

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Nov. 18, 2020 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 138 ~ 1 of 91

- [1- Angel Tree](#)
- [2- City Council Story](#)
- [2- Groton School Covid-19 Numbers](#)
- [3- Spotlight on Groton Area Staff](#)
- [3- Water Tower Progress](#)
- [4- Duncans to celebrate 50th Anniversary](#)
- [5- That's Life by Tony Bender](#)
- [6- Weekly Vikings Roundup](#)
- [6- Death Notice: Robert Pray Sr.](#)
- [7- Groton City October Financial Report](#)
- [8- Covid-19 Update by Marie Miller](#)
- [11- Area COVID-19 Cases](#)
- [12- November 17th COVID-19 UPDATE](#)
- [16- South Dakota COVID-19 Numbers](#)
- [17- Brown County COVID-19 Numbers](#)
- [18- Day County COVID-19 Numbers](#)
- [19- Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs](#)
- [20- Weather Pages](#)
- [23- Daily Devotional](#)
- [24- 2020 Groton Events](#)
- [25- News from the Associated Press](#)

"WE OFTEN TAKE FOR GRANTED THE VERY THINGS THAT MOST DESERVE OUR GRATITUDE."

-CYNTHIA OZICK



Groton's Angel Tree is now available at Lori's Pharmacy and Next Level Nutrition



OPEN: Recycling Trailer in Groton

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

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Nov. 18, 2020 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 138 ~ 2 of 91

Abeln hired as deputy finance officer

The Groton City Council met in regular session Tuesday night at the Groton Community Center.

Kristi Flihs, David Blackmun and Karyn Babcock were not able to make the council meeting due to COVID-19 issues Babcock and Blackmun joined the meeting via the phone. Jon Cutler and Flihs were not present. Physically at the meeting were Shirley Wells, Emily Kappes, Mayor Scott Hanlon, Attorney Drew Johnson and Finance Officer Hope Block.

Doug Hamilton was appointed to the Planning and Zoning Commission with his term to expire in 2025.

The committee assignments were adjusted as Kappes said she did not feel comfortable being chairman of the police department. Cutler will be chairman of both finance office and police with Kappes moving from chairman of police to co-chairman of Wastewater dept.

The council approved a letter of support to the S Dept. of Environment and Natural Resources to come to Groton to help identify old abandoned buildings and help with development of vacant lots. It will be done at no charge to the city.

The council approved a pay request to AB Contracting for the purchase and delivery of the new pumps for the new pumphouse for \$15,736.57.

The council approved moving \$45,000 from and to various departments to balance the 2020 budget. "You did not use a single penny of contingency in 2020," Block said. "It was a beautiful budget."

The council accepted the resignation of Peggy Locke as deputy finance officer. Mayor Scott Hanlon said, "We would like to thank her for all of her years of service to the city"

April Abeln was hired as the new deputy finance officer with a dollar an hour raise. She was previously the assistant finance officer.

The applicants for the skating rink were hired as follows: Grace Wambach as manager, and attendants Shallyn Foertsch, Andrew Marzahn, Hollie Frost, Emma Schinkel, Ava Kramer, Sara Menzia, Madeline Flihs, Marlee Tollifson, Anna Fjeldheim, Bryson Wambach, Carly Guthmiller, Stella Meier and Elizabeth Flihs.

First reading was given on the 2021 salary ordinance with a proposed 2.3 percent increase. In addition, the current insurance with Allied was accepted for the upcoming year with a 5 percent to 6 percent decrease in premiums. "We've had good review with the current plan," Hanlon said. "We'll go ahead with Allied."

Groton Area School District															
Active COVID-19 Cases															
Updated November 17, 2020; 1:01 PM															
JK	KG	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	Staff	Total
0	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	5	8

A positive case is considered active for a minimum of ten days after onset of symptoms. It is important to note that not all reported cases have been in school or school activities during their infectious periods (48 hours prior to onset of symptoms).

Spotlight on Groton Area Staff



Jodi Schwan
Photo by
Benjamin Higgins

Name: Jodi Schwan

Occupation: Opportunity Coordinator

Length of Employment: 2016-Present

Jodi Schwan has been the resident opportunity counselor at Groton Area High School since 2016. She describes herself as being a “born helper”, so it is no wonder that she is an experienced and well-known figure amongst the Groton Area staff. Her job can be described as an academic advisor for the students of Groton, assisting the high school students with planning for their lives after high school, alongside ensuring that they reach graduation without trouble. She has provided services as the Opportunity Coordinator for two years, but she had been a faculty member working in a similar capacity for an additional two years before that point.

