joe Biden's victory in the presidential election with denial, delay and outright misrepresentation.

Trump raged about widespread cases of fake ballots that aren't so and undertook legal challenges that even state GOP election officials say can't overcome Biden's lead. Over the weekend, he also misrepresented Georgia's process for verifying signatures on absentee ballot envelopes.

Meanwhile, as the coronavirus surged nationwide, Trump said little about public safety measures. Instead he tried to take full credit for drugmaker Pfizer Inc.'s news that its COVID-19 vaccine may be 90% effective and suggested the mission was basically done.

His assertions on both matters are untrue.

A review of the past week's claims:

### VACCINE DISTRIBUTION

TRUMP, on Pfizer's announcement: "As soon as April, the vaccine will be available to the entire general population with the exception of places like New York state where for political reasons the governor decided to say — and I don't think it's good politically, I think it's very bad from a health standpoint — but he wants to take his time with a vaccine. ... We can't be delivering it to a state that won't be giving it to its people immediately." — remarks Friday.

TRUMP: "I LOVE NEW YORK! ... The problem is, @NYGovCuomo said that he will delay using it, and other states WANT IT NOW... We cannot waste time and can only give to those states that will use the Vaccine immediately. Therefore the New York delay." — tweet Saturday.

THE FACTS: That's a misrepresentation. New York's separate review doesn't guarantee a protracted delay.

Trump is referring to a state panel of experts that Gov. Andrew Cuomo, D-N.Y., announced in September to review any coronavirus vaccine authorized by the Food and Drug Administration before it is to be distributed in the state.

That additional review doesn't necessarily mean weeks of delay before New York residents can get a federally approved vaccine. As a practical matter, the FDA will have a public meeting where its independent advisers debate the data. That's an opportunity for any interested group to get an early look.

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Cuomo said Saturday that as soon as the FDA acts, the state review group would, too.

"It's not that these panels are going to do tests; they are just going to review what FDA did, so it's just a review on the FDA process," Cuomo told reporters. "We are ready now to receive the vaccine and then, simultaneous with the FDA approval, our panel will be looking at it. So, there's no delay."

"Send me a vaccine today; I will distribute it this afternoon," he said.

There is some uncertainty around how the state-level reviews will ultimately work. Cuomo explained one purpose of the panel is to "develop confidence in people" to take the vaccine, also telling CNN on Friday the only issue could be if the review group in New York finds a problem. But he notes that: "I don't think the FDA is going to play any games at this point."

A handful of other states, including California, have also said they would conduct separate safety reviews.

California's plan is to review data quickly so there is no delay in distribution, said Dr. Arthur Reingold, the group's chair. He said the state's review group — which has been joined by Nevada, Oregon and Washington — has trust in the federal review process, but that its work is intended to provide additional reassurance to people.

"Any assertion that our citizens will be delayed in receiving a safe and effective COVID vaccine is simply not borne out by the plans we have in place," said Reingold, a professor of epidemiology at the University of California, Berkeley.

## ELECTION GEORGIA

TRUMP: "The Consent Decree signed by the Georgia Secretary of State, with the approval of Governor @BrianKempGA, at the urging of @staceyabrams, makes it impossible to check & match signatures on ballots and envelopes, etc. They knew they were going to cheat. Must expose real signatures!" — tweet Saturday.

THE FACTS: There is nothing in the consent decree that prevents Georgia election clerks from scrutinizing signatures. The legal settlement signed in March addresses accusations about a lack of statewide standards for judging signatures on absentee ballot envelopes.

Georgia Secretary of State Brad Raffensperger, a Republican, said that not only is it entirely possible to match signatures, but that the state requires it.

When a voter requests an absentee ballot on a paper application, he or she must sign it. Election officials compare that signature to the signature in voter registration files before a ballot is sent to the voter, Raffensperger said.

When those ballots are returned, the required signature on the outer envelope is compared to signatures in the voter registration system.

This process was spelled out in detail in the consent decree, a legal settlement that was signed March 6.

A lawsuit by the Democratic Party, which led to the agreement, argued that minorities were disproportionately affected when they had their ballots rejected. Among other things, the settlement sets steps for local election officials to notify a voter — by phone, mail or email — in a timely fashion about problems with a signature.

The changes were made by the state election board.

Following state law, Georgia is pursuing a hand tally of votes in the presidential race. Democrat Joe Biden leads Trump by about 14,000 votes in the state. There are no examples of similar recounts that have overturned leads of that magnitude.

The signature issue resurfaced after lawyer L. Lin Wood Jr. filed a federal lawsuit Friday questioning whether the secretary of state had the authority to require the process of signature verification outlined in the agreement.

Wood is known for representing several high-profile clients including security guard Richard Jewell, who was identified as a suspect of the 1996 Centennial Olympic Park bombing in Atlanta but later cleared.

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TRUMP: "Georgia will be a big presidential win, as it was the night of the Election!" — tweet Nov. 9.

THE FACTS: Georgia wasn't a win for Trump on election night. It still isn't. He's falsely suggesting that any ballot counted after Nov. 3 in Georgia and other states must be illegitimate and illegal. In fact, such counting is explicitly allowed in about 20 states, and the Supreme Court did not stand in the way of it.

Trump refused to concede and said he will press his legal challenges, despite seeing several lawsuits dismissed by courts.

Studies have repeatedly shown that voter fraud is exceptionally rare. Currently Biden leads Trump in Georgia by 14,000 votes.

The state's top election official, Secretary of State Brad Raffensperger, a Republican, has repeatedly assured the public there were no widespread problems.

"Was there illegal voting? I'm sure there was, and my office is investigating all of it," Raffensperger said. "Does it rise to the numbers or margin necessary to change the outcome to where President Trump is given Georgia's electoral votes? That is unlikely."

Raffensperger has rejected the demands of Republican Sens. David Perdue and Kelly Loeffler — who face January runoffs that will decide control of the Senate — that he resign over what they say are "too many failures in Georgia elections this year." He announced an audit of presidential election results that will trigger a full hand tally in the state.

His assurances of a smoothly run election were broadly affirmed Thursday by a coalition of federal and state officials, who described the voting nationwide as the "most secure in U.S. history."

"While we know there are many unfounded claims and opportunities for misinformation about the process of our elections, we can assure you we have the utmost confidence in the security and integrity of our elections, and you should too," said the Homeland Security Department's Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency, which spearheaded federal election protection efforts. "When you have questions, turn to elections officials as trusted voices as they administer elections."

## PENNSYLVANIA

TRUMP: "Pennsylvania ... wouldn't let our Poll Watchers & Observers into counting rooms. Illegal!" — tweet Thursday.

TRUMP: "Pennsylvania prevented us from watching much of the Ballot count. Unthinkable and illegal in this country." — tweet Nov. 9.

THE FACTS: His assertion is false.

Trump is wholly misrepresenting a court case in the state and what happened at voting places. No one tried to ban poll watchers representing each side in the election. Democrats did not try to stop Republican representatives from being able to observe the process.

The main issue in the case was how close observers representing the parties could get to election workers who were processing mail-in ballots in Philadelphia. Trump's representatives sued to allow the observers to get closer than the guidelines had allowed. A court ruled in favor of that request.

The counting in Philadelphia was being livestreamed and Trump's lawyers admitted in court that their campaign had observers in the room — "a nonzero" number of them, as they put it.

It was well-known that huge numbers of mailed-in ballots as well as in-person ballots were to be counted after Election Day and that many would be from Democratic-leaning areas. Poll watchers have no role in counting votes.

## CALIFORNIA

TRUMP, tweeting a video widely shared on social media pointing to alleged voter fraud in California: "You are looking at BALLOTS! Is this what our Country has come to?" — tweet Wednesday.

THE FACTS: Trump's suggestion of voting fraud or impropriety is a gross distortion. The video, which shows two men collecting ballots from collection boxes the day after the election, does not show evidence of anything nefarious.

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Mike Sanchez, speaking for the Los Angeles County Registrar-Recorder County Clerk's office, which oversees elections for the county, told The Associated Press that the two men were staff from his office carrying out a scheduled pickup.

"All vote by mail ballot drop boxes were closed and locked at 8 p.m. on Election Day," Sanchez said. "Ballots from all boxes throughout the county were picked up the following day." He said: "The ballots are valid ballots and will be processed and counted."

The video was shared on various social media sites, including on TikTok with the caption, "The cheating is unreal!!!" A post on Instagram with over 500,000 views shared the video with the caption, "The lies, the cheating, the hypocrisy must be exposed."

Under California law, voters can submit vote-by-mail ballots as late as Election Day. Election officials must count those ballots as long as they have a Nov. 3 postmark and arrive within 17 days of the election.

TRUMP: "WATCH FOR MASSIVE BALLOT COUNTING ABUSE." — tweet Tuesday.

TRUMP: "WE WILL WIN!" — tweet Tuesday.

THE FACTS: He's making unsubstantiated claims. There is no evidence of widespread fraud in the 2020 election. In fact, election officials from both political parties have stated publicly that the election went well and international observers confirmed there were no serious irregularities.

The Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency, which led federal election protection efforts, said Thursday it had no evidence that any voting system had deleted or lost votes, had changed votes, or was in any way compromised. The officials said all of the states with close results have paper records, which allows for the recounting of each ballot, if necessary, and for "the identification and correction of any mistakes or errors."

"America, we have confidence in the security of your vote, you should, too," tweeted Chris Krebs, the agency's director.

The issues Trump's campaign and its allies have pointed to are typical in every election: problems with signatures, secrecy envelopes and postal marks on mail-in ballots, as well as the potential for a small number of ballots miscast or lost. With Biden leading Trump by wide margins in battleground states, none of those issues would have any impact on the outcome of the election.

Trump's campaign has also launched legal challenges complaining that its poll watchers were unable to scrutinize the voting process. Many of those challenges have been tossed out by judges, some within hours of their filing, and none of the complaints shows any evidence that the outcome of the election was affected.

## MORE ON VACCINE

TRUMP: "As a result of Operation Warp Speed, Pfizer announced on Monday (Nov. 9) that its 'China virus' vaccine was more than 90% effective." — remarks Friday.

TRUMP, quoting his former White House physician: "'Only because of President Trump, we are going to have a Vaccine by the end of the year.' Ronny Jackson, Texas Congressman-Elect." — tweet Tuesday.

VICE PRESIDENT MIKE PENCE: "HUGE NEWS: Thanks to the public-private partnership forged by President @realDonaldTrump, @pfizer announced its Coronavirus Vaccine trial is EFFECTIVE, preventing infection in 90% of its volunteers." — tweet Nov. 9.

THE FACTS: Pfizer notably did not accept government money to develop, test or expand manufacturing capacity under Trump's Operation Warp Speed initiative to quickly find a vaccine and treatments for the disease sweeping the country.

In fact, Pfizer partnered with the vaccine's original developer, Germany's BioNTech, in March and the following month announced the first human study in Germany. The White House announced Operation Warp Speed in May.

Pfizer opted not to join Operation Warp Speed initially but is following the same general requirements for the vaccine's development as competitors who received government research money. The company says



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it has risked \$2 billion of its own money on vaccine development and won't get anything from Washington unless the effort is successful.

"Pfizer's COVID-19 vaccine development and manufacturing costs have been entirely self-funded," Pfizer spokeswoman Jerica Pitts said this week. "We decided to self-fund our efforts so we could move as fast as possible."

Pfizer did sign an agreement with the U.S. government in July worth \$1.95 billion — if the vaccine pans out and is cleared by the FDA — to supply 100 million doses. That guarantees Pfizer a U.S. market, an important incentive.

The supply side of Operation Warp Speed also allows Pfizer logistical help, although the company will directly ship its own vaccine, while the government will control shipping of other COVID-19 vaccines.

**TRUMP:** "President Trump told us for some time we would be getting a Vaccine by the end of the year and people laughed at him, and here we are with Pfizer getting FDA approval by the end of this month. He was right.' @MariaBartiro." — tweet Tuesday.

**THE FACTS:** Trump's suggestion — quoting Fox Business Network anchor Maria Bartiro — that he stood alone in saying a COVID-19 vaccine was possible by year's end is incorrect. Top health experts said they considered that possible, though far from certain, and were more skeptical of Trump's claim that a coronavirus vaccine would become available before the Nov. 3 election. The vaccine isn't expected to become widely available to the public before 2021.

Dr. Anthony Fauci, the government's top infectious diseases expert, had previously said that he was "cautiously optimistic" that a vaccine will be ready by late 2020 or early 2021. On Nov. 9, he called Pfizer's news "extraordinary" but reiterated that it did not mean the U.S. had its immediate cure-all for the coronavirus.

The first step for Pfizer would be to apply for "emergency use authorization" by the FDA, probably later this month, which would allow for limited distribution before it seeks full FDA approval for wider use. Neither step is guaranteed to happen.

"There's still some questions about, you know, the durability of the effect about whether how effective it is in the elderly versus younger people," Fauci told CNN. "We know this is light at the end of the tunnel, but that doesn't mean that we're going to give up the important public health measures that we continually still have to do every single day."

Pfizer's interim analysis, from an independent data monitoring board, looked at 94 infections recorded so far in a study that has enrolled nearly 44,000 people in the U.S. and five other countries.

Some participants got the vaccine, while others got dummy shots. Pfizer says only the data and safety monitoring board knows the breakdowns, not Pfizer researchers or executives. For the vaccine to be 90% effective, nearly all the infections must have occurred in placebo recipients. The study is continuing, and Pfizer cautioned that the protection rate might change as more COVID-19 cases are added to the calculations.

During the presidential campaign, Trump frequently suggested a vaccine might arrive before the Nov. 3 election.

"What I said is by the end of the year, but I think it could even be sooner than that," Trump said in September about a vaccine. "It could be during the month of October, actually could be before November."

**TRUMP:** "As I have long said, @Pfizer and the others would only announce a Vaccine after the Election, because they didn't have the courage to do it before. Likewise, the @US\_FDA should have announced it earlier, not for political purposes, but for saving lives!" — tweet Nov. 9.

**TRUMP:** "The @US\_FDA and the Democrats didn't want to have me get a Vaccine WIN, prior to the election, so instead it came out five days later — As I've said all along!" — tweet Nov. 9.

**THE FACTS:** His claim that Pfizer and the FDA withheld vaccine information until after the election is false. The company itself learned of the interim results a week ago, and the FDA was not involved in Pfizer's decision to announce its early results.

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Every vaccine study such as the one done on Pfizer's is overseen by an independent data and safety monitoring board.

These boards include scientists and statisticians who have no ties to the vaccine makers.

Before a study is complete, only the board has the power to unlock the code of who got a real vaccine and who got a placebo, and to recommend if the shots are working well enough to stop testing early.

Those boards take sneak peeks at predetermined times agreed to by the manufacturer and the FDA. It provided the first interim analysis for Pfizer on Nov. 8.

John Burkhardt, senior vice president of drug safety research and development at Pfizer, said on Nov. 9 that the timing of the company's vaccine announcement was not related in any way to the presidential election and was made as soon as the efficacy data was ready.

Pfizer and the maker of the other leading U.S. vaccine candidate, Moderna Inc., have been cautioning for weeks that the earliest they could seek regulatory approval for wider use of their shots would be late November.

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Associated Press writers Candice Choi, Michelle R. Smith, Jennifer Peltz, Linda A. Johnson, Calvin Woodward, Jude Joffe-Block, Marcos Martinez Chacon and Jeff Martin.

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

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## Peru now has no president as crisis takes chaotic turn

By FRANKLIN BRICEÑO and CHRISTINE ARMARIO Associated Press

LIMA, Peru (AP) — Who is the president of Peru?