Jodi Schwan graduated from Northern State University with a major in Sociology, specializing in Human Services and Criminal Justice. Mrs. Schwan does not have a set list of services she can provide to the students of Groton, but she can be trusted to give good advice, provide much-needed guidance and knowledge, and help students get to graduation unimpeded. When she is not busy helping the resident adolescents, Jodi Schwan can be found jogging the streets of Groton or working on a crafts project!

Editor’s Note: This is the first in a series compiled by Benjamin Higgins. Higgins is working for the Groton Independent through the Project Skills program.



Water Tower Progress

Work on the new Groton Water Tower continues. Three sections of the tube are currently being welded (you can see the welding going on inside the tube on the right side). Also, scaffolding was installed on the top part of the tank as the lid will be lifted and placed on top where welders will be busy welding it all together. It is estimated that the big crane will come to Groton on December 7th to put all of the parts together. (Photo by Paul Kosel)



50th Anniversary

Bill and Jana Duncan will be celebrating their 50th Wedding Anniversary on November 28th.

We won't be able to host a gathering due to the pandemic, but we would love for you to send Mom and Dad a card wishing them a Happy 50th!!

**The Duncans
PO Box 564, Groton, SD 57445**



That's Life by Tony Bender

In your heart forever

We're all spending more time at home these days, and if you're lucky, you have a furry friend there to keep you company. I was reminded just how intuitive and noble dogs can be when I read a story by an Englishman named Ian Brown about a dog, Gunner, that his uncle adopted during WWII.

Brown wrote, "(Gunner) was raised and slept under my uncle's anti-aircraft gun. The gun crew shared their rations to feed him. By the time he was 18 months old, my uncle said he would stand up and look at the sky. If he laid back down they knew all was OK. If he growled and put his hackles up they got at the ready. He knew the sound of the German aircraft and my uncle said he never got it wrong. He said Gunner was better than any early warning system. I'm probably the only one left in the family that knows that story now so I thought I'd tell it before it's lost forever..."

I can't say that Gus the Wonder Pug has done anything as heroic as that, but he has successfully defended me from FedEx and UPS drivers, substitute mail carriers, and butterflies. He's incorrigible, a pint-sized bully, sometimes snapping at my ankles when I walk in the yard (he thinks it's hilarious), other times growling at the pantry door where the dog treats are kept. He rules by threat. But when I return home after work, the greeting I get assures me that all is forgiven (whatever I did).

We downsized to Gus from Atlas who was more NFL lineman than St. Bernard. He made Cujo look small but he was soft-hearted and mischievous. When visitors came, he'd latch onto their sleeves knowing full well they were too terrified to push him away until he had his ears scratched. When we had carpenters working on the old church I had moved to our property and restored, he stole every tool that was left on the ground. I don't know how much extra that cost me.

When my friend Doug was up on a ladder painting the trim on the windows, Atlas walked off with his hat that had been left on the ground. When Atlas returned later looking for some ear-scratching, Doug chewed him out. "Get away from me! You stole my favorite hat!" As he was wont to do, Atlas hung his head and sulked in the shade across the yard. A while later Doug descended the ladder to find Atlas waiting for him with the missing hat in his mouth.

Before Atlas, was Karma, a Springer we raised from a pup. The smartest, most intuitive dog I ever knew. There was no training involved. She knew what I wanted.

She patrolled the house like a guard dog, wearing a cow path around it. She despised other dogs, and when my friend Harriet insisted on bringing her Dalmatian with her for a visit despite my repeated warnings, they didn't even make it in the house. The dog that Harriet claimed was so tough was spirited away to the vet clinic with one ear in bloody ribbons.

Did I say Karma was our dog? Actually, for years she was Melvin Blumhardt's dog. He ran cattle across the road, and while everyone in the house was at work or school, Karma hung out with him. Melvin would drive into the yard with a big green Oliver loader tractor, open the cab door, and Karma would leap like a greyhound to join him.

Now, Springer Spaniels are not noted cattle dogs—she was a hunting dog through and through, and even though I never hunted with her, she brought home a pheasant, and sometimes a duck, every year on her own—but one spring when Melvin, who was getting up there in years, was checking on the calves in the corral, a cow charged him. He wouldn't have stood a chance of making it over the fence had Karma not held off the enraged bovine until he scrambled to safety. "Saved my life," he told everyone at the Duck Inn in Venturia that evening, bragging about how smart she was.

Like all of us, she eventually broke down and just couldn't do it anymore. The calendar says she nearly made it 15 years, but a great dog is in your heart forever.

© Tony Bender, 2020

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Nov. 18, 2020 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 138 ~ 6 of 91

Heading into the Monday night game against the Chicago Bears, there were plenty of questions that the Minnesota Vikings needed to answer. Was the two-game winning streak a fluke? Would Kirk Cousins wither under the bright lights of Monday Night Football, or would he finally win a MNF game and get that monkey off his back? Would Dalvin Cook be able to have any success against the Bears' defense, which is one of the best in the league against the run?



By Jordan Wright

Luckily for Vikings fans, those questions were all answered positively, and Minnesota (4-5) escaped Chicago (5-5) with their third win in a row and fourth of the season. The Vikings dominated for most of the game, and even though it wasn't a pretty win, the game was never really in doubt, ending with a score of 19-13. The Vikings had 385 total yards compared to 149 for Chicago, while also leading in time of possession (35:50 to 24:10) and first downs (19 to 10).

The Chicago Bears' game plan was simple: shut down Dalvin Cook and make Kirk Cousins beat you. And while Cook did manage to put up 96 rushing yards, it took him 30 carries to do it, so the first part of Chicago's plan was executed well. Cook only averaged 3.2 yards per carry, which was the lowest mark for him this season. Cook also failed to reach the endzone for the first time this season, which means he remains tied with Emmitt Smith for consecutive games with a touchdown to start a season (7).

Justin Jefferson was the player of the game on offense, as the rookie was able to haul in eight passes for 135 yards. Most of Jefferson's damage came on third down, and according to Pro Football Reference, he had 36 more third-down receiving yards than any other player in the league this week! Kyle Rudolph was second on the team in receiving, catching four passes for 63 yards. Adam Thielen was third on the team (four catches, 43 yards), but he scored both of Minnesota's touchdowns.

The Vikings defense has been getting better every week, and Monday night's game might have been their best performance of the season so far. Not only did they hold Chicago to under 150 yards, but they also held them out of the end zone (Chicago's only touchdown came on a Cordarrelle Patterson kickoff return). The defense had a good game, but the second half is really when they took it to another level, as Chicago was held to only 32 yards and two first downs in the half. Kris Boyd and Jeff Gladney have gotten noticeably better at cornerback, and rookie D.J. Wonnum was impressive in this game and he is starting to look like a great young defensive end.

The game ball goes to Kirk Cousins this week. His stats weren't out of this world (25/36, 292 yards, two touchdowns, one interception), but the reason Cousins is getting the game ball is because he finally got a win on Monday Night Football, and he did it against a good defense who shut down the Vikings' best playmaker in Dalvin Cook. There were many plays Monday night where Kirk needed to put the team on his back, and he came through and delivered.

Looking ahead, the Vikings return home and welcome the Dallas Cowboys to U.S. Bank Stadium. The game will be on Sunday and is scheduled for a 3:25 PM (CT) kickoff. The Cowboys have had a rough year so far, and are 2-7 this season heading into this week 11 matchup. The Vikings are heavy favorites in this game, and if everything goes according to plan, the team should be able to pick up their fifth win of the season. Skol!

Robert Pray, Sr., 96, of Groton passed away November 17, 2020 at Avera St. Lukes Hospital, Aberdeen. Services are pending with Paetznick-Garness Funeral Chapel, Groton.

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Nov. 18, 2020 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 138 ~ 7 of 91

October 2020

1st State Bank Checking Acct	\$ 1,918,813.19
General Cash	\$ 300.00
SD FIT Acct	\$ 1,452,150.00
1st State Bank Water CD	\$ 83,654.27
BB Trust CD	\$ 1,500.00
SD FIT CD	\$ 102,514.21
Cemetery Perp Care CD	\$ 32,876.69
Total	\$ 3,591,808.36

Invested In		
Cash	\$ 300.00	0.01%
1st State Bank	\$ 2,036,844.15	56.71%
SD Fit	\$ 1,554,664.21	43.28%
Total	\$ 3,591,808.36	100.00%