That answer to that question early Monday was no one.

The Latin American nation's political turmoil took a chaotic turn Sunday when interim leader Manuel Merino quit and Congress couldn't decide on his replacement. That left Peru rudderless and in crisis less than a week after legislators ignited a storm of protest by removing President Martín Vizcarra, an anti-corruption crusader highly popular among Peruvians.

After several hours of closed-door negotiations, congressional leaders emerged in the early hours of Monday to announce that their session was recessing without any decision and would reconvene later in the day.

There are two potential exits to the ordeal: Congress could put forward a new candidate to approve with a simple majority vote or the country's highest court could step in. But with neither route guaranteed to bring a solution, some Peruvians called for new protests and the country verged on disorder.

"I think this is the most serious democratic and human rights crisis we have seen since Fujimori was in power," said analyst Alonso Gurmendi Dunkelberg, referring to the turbulent rule of strongman Alberto Fujimori from 1990 to 2000.

Peru has much at stake. The country is in the throes of one of the world's most lethal coronavirus outbreaks and political analysts say the constitutional crisis has cast the country's democracy into jeopardy.

Congress sparked the calamity a week ago when lawmakers overwhelmingly voted to oust Vizcarra. Using a 19th century-era clause, legislators accused him of "permanent moral incapacity," saying he took over \$630,000 in bribes in exchange for two construction contracts while governor of a small province years ago.

Prosecutors are investigating the accusations, but Vizcarra has not been charged. He vehemently denies any wrongdoing.

The move outraged many in Peru, who denounced it as an illegal power grab by a Congress full of amateur politicians looking out for their own interests. Half of the lawmakers are under investigation for potential crimes, including money laundering and homicide. Vizcarra wanted to do away with their parliamentary

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immunity — a move popular with Peruvians but not with the legislature.

The little-known president of Congress, Manuel Merino, a rice farmer, was sworn into office Tuesday as hundreds of Peruvians protested nearby. He promised to keep in place a scheduled presidential election in April. But his Cabinet appointments irked many, and a heavy-handed response by police fueled anger.

A network of human rights groups reported that 112 people were hurt in Saturday's protests by wounds from projectiles, batons and inhaling tear gas. Two died — Jack Pintado, 22, who was shot 11 times, including in the head, and Jordan Sotelo, 24, who was hit four times in the chest near his heart.

"Two young people were absurdly, stupidly, unjustly sacrificed by the police," Peruvian writer and Nobel laureate Mario Vargas Llosa said in a recorded video shared on Twitter. "This repression — which is against all of Peru — needs to stop."

The protests rocking Peru have been unlike any seen in recent years, fueled largely by young people typically apathetic to the country's notoriously erratic politics. They come a year after a wave of anti-government demonstrations around Latin America demanding better conditions for the poor and working class.

"We want the voice of the people to be heard," protester Fernando Ramirez said as he banged a spoon against a pot at a protest.

Merino resigned Sunday after most of his Cabinet resigned.

The protests sent a resounding message to political elites that Peruvians will serve as a check on Congress if they try to illegitimately grab power, said Steven Levitsky, a Harvard University political scientist who has extensively studied Peru.

"This is a very good day for Peruvian democracy," Levitsky said.

But hours after jubilant Peruvians filled the streets, cheering Merino's departure, the country's crisis was far from a resolution.

Congress has relatively few options for a new president that will appease protesters. An overwhelming majority — 105 of the 130 lawmakers — voted in favor of removing Vizcarra. They were widely expected to choose the latest president from among those who voted against Vizcarra's ouster.

"You look for someone who is clean — not corrupt, not tainted, not behaving in some sort of ridiculous self-interested way — you don't have a lot of options," Levitsky said.

After Merino quit, congressional leaders initially nominated Rocio Silva, a lawyer and poet from the leftist Broad Front party who would have become the country's first female president. But just 42 legislators of 119 casting votes supported her nomination.

The timing of the crisis could not be worse: Peru has the world's highest per-capita COVID-19 mortality rate and has seen one of Latin America's worst economic contractions. The International Monetary Fund projects a 14% decline in GDP this year.

In Lima's historic district — the focal point of protests — demonstrators laid flowers and wrote messages lamenting the two young men killed. Many put the blame squarely on those who voted for Vizcarra's removal.

"The 105 congressmen are the only ones guilty in their deaths," protester Rosa Rodriguez shouted through her face mask.

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Associated Press writer Franklin Briceño reported this story in Lima and AP writer Christine Armario reported from Bogota, Colombia.

## **Pandemic pushes steep drop in foreign college students**

By JOHN SEEWER and COLLIN BINKLEY Associated Press

TOLEDO, Ohio (AP) — Just two semesters short of earning a cybersecurity master's degree in the U.S., Sai Naini is stuck in India, unsure what his future holds.

He rushed home this summer after learning that his father was in failing health after being diagnosed with COVID-19, making it to his hospital bedside only four hours before he died.

"He was emotional; he was in tears," Naini said. "I was fortunate to see him. I think he was waiting to see someone who would take care of my mother, and then he left."

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Two months later, when the 28-year-old was ready to return to the University of Toledo, his visa application was denied even though he had letters from his college advisers explaining why he had gone home and that he already was enrolled in classes. The only explanation he got, he said, was that he was turned down "based on guidelines they received from the White House."

"Everything changed," he said. "The goals I had changed. The milestones I had changed."

Complications and new policies brought on by the coronavirus pandemic have stopped thousands of international students from attending universities in the U.S. this fall, raising concerns that the steep decline could foretell a long-lasting shift for universities that have come to rely on attracting international students. At risk are millions of dollars in tuition for the universities and some of the world's brightest minds for U.S. employers.

While the number of new international enrollees has been on the decline during the past few years because of new rules limiting student visas and competition from other countries, the pandemic has been a crushing blow.

This fall, new international students enrolled at U.S. universities online or in person fell by 43%, according to a survey of more than 700 schools released Monday. That's the largest decrease recorded by the Institute of International Education, which has been publishing data on international enrollment since 1954.

Including both new and returning students, total international enrollment fell by 16%. The survey found that among those who did enroll at U.S. colleges, about one in five were studying online from abroad.

Some of the nation's largest universities saw big losses. The number of undergraduate and graduate international students at Michigan State University was down 20% and the University of Texas fell by 17%, while Arizona State University and Ohio State University each reported declines of 15%.

Administrators agree the pandemic caused a wide variety of hurdles for students, ranging from financial strains brought on by job losses to worries over a Trump administration proposal that sought to force international students to leave if their schools held online-only classes.

With American consulates closed in many countries, quite a few first-time students were unable to get visas, while others were stranded because of travel restrictions and flight cancellations.

Universities were flooded with questions from worried parents who wanted to know where their children would live if schools closed their dorms and what would happen if they got sick. Some decided to stay home because of those unknowns.

"At a human level, we can all relate to that," said Barbara Kappler, assistant dean of International Student & Scholar Services at the University of Minnesota, which saw a 15% decline.

It all has forced to students make tough choices. One University of Toledo student decided not to go home even though two relatives had died of COVID-19, said Tracey Hidalgo, the school's assistant director for international student services.

"They just bawl their eyes out and tell me 'no' because they're worried they're not going to be able to come back," she said.

Compounding the problems of the pandemic is a growing belief that the U.S. is no longer as welcoming for international scholars because of President Donald Trump's repeated moves to curb immigration.

"The confluence of the pandemic and these policies has created an incredibly tough situation," said Leonardo Villalon, dean of the University of Florida's International Center. "International higher education is under the greatest stress it has been in decades."

The sudden drop in enrollment will be felt in budgets at colleges because foreign students typically pay higher tuition rates. The University of Illinois alone estimates it will lose about \$26 million this semester. But the impact goes beyond that.

High-tech companies depend on foreign-born people who come to the U.S. for training, Villalon said.

"Where do we want the best and brightest young people in the world to go?" he said. "If you're running a research lab studying the coronavirus, you want the very best in there."

There's hope among some college administrators that President-elect Joe Biden will carry through with promises to reverse some of Trump's immigration orders. Biden also has proposed giving foreign graduates of U.S. doctoral programs a pathway to citizenship.

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But U.S. universities are facing increased competition from countries, including Canada and Australia, that are trying to woo more foreign students. And China is heavily investing in its colleges.

Ousmane Barry, a refugee from Guinea who moved to Italy when he was 16, thought he'd be starting classes this fall on an academic scholarship at Whitman College in Walla Walla, Washington.

But his visa application was turned down because he could not show enough ties to his home country. He's still holding out hope that he'll get another chance.

Going to the U.S. to study is still the best option, he said, because of all the educational opportunities it offers.

"I'm not trying to work or spend my life there," said Barry, 21. "All I'm looking for is a better education and then to go back to my country."

Binkley reported from Boston.

## The Latest: India registers over 30,000 new virus cases

By The Associated Press undefined

NEW DELHI — India has registered 30,548 new confirmed coronavirus cases in the past 24 hours, the lowest in the last four months but amid growing concerns of the latest surge in the capital New Delhi.

The Health Ministry on Monday raised India's tally to more than 8.84 million. It said the country was showing a trend of declining average daily cases over the last two months. The ministry also reported 435 deaths in the same period, driving total fatalities to 130,070.

India's daily cases have seen a steady decline since the middle of September, but its capital New Delhi is battling the latest surge, recording more new cases than any other Indian state. Experts have attributed the surge to the festive season, dangerous pollution levels and the dip in temperatures.

Concerns remain over the ability of New Delhi's health infrastructure to handle the severe caseload.

To tackle the rise in infections, India's home ministry said it will airlift doctors from other regions to the capital, double the current testing numbers and provide 300 additional intensive care unit beds to fight the spread of the virus.

On Sunday, India's health minister Harsh Vardhan said the capital's surge is "likely to worsen over next few weeks."

A country of nearly 1.4 billion people, India is the world's second most coronavirus affected country after the United States.

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

- Joe Biden's science advisors to meet soon with vaccine makers
- North Dakota nurses are worried about working with infected but asymptomatic colleagues
- Second round of lockdowns brings misery for Europe's Michelin-rated chefs
- Protesters in French cities called for the lifting of a virus ban on religious services

Follow AP's coverage at <https://apnews.com/hub/coronavirus-pandemic> and <https://apnews.com/UnderstandingtheOutbreak>

### HERE'S WHAT ELSE IS HAPPENING:

WELLINGTON, New Zealand: From Thursday, New Zealanders will be legally required to wear masks on public transport in Auckland and on planes nationwide.

Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern and Virus Response Minister Chris Hipkins announced the new rules on Monday after meeting with senior lawmakers.

The country has been largely successful in eliminating the virus but has experienced several small outbreaks in Auckland, the latest one after a military worker at a hotel where travelers returning from abroad are being quarantined got infected.

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Ardern said the new rules were precautionary. "New Zealand remains in a unique position globally. We have economic and personal freedoms that few other countries enjoy," Ardern said. "But these freedoms are under increased threat as COVID surges in the world around us." The rules don't apply to children under age 12 or passengers taking taxis or Ubers, although their drivers will be required to wear masks.

South Korea's daily coronavirus tally has stayed above 200 for a third consecutive day, as authorities consider raising the country's social distancing rules.

The 223 additional cases recorded Monday by the Korea Disease Control and Prevention Agency took the country's total to 28,769 with 494 deaths. The agency says 193 of them are locally transmitted cases while the rest was associated with international arrivals.

South Korea has seen a steady increase in various cluster infections as it eased its social distancing guidelines last month amid then a viral slowdown.

Health Minister Park Neung-hoo calls the latest uptick in new infections "grave" and says authorities are "at the crossroads of adjusting the physical distancing rules."

BALTIMORE — More than 11 million cases of the coronavirus have now been reported in the United States, with the most recent million coming in less than a week.

Johns Hopkins University's coronavirus tracker reached 11 million on Sunday. It had topped 10 million cases on Nov. 9.

It took 300 days for the U.S. to hit the 11 million mark since the first case was diagnosed in Washington state on Jan. 20.

COVID-19 is spreading more rapidly across the U.S. than it has at any time since the pandemic started. Deaths are also on the rise, though not at the record high numbers reached in the spring. The seven-day rolling average for daily new deaths was more than 1,080 as of Saturday, more than 30% higher than it was two weeks earlier.

COVID-19 has now killed more than 246,000 people in the U.S., according to Johns Hopkins.

Worldwide, more than 54 million coronavirus cases have been reported with more than 1.3 million deaths. The U.S. has about 4% of the world's population, but about a fifth of all reported cases.

OLYMPIA, Wash. — Washington Gov. Jay Inslee has announced new restrictions on businesses and social gatherings for the next four weeks as part of the state's efforts to slow the spread of the coronavirus.

Starting at 12:01 a.m. Tuesday, a host of businesses must close their indoor services, including fitness facilities and gyms, bowling centers, and movie theaters.

Retail stores, including grocery stores, must limit indoor capacity to 25%. Indoor social gatherings with people from more than one household are also prohibited unless attendees have either quarantined for 14 days before the gathering or tested negative for COVID-19 and have quarantined for seven days.

By Wednesday, restaurants and bars will be limited to outdoor dining and to-go service.

CHARLESTON, W.Va. — West Virginia has set another weekly record for the number of confirmed coronavirus cases, even with one day left to count.

Health statistics released Sunday show there were 3,718 positive cases reported statewide from Nov. 9 through Saturday. That six-day mark broke the record of 2,696 cases set for the seven days in the previous week.

The state set three daily marks for confirmed cases in the past week, including a record 821 cases on Friday. Daily records have been set seven times in the past three weeks. There had been no daily records set in the six weeks prior to that, an indication of the recent surge in the virus.

Gov. Jim Justice on Friday announced that face coverings will be required at all times in businesses and other indoor spaces. He first issued an indoor mask order in July that did not require masks if social distancing was possible. The new mandate requires masks at all times except when eating or drinking.

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LONDON — One of the scientists behind the experimental coronavirus vaccine developed by BioNTech and Pfizer says he's confident that it could halve the transmission of the virus, resulting in a "dramatic" curb of the virus' spread.

The chief executive of Germany's BioNTech said Sunday that it is "absolutely essential" to have a high vaccination rate before next autumn to ensure a return to normal life next winter. He says if everything continues to go well, deliveries of the vaccine will start late this year or early next year.

He says he's confident that transmission between people will be reduced by perhaps 50% through a highly effective vaccine.

Pfizer and BioNTech said last week that interim results showed the vaccine was 90% effective.

WASHINGTON — Joe Biden's scientific advisers will meet with vaccine makers in coming days as the presidential transition remains stalled because of President Donald Trump's refusal to acknowledge that he lost the election.

Dr. Anthony Fauci, the government's top infectious disease expert, says the delayed handoff is especially problematic during a public health crisis.

Fauci, who heads the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, has been through multiple presidential transitions during 36 years of government service. He likens the process to runners passing on the baton in a relay race, saying, "You don't want to stop and then give it to somebody. You want to just essentially keep going."

The president-elect's outreach to the vaccine manufacturers comes as the coronavirus pandemic in the U.S. has entered perhaps its most dangerous phase. The seven-day rolling average for new daily cases stood at 145,400 on Saturday, according to data from Johns Hopkins University. That means the U.S. is adding about 1 million new cases a week, and deaths averaged 820 a day as of Saturday, a 33% increase in just two weeks.

Biden's chief of staff, Ron Klain, says the consultations with pharmaceutical companies will begin this week.

BISMARCK, N.D. — With coronavirus cases soaring in North Dakota, Gov. Doug Burgum moved to allow the state's beleaguered hospitals to use infected but asymptomatic doctors and nurse to treat COVID-19 patients.