	Beginning	Receipts	Expenditures	Transfers	Ending
	Cash Balance				Cash Balance
General	\$ 408,751.14	\$ 125,688.44	\$ 146,401.23		\$ 388,038.35
Bed, Board, Booze Tax	\$ 73,911.72	\$ 4,898.34			\$ 78,810.06
Baseball Uniforms	\$ 1,710.20				\$ 1,710.20
Airport	\$ 495.88	\$ -	\$ 4,888.97		\$ (4,393.09)
**Debt Service	\$ 329,107.50		\$ 11,320.38		\$ 317,787.12
Cemetery Perpetual Care	\$ 34,756.69	\$ -			\$ 34,756.69
Water Tower	\$ 180,000.00				\$ 180,000.00
Water	\$ 201,864.03	\$ 207,263.49	\$ 191,509.68		\$ 217,617.84
Electric	\$ 1,785,032.83	\$ 117,707.13	\$ 59,573.19		\$ 1,843,166.77
Wastewater	\$ 331,705.11	\$ 18,095.66	\$ 20,490.56		\$ 329,310.21
Solid Waste	\$ 21,702.67	\$ 9,398.13	\$ 8,342.36		\$ 22,758.44
Family Crisis	\$ 7,172.29	\$ -	\$ -		\$ 7,172.29
Sales Tax	\$ 17,615.87	\$ 7,673.52	\$ 9,551.09		\$ 15,738.30
Employment	\$ 4,043.15	\$ -	\$ 5,498.33		\$ (1,455.18)
Utility Prepayments	\$ 78,761.78	\$ 1,898.49	\$ 397.53		\$ 80,262.74
Utility Deposits	\$ 78,873.01	\$ 2,000.00	\$ 550.00		\$ 80,323.01
Other	\$ 204.61	\$ -	\$ -		\$ 204.61
Totals	\$ 3,555,708.48	\$ 494,623.20	\$ 458,523.32	\$ -	\$ 3,591,808.36

**Debt to be Paid		
**2015 Refinance	\$ 2,533,062.50	by 12/1/2035
**West Sewer	\$ 70,755.51	by 10/15/2022
**RR Sewer Crossing	\$ 39,723.41	by 7/15/22
Total Debt	\$ 2,643,541.42	

#268 in a series

Covid-19 Update: by Marie Miller

We're back to normal reporting days after the weekend, and it's not better. We have a new third-worst day after yesterday's third-worst. We are now up to 11,424,900 cases in the US, a 1.4% increase from yesterday's total. There were 158,800 new cases reported today. A million new cases in a week when your total is 11 million means one in 11 new cases was reported in the past seven days. That's startling, and it means this is not going well.

Thirty-one states were seeing more new cases than in any previous week in this pandemic. A third of states have more people hospitalized than at any point in the pandemic so far.

There were 1563 deaths reported today, a 0.6% increase. This is our first day back over 1500 after 11 days below that mark, so this is not a great sign. This is a large increase after the weekend below 1000. While deaths overall are rising only modestly, some states—Utah, South Dakota, Iowa, Wisconsin, and Tennessee are seeing higher seven-day death rates than ever before. We've seen that consistently the average number of deaths per day has been representing 1.7% of new cases a little more than two weeks prior; so this is an indication we're headed for trouble by the beginning of next month.

Indiana has reported more than 5000 daily new cases for a solid week now and also reports a record number of hospitalizations, breaking a record set just two days earlier. Schools are struggling to stay open as more and more teachers are sick or in quarantine. Maine shows alarming growth in seven-day average new case reports, from 30 a month ago to 91 two weeks ago to 190 today. The director of the Maine CDC warned of "forceful and widespread" community transmission throughout the state. The Plains and Mountain West continue to burn. Things are looking worse over much of the country.

Rural Americans are not only the new epicenter of infections in many regions; they are also almost 3.5 times as likely to die as urban dwellers. The seven-day death rate per 100,000 residents for large metro areas is 0.2 while it is 0.69 in rural areas. Rural areas also have a new-case rate 1.7 times that in urban areas.

One example of the breathtaking disregard for human life underlying the repeated surges in infection rates is what we've seen in outbreaks associated with weddings, events it's pretty easy to categorize as nonessential, at least in terms of having a few hundred of your closest buddies witness your ceremony when there's a pandemic on. There was that Maine wedding in August we tracked for weeks; the event exceeded crowd-size limits mandated by the state. And the latest figures on that one are nearly 200 infections and at least seven deaths—not a one of which was in someone who made the choice to attend the wedding, but instead every one of which was in a person exposed by a wedding guest who made their choice for them. And then there was the Long Island wedding last month, another that flouted pandemic orders. This event is up to one-third of the guests infected and 159 others in quarantine, and we're still counting. Now there's another wedding, this one in Washington with around 300, ten times the legal limit, in attendance. Fallout's still settling, but so far, we're looking at 17 guests testing positive with more being diagnosed each day. Given that guests streamed into the small town where the wedding was held and then carried the virus back to their home towns, this one shows real promise in the superspreader category. There are already two associated outbreaks in what authorities are referring to as "an evolving situation." They're also suggesting the least you can do is keep a good record of who attends your wedding—you know, for the eventual contact tracing.

There's new polling out from Gallup on people's willingness to receive a new Covid-19 vaccine when it becomes available, and the news is good, if not great. There is a hefty increase in people saying they would get a vaccine from 50% in September to 58% now. It should be noted the polling was done shortly before Pfizer and Moderna made their announcements about the interim results for their vaccines; so we do not know how those announcements might affect willingness. That will be for the next poll, I guess. We can hope that number continues to rise; it really needs to.

This is probably a good time to discuss the outlook for these vaccines, now that we appear to be getting close. We're waiting for trials to reach their safety checkpoint; the FDA has made it clear it wants to

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Nov. 18, 2020 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 138 ~ 9 of 91

see two months of safety data on at least half of vaccine participants after receiving their second dose. We should be there in the next couple of weeks for both of these mRNA vaccines that have been in the news lately, one from Pfizer and one from Moderna. We're also looking for them to hit their predetermined number of cases, something that this latest surge is causing to happen faster: The more virus is circulating, the sooner your volunteers are going to show up sick.

Once we're at that point, the company will evaluate their data and package it with an application for an emergency use authorization (EUA) for the FDA. Regulators will review all of these data on efficacy, safety, and manufacturing and hand the package to an advisory committee. These folks will be people who are not affiliated in any way with the companies seeking the EUA, and they will vote on a recommendation for the FDA which will then authorize or reject the product. An EUA will trigger final distribution prioritization plans being made by a different advisory board, which will be finalized based on what the data from the trial show about the characteristics of the vaccine(s) in question.

Once the EUAs are issued, the vaccines can be distributed; this will likely begin in late December or shortly after the first of the year. They will go first to those in high-risk groups, the exact parameters of which are still to be finalized. It is likely health workers and first responders will be early recipients, as will others in essential jobs like teachers and food workers and those at risk because of age or health conditions. The two companies together anticipate having doses for around 20 million people available by the end of the year. Healthy younger adults not in priority groups probably won't see vaccination opportunities until April at the soonest—and it could be into the summer, but even then, it will take time before supplies are sufficient for all who qualify. Children aren't likely to even be included in the EUA because there won't be enough data on safety in that age group. No one currently has children in its clinical trial groups; Pfizer is just getting underway including them. As a result, children will probably be the last to get access.

We are not sure whether people who've recovered from Covid-19 should be vaccinated or not. The clinical trials did not exclude them, so it could be that analysis of the full data will yield a recommendation in that regard. For most pathogens, natural infection results in better immunity than vaccination does, but there are exceptions. As far as I know, we're not sure whether this is such a case. We should also note that, while full safety data haven't been released, the Data Safety and Monitoring Boards for the trials have not reported any serious safety concerns. The side effects noted sound unpleasant, but not unbearable: pain at the injection site, fatigue, muscle aches, chills, fever.

We have a new study out from a US/Canadian team and published in the Annals of the American Thoracic Society, which looked at the effects of wearing a face mask while exercising. Bottom line is that there is no real effect. Dr. Susan Hopkins, one of the team and professor of medicine and radiology at the University of California San Diego School of Medicine, said, "There might be a perceived greater effort with activity, but the effects of wearing a mask on the work of breathing, on gases like oxygen and carbon dioxide in blood or other physiological parameters are small, often too small to be detected" irrespective of the intensity of the exercise or the type of mask. Age and gender also appear not to play a role. So while the wearer might feel more short of breath, there is simply no difference in physiologic response to exercise that is of concern. This may not be true for those with severely compromised cardiopulmonary function, and those individuals are recommended to discuss the matter with their physician. So much for all those assertions about mask-wearing damaging your lungs.

Another study of interest was published in the Clinical Journal of the American Society of Nephrology; it deals with kidney injury developing during Covid-19 disease. This study at the Institute for Public Health at Washington University involved more than 5000 veterans hospitalized with the infection and found that these cases were at a higher risk of acute kidney injury (AKI) due to the infection and nearly half of those who developed AKI did not fully recover kidney function in the short term. Also, those who developed AKI were more than six times more likely to die than those without the kidney damage. Here, there was a significant racial pattern as well: Black men with high blood pressure and diabetes were the majority of cases of AKI, showing up at twice the rate as others.

David Deutchman had too much time on his hands after he retired from his career in marketing. He did

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Nov. 18, 2020 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 138 ~ 10 of 91

some guest lectures in universities, but it wasn't really enough to occupy his time; so one day, he asked at a local hospital about volunteer opportunities. And that is how he became the ICU grandpa. Twice a week for the past 14 years—until the pandemic—he went into the neonatal intensive care unit and cuddled babies.