Although hospitals pushed for the right, many nurses say it will make their lives even harder than they've been during the pandemic.

Adam Johnston, an emergency room nurse in Fargo, says it will be impossible to not wonder if other nurses in the break room or cafeteria might be infected.

And nurses also questioned why the Republican governor would make such a move when for months he resisted more common steps such as statewide orders requiring masks or limiting the size of gatherings.

Experts say other states are weighing moves similar to Burgum's.

PARIS — With banners reading "Let us Pray" and "We Want Mass," Catholic protesters held scattered demonstrations around France on Sunday to demand that authorities relax virus lockdown measures to allow religious services.

In the western city of Nantes, hundreds gathered in front of a statue of the Virgin Mary, some kneeling on the rain-soaked pavement, according to local broadcaster France Bleu. Similar gatherings were reported or planned in the eastern city of Strasbourg, in Bordeaux in the southwest, and outside the Saint-Louis Cathedral in Versailles.

With more confirmed virus cases than any other European country, predominantly Catholic France banned Mass and other religious services for the month of November as part of nationwide partial lockdown measures aimed at reining in infections and relieving pressure on hospitals. Churches and other religious sites remain open for individual visitors to come and pray.

France's interior minister is scheduled to meet with religious leaders Monday to discuss when and how services could again be permitted, notably amid pressure to allow Christmas ceremonies.

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ATHENS, Greece — Greek health authorities on Sunday 71 deaths from COVID-19, which is a single-day record for the country.

There were also 1,698 new confirmed cases, which was significantly lower than in recent days.

Greece has had 74,205 confirmed cases and 1,106 deaths from COVID-19 since the start of the pandemic. A record 392 patients are on ventilators and authorities are concerned over the rapid filling of intensive care units.

The country is now in its second lockdown and a nighttime curfew is being enforced.

ROME — Italy's day-to-day new caseload of confirmed coronavirus infections decreased by a few thousand on Sunday, but roughly 32,000 fewer swab tests to detect the virus were conducted over the previous 24 hours.

With almost 34,000 new cases, Italy's total of confirmed infections during the pandemic rose to 1,178,529, according to Health Ministry figures. Weekends frequently see smaller numbers of tests performed.

With 546 deaths since the previous day, the nation's COVID-19 death toll rose to 45,229.

Two more regions, which include the cities of Naples and Florence, on Sunday joined several other "red zones" in Italy, beginning at least 15 days of restrictions, including a ban on leaving one's town and the shuttering of non-essential shops.

NICOSIA, Cyprus — A Cyprus court has ordered nine people detained for three days on suspicion of smashing store fronts and hurling stones and Molotov cocktails at police following a rally against a regional lockdown in the coastal town of Limassol.

Police said Sunday that they have also arrested the 31 year-old organizer of the rally on suspicion of inciting others to commit a criminal offense.

The violence took place after around 1,000 people gathered late Saturday in Limassol to protest a strict, 19-day lockdown that bans all non-essential movement of people, shut bars and restaurants and imposes a 8 p.m.-5 a.m. curfew.

Police said the protest was peaceful, but some people began vandalizing nearby stores and attacking police.

Some 23 people were arrested, of which nine — aged 16 to 27 — were detained. They face rioting, vandalism and conspiracy charges. Three others were charged with attacking and obstructing police and were released. Police said all identified demonstrators who violated mask-wearing and social distancing rules will be fined 300 euros (\$355).

Health officials say infections in the country's two southwestern districts jumped from 28% to 70% of the national average in the last six weeks.

COLOMBO, Sri Lanka — Authorities in Sri Lanka say about 400 inmates from the country's highly-congested prisons have tested positive for COVID-19 as infected cases are surging in the capital and its suburbs.

Twelve of the 400 are prison officers while the rest are inmates. The cases are detected from five prisons in different parts of the country.

Sri Lankan prisons are highly congested with more than 26,000 inmates crowded in facilities designed to hold about 10,000.

Sri Lanka has seen a fresh outbreak of the disease since last month when two clusters — one centered on a garment factory and other on the fish market — emerged in Colombo and its suburbs. Confirmed cases from just those clusters have grown by Sunday to 13,079 people.

Sri Lanka's total number of positive cases reached 16,582 on Sunday with 53 fatalities.

ANTWERP, Belgium — Many a three-star Michelin meal has been put into a takeout box and sent out on Deliveroo scooters, as renowned chefs in Belgium and elsewhere try to scrape through a second pandemic lockdown that is likely to threaten even the lucrative Christmas season.



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Sergio Herman, who has run three-star, two-star and many other establishments that have wowed the Michelin powers and the most refined palates around the world, doesn't really see any positives to come out of working amid the pandemic.

"Sometimes you feel that whatever you built up over the years is slipping like sand through your fingers. It gives you this kind of fear," he told The Associated Press.

Across much of Europe, exclusive restaurants have lost the precious appeal of the luxury dining experience — from eating several inventive courses, to basking in sommelier tastings, to savoring the after-dinner sweet and having that little extra chat with the chef.

"All that cannot just be replaced by a box and a plastic tray. That is just impossible," Herman said amid the whirl of his new restaurant, Le Pristine, in the Belgian port of Antwerp.

**NEW DELHI** — India has reported 41,100 new cases of coronavirus in the past 24 hours, taking the country's overall tally since the pandemic began to 8.79 million.

The Health Ministry on Sunday also reported 447 deaths in the same period, driving total fatalities to 129,635.

India is second in the world in total reported cases behind the U.S., but daily infections have been on the decline since the middle of September. There has been, however, a resurgence of infections in New Delhi, which has seen a renewed surge in recent weeks, recording more new cases than any other Indian state.

On Sunday, New Delhi registered 7,340 new coronavirus cases, including 96 deaths.

**PARIS** — The number of coronavirus patients hospitalized in France dropped this weekend for this first time since September, after two weeks of new nationwide lockdown measures aimed at slowing surging infections and easing hospital strains.

The number of COVID-19 patients in intensive care also fell for the first time in six weeks, according to figures released Saturday night, though virus patients still occupy 96% of France's standard ICU beds.

The number of weekly infections per 100,000 people in France has now been falling for 14 straight days, and some doctors say they're starting to see signs of relief in over-stretched ICUs.

But it remains too early to say whether the one-day drop in hospital numbers means France has hit the peak in this second surge of the pandemic.

France has reported more virus infections than any European country and has had 44,246 virus-related deaths. The government imposed a nationwide partial lockdown starting Oct. 30 as the second surge hit and could start easing the measures Dec. 1 if the number of virus patients in hospitals shows consistent decline.

**SEATTLE** — Washington Gov. Jay Inslee has scheduled a news conference for Sunday morning as COVID-19 case numbers soar throughout the Pacific Northwest where he will reportedly detail new restrictions.

Inslee's office said he would discuss actions to combat the crisis but offered no details. The Seattle Times reports that among Inslee's announcements will be a ban on indoor service at restaurants and bars and significantly reduced capacity at grocery stores and retail shops.

The newspaper cited industry officials briefed by Inslee's staff. The Democratic governor will also prohibit all indoor social gatherings. And Inslee will reportedly limit grocery stores and retailers to 25% occupancy.

## Peru's interim president resigns as chaos embroils nation

By FRANKLIN BRICEÑO and CHRISTINE ARMARIO Associated Press

**LIMA, Peru (AP)** — Peru's interim president resigned Sunday as the nation plunged into its worst constitutional crisis in two decades following massive protests unleashed when Congress ousted the nation's popular leader.

In a short televised address, Manuel Merino said Congress acted within the law when he was sworn into office as chief of state Tuesday, despite protesters' allegations that legislators had staged a parliamentary

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coup.

"I, like everyone, want what's best for our country," he said.

The politician agreed to step down after a night of unrest in which two young protesters were killed and half his Cabinet resigned. Peruvians cheered the decision, waving their nation's red and white flag on the streets of Lima and chanting "We did it!" But there is still no clear playbook for what comes next.

Congress called an emergency session for Sunday evening to select a new president, but was still debating the question late into the night. Meanwhile, ex-President Martín Vizcarra – whose ouster sparked the upheaval – called on the country's highest court to step in.

"It can't be that the institution that got us into this political crisis, that has for five days paralyzed Peru, with deaths, is going to give us a solution, choosing the person who they best see fit," Vizcarra said.

Peru has much at stake: The country is in the throes of one of the world's most lethal coronavirus outbreaks and political analysts say the constitutional crisis has cast the country's democracy into jeopardy.

"I think this is the most serious democratic and human rights crisis we have seen since Fujimori," said analyst Alonso Gurmendi Dunkelberg, referring to the turbulent rule of strongman Alberto Fujimori from 1990 to 2000.

Congress kicked Vizcarra out using a clause dating back to the 19th century that allows the powerful legislature to remove a president for "permanent moral incapacity." Legislators accused Vizcarra of taking more than \$630,000 in bribes in exchange for two construction contracts while governor of a small province years ago.

Prosecutors are investigating the allegations but Vizcarra has not been charged. He has vehemently denied the accusations.

Merino, previously head of Congress, stepped in as interim president, but his six-day rule was marred by constant protests. The little-known politician and rice farmer promised to keep in place a scheduled vote for a new president in April. That did little to sway Peruvians who were loath to accept him.

Half of those in Congress are themselves under investigation for alleged crimes including money laundering and homicide. Polls show most wanted Vizcarra to carry out the rest of his presidential term, due to expire in July. As Peruvians took to the streets, police responded with batons, rubber bullets and tear gas.

A network of human rights groups reported that 112 people were hurt in Saturday's protests and the whereabouts of 41 others were unknown. Health authorities said the dead included Jack Pintado, 22, who was shot 11 times, including in the head, and Jordan Sotelo, 24, who was hit four times in the thorax near his heart.

"Two young people were absurdly, stupidly, unjustly sacrificed by the police," Peruvian writer and Nobel laureate Mario Vargas Llosa said in a recorded video shared on Twitter. "This repression – which is against all of Peru – needs to stop."

The protests rocking Peru are unlike any seen in recent years, fueled largely by young people typically apathetic to the country's notoriously erratic politics. Protesters are upset at Congress for staging what they consider an illegal power grab.

In remarks before Saturday's upheaval, Merino denied the protests were against him, telling a local radio station that young people were demonstrating against unemployment and not being able to complete their studies because of the pandemic. For many, that showed just how out of touch Congress is.

"We want the voice of the people to be heard," protester Fernando Ramirez said as he banged a spoon against a pot at a protest.

The protests sent a resounding message to political elites that Peruvians will serve as a check on Congress if they try to illegitimately grab power, said Steven Levitsky, a Harvard University political scientist who has extensively studied Peru.

"This is a very good day for Peruvian democracy," he said.

According to the National Association of Journalists, there were 35 attacks against members of the media between Monday and Thursday, almost all by police officers. Rights groups have also documented excessive force against protesters, the use of tear gas near homes and hospitals and the detention of demonstrators.

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"We are documenting cases of police brutality in downtown Lima," José Miguel Vivanco, Americas director of Human Rights Watch, wrote on Twitter Saturday. "Everything indicates repression against peaceful protesters is intensifying."

If Congress proceeds with selecting a new leader, they may have relatively few options that would appease demonstrators. An overwhelming majority – 105 of 130 – voted in favor of removing Vizcarra. They are widely expected to choose among those who were against the ex-president's surprise rushed removal.

"You look for someone who is clean — not corrupt, not tainted, not behaving in some sort of ridiculous self interest way — you don't have a lot of options," Levitsky said.

There is also still a possibility that Congress could find a way to usher in Vizcarra's return.

The timing of the crisis could not be worse: Peru has the world's highest per-capita COVID-19 mortality rate and has seen one of Latin America's worst economic contractions. The International Monetary Fund projects a 14% decline in GDP this year.

In stepping down, Merino said he'd fulfilled his responsibility with "humility and honor" and that it was a challenge he "accepted and did not seek." He accused unnamed actors of trying to "confuse the country" into thinking Congress wanted to kick out Vizcarra in order to delay the upcoming presidential vote.

Merino's resignation is likely to quell protests, at least temporarily, but much still hangs in the balance with the future of the presidency uncertain, said Cynthia McClintock, a political science professor at George Washington University.

"The longer he was in office, the more reactionary and old-school his administration appeared likely to be," she said. "A lot will depend, though, on the successor."

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Associated Press writer Franklin Briceño reported this story in Lima and AP writer Christine Armario reported from Bogota, Colombia.

## 2 states announce new virus restrictions as US cases hit 11M

Michigan and Washington on Sunday joined several other states in announcing renewed efforts to combat the coronavirus as more than 11 million cases of COVID-19 have now been reported in the United States — with the most recent million coming in less than a week — and as many Americans prepare to observe a Thanksgiving holiday marked by the pandemic.

Michigan Gov. Gretchen Whitmer's administration ordered high schools and colleges to stop in-person classes, closed restaurants to indoor dining and suspended organized sports — including the football playoffs — in an attempt to curb the state's spiking case numbers. The order also restricts indoor and outdoor residential gatherings, closes some entertainment facilities and bans gyms from hosting group exercise classes.

The new rules, set to last three weeks, are extensive but not as sweeping the Democratic governor's stay-at-home order this past spring, when she faced criticism from a Republican-led Legislature that refused to extend the state's coronavirus emergency declaration and authorized a lawsuit challenging Whitmer's authority to combat the pandemic. She faced pushback from those who opposed the decision to toughen rather than relax what already was one of the nation's strictest stay-home orders.

"The situation has never been more dire," Whitmer, who authorities say also was the target of a kidnapping plot spurred on by anger over her earlier virus measures, said at a Sunday evening news conference. "We are at the precipice and we need to take some action."

The directives from Michigan come on the same day that Washington Gov. Jay Inslee announced the state would enforce new restrictions on businesses and social gatherings for the next month as it, too, continued to combat a rising number of cases.

Starting Tuesday, gyms and some entertainment centers in Washington will be required to close their indoor services. Retail stores, including grocery stores, will be ordered to limit indoor capacity and multiple-household, indoor social gatherings will be prohibited unless attendees have quarantined for 14 days or tested negative for COVID-19 and quarantined for a week. By Wednesday, restaurants and bars will again

be limited to outdoor dining and to-go service.

The actions also follow grim milestones passed by Texas and California last week as the states each marked more than 1 million confirmed COVID-19 cases since the beginning of the pandemic.

In Texas, sporting events were canceled and at least one city added mobile morgues in anticipation of hospital-overwhelming virus deaths. Meanwhile, in California, the nation's most populous state and the first one to issue a statewide stay-at-home order, officials urged those planning holiday gatherings to take strict precautions, including keeping visits small, outdoors and under two hours long.

And in North Dakota, a previously resistant Gov. Doug Burgum ordered a statewide mask mandate and imposed several business restrictions late Friday in an effort to contain the spread of the coronavirus that has stressed the state's hospital capacity. The Republican heeded the advice of doctors, nurses and other health care professionals to require face coverings. Bars, restaurants and other venues were also ordered to reduce capacity.

Though not nearly as sweeping as those imposed last spring, the restrictions in Michigan and Washington signified returns similar to measures taken in the beginning months of the coronavirus pandemic in the U.S. when both were under strict stay-at-home orders.

In Washington — which was among the first states to report a COVID-19 case and death in early 2020 — all 39 of its counties have been paused in either the second or third phase of a four-stage reopening plan that started in early May after a lockdown that began in March.

The restrictions announced by Inslee, a Democrat, temporarily rolls back all counties and places them under the same guidelines. The advisories say people should avoid non-essential out-of-state travel and quarantine for 14 days after arriving from another state or country.

Health experts and officials across the nation are now cautioning people to forego or revise gatherings and holiday travel plans as Thanksgiving and winter celebrations approach.

As of Sunday, Johns Hopkins University's coronavirus tracker has reached 11 million after topping 10 million cases Nov. 9 — with the most recent million coming in just six days. It took 300 days for the U.S. to hit the 11 million mark since the first case was diagnosed in Washington state Jan. 20.

For most, the coronavirus causes mild or moderate symptoms, such as fever and cough that clear up in two to three weeks, although long-term effects are unknown. But for some, it can cause more severe illness, including pneumonia and death.

## **Trump campaign retreats from key claim in Pennsylvania suit**

By MARC LEVY Associated Press

HARRISBURG, Pa. (AP) — President Donald Trump's campaign on Sunday withdrew a central part of its lawsuit seeking to stop the certification of the election results in Pennsylvania, where Democrat Joe Biden beat Trump to capture the state and help win the White House.

Ahead of a Tuesday hearing in the case, Trump's campaign dropped the allegation that hundreds of thousands of mail-in and absentee ballots — 682,479, to be precise — were illegally processed without its representatives watching.

The campaign's slimmed-down lawsuit, filed in federal court on Sunday, maintains the aim of blocking Pennsylvania from certifying a victory for Biden in the state, and it maintains its claim that Democratic voters were treated more favorably than Republican voters.

The Associated Press on Nov. 7 called the presidential contest for former Vice President Joe Biden, after determining that the remaining ballots left to be counted in Pennsylvania would not allow Trump to catch up. Trump has refused to concede.

The remaining claim in the lawsuit centers on disqualifying ballots cast by voters who were given an opportunity to fix mail-in ballots that were going to be disqualified for a technicality.

The lawsuit charges that "Democratic-heavy counties" violated the law by identifying mail-in ballots before Election Day that had defects — such as lacking an inner "secrecy envelope" or lacking a voter's signature on the outside envelope — so that the voter could fix it and ensure that their vote would count,

called "curing."

Republican-heavy counties "followed the law and did not provide a notice and cure process, disenfranchising many," the lawsuit said.

Cliff Levine, a lawyer representing the Democratic National Committee, which is seeking to intervene, said it isn't clear how many voters were given the chance to fix their ballot.

But, he said, it is minimal and certainly fewer than the margin — almost 70,000 — that separates Biden and Trump.

"The numbers aren't even close to the margin between the two candidates, not even close," Levine said.

In any case, there is no provision in state law preventing counties from helping voters to fix a ballot that contains a technical deficiency. Levine said the lawsuit does not contain any allegation that somebody voted illegally.

"They really should be suing the counties that didn't allow (voters) to make corrections," Levine said. "The goal should be making sure every vote counts."

Pennsylvania's top election official, Secretary of State Kathy Boockvar, a Democrat, responded in court on Sunday, asking the judge to dismiss the case. State courts are the proper jurisdiction for the subject, and the lawsuit contains no "plausible claim for relief on any legal theory," the state's lawyers wrote.

More than 2.6 million mail-in ballots were reported received by counties, and there has been no report by state or county election officials or a prosecutor of fraud or any other problem with the accuracy of the count.

A key theme of Trump and his supporters has been their claim that Philadelphia — a Democratic bastion where Trump lost badly — had not allowed Trump's campaign representatives to watch mail-in and absentee ballots processed and tabulated.

However, Republican lawyers have acknowledged in a separate federal court proceeding that they had certified observers watching mail-in ballots being processed in Philadelphia. Gov. Tom Wolf's administration has said that ballot watchers from all parties had observers throughout the process and that "any insinuation otherwise is a lie."

Follow Marc Levy on Twitter at [www.twitter.com/timelywriter](https://www.twitter.com/timelywriter).

## Poll workers contract virus, but Election Day link unclear

By ANTHONY IZAGUIRRE Associated Press

Despite painstaking efforts to keep election sites safe, some poll workers who came in contact with voters on Election Day have tested positive for the coronavirus, including more than two dozen in Missouri and others in New York, Iowa, Indiana and Virginia.

The infections cannot be tied definitively to polling places. Because COVID-19 is spreading rapidly in the U.S., there is no way to determine yet whether in-person voting on Election Day contributed to the surge, public health experts said.

Still, the infections among poll workers raise concerns because of how many people passed through voting sites, which implemented social-distancing rules, erected protective barriers and stocked sanitizer, masks, gloves and other safety gear. In most places, poll workers were required to wear masks.

The cases emerged while election workers continued counting thousands of ballots. As a hand tally of the presidential race began in Georgia, the state's top election official placed himself under quarantine after his wife tested positive for the coronavirus.

In Cedar Rapids, Iowa, which is in a county considered a national virus hot spot, an election official who worked an early voting site later tested positive.

"I'm actually surprised that we don't have more cases," said Linn County Election Commissioner Joel Miller, who noted that several county workers in his building tested positive in the last week. "It actually seems kind of far-fetched that we didn't have more, but they might not be reporting it to us."

Election workers in Jackson County, Missouri, which includes Kansas City, seem to be the hardest hit so

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far, with about 28 staffers testing positive in the past couple of weeks.

Tammy Brown, head of the Jackson County Election Board, said her staffers urged voters who felt ill to avoid coming inside, though she suspects not everyone listened. The board dealt with nearly 200,000 voters, including more than 60,000 who cast early ballots.

"We, as election officials, all knew we were at risk," Brown said. "I don't think this was shocking to any of us."

With transmission rates high in Missouri, health officials are not ready to link the cases to polling places. They say the workers could have become infected anywhere.

The county offered drive-thru voting for people with COVID-19 or who were quarantining because of contact with someone who was infected. When part-time workers became ill, full-time election board staff worked the drive-thru line.

It's difficult to trace cases back to polling places because the virus manifests in different ways, and some people never get symptoms. Infections also are spiking as people gather with extended family or friends and return to more crowded public settings.

The U.S. on Sunday surpassed 11 million confirmed COVID-19 cases, with the most recent million coming in less than a week, according to Johns Hopkins University. The virus has now killed more than 246,000 people in the United States, and the disease is spreading faster across the country than at any time since the pandemic started.

While that spread increases the likelihood poll workers may have contracted the disease elsewhere, there have been calls for their co-workers to quarantine and voters to be tested as a precaution.

In New York, more than 1,600 people who voted at a site in the Hudson Valley on Election Day have been advised to get tested after a poll worker tested positive. Officials said colleagues who had sustained contact with the worker will be tested, but they described the risk to voters as minimal because the person wore a mask, kept distance and followed other safety measures.

Similarly, officials in Virginia's Carroll County said two poll workers in different precincts have tested positive. A health official said that because both were in their infectious periods on Election Day, testing has been offered to workers and voters.

Virginia officials statewide had masks, face shields, gloves, hand sanitizer and other supplies for polling places, and they trained people in safety practices, said Jessica Bowman, deputy commissioner of the Virginia Department of Elections.

It could be several weeks before the effect of in-person voting nationwide is known. Polling places that used safety measures could have greatly minimized transmission rates, perhaps making them less risky than going to a restaurant with friends, said M. Kumi Smith, an assistant professor with the epidemiology division at the University of Minnesota.

"A super-spreader event is a lot easier to identify when you're still at an early stage of an epidemic or when there's a really discrete event that's really unlike anything else that anyone else is doing," she said. "But given the real range of activities that are going on here, I would probably be a little bit more skeptical of someone who declares that this is definitively a super-spreading event."

No major reports of safety lapses or risky voting conditions have emerged.

States had varying rules for masks. But even in places with mandates, officials balked at requiring face coverings while voting. Instead, they opted for a strong recommendation or offered options such as curbside voting or booths away from others.

In Indiana, a poll worker who later tested positive did not show symptoms, practiced social distancing and "wore a mask at all times" on Election Day, said Bartholomew County Clerk Jay Phelps. As a precaution, seven colleagues are quarantining for two weeks.

He said election officials spent a lot of time and money making polling places as safe as possible. Poll workers wore masks, and machines, tables and doorknobs were constantly sanitized.

"We worked really hard to make sure that every polling location had protocols in place," Phelps said.

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This story has been corrected to show that Jackson County includes Kansas City, not just the Kansas

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City suburbs.

Izaguirre reported from Lindenhurst, New York. Associated Press writers Michelle R. Smith in Providence, Rhode Island; Matthew Barakat in Falls Church, Virginia; Ryan J. Foley in Iowa City, Iowa; Jim Salter in O'Fallon, Missouri; and Casey Smith in Indianapolis contributed to this report.

Associated Press coverage of voting rights receives support in part from Carnegie Corporation of New York. The AP is solely responsible for this content.

## Trump seems to acknowledge Biden win, but he won't concede

By KEVIN FREKING Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump on Sunday appeared to acknowledge for the first time that Joe Biden won the White House, but made clear he would not concede and would keep trying to overturn the election result. Trump's statements came in tweets that included several baseless claims about the Nov. 3 vote, which state and federal officials say was safe and secure.

Trump, without using Biden's name, tweeted that "He won," something Trump had not said before publicly, though he said the Democrat's victory was only "in the eyes" of the media. Biden defeated Trump by winning back a trio of battleground states that switched from the Democratic column in 2016 — Michigan, Wisconsin and Pennsylvania — and topped the 270 electoral vote threshold to clinch the presidency. Biden so far has 78.8 million votes, the most ever by a winning candidate, to Trump's total — more than 73 million.

"If the president's prepared to begin to recognize that reality, that's positive," Biden's incoming chief of staff, Ron Klain told NBC's "Meet the Press." Still, Klain said, "Donald Trump's Twitter feed doesn't make Joe Biden president or not president. The American people did that."

A Republican governor said "it was good actually" to see Trump's tweet that Biden won. "I think that's the start of an acknowledgment. ... We want to make sure that there is a smooth transition," said Arkansas' Asa Hutchinson on NBC.

The president has previously refused to accept the results of the election and, in a later tweet Sunday, he dug in again, saying, "I concede NOTHING! We have a long way to go." Even while seemingly acknowledging Biden's victory, he also argued without evidence that the former vice president only won because the election was "rigged." Trump then made unsubstantiated complaints about access for poll watchers and about vote tabulations and asserted, "WE WILL WIN!" Twitter soon posted warning labels about the tweets.

There has been no widespread fraud in the 2020 election. In fact, election officials from both political parties have stated publicly that the election went well and international observers confirmed there were no serious irregularities.

Trump's campaign has tried to mount legal challenges across the country, but many of the lawsuits have been thrown out and none has included any evidence that the outcome might be reversed.

Former President Barack Obama, in an interview conducted and aired Sunday on CBS' "60 Minutes," said he would remind Trump that, as president, he is a public servant and a temporary occupant of the office.

"And when your time is up then it is your job to put the country first and think beyond your own ego, and your own interests, and your own disappointments," Obama said. "My advice to President Trump is, if you want at this late stage in the game to be remembered as somebody who put country first, it's time for you to do the same thing."

Obama also criticized those Republicans going along with Trump's false claims of widespread voter fraud.

"I'm more troubled by the fact that other Republican officials who clearly know better are going along with this, are humoring him in this fashion. It is one more step in delegitimizing not just the incoming Biden administration, but democracy generally. And that's a dangerous path," he said.

Nearly two weeks after Election Day, Trump has neither called Biden nor made a formal concession, and White House officials have insisted that they are preparing for a second term.

In recent days, Trump appeared to be inching closer to acknowledging the reality of his loss. In com-

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ments Friday in the Rose Garden about a coronavirus vaccine, Trump said his administration would “not be going to a lockdown” to slow the spread of COVID-19, and added that “whatever happens in the future, who knows which administration it will be? I guess time will tell.”

Trump on Sunday renewed his groundless attacks on an election technology firm, Dominion Voting Systems, without evidence of any serious irregularities. Dominion has said it “denies claims about any vote switching or alleged software issues with our voting systems.”

The Cybersecurity & Infrastructure Security Agency, a federal agency that oversees U.S. election security, said in a statement last week that the “November 3rd election was the most secure in American history.” The agency said, “There is no evidence that any voting system deleted or lost votes, changed votes, or was in any way compromised.”

In his latest fundraising email, Trump told supporters that “we are fighting to ensure EVERY SINGLE LEGAL ballot is counted” and that he had “legal teams on the ground in every critical state.”

John Bolton, a former Trump national security adviser, said it was important for party leaders to explain to voters that Trump did lose and that his claims of election fraud are baseless. Bolton left the administration last year. He says he resigned; Trump says he fired Bolton.

“I think as every day goes by, it’s clearer and clearer there isn’t any evidence. But if the Republican voters are only hearing Donald Trump’s misrepresentations, it’s not surprising that they believe it,” Bolton said on ABC’s “This Week.” “It’s critical for other Republican leaders to stand up and explain what actually happened. Donald Trump lost what by any evidence we have so far was a free and fair election.”

Having none of that was Rudy Giuliani, the president’s personal attorney who is helping lead Trump’s national legal front on the election challenge. In a television appearance that Trump previewed on Twitter after his morning tweets, Giuliani denied Trump was conceding — “No, no, no, far from it.”

“I guess,” Giuliani told Fox News Channel’s “Sunday Morning Futures,” “you would call it sarcastic.”

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Associated Press writers Will Weissert in Wilmington, Delaware, and Zeke Miller contribute to this report.

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This story has been corrected to reflect that Trump’s tweet said, “He won,” not “Biden won.”

## AP FACT CHECK: Trump wrong on Georgia voter signature checks

Associated Press undefined

ATLANTA (AP) — President Donald Trump has wrongly claimed that Georgia election officials are unable to verify signatures on absentee ballot envelopes because of a legal settlement known as a consent decree.

Here’s a look at Trump’s claims, in a tweet on Saturday:

TRUMP: “The Consent Decree signed by the Georgia Secretary of State, with the approval of Governor @BrianKempGA, at the urging of @staceyabrams, makes it impossible to check & match signatures on ballots and envelopes, etc. They knew they were going to cheat. Must expose real signatures!”

THE FACTS: There is nothing in the consent decree that prevents Georgia election clerks from scrutinizing signatures. The legal settlement signed in March addresses accusations about a lack of statewide standards for judging signatures on absentee ballot envelopes.

Georgia Secretary of State Brad Raffensperger, a Republican, said that not only is it entirely possible to match signatures, but that the state requires it.

When a voter requests an absentee ballot on a paper application, he or she must sign it. Election officials compare that signature to the signature in voter registration files before a ballot is sent to the voter, Raffensperger said.

When those ballots are returned, the required signature on the outer envelope is compared to signatures in the voter registration system.

This process was spelled out in detail in the consent decree, a legal settlement that was signed March 6.

A lawsuit by the Democratic Party, which led to the agreement, argued that minorities were disproportionately affected when they had their ballots rejected. Among other things, the settlement sets steps



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for local election officials to notify a voter -- by phone, mail or email -- in a timely fashion about problems with a signature.

The changes were made by the state election board.

Following state law, Georgia is pursuing a hand tally of votes in the presidential race. Democrat Joe Biden leads Trump by about 14,000 votes in the state. There are no examples of similar recounts that have overturned leads of that magnitude.

The signature issue resurfaced after lawyer L. Lin Wood Jr. filed a federal lawsuit Friday questioning whether the secretary of state had the authority to require the process of signature verification outlined in the agreement.

Wood is known for representing several high-profile clients including security guard Richard Jewell, who was identified as a suspect of the 1996 Centennial Olympic Park bombing in Atlanta but later cleared.