That's a thing, volunteer cuddler. Turns out babies do better when they're held and touched a lot, but when they're in the hospital for a long time and parents have jobs and other children, they can't always be there. That's where the volunteers come in. Research shows touch stimulation is linked with healthy physical and psychological development; babies gain weight faster when they're held a lot. He also serves parents as someone to talk to, to share their worries with, someone who doesn't have to rush off to the next patient and who can listen. Over the years, he has touched a lot of lives. In recent years, many of his moms have been in touch on social media, so he was even able to keep up on how the little ones did.

Your touch and your time are invaluable resources for those who need them, and for a very long time, Deutchman freely shared both with the premature babies at the hospital twice a week. A year or two ago, he told an interviewer he loves giving back to the community. "I think it's important that the parents in the ICU can rely on someone and have somebody they can talk to." And so, for 14 years, Deutchman was that guy.

Lately he'd been feeling tired and under the weather himself and began to wonder whether it was time to retire from his volunteer work. When the pandemic came and hospital visits were curtailed—even for volunteers—that made the decision fairly straightforward, sort of a natural end to the work he so valued. But when the fatigue and weakness continued and he consulted his physician, he was not exactly ready to hear he'd been diagnosed with stage 4 pancreatic cancer. There wasn't much to be done; he went right into hospice care.

And the community to whom he'd given so much decided to give back. The hospital organized a drive-by parade at his home with dozens of well-wishers making their presence known with honking horns and balloons. His daughter said she and her sister were not at all surprised their dad was so popular with the families who'd known him from the hospital and expressed their appreciation for the support. Deutchman died Saturday at the age of 86, just two and a half weeks after he was diagnosed, having managed to slip in one final birthday and his 58th wedding anniversary in those weeks.

His daughter said, "He made it very clear to all his loved ones and even his friends that he feels grateful to have lived such a rich and full life." And then he slipped away, having left his corner of the world a better place for him having been there. I'm just going to say that's a pretty darned good life goal.

Be well. We'll talk again.

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Nov. 18, 2020 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 138 ~ 11 of 91

Area COVID-19 Cases

	Nov. 18
Minnesota	236,949
Nebraska	103,805
Montana	49,398
Colorado	172,044
Wyoming	21,047
North Dakota	65,967
South Dakota	67,284
United States	11,360,125
US Deaths	248,707

Minnesota	+5,931
Nebraska	+2,204
Montana	+1,371
Colorado	+4,331
Wyoming	+1,162
North Dakota	+1,082
South Dakota	+1,006
United States	+154,640
US Deaths	+1,487

	Nov. 11	Nov. 12	Nov. 13	Nov. 14	Nov. 15	Nov. 16	Nov. 17
Minnesota	189,681	194,570	201,795	207,339	213,582	223,581	231,018
Nebraska	87,733	89,942	92,553	94,922	96,834	98,161	101,601
Montana	41,151	42,070	43,031	44,244	45,886	47,158	48,027
Colorado	138,427	142,042	147,599	154,038	159,234	163,417	167,713
Wyoming	16,442	16,518	17,442	18,243	18,726	19,298	19,885
North Dakota	56,342	57,373	59,173	60,602	62,872	63,796	64,885
South Dakota	57,334	58,696	60,716	62,327	64,182	65,381	66,278
United States	10,258,090	10,402,273	10,557,451	10,746,996	10,905,597	11,038,312	11,205,485
US Deaths	239,695	241,808	242,436	244,366	245,614	246,224	247,220

Minnesota	+4,893	+4,889	+7,225	+5,554	+6,243	+9,999	+7,437
Nebraska	+2,182	+2,209	+2,611	+2,369	+1,912	+1,327	+3,440
Montana	+1,098	+919	+961	+1,213	+1,642	+1,272	+869
Colorado	+3,890	+3,615	+5,557	+6,439	+5,196	+4,183	+4,296
Wyoming	+1,131	+76	+924	+801	+483	+572	+587
North Dakota	+894	+1,031	+1,801	+1,429	+2,270	+924	1,089
South Dakota	+1,024	+1,362	+2,019	+1,611	+1,855	+1,199	+897
United States	+147,538	+144,183	+155,178	+189,545	+158,601	+132,715	+167,173
US Deaths	+1,444	+2,113	+628	+1,930	+1,248	+610	+996

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Nov. 18, 2020 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 138 ~ 12 of 91

November 17th COVID-19 UPDATE

Groton Daily Independent from State Health Lab Reports

Another easy day - no deaths for the second straight day. Positive cases increased over recoveries, 1006-521. The state's positivity rate for today was just 12.1 percent while here in Brown County, with the additional testing, was only 6.8 percent. It appears the more testing we do, the lower our positivity rate. Our raw number for positive cases remains near the thousand mark. Use common sense! The 14-day positivity rate is 20.4 percent. The seven-day rate is 21.2 percent and the last day was 20.5 percent. Nothing even close to what CNN is reporting for 60 percent. By the way, other states have had issues with CNN's positivity rate figures as well, so we're not alone.