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

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## Dustin Johnson buries some major memories, wins the Masters

By DOUG FERGUSON AP Golf Writer

AUGUSTA, Ga. (AP) — In this one-of-a-kind Masters that had no fans and no roars, Dustin Johnson made sure it had no drama. And when he polished off his five-shot victory Sunday with lowest score in tournament history, he had no words.

Only tears.

Looking smart in his Masters green jacket he dreamed his whole life of winning, Johnson spoke to a small gathering on the putting green in absence of the official ceremony, but only briefly. In control of every aspect of his game on a course that never allows anyone to relax, he couldn't speak when it was over. Instead, he turned to wipe his eyes.

"I've never had this much trouble gathering myself," Johnson finally said. "On the golf course, I'm pretty good at it."

No one was better. Not even close.

Johnson overcame a nervous start that conjured memories of past majors he failed to finish off, and then delivered a command performance that added his own touch to a Masters unlike another.

Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, it was the first played in November. It was the first without ropes and without roars because patrons were not allowed, only one guest for each player, coaches, Augusta National members and officials.

Leading by two shots heading into Amen Corner, the world's No. 1 player got through the 12th hole — where Tiger Woods earlier hit three balls in Rae's Creek and made 10 — and then ran off three straight birdies to pull away from Cameron Smith and Sungjae Im, the only players who had a chance.

Johnson closed with a 4-under 68 and finished at 20-under 268, breaking by two shots the record set by Tiger Woods in 1997 and matched by Jordan Spieth in 2015.

He had only four bogeys in 72 holes, another record, this one held by Jack Nicklaus and Jimmy Demaret. He missed only 12 greens all week, a record last set by Woods.

All that mattered was that green jacket. Nothing ever comes easily for Johnson in the majors. Nothing looked so natural as seeing Woods, the defending champion, help him into that size 42 long in Butler Cabin.

"Having Tiger put it on was awesome. You wouldn't want it any other way," Johnson said. And then he smiled before adding, "But any guy could put it on me and I'd be just fine."

His five-shot victory was the largest at the Masters since Woods won by 12 in 1997. All that was missing were the roars from a crowd for any of his pivotal putts early and his birdie putts on the back nine that put it away.

It wasn't the loneliest walk up the hill to the 18th green. About 250 people offering warm applause and

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partner Paulina Gretzky rushed onto the green to celebrate with Johnson and his brother, caddie Austin Johnson.

Johnson now has two majors to go along with his 25 victories worldwide, a combination that validates him as one of the greats of his generation.

Gone are the doubts that he could hold a lead in the major on the final day. Four times he had gone into the final round with at least a share of the lead without winning. Johnson had questions, too. His only major was the U.S. Open at Oakmont in 2016 when he rallied from four shots behind.

"I'm sure a lot of you all think ... there were doubts in my mind, just because I had been there. I'm in this position a lot of times," Johnson said. "When am I going to have the lead and finishing off a major? It definitely proved that I can do it."

There were some nervous moments early.

Johnson's four-shot lead was reduced to one after five holes, and then he quickly restored control with an 8-iron to 6 feet on the top shelf on the right corner of the green at the par-3 sixth for birdie. That restored his lead to three shots when Im missed a 3-foot par putt. Smith was the only one who was closer than two the rest of the way.

Smith got quite the consolation. He became the first player in Masters history to post all four rounds in the 60s, and all it got him was a silver medal.

"I thought I'd have a decent shot if I got to Dustin's original score at the start of the day, 16 under," Smith said. "I knew I had to put the pressure on early. Got out of the gates pretty good and DJ was just too good at the end."

Johnson became the 12th Masters champion to never trail after any round, and his closing 68 broke another record held by Woods — it was his 11th consecutive subpar round at Augusta National.

No one had a better finish than Woods, but only after the five-time Masters champion posted the highest score of his career on the 12th hole. He finished with five birdies over the last six holes to salvage a 76.

The betting favorite and biggest basher in golf, Bryson DeChambeau, couldn't even beat 63-year-old Bernhard Langer, who shot 71 and wound up one shot ahead of the U.S. Open champion.

These were only sideshows on a quiet Sunday at Augusta National.

Johnson, the first No. 1 player in the world to win the Masters since Woods in 2002, was the main event.

But even a record score, and the widest margin of victory since 1997, didn't mean it was easy. This is Johnson, after all, who for all his talent has dealt with more than his share of misfortune, not all his own doing.

"I knew it wasn't going to be easy," he said.

After the big turning point at No. 6, and his nifty par save from a bunker on the seventh, Johnson didn't bother looking at a leaderboard until his brother asked if he knew where he stood on the 18th green. Johnson knew only that he was in control and it was up to everyone else to catch him.

"I took what the course gave me and hit the shots I felt I could hit," he said.

And so ended the Masters in November, so strange in so many ways. No roars from Amen Corner. Soft conditions — not only from rain that delayed the start but an autumn date that affected the grass — led to record scoring. The average score for the week was 71.75, the lowest ever, breaking the record from last year.

Gone were the white and pink blooms of azaleas and dogwoods, replaced by autumn hues of brown and gold.

The Masters, though, in any month is defined by green. And the jacket fit Johnson well.

## Britain's Johnson in self-isolation; has no virus symptoms

LONDON (AP) — British Prime Minister Boris Johnson is self-isolating after being told he came into contact with someone who tested positive for the coronavirus, officials said Sunday.

"He will carry on working from Downing Street, including on leading the government's response to the coronavirus pandemic," a statement from his office said.

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Johnson "is well and does not have any symptoms of COVID-19," it added.

Johnson met with a small group of lawmakers for about a half-hour on Thursday, including one who subsequently developed coronavirus symptoms and tested positive.

He was notified by the National Health Service's Test and Trace system Sunday and told he should self-isolate because of factors including the length of the meeting.

Officials said they will discuss with parliamentary authorities how Johnson can take part remotely in Parliament's business. He plans to "continue speaking to the country during his self-isolation period," they added.

The statement didn't say how long Johnson planned to isolate, but U.K. health authorities' guidance is that anyone contacted by Test and Trace should quarantine for 14 days.

In April, Johnson was hospitalized in intensive care for three nights after contracting COVID-19. After he was discharged, he thanks health workers for saving his life and said for 48 hours during his hospital stay "things could have gone either way."

His partner Carrie Symonds, who was pregnant at the time, also experienced symptoms and had to self-isolate.

The prime minister later said he wanted to build up his fitness, and in the summer he launched a national campaign to tackle obesity after acknowledging that he was "too fat" when he fell ill.

## 900 reported arrested in Belarus protests

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — A human rights group in Belarus said more than 900 people were arrested Sunday in protests around the country calling for authoritarian President Alexander Lukashenko to step down.

The demonstrations continued the wave of near-daily protests that have gripped Belarus since early August. In the capital Minsk, police wielded clubs and used tear gas and stun grenades to disperse thousands of demonstrators.

The Viasna human rights organization reported detentions at demonstrations in other cities, including Vitebsk and Gomel. It said the nationwide arrest total was at least 928 and that some of those detained were beaten by police.

Many of the demonstrators carried placards in commemoration of Raman Bandarenka, an opposition supporter who died Thursday after reportedly being beaten in police detention.

A wide wave of protests, some attracting more than 100,000 people, broke out following the Aug. 9 presidential election that official results say gave Lukashenko a sixth term in office. The opposition and some poll workers say the results were manipulated.

Lukashenko, who has suppressed opposition and independent media during 26 years in power, refuses to negotiate with the opposition and alleges the protests are incited by Western countries.

## Cable failures endanger renowned Puerto Rico radio telescope

By DÁNICA COTO Associated Press

SAN JUAN, Puerto Rico (AP) — The giant, aging cables that support one of the world's largest single-dish radio telescopes are slowly unraveling in this U.S. territory, pushing an observatory renowned for its key role in astronomical discoveries to the brink of collapse.

The Arecibo Observatory, which is tethered above a sinkhole in Puerto Rico's lush mountain region, boasts a 1,000-foot-wide (305-meter-wide) dish featured in the Jodie Foster film "Contact" and the James Bond movie "GoldenEye." The dish and a dome suspended above it have been used to track asteroids headed toward Earth, conduct research that led to a Nobel Prize and helped scientists trying to determine if a planet is habitable.

"As someone who depends on Arecibo for my science, I'm frightened. It's a very worrisome situation right now. There's a possibility of cascading, catastrophic failure," said astronomer Scott Ransom with the North American Nanohertz Observatory for Gravitational Waves, a collaboration of scientists in the U.S. and Canada.

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Last week, one of the telescope's main steel cables that was capable of sustaining 1.2 million pounds (544,000 kilograms) snapped under only 624,000 pounds (283,000 kilograms). That failure further mangled the reflector dish after an auxiliary cable broke in August, tearing a 100-foot hole and damaging the dome above it.

Officials said they were surprised because they had evaluated the structure in August and believed it could handle the shift in weight based on previous inspections.

It's a blow for the telescope that more than 250 scientists around the world were using. The facility is also one of Puerto Rico's main tourist attractions, drawing some 90,000 visitors a year. Research has been suspended since August, including a project aiding scientists in their search for nearby galaxies.

The telescope was built in the 1960s and financed by the Defense Department amid a push to develop anti-ballistic missile defenses. It's endured over a half-century of disasters, including hurricanes and earthquakes. Repairs from Hurricane Maria, which devastated Puerto Rico in 2017, were still underway when the first cable snapped.

Some new cables are scheduled to arrive next month, but officials said funding for repairs has not been worked out with federal agencies. Scientists warn that time is running out. Only a handful of cables now support the 900-ton platform.

"Each of the structure's remaining cables is now supporting more weight than before, increasing the likelihood of another cable failure, which would likely result in the collapse of the entire structure," the University of Central Florida, which manages the facility, said in a statement Friday.

University officials say crews have already noticed wire breaks on two of the remaining main cables. They warn that employees and contractors are at risk despite relying heavily on drones and remote cameras to assess the damage.

The observatory estimates the damage at more than \$12 million and is seeking money from the National Science Foundation, an independent federal agency that owns the observatory.

Foundation spokesman Rob Margetta said engineering and cost estimates have not been completed and that funding the repairs would likely involve Congress and discussions with stakeholders. He said the agency is reviewing "all recommendations for action at Arecibo."

"NSF is ultimately responsible for decisions regarding the structure's safety," he said in an email. "Our top priority is the safety of anyone at the site."

Representatives of the university and the observatory said the telescope's director, Francisco Córdoba, was not available for comment. In a Facebook post, the observatory said maintenance was up to date and the most recent external structural evaluation occurred after Hurricane Maria.

The most recent damage was likely the result of the cable degrading over time and carrying extra weight after the auxiliary cable snapped, the university said. In August, the socket holding that cable failed, possibly the result of manufacturing error, the observatory said.

The problems have interrupted the work of researchers like Edgard Rivera-Valentín, a Universities Space Research Association scientist at the Lunar and Planetary Institute in Texas. He had planned to study Mars in September during its close approach to Earth.

"This is the closest Mars was going to be while also being observable from Arecibo until 2067," he said. "I won't be around the next time we can get this level of radar data."

The observatory in Puerto Rico is considered crucial for the study of pulsars, which are the remains of stars that can be used to detect gravitational waves, a phenomenon Albert Einstein predicted in his theory of general relativity. The telescope also is used to search for neutral hydrogen, which can reveal how certain cosmic structures are formed.

"It's more than 50 years old, but it remains a very important instrument," said Alex Wolszczan, a Polish-born astronomer and professor at Pennsylvania State University.

He helped discover the first extrasolar and pulsar planets and credited the observatory for having a culture that allowed him to test what he described as wild ideas that sometimes worked.

"Losing it would be a really huge blow to what I think is a very important science," Wolszczan said.

An astronomer at the observatory in the 1980s and early 1990s, Wolszczan still uses the telescope for

certain work because it offers an unmatched combination of high frequency range and sensitivity that he said allows for a "huge array" of science projects. Among them: observing molecules of life, detecting radio emission of stars and conducting pulsar work.

The telescope also was a training ground for graduate students and widely loved for its educational opportunities, said Carmen Pantoja, an astronomer and professor at the University of Puerto Rico, the island's largest public university.

She relied on it for her doctoral thesis and recalled staring at it in wonder when she was a young girl. "I was struck by how big and mysterious it was," she said. "The future of the telescope depends greatly on what position the National Science Foundation takes ... I hope they can find a way and that there's goodwill to save it."

## North Dakota nurses worry about working with sick colleagues

By JAMES MacPHERSON and STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press

BISMARCK, N.D. (AP) — Like many medical workers around the world, Fargo emergency room nurse Adam Johnston can't escape the grim reality of the coronavirus pandemic. It follows him everywhere: at work, where people die every shift; at the grocery store, where people rail against his city's mask requirement; and at home, where he struggles to sleep.

He's gotten through the long months, including North Dakota's current virus wave that is among the worst in the U.S., by finding solace with fellow nurses during brief breaks where they can swap tips on beating insomnia or just vent frustrations. But he and many other nurses fear things are about to get even harder now that Gov. Doug Burgum has allowed the state's beleaguered hospitals to use infected but asymptomatic workers to treat COVID-19 patients.

"It's going to make you question every time you want to sit down and grab a five-minute snack with one of your co-workers," said Johnston, who is the president of the state's Emergency Nurses Association. "You're always going to think, 'Am I 6 feet away from them? Am I safe? Am I not?'"

Burgum said his decision could help North Dakota's hospitals, which are at or near capacity after a surge in cases that began over the summer and has only gotten worse. But Johnston and many other nurses feel he's saddling them with yet another burden while resisting imposing common safeguards to stanch the spread of the virus that might be less politically palatable in the conservative state.

Like some of his Republican counterparts in other states that have had big spikes in COVID-19 cases, Burgum for months took a business-friendly approach that puts the responsibility for slowing the virus on individuals rather than government mandates, so as to protect "both lives and livelihoods." It wasn't until Friday that he finally relented and ordered a statewide mask mandate and certain restrictions on businesses and gatherings.

The hands-off approach didn't work. After avoiding the explosion of cases that many other states experienced early in the pandemic, the virus has run rampant in North Dakota, which now regularly breaks its daily record highs for cases and deaths.

Burgum's move, which is permitted under Centers for Disease Control and Prevention guidelines, reflects the scarcity of medical workers in one of the hardest-hit regions of the country, said Dr. Thomas Tsai, an assistant professor at Harvard's School of Public Health. He said hospitals across the country are weighing such options as case numbers soar.

That's the case in South Dakota, which allows the practice but where none of the major hospitals are currently using infected workers.

In the spring and early summer in places like New York, medical workers from around the country were able to fly in and volunteer, providing relief for hospitals. But Tsai said the virus is now so widespread that there is little hope for such relief in North Dakota.

The state's major hospitals pushed Burgum's administration to allow them to have infected but asymptomatic staffers treat COVID-19 patients.

"We applaud the governor for another tool we can use," said Michael LeBeau, the head of Sanford Health

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Bismarck, which is developing protocols to allow such employees to work in a dedicated COVID-19 unit after it's found to be safe for its employees and patients. He said he expects his hospital's hundreds of health care workers to support the move once adequate safeguards are in place.

But Tessa Johnson, who heads the North Dakota Nurses Association, said the group surveyed hundreds of its members this week and "we are not at all thrilled" with the decision.

"I know nurses who leave work every day and cry in their car before they go home to see their kids," said Johnson. "I don't know how much more we can take."

Under the CDC guidelines, asymptomatic infected medical workers who intend to treat COVID-19 patients must take their temperatures before every shift and confirm that they don't have any symptoms. Workers with even mild symptoms aren't allowed to treat patients.

Dr. Marcus Plescia, the chief medical officer with the Association of State and Territorial Health Officials, pointed out that hospitals will have to determine if naming employees with infections is a violation of HIPAA laws, though he said that rigorous use of protective equipment in COVID units should prevent infections from spreading between hospital staff, even if co-workers don't know who is infected.

But the rule change also could place internal and external pressure on infected staff members to work when they should be home recovering, Plescia said.

Many nurses say they're already at a breaking point, and some are starting to feel hopeless.

"We're getting stretched so thin and there is no end in sight," said Kami Lehn, a nurse at a hospital in Fargo, which is North Dakota's largest city and which last month adopted its own mask requirement, though it doesn't penalize non-compliance. "We don't know how long this is going to last, or if it's at its peak or if it's going to get worse."

The grief is the toughest part, she said.

"There is a lot of loss that is hard to take," she said. "Families drop off a loved one at the door thinking things are going to be OK, and sometimes they're not."

Health workers worry that even if asymptomatic infected colleagues are limited to COVID-19 units, they could still spread the disease in break rooms, cafeterias, restrooms and other shared areas.

Kristin Roers, a hospital administrator and Republican state senator from Fargo, said Burgum's move will help hospitals continue to care for patients. But she also acknowledged that it presents a dilemma for hospital staff. Roers, who is also a registered nurse, has increasingly been working with patients because staffing has gotten so thin.

"I can totally understand the trepidation," she said. "But I mean, what do you do when there is nobody left to care for patients?"

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Groves reported from Sioux Falls, S.D.

## **Azerbaijan delays takeover, denounces fleeing Armenians**

By JIM HEINTZ Associated Press

MOSCOW (AP) — Azerbaijan on Sunday postponed taking control of a territory ceded by Armenian forces in a cease-fire agreement, but denounced civilians leaving the area for burning houses and committing what it called "ecological terror."

The cease-fire ended six weeks of intense fighting between Azerbaijan and Armenia over the Nagorno-Karabakh region and territories outside its formal borders that had been under the control of Armenian forces since 1994. The agreement calls for Azerbaijan to take control of the outlying territories. The first, Kelbajar, was to be turned over on Sunday.

But Azerbaijan agreed to delay the takeover until Nov. 25 after a request from Armenia. Azerbaijani presidential aide Hikmet Hajiyev said worsening weather conditions made the withdrawal of Armenian forces and civilians difficult along the single road through mountainous territory that connects Kelbajar with Armenia.

After the agreement was announced early Tuesday, many distraught residents preparing to evacuate set

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their houses ablaze to make them unusable to Azerbaijanis who would move in.

"Armenians are damaging the environment and civilian objects. Environmental damage, ecological terror must be prevented," Hajiyev said.

Prior to a separatist war that ended in 1994, Kelbajar was populated almost exclusively by Azerbaijanis. But the territory then came under Armenian control and Armenians moved in. Azerbaijan deemed their presence illegal.

"The placement and settlement of the Armenian population in the occupied territory of the Kelbajar region was illegal ... All illegal settlements there must be evicted," Hajiyev said.

The imminent renewal of Azerbaijani control raised wide concerns about the fate of Armenian cultural and religious sites, particularly Dadivank, a noted Armenian Apostolic Church monastery that dates back to the ninth century.

Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev assured Russian President Vladimir Putin, who negotiated the cease-fire and is sending about 2,000 peacekeeping troops, that Christian churches would be protected.

"Christians of Azerbaijan will have access to these churches," Aliyev's office said in statement Sunday.

Azerbaijan is about 95% Muslim and Armenia is overwhelmingly Christian. Azerbaijan accuses Armenians of desecrating Muslim sites during their decades of control of Nagorno-Karabakh and surrounding territories, including housing livestock in mosques.

The Armenian Foreign Ministry on Sunday denounced vandalization of the Ghazanchetsots cathedral in the Azerbaijan-held city of Shusha as "outrageous." The Armenian Apostolic Church earlier said vandals defaced walls of the church after Azerbaijani forces took the city.

Nagorno-Karabakh was an autonomous republic of Azerbaijan during the Soviet period. A movement to join with Armenia arose in the late Soviet years and after the Soviet Union collapsed, a war erupted in which an estimated 30,000 died and hundreds of thousands of people were displaced.

Sporadic clashes erupted after the war ended in 1994 and international mediators unsuccessfully sought for a resolution of the dispute. Full-scale fighting flared anew on Sept. 27. Azerbaijan made significant advances and a week ago announced that it had seized the strategically critical city of Shusha. The cease-fire agreement came two days later.

Armenia says 1,434 servicemen died in this year's fighting, but civilian casualties are unclear. Azerbaijan hasn't stated its losses.

The cease-fire agreement and cession of territories was a strong blow to Armenia and prompted protests against Prime Minister Nikol Pashinian.

On Saturday, Artur Vanetsyan, the leader of a small center-right party who formerly headed the national security service, was arrested on suspicion of plotting to assassinate Pashinian. He was released from custody Sunday and it was unclear if the charges against him would stand.

The agreement also dismayed many Armenians who had hoped for Russian support in the conflict. Russia and Armenia are part of a defense alliance and Russia has a large military base in Armenia.

"Our nation has lost everything, our heritage, everything. We have nothing left. I can't say anything. I'm only begging Russian people to help us, so that at least others can have a better life in our own land," said Seda Gabriyan, a weeping mourner at the Sunday burial of a Nagorno-Karabakh soldier in Stepanakert, the regional capital.

Aida Sultanova in London, Avet Demourian in Yerevan, Armenia, and Kostya Manenkov in Stepanakert, contributed to this report.

## Biden advisers to meet vaccine firms as Trump stalls handoff

By RICARDO ALONSO-ZALDIVAR and WILL WEISSERT Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Joe Biden's scientific advisers will meet with vaccine makers in coming days as the presidential transition remains stalled because of President Donald Trump's refusal to acknowledge that he lost the election. That delayed handoff is especially problematic during a public health crisis, the

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government's top infectious disease expert said.

"Of course it would be better if we could start working with them," said Dr. Anthony Fauci, head of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases who has been through multiple presidential transitions during 36 years of government service. He likened the process to runners passing on the baton in a relay race. "You don't want to stop and then give it to somebody," he said. "You want to just essentially keep going."

The president-elect's outreach to the vaccine manufacturers comes as the coronavirus pandemic in the United States has entered perhaps its most dangerous phase. The seven-day rolling average for new daily cases stood at 145,400 on Saturday, according to data from Johns Hopkins University. That means the U.S. is adding about 1 million new cases a week, and deaths averaged 820 a day as of Saturday, a 33% increase in just two weeks.

"We're going to start those consultations this week," said Biden's chief of staff, Ron Klain, citing Pfizer and other pharmaceutical companies.

Pfizer's announcement that preliminary data indicate its vaccine is 90% effective lifted financial markets last week and gave people worldwide hope that an end to the pandemic will be coming.

Klain said Biden's experts also need a detailed understanding of distribution plans being finalized by the Department of Health and Human Services and the Pentagon. In some ways, that's the more critical issue, he said.

"We need to be talking to them as quickly as possible," Klain said. "It's great to have a vaccine, but vaccines don't save lives: vaccinations save lives. And that means you've got to get that vaccine into people's arms all over this country. It's a giant logistical project."

Fauci stressed the arrival of vaccines won't be like flipping a switch to return to normal life. The first doses will become available for people in high-risk groups later this year. He said Americans will have to keep up preventive measures such as wearing masks, observing social distancing and frequently washing their hands well into next year.

"Everyone is sensitive to what we call 'COVID fatigue,'" Fauci said. "People are worn out about this. But we have got to hang in there a bit longer. ... We have got to hang together on this."

Other vaccine makers are also in the final phase of testing their formulations, and Fauci said he expects those vaccines will also be highly effective.

The government has launched a program called "Operation Warp Speed," backed by the White House, to quickly manufacture and distribute tens of millions of doses of vaccines. The shots will be free to Americans, and the goal is to have most people vaccinated by about this time next year. Many people will need two doses.

Initial access to the vaccine will be limited to high-priority groups such as hospital and nursing home workers.

A top Trump administration health official said 20 million doses could be available by the end of this month, and an additional 20 million by the end of the year.

But Adm. Brett Giroir, assistant HHS secretary, seconded Fauci's admonition that Americans must keep following basic public health precautions such as wearing masks.

"If we do these things combined with the testing that we have, we can flatten the curve," he said. "If we do not do these things, the cases will continue to go up." Giroir said the country is in a critical situation.

Pressed on whether the administration should be talking to the Biden team, Giroir responded: "Look, I want to be as transparent as possible with everybody. This is not a political issue. This is an issue of public health and saving American lives. And I think there's nothing more important than that."

The risks are real. Around the country, hospitals report that doctors and nurses are being stretched to cope with rising numbers of hospitalized COVID-19 patients requiring special care. In some communities, hospitals have started limiting elective procedures in order to conserve resources.

A leading adviser, former Surgeon General Vivek Murthy, sought to tamp down speculation that Biden as president would order a national lockdown, calling that a measure of last resort.



"In the spring, when we didn't know a lot about COVID, we responded in a sense with an on/off switch," Murthy said. "We shut things down because ... we didn't know exactly how this was spreading and where it was spreading.

"We learned a lot more since then," he added. "The better way to think about these safety restrictions is more a dial that we turn up and down depending on severity, and that's really the key here, is applying this, these restrictions judiciously and precisely."

Fauci was on CNN's "State of the Union," Klain appeared on NBC's "Meet the Press," Giroir spoke on ABC's "This Week," and Murthy was interviewed on "Fox News Sunday."

Weissert reported from Wilmington, Delaware.

## Ethiopia's Tigray leader confirms firing missiles at Eritrea

By CARA ANNA Associated Press

NAIROBI, Kenya (AP) — The leader of Ethiopia's rebellious Tigray region has confirmed firing missiles at neighboring Eritrea's capital and is threatening more, marking a huge escalation as the deadly fighting in northern Ethiopia between Tigray forces and the federal government spills across an international border.

Tigray regional President Debretsion Gebremichael, in a phone interview Sunday with The Associated Press, wouldn't say how many missiles were fired at the city of Asmara on Saturday, but said it was the only city in Eritrea that was targeted.

"As long as troops are here fighting, we will take any legitimate military target and we will fire," he said, accusing Eritrea of sending troops into the Tigray region and denying reports that Tigray regional forces have entered Eritrea.

"We will fight them on all fronts with whatever means we have," he said. He asserted that around 16 Eritrean divisions are fighting in what he called a "full-scale war."

The brewing civil war in Ethiopia between a regional government that once dominated the country's ruling coalition, and a Nobel Peace Prize-winning prime minister whose sweeping reforms marginalized the Tigray region's power, could fracture a key U.S. security ally and destabilize the strategic Horn of Africa, with the potential to send scores of thousands of refugees into Sudan.

The United States strongly condemned the Tigray region's "unjustifiable attacks against Eritrea ... and its efforts to internationalize the conflict."

At least three rockets appeared to be aimed at the airport in Asmara, hours after the Tigray regional government warned it might attack. It accuses Eritrea of attacking at the invitation of Ethiopia's government after the conflict in the Tigray region erupted on Nov. 4 with an attack by regional forces on a federal military base there.

In a security alert, the U.S. Embassy in Eritrea said "a series of loud noises were heard in Asmara" on Saturday night, and "unconfirmed reports indicate they may have been explosive devices believed to be in the vicinity of the Asmara International Airport. There are no indications the airport was struck."

The Tigray regional leader would not say how many missiles remain at his forces' disposal but said "we have several. We can use it selectively, anywhere." When asked about targeting Ethiopia's capital, Addis Ababa, he replied: "I don't want to tell you, but the missiles are long-range as well."

Officials in Eritrea, one of the world's most reclusive nations, have not responded to requests for comment.

Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed in a brief statement declared that "Ethiopia is more than capable of attaining the objectives of the operation by itself." He did not mention the missiles or Eritrea but added: "Justice will prevail. Ethiopia will prevail!" His office in a separate statement said "we will see this operation to its end."

The Tigray leader said he had no communication with Ethiopia's federal government. The African Union is pushing for a cease-fire, he said, "but the prime minister is not ready to listen. He believes in the might he has." He called this a "really messy situation which requires international intervention."

Tigray's heavily armed regional government broke away from Ethiopia's ruling coalition last year, and it

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objects to the postponement of national elections until next year, which extends Abiy's rule. In September it held a regional election in defiance.

Each side regards the other as illegal, and the federal government says members of the Tigray region's ruling "clique" must be arrested and their arsenal destroyed. Abiy calls it a "law enforcement action" while his military officials call it war.

The Tigray leader told the AP he didn't have a number of people killed in the fighting but said "a very massive displacement is happening. The fighting is happening on all fronts, in addition to airstrikes." He added, "we have to defend ourselves, you know?"

The Tigray region is boxed in among Ethiopian forces, Eritrea and Sudan, which has closed its border but allows in refugees.

The Tigray leader said his government, the Tigray People's Liberation Front, had no communications channel with Eritrea even before the conflict. The two sides are at bitter odds after a long and deadly border war that ended after Abiy took office in 2018.

Abiy has rejected international pleas for an immediate de-escalation.

In a separate, bloody example of Ethiopia's growing tensions, at least 34 people were killed in a "gruesome attack" on a passenger bus in the western Benishangul-Gumuz Region on Friday, the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission said. It did not say who attacked.

The conflict could pull in more countries. A senior TPLF official, Getachew Reda, on social media asserted that Ethiopia's prime minister "is now enlisting the support of UAE drones based in (the Eritrean city of) Assab in his devastating war against the people of Tigray." He offered no evidence.

Officials in the United Arab Emirates did not comment. For years, the UAE has built up a military presence in Eritrea at the port of Assab and a once-abandoned airfield there, but it has since reportedly drawn down its forces after largely withdrawing from the Saudi-led war in Yemen.

The United Nations and others have warned of a looming humanitarian disaster in the growing conflict as some 25,000 Ethiopian refugees, hungry and scared, have fled the Tigray region into Sudan. Communications and transport links with the Tigray region remain almost completely severed, and millions are at risk as food, fuel and other supplies run low.

Over the border in Sudan, the refugees — roughly half of them children — huddled in makeshift tents of sheets, even umbrellas, as authorities rushed to organize assistance in the remote area and more arrivals were on the way.

"The situation is very bad at the moment," Jens Hessemann with the U.N. refugee agency said in Hamdayet town, which he described as a generous but "very burdened" community.

"War is meaningless," one refugee, Fabrik Tessafay, said. "This is genocide, it seems to me. This is genocide, to destroy Tigray and Tigray people."

Shaken, they described being under attack even as they fled.

"Like this, all of Tigray will be killed," said another refugee, Alem Gabriel. "The (Eritrean) President Isaias Afwerki also attacked us, we were hit in the al-Hamra region, we went to the river and we were attacked there, and some of the people died, and the others crossed into Sudan."

One woman wailed as she was told her son had died in the fighting.

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Associated Press writer Jon Gambrell in Dubai, United Arab Emirates, contributed to this report.

## Bound despite Brexit: Prince Charles hails UK-Germany ties

By FRANK JORDANS Associated Press

BERLIN (AP) — Prince Charles called Sunday for Britain and Germany to remember their long and close ties, reaffirmed by the nations' reconciliation after two world wars, as the U.K. tries to find its place outside — but also alongside — the European Union.