Glacial Lakes hospital beds being occupied by COVID-19 patients as well as Minnehaha and Pennington counties: Walworth: 4 (-0) Occupied Beds.; Potter: 2 (-2) Occupied Beds; Hughes: 14 (+3) Occupied Beds, 2 (-1) ICU Beds, 0 (-1) Ventilation; Hand: 4 (-0) Occupied Beds; Faulk: 4 (+1) Occupied Beds; Edmunds: 1 (-0) Occupied Bed; Brown: 34 (+3) Occupied Beds, 3 (+1) ICU, 1 (+0) Ventilation; Spink: 3 (-0) Occupied Beds; Day: 2 (+0) Occupied Beds; Marshall: 0 (-2) Occupied Beds; Grant: 4 (+2) Occupied Beds; Codington: 23 (+6) Occupied Beds, 4 (+1) ICU, 1 (-1) Ventilation; None (some counties have no hospitals): Clark, Hyde, Stanley, Sully, Campbell, McPherson, Roberts; Minnehaha: 276 (-4) Occupied Beds, 59 (-0) ICU, 37

(+3) Ventilation; Pennington: 84 (+8) Occupied Beds, 12 (-0) ICU, 8 (-3) Ventilation

Brown County:

Total Positive: +42 (2,980) Positivity Rate: 6.8%
Total Tests: +616 (23,433)
Total Individuals Tested: +172 (12,405)
Recovered: +26 (2,264)
Active Cases: +16 (706)
Ever Hospitalized: +3 (168)
Deaths: +0 (10)
Percent Recovered: 76.0%
Hospital Reports:
Avera St. Luke's: Covid-19 Occupied 24 (+3); ICU 2 (+1), Ventilation 0 (0).
Sanford Aberdeen: Covid-19 Occupied 10 (-0); ICU 1 (+0), Ventilation 1 (+0)
Sanford Webster: Covid-19 Occupied 2 (+0).
Marshall County Healthcare: Covid-19 Occupied: 0 (-2).

South Dakota:

Positive: +1006 (67,284 total) Positivity Rate: 12.1%
Total Tests: 8325 (530,768 total)
Total Individuals Tested: 2212 (298,359)
Hospitalized: +71 (3,769 total). 582 currently hospitalized +12)
Deaths: +0 (644 total)
Recovered: +521 (48,016 total)
Active Cases: +485 (18,624)
Percent Recovered: 71.3%

Total COVID-19 Occupied Beds: 582 (+22), Black Hills Region 118 (+10), Glacial Lakes Region 95 (+11) Sioux Empire Region 297 (-1), South Central Plains 72 (+2).

ICU Units: Total 95 (-2), BH 13 (-3), GL 9 (+1), SE 60 (-0), SCP 13 (+0).

Ventilation: Total 47 (-1), BH 8 (-3), GL 2 (-1), SE 37 (+3), SCP 0 (-0).

Staffed Hospital Bed Capacity: 21% Covid, 43% Non-Covid, 36% Available

ICU Bed Capacity: 31% Covid, 33% Non-Covid, 36% Available

Ventilator Capacity: 11% Covid, 15% Non-Covid, 74% Available

Beadle (22) +32 positive, +22 recovered (575 active cases)

Brookings (13) +16 positive, +12 recovered (511 active cases)

Brown (10): +42 positive, +26 recovered (706 active cases)

Clark (1): +5 positive, +2 recovered (55 active cases)

Clay (8): +6 positive, +1 recovered (262 active cases)

Codington (30): +43 positive, +14 recovered (543 active cases)

Davison (15): +71 positive, +34 recovered (858 active cases)

Day (5): +2 positive, +1 recovered (94 active cases)

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Nov. 18, 2020 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 138 ~ 13 of 91

Edmunds (1): +0 positive, +1 recovered (52 active cases)

Faulk (6): +1 positive, +0 recovered (36 active cases)

Grant (5): +6 positive, +4 recovered (133 active cases)

Hanson (1): +3 positive, +2 recovered (73 active cases)

Hughes (8): +69 positive, +11 recovered (416 active cases)

Lawrence (9): +22 positive, +23 recovered (506 active cases)

Lincoln (40): +65 positive, +27 recovered (1357 active cases)

Marshall (3): +5 positive, +2 recovered (42 active cases)

McCook (9): +13 positive, +6 recovered (194 active cases)

McPherson (1): +2 positive, +0 recovery (41 active case)