Charles' appeal during a visit to Berlin to attend Germany's traditional day of remembrance was part of Britain's diplomatic outreach to Europe's biggest economy, days before a deadline to strike a post-Brexit

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deal with the EU.

There is growing anxiety in London that Britain may find itself without favorable access to its biggest trading partner when a transition agreement with the EU expires at the end of the year.

"As our countries begin this new chapter in our long history let us reaffirm our bond for the years ahead," Charles said during a speech at the German parliament. "And let us reflect on all that we have been through together and all that we have learned."

Wearing masks and the customary remembrance poppy, Charles arrived in Berlin late Saturday on a freshly rebranded U.K. government plane with his wife Camilla, the Duchess of Cornwall. They were welcomed on their first foreign trip since the start of the pandemic by Britain's new ambassador to Berlin, Jill Gallard, who tweeted that the prince was a "true friend of Germany."

On Sunday, the royal couple were received by German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier and his wife, Elke Buedenbender, at Bellevue Palace. The palace was built in the late 18th century by Prince Augustus Ferdinand of Prussia, to whom Charles is distantly related through his family's German line.

In his speech to the Bundestag, Queen Elizabeth II's eldest son noted such personal bonds, as well as the close diplomatic, cultural and economic links between the two countries going back centuries, and which were revived after the enmity of World Wars I and II.

"Our people have prospered from one another through commerce since the Hanseatic League established a trading relationship which continues to drive our shared prosperity," Charles said.

"However, the relationship between us has always been so much more than a transaction," he added, citing Germans' love for Shakespeare and English gardens, and the fixture of German-born composer George Frideric Handel's music being played at British royal coronations.

"We are heavily invested in each other's futures, such that our national interests, whilst distinct, will always be entwined," Charles said in German, before switching to English and stating that "Our countries are instinctive problem solvers working together to find innovative and practical solutions to the challenges we see in the world around us."

Describing the two countries as having a "natural position of allies and friends," Charles drew on English poet John Donne's words that "no man is an island" to argue that "one might equally submit that no country is really an island either, other than in the wholly literal sense" — a clear reference to Britain's insular geography.

"Our histories bind us tightly together and our destinies, although each our own to forge, are interdependent to a considerable degree," he said.

The heir apparent, who has visited Germany more than 30 times since 1962, said that while Britain "has chosen a future outside the European Union and the relationship between our countries is evolving, once again," he believed the two countries "will always be friends, partners and allies."

The ceremony in parliament included a rendition of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony, the "Ode to Joy," which is the official anthem of the EU and also the 47-nation Council of Europe that Britain remains a member of.

Earlier Sunday, Charles and Camilla observed the traditional wreath laying ceremony at Berlin's Neue Wache. Originally designed as a site to commemorate those who died in the Napoleonic Wars, it is now Germany's Central Memorial for the Victims of War and Tyranny.

Steinmeier, who was Germany's foreign minister when Britain held a referendum on Brexit in 2016 before assuming the largely ceremonial role as head of state a year later, has in the past dismissed British Prime Minister Boris Johnson's efforts to renegotiate existing agreements with the EU.

Charles, 72, was exempt due to the diplomatic nature of his trip from Germany's rules requiring him to go into quarantine on arrival from Britain. The prince has himself recovered from a coronavirus infection in March.

## Belgian racing pigeon fetches record price of \$1.9 million

By RAF CASERT Associated Press

HALLE, Belgium (AP) — New Kim is worth her weight in gold and then some — actually much, much more.

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A wealthy Chinese pigeon racing fan put down a record price of 1.6 million euros (\$1.9 million) for the Belgian-bred bird, saying a lot more than merely what kind of money can be made in the once-quaint sport, which seemed destined to decline only a few years back.

During a frantic last half hour Sunday at the end of a two-week auction at the Pipa pigeon center, two Chinese bidders operating under the pseudonyms Super Duper and Hitman drove up the price by 280,000 euros (\$325,000), leaving the previous record that Belgian-bred Armando fetched last year well behind by 350,000 euros (\$406,000).

Super Duper got the hen, and behind the pseudonym is said to be the same wealthy Chinese industrialist who already had Armando, allowing for breeding with the two expensive birds.

It was proof again that an age-old hobby in Western Europe identified with working-class men now has a new, elitist foreign lease on life. Top breeders relying on generations of family experience can now sell their birds for prices unheard of merely a decade ago, and often China is their destination.

On this occasion, successful breeder Gaston Van de Wouwer retired at 76 and his son had too busy a professional life to continue the famed pigeon coop. All 445 birds were put on auction and the overall sale was already pushing past 6 million euros (\$7 million). A second part of the auction is ending on Monday, but didn't include any bird that could match New Kim. It still amounted to an amazing weekend for one pigeon breeder.

Belgians have long stood out as the best breeders, both because of their generations-long experience and the density of a network where many breeders can organize races close together. It's not a short-term endeavor, however, since becoming expert at genetic breeding with the constant mixing and mating of birds takes years, if not decades. Birds can live up to 15 years.

"Everybody is interested in our pigeons," Pascal Bodengien, head of the Belgian pigeon federation, told The Associated Press.

Only a decade ago, the record price for a pigeon stood at one-tenth of New Kim's price. And the current price of gold stands about 26,000 euros (\$30,350) per pound.

As so often, globalization has made the difference.

With the rise of business wealth in China came also conspicuous consumption and a new venue for gambling. Somehow, pigeons fit the bill. China often features one-loft racing, where pigeons all get used to one coop for months and then are released many hundreds of miles away to make their way back with their unique sense of orientation and special speed training. Prize pots can reach into the tens of millions of euros.

For breeding, though, there is no place like Belgium. This is where, little more than a generation ago, the national weekend radio news was followed by announcements on whether pigeons were released in faraway places in France or even Spain and what weather conditions the birds were facing.

After World War II, Belgium had over 250,000 members in the pigeon fancier federation. Now there are 18,000, Bodengien says.

Pigeon breeding demands constant attention, every single day of the year. Those demands had turned away many modern folk, once sending the sport into a decline.

"To be the best, it has to be your life's work. For some, it may seem boring. Day in, day out. Winter and summer, always those pigeons," he said.

Once bitten though, many remain committed for life. And the news that a pigeon can sell for \$1.9 million could prompt new challengers to enter the sport. Bodengien welcomed that development but urged patience and a reality check.

"Anybody thinking about getting into our sport to get money out of it had better think again and move to another sport," he said.

## Israel advances plans in sensitive east Jerusalem settlement

By TIA GOLDENBERG Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — A settlement watchdog group said Sunday Israel is moving ahead with new construc-

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tion of hundreds of homes in a strategic east Jerusalem settlement that threatens to cut off parts of the city claimed by Palestinians from the West Bank.

The group, Peace Now, said the Israel Land Authority announced on its website Sunday that it had opened up tenders for more than 1,200 new homes in the key settlement of Givat Hamatos in east Jerusalem.

The move may test ties with the incoming administration of President-elect Joe Biden, who is expected to take a firmer tack against Israeli settlement expansion after four years of a more lenient policy under President Donald Trump, who has largely turned a blind eye to settlement construction.

With the Trump administration in its final weeks in office, Israel may be aiming to push ahead on contentious projects before Biden's term starts, a move that could set it on the wrong foot with the new president.

The approval of the 1,200 homes is a further setback to dwindling hopes of an internationally backed partition deal that would enable the establishment of a Palestinian state alongside Israel.

The Palestinians, along with critics of Israel's settlement policy, say construction in the Givat Hamatos settlement would seal off the Palestinian city of Bethlehem and the southern West Bank from east Jerusalem, further cutting off access for the Palestinians to that part of the city.

"This is a continuation of the current Israeli government policy in destroying the two-state solution," said Nabil Abu Rdeneh, a spokesman to Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas.

Sunday's development comes as Secretary of State Mike Pompeo is set to travel to the region this week, where he is expected to visit an Israeli settlement in the West Bank — a stop previous U.S. secretaries of state have avoided. Palestinian officials, who have cut off ties with the Trump administration over its policies in favor of Israel, have denounced Pompeo's planned visit. Palestinian Prime Minister Mohammad Shtayyeh tweeted on Friday that this was a "dangerous precedent" that legalizes settlements.

Brian Reeves, a spokesman for Peace Now, said the move Sunday allows contractors to begin bidding on the tenders, a process that will conclude just days before Biden's inauguration. Construction could then begin within months.

"This is a lethal blow to the prospects for peace," Peace Now said in a statement, adding that Israel was "taking advantage of the final weeks of the Trump administration in order to set facts on the ground that will be exceedingly hard to undo in order to achieve peace."

The Palestinians seek the West Bank, along with the Gaza Strip and east Jerusalem — areas Israel captured in the 1967 Mideast war — for their future state. With nearly 500,000 settlers now living in the West Bank, and over 220,000 more in east Jerusalem, the Palestinians say the chances of establishing their state are quickly dwindling.

Israel views the entire city of Jerusalem as its eternal, undivided capital.

The European Union's foreign policy chief, Josep Borrell, said he was deeply worried about Israel's latest announcement, saying construction in Givat Hamatos would cause serious damage to the prospects for Palestinian independence.

"The announced settlement activity will lead to the continuing weakening of efforts to rebuild trust and confidence between the parties," he said. "The government of Israel should instead show vision and responsibility and reverse these negative decisions at this critical and sensitive time."

Much of Jerusalem is already blocked off from the West Bank by a series of checkpoints and the separation barrier. Israel has previously moved forward on plans to build in E1, another sensitive area east of Jerusalem that critics say, with Givat Hamatos, would block east Jerusalem off entirely from the West Bank.

After four years of Trump, whose policies were hugely favorable toward Israel and who shrugged at settlement building, Israel faces a new reality under Biden, who will likely restore the previous U.S. position that viewed settlements as illegitimate and an obstacle to peace with the Palestinians.

Under previous administrations, Israel held back on building plans in the most sensitive areas, including Givat Hamatos, amid opposition by both Washington and the international community, which saw such plans as dashing hopes for a contiguous Palestinian state.

But Israel has been emboldened under Trump, approving thousands of new settlement homes during his term, including in highly contested areas. Many of those plans are expected to break ground after Biden assumes the presidency.

## **ASEAN, China, other partners sign world's biggest trade pact**

By ELAINE KURTENBACH AP Business Writer

China and 14 other countries agreed Sunday to set up the world's largest trading bloc, encompassing nearly a third of all economic activity, in a deal many in Asia are hoping will help hasten a recovery from the shocks of the pandemic.

The Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership, or RCEP, was signed virtually on Sunday on the sidelines of the annual summit of the 10-nation Association of Southeast Asian Nations.

"I am delighted to say that after eight years of hard work, as of today, we have officially brought RCEP negotiations to a conclusion for signing," said host country Vietnam's prime minister, Nguyen Xuan Phuc.

"The conclusion of RCEP negotiation, the largest free trade agreement in the world, will send a strong message that affirms ASEAN's leading role in supporting the multilateral trading system, creating a new trading structure in the region, enabling sustainable trade facilitation, revitalizing the supply chains disrupted by COVID-19 and assisting the post-pandemic recovery," Phuc said.

The accord will take already low tariffs on trade between member countries still lower, over time, and is less comprehensive than an 11-nation trans-Pacific trade deal that President Donald Trump pulled out of shortly after taking office.

Apart from the 10 ASEAN members, it includes China, Japan, South Korea, Australia and New Zealand, but not the United States. Officials said the accord leaves the door open for India, which dropped out due to fierce domestic opposition to its market-opening requirements, to rejoin the bloc.

It will take time to fully assess exact details of the agreement encompassing tariff schedules and rules for all 15 countries involved — the tariffs schedule just for Japan is 1,334 pages long.

It is not expected to go as far as the European Union in integrating member economies but does build on existing free trade arrangements.

The deal has powerful symbolic ramifications, showing that nearly four years after Trump launched his "America First" policy of forging trade deals with individual countries, Asia remains committed to multi-nation efforts toward freer trade that are seen as a formula for future prosperity.

Ahead of Sunday's RCEP "special summit" meeting, Japanese Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga said he would firmly convey his government's support for "broadening a free and fair economic zone, including a possibility of India's future return to the deal, and hope to gain support from the other countries."

The accord is also a coup for China, by far the biggest market in the region with more than 1.3 billion people, allowing Beijing to cast itself as a "champion of globalization and multilateral cooperation" and giving it greater influence over rules governing regional trade, Gareth Leather, senior Asian economist for Capital Economics, said in a report.

China's official Xinhua News Agency quoted Premier Li Keqiang hailing the agreement as a victory against protectionism, in remarks delivered via a video link.

"The signing of the RCEP is not only a landmark achievement of East Asian regional cooperation, but also a victory of multilateralism and free trade," Li said.

The agreement is expected to help China, Japan and South Korea finally reach a trilateral free trade deal after years of struggling to bridge their differences.

Now that Trump's opponent Joe Biden has been declared president-elect, the region is watching to see how U.S. policy on trade and other issues will evolve.

Analysts are skeptical Biden will push hard to rejoin the trans-Pacific trade pact or to roll back many of the U.S. trade sanctions imposed on China by the Trump administration given widespread frustration with Beijing's trade and human rights records, and accusations of spying and technology theft.

Critics of free trade agreements say they tend to encourage companies to move manufacturing jobs overseas. So, having won over disaffected rust-belt voters in Michigan and western Pennsylvania in the Nov. 3 election, Biden is "not going to squander that by going back into TPP," Michael Jonathan Green of the Center for Strategic and International Studies said in a web seminar.

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But given concerns over China's growing influence, Biden is likely to seek much more engagement with Southeast Asia to protect U.S. interests, he said.

The fast-growing and increasingly affluent Southeast Asian market of 650 million people has been hit hard by the pandemic and is urgently seeking fresh drivers for growth.

RCEP originally would have included about 3.6 billion people and encompassed about a third of world trade and global GDP. Minus India, it still covers more than 2 billion people and close to a third of all trade and business activity.

The United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement, or USMCA, the retooled version of the North American Free Trade Agreement under Trump, covers slightly less economic activity but less than a tenth of the world's population. The EU and Comprehensive and Progressive Trans-Pacific Partnership, the revised version of the deal Trump rejected, also are smaller. RCEP includes six of the 11 remaining CPTPP members.

India balked at exposing its farmers and factories to more foreign competition. Among other concerns, Indian dairy farmers are worried about competition from New Zealand and Australian milk and cheese producers. Automakers fear imports from across the region. But overall the biggest fear is over a flood of manufactured goods from China.

Trade and investment flows within Asia have vastly expanded over the past decade, a trend that has accelerated amid feuding between the U.S. and China, which have imposed billions of dollars' worth of punitive tariffs on each other's exports.

The RCEP agreement is loose enough to stretch to fit the disparate needs of member countries as diverse as Myanmar, Singapore, Vietnam and Australia. Unlike the CPTPP and EU, it does not establish unified standards on labor and the environment or commit countries to open services and other vulnerable areas of their economies.

But it does set rules for trade that will facilitate investment and other business within the region, Jeffrey Wilson, research director at the Perth USAsia Center, said in a report for the Asia Society.

"RCEP, therefore, is a much-needed platform for the Indo-Pacific's post-COVID recovery," he wrote.

ASEAN members include Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Myanmar, the Philippines, Thailand, Brunei, Singapore, Malaysia and Vietnam.

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Associated Press writers Hau Dinh in Hanoi, Vietnam, and Mari Yamaguchi in Tokyo contributed to this report.

## **Biden's beach hideaway has political sun shining on Rehoboth**

By WILL WEISSERT Associated Press

REHOBOTH BEACH, Del. (AP) — This resort town known for Atlantic waves that are sometimes surfable, fresh-cut French fries and a 1-mile wooden boardwalk that dates to the 1870s has long prided itself on being the "Nation's Summer Capital."

It may soon sport a beach White House.

President-elect Joe Biden owns a \$2.7 million, Delaware North Shores home with a swimming pool that overlooks Cape Henlopen State Park, is blocks from the ocean and a short drive from downtown Rehoboth Beach. It's a getaway about two hours by motorcade from Washington and a bit less than that from Biden's longtime home in Wilmington.

Biden spent time in Rehoboth Beach after the Democratic National Convention and made his first trip back this weekend as president-elect.

"I think he's earned, certainly, a couple of days off," said Jen Psaki, an adviser to Biden's transition team.

Movie stars Richard Gere and Denzel Washington have frequented Rehoboth Beach, as has ESPN commentator and former Washington Post columnist Tony Kornheiser. Biden would be the first president to vacation regularly in the shore town.

That may be fitting for Biden, who proudly referred to himself as the poorest man in Congress for much of the 36 years he served in the Senate. He bought the beach house after leaving the vice presidency,

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aided by an \$8 million, multibook deal that he and his wife, Jill, signed.

"Throughout our careers, Jill and I have dreamed of being able to buy a place at the beach at home where we can bring the whole family," Biden said in a statement upon buying the home. "We feel very lucky that we're now able to make that happen."

They moved in less than two years after Biden's son Beau, a former Delaware attorney general, died of brain cancer. One sign on the house reads "Beau's gift," while another says "Forever Jill."

Rehoboth Beach may now join Palm Beach, Florida, Massachusetts' Martha's Vineyard and Crawford, Texas, as famous recent presidential retreats.

The transformation is already underway.

Though access to Biden's home is restricted, reporters swarmed Rehoboth Beach anyway this weekend, with TV journalists thronging the boardwalk for stand-ups.

The Browseabout Bookstore on the main drag set up a special display featuring biographies about Biden, as well as the books that Joe and Jill Biden wrote, Biden calendars, mugs, coloring books and earrings. A Biden action figure cost \$15, as did the newest item — gray socks adorned with the now-president-elect wearing a red, white and blue-stripped tie and proclaiming, "Vote for Joe Biden."

The top seller was a Biden scented candle that smells like one of his favorite drinks: orange Gatorade.

After he left the vice presidency, Biden used to come to the Browseabout to buy coffee and newspapers after church on some Sundays.

"The treatment that they get is the same as everybody. We're not fan-girling. We want everybody to feel welcome," Jessie Jones, a senior Browseabout staff member, said of the Bidens. "Now, people in the store, that's a different story."

Another senior staff member, Andreea Istrate, said that when Jill Biden came to sign copies of her 2012 book "Don't Forget: God Bless Our Troops" at the store, Joe Biden shook hands with everybody in line and used a quip he reprised often while running for president, "Hi, I'm Jill's husband." It got so crowded that Istrate climbed out a window to leave, rather than trying to squeeze through the door.

"There was definitely a high energy today," Jones said, as word spread that Biden was back. "People were saying, 'Lets' do our Christmas shopping and, if we happen to see Joe, great.'"

Mayor Stan Mills said Jill Biden often biked through neighborhoods, enjoying the shade of expansive tree canopies that are rare in seaside areas.

"We're hopeful that, I call him the famously friendly Biden, will continue his strolls around town," said Mills, who said he'd not yet met Biden but hope he would "soonish."

Rehoboth has a high concentration of LGBTQ-owned businesses, dolphins that are frequently spotted frolicking in the surf and other noted vacation fare including fudge, saltwater taffy and ice cream flavored with tonsil-toasting ghost peppers.

It has about 1,500 full-time residents but grows to about 25,000 during the summer months. Before the coronavirus pandemic, Independence Day weekend and the annual Sea Witch Festival marking Halloween could draw 80,000.

Nick Caggiano, owner of Nicola Pizza, first met Biden during his inaugural run for the Senate in 1972. Caggiano said three teams of Secret Service agents arrived to pickup takeout pizzas for the Bidens when they got to town on Thursday.

"I think Joe, through the years, always had the personality," Caggiano said. "He's got the charisma."

Rita Sonntag, a nurse, lives in nearby Bethany Beach but headed to Rehoboth to buy cat food on Saturday and went for a walk in Cape Henlopen State Park. She happened upon Joe and Jill Biden as they rode along Gordons Pond trail, with five plain-clothed Secret Service and medical agents.

"I thought, at this point, he'd be holed up and not going out in public," Sonntag said. "But then I was like, 'Oh, there he is.'"

As the Bidens made their way back along the same trail, more than a dozen onlookers joined a crowd of reporters waiting. Asked as he whizzed by if he was any closer to choosing a Cabinet, the president-elect deadpanned, "Yes," but didn't slow to elaborate. At least one woman in the crowd yelled "Go Joe!"



As popular as Biden is locally, however, not everyone is a fan. At T-Shirt World, employee Sydney Doel said the few Biden shirts the store stocked weren't big sellers. President Donald Trump, though, had his own section, with more than half a dozen shirts, assorted hats and visors and keepsakes that ranged from bottle openers to boxer shorts. Red Trump pajama bottoms had sold out.

Doel said politely that she hoped to one day spot Biden around town, but her face lit up when asked what would happen if Trump bought a house in Rehoboth Beach. She and co-worker agreed that the rural areas away from the beach are full "of country-loving people."

"If you ride out a bit, you see a lot more Trump signs," Doel said. "I think having Trump here, it would be more exciting for a lot of people."

## **In a moment of turmoil, US Catholic bishops meet virtually**

By DAVID CRARY AP National Writer

Catholic bishops of the United States open a national meeting Monday under dramatic circumstances.

A pandemic has compelled them to meet virtually from their far-flung dioceses. A hard-fought presidential election has caused sharp divisions in their own ranks. And six days before the meeting, the Vatican released a revelatory report detailing how clerics in the U.S. and abroad failed to hold ex-Cardinal Theodore McCarrick to account until many years after suspicions of serial sexual misconduct had become widespread.

"The shadow of the McCarrick report hangs over this meeting," said John Gehring, Catholic program director at a Washington-based clergy network called Faith in Public Life.

McCarrick, who was defrocked by Pope Francis last year, headed up dioceses in Metuchen and Newark, New Jersey, and in Washington, D.C. The report found that three decades of bishops, cardinals and popes dismissed or downplayed reports of McCarrick's misconduct with young men.

For U.S. clergy, one of the most embarrassing revelations was that three New Jersey bishops — all now deceased — provided "inaccurate and incomplete information" about McCarrick to the Vatican as part of an investigation in 2000, just a few months before he became a cardinal and archbishop of Washington.

The bishops will discuss the McCarrick report twice Monday, first in a private session and later in a public livestream, according to the communications office of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops.

Among the opening speakers at USCCB's two-day meeting will be its president, Los Angeles Archbishop José Gomez. He has described the report as "another tragic chapter in the Church's long struggle to confront the crimes of sexual abuse by clergy."

Other scheduled speakers include the Vatican's ambassador to the U.S., Archbishop Christophe Pierre, and one of the conference's top advisers on the prevention of clerical sex abuse, National Review Board chair Suzanne Healy.

Gehring noted that the U.S. bishops already vary in their views of Pope Francis, with some skeptical of his exhortations on issues such as climate change and social justice, and said it's important to avoid having the latest McCarrick revelations further divide the U.S. church.

"It will be a disservice to survivors if bishops allow the report to create even more factions and fissures," Gehring said. "They need to address the moral and systemic failures revealed in the report head-on."

Also on the meeting's agenda are discussions of how the church can best respond to the coronavirus pandemic and to racism and racial inequality.

A budget for 2021 is expected to be approved, though some bishops may point out that their dioceses are suffering financially as attendance and offerings have declined during the pandemic.

This is the bishops' first national meeting since November 2019, when Gomez was elected the USCCB's first Hispanic president. A scheduled June gathering was canceled because of the coronavirus.

Gomez is considered a pragmatic conservative in terms of church doctrine, though he has made clear his dismay over restrictive immigration policies during the Trump administration.

He drew criticism last week from some staunch conservatives for congratulating the Democratic ticket of Joe Biden and Kamala Harris for their victory in the presidential election.

Biden, who is a practicing Catholic, has been reviled by some members of the faith, including several

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conservative bishops, for supporting abortion rights even while saying he personally accepts the church's teachings against the procedure.

"A dark cloud has descended on this nation when the USCCB and Planned Parenthood speak in unison in support of a Biden-Harris administration that supports the slaughter of innocents by abortion," Bishop Joseph Strickland of Tyler, Texas, tweeted Tuesday, alluding to Gomez's statement.

Bishop Richard Stika of Knoxville, Tennessee, has suggested, also on Twitter, that Biden supports "the ultimate child abuse."

And during the election campaign, Bishop Thomas Tobin of Providence, Rhode Island, openly questioned Biden's faith: "Biden-Harris. First time in a while that the Democratic ticket hasn't had a Catholic on it. Sad," he tweeted.

USCCB policy discourages bishops from endorsing political candidates, and Rev. James Martin, a prominent Jesuit priest, said such comments appear to violate that.

"Why did so many bishops seem to do so by telling people they could not vote for Joe Biden?" he said.

More liberal bishops in the conference also spoke out during the campaign, saying neither of the two major political parties fully embraces Catholic teaching.

Bishop John Stowe of Lexington, Kentucky, who like Gomez has congratulated Biden on his victory, wrote an op-ed for the Lexington Herald-Leader in October arguing that while Biden contradicted church doctrine by supporting abortion rights, Trump did too through certain policies and comments related to immigration, racial inequality and other issues.

And Bishop Mark Seitz of the border city of El Paso, Texas, contended in a recent article for the Jesuit magazine America that anti-abortion fervor has led some Catholics to "turn a blind eye" to other important matters.

Seitz said he was encouraged by the Biden campaign's promises to "address climate change, create a path to citizenship for the undocumented, restore protections for asylum seekers and never repeat the criminal practice of separating families at the border."

Trump "has voiced his support for unborn life," Seitz wrote. "But the president has also tainted the pro-life cause with the individualism and cult of wealth, greed and celebrity that very quickly erode solidarity and cheapen life."

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Associated Press religion coverage receives support from the Lilly Endowment through the Religion News Foundation. The AP is solely responsible for this content.

## Today in History

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Monday, Nov. 16, the 321st day of 2020. There are 45 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On Nov. 16, 1933, the United States and the Soviet Union established diplomatic relations.

On this date:

In 1776, British troops captured Fort Washington in New York during the American Revolution.

In 1907, Oklahoma became the 46th state of the union.

In 1914, the newly created Federal Reserve Banks opened in 12 cities.

In 1960, Academy Award-winning actor Clark Gable died in Los Angeles at age 59.

In 1970, the Lockheed L-1011 Tristar jetliner went on its first test flight, from Palmdale, Calif.

In 1982, an agreement was announced in the 57th day of a strike by National Football League players.

In 1991, former Louisiana governor Edwin Edwards won a landslide victory in his bid to return to office, defeating State Rep. David Duke, a former Ku Klux Klan leader.

In 2001, investigators found a letter addressed to Sen. Patrick Leahy, D-Vt., containing anthrax; it was the second letter bearing the deadly germ known to have been sent to Capitol Hill.

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In 2004, President George W. Bush picked National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice to be his new secretary of state, succeeding Colin Powell.

In 2006, Democrats embraced Nancy Pelosi as the first female House speaker in history, but then selected Steny Hoyer as majority leader against her wishes.

In 2017, Minnesota Democratic Sen. Al Franken became the first member of Congress to be caught up in a wave of allegations of sexual abuse and inappropriate behavior, after a Los Angeles radio anchor accused him of forcibly kissing her and groping her during a 2006 USO tour. (Franken eventually resigned from the Senate.)

In 2018, a U.S. official said intelligence officials had concluded that Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman had ordered the killing of journalist Jamal Khashoggi (jah-MAHL' khahr-SHOHK'-jee). A federal judge ordered the Trump administration to immediately return the White House press credentials of CNN reporter Jim Acosta.

Ten years ago: President Barack Obama presented the Medal of Honor to Army Staff Sgt. Salvatore Giunta, the first living service member from the Afghanistan and Iraq wars to receive the nation's top military award. U.S. Rep. Charles Rangel was convicted on 11 of 13 charges related to financial misconduct, prompting fellow lawmakers to censure the 80-year-old New York Democrat. The engagement of Prince William and Kate Middleton was announced in London. Hollywood publicist Ronni Chasen, 64, was shot to death in her car on Sunset Boulevard. (Police believe the killer was Harold Martin Smith, who took his own life when confronted by officers.) Roy Halladay of the Philadelphia Phillies unanimously won the NL Cy Young Award.

Five years ago: President Barack Obama, in Turkey for a meeting of world leaders, conceded that the Paris terror attacks were a "terrible and sickening setback" in the fight against the Islamic State, but forcefully dismissed critics who had called for the U.S. to change or expand its military campaign against the extremists. Chicago Cubs third baseman Kris Bryant was a unanimous pick as NL Rookie of the Year, and Houston Astros shortstop Carlos Correa was voted the AL honor. Actor David Canary, 77, died in Wilton, Connecticut.

One year ago: Transcripts released in the impeachment inquiry showed Ambassador Gordon Sondland playing a central role in President Donald Trump's effort to push Ukraine to conduct political investigations as a condition for receiving needed military aid. Trump went to Walter Reed National Military Medical Center for what he later described as a "very routine physical"; it had not been on Trump's public schedule, raising suspicions about the president's health. At the last minute, former San Francisco 49ers quarterback Colin Kaepernick skipped a workout arranged by the NFL at the Atlanta Falcons' training complex to which all 32 teams had been invited, and instead held a workout on a high school field 60 miles away, open to the media. (The NFL had scheduled its workout after Kaepernick claimed that the league had blackballed him for kneeling in protest during the national anthem.)

Today's Birthdays: Actor Clu Gulager is 92. Journalist Elizabeth Drew is 85. Blues musician W.C. Clark is 81. Actor Joanna Pettet is 78. Actor Steve Railsback is 75. Actor David Leisure is 70. Actor Miguel Sandoval is 69. Actor Marg Helgenberger is 62. Rock musician Mani is 58. Country singer-musician Keith Burns (Trick Pony) is 57. Former pro tennis player Zina Garrison is 57. Former MLB All-Star pitcher Dwight Gooden is 56. Jazz singer Diana Krall is 56. Actor Harry Lennix is 56. Rock musician Dave Kushner (Velvet Revolver) is 54. Actor Lisa Bonet (boh-NAY') is 53. Actor Tammy Lauren is 52. Rhythm-and-blues singer Bryan Abrams (Color Me Badd) is 51. Actor Martha Plimpton is 50. Actor Michael Irby is 48. Actor Missi Pyle is 48. Rock musician Corey McCormick (Lukas Nelson & Promise of the Real) is 44. Olympic gold medal figure skater Oksana Baiul (ahk-SAH'-nah by-OOL') is 43. Actor Maggie Gyllenhaal (JIHL'-ehn-hahl) is 43. Pop singer Trevor Penick is 41. Former NBA player Amare Stoudemire (ah-MAR'-ay STOW'-duh-my-ur) is 38. Actor Kimberly J. Brown is 36. Rock singer Siva Kaneswaran (The Wanted) is 32. Actor-comedian Pete Davidson (TV: "Saturday Night Live") is 27. Actor Casey Moss is 27. Actor Noah Gray-Cabey is 25.