Minnehaha (139): +230 positive, +142 recovered (4761 active cases)

Potter: +2 positive, +0 recovered (65 active cases)

Roberts (13): +6 positive, +7 recovered (165 active cases)

Spink (8): +4 positive, +1 recovered (138 active cases)

Walworth (10): +4 positive, +1 recovered (98 active cases)

NORTH DAKOTA

COVID-19 Daily Report, Nov. 17:

- 15.9% rolling 14-day positivity
- 1,091 new positives
- 7,989 susceptible test encounters
- 304 currently hospitalized (-28)
- 10,022 active cases (-878)
- 769 total deaths (+26)

Yesterday

Global Cases
55,079,810
11,205,485 US
8,874,290 India
5,876,464 Brazil
2,041,293 France
1,954,912 Russia
1,496,864 Spain
1,394,299 United Kingdom
1,318,384 Argentina
1,205,881 Italy
1,205,217 Colombia
1,009,396 Mexico
937,011 Peru

Today

Global Cases
55,695,116
11,360,125 US
8,912,907 India
5,911,758 Brazil
2,087,183 France
1,975,629 Russia
1,510,023 Spain
1,414,359 United Kingdom
1,329,005 Argentina
1,238,072 Italy
1,211,128 Colombia
1,011,153 Mexico

Global Deaths

1,328,167

247,220 deaths US
166,014 deaths Brazil
130,519 deaths India
98,861 deaths Mexico
52,240 deaths United Kingdom
45,733 deaths Italy
45,122 deaths France

Global Deaths

1,339,820

248,707 deaths US
166,699 deaths Brazil
130,993 deaths India
99,026 deaths Mexico
52,839 deaths United Kingdom
46,464 deaths Italy

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Nov. 18, 2020 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 138 ~ 14 of 91

County	Positive Cases	Recovered Cases	Negative Persons	Deceased	Community Spread	% RT-PCR Test Positivity
Aurora	305	195	754	2	Substantial	52.13%
Beadle	1975	1378	4383	22	Substantial	32.61%
Bennett	277	200	1014	5	Substantial	10.92%
Bon Homme	1237	1060	1690	7	Substantial	41.51%
Brookings	2102	1578	7473	13	Substantial	23.64%
Brown	2980	2264	9425	10	Substantial	26.90%
Brule	475	327	1480	5	Substantial	41.57%
Buffalo	334	297	800	5	Substantial	29.69%
Butte	621	429	2318	8	Substantial	31.06%
Campbell	96	78	177	1	Moderate	31.82%
Charles Mix	652	446	3189	1	Substantial	22.72%
Clark	193	137	730	1	Substantial	11.56%
Clay	1142	872	3727	8	Substantial	29.44%
Codington	2289	1716	6961	30	Substantial	31.54%
Corson	320	259	818	3	Substantial	55.26%
Custer	442	349	1913	4	Substantial	25.52%
Davison	1983	1110	4957	15	Substantial	37.69%
Day	279	180	1290	5	Substantial	47.20%
Deuel	261	204	849	2	Substantial	34.88%
Dewey	711	321	3406	2	Substantial	30.02%
Douglas	260	182	728	5	Substantial	23.02%
Edmunds	209	156	791	1	Substantial	19.31%
Fall River	324	229	1945	7	Substantial	21.03%
Faulk	261	219	544	6	Substantial	31.25%
Grant	488	350	1637	5	Substantial	32.61%
Gregory	373	260	918	13	Substantial	32.00%
Haakon	123	94	436	3	Moderate	7.77%
Hamlin	345	226	1315	0	Substantial	18.53%
Hand	252	158	626	1	Substantial	41.30%
Hanson	194	120	506	1	Substantial	41.56%
Harding	64	58	121	0	Minimal	30.77%
Hughes	1378	954	4616	8	Substantial	32.26%
Hutchinson	444	262	1718	3	Substantial	24.50%

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Nov. 18, 2020 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 138 ~ 15 of 91

Hyde	105	54	323	0	Substantial	51.11%
Jackson	180	130	791	5	Substantial	30.30%
Jerauld	221	156	414	13	Substantial	29.55%
Jones	50	38	144	0	Moderate	40.00%
Kingsbury	360	219	1163	5	Substantial	22.60%
Lake	726	491	2087	9	Substantial	43.88%
Lawrence	1690	1175	6211	9	Substantial	24.00%
Lincoln	4601	3204	14568	40	Substantial	36.03%
Lyman	381	307	1488	7	Substantial	24.82%
Marshall	123	78	835	3	Substantial	38.04%
McCook	512	309	1181	9	Substantial	36.01%
McPherson	110	68	432	1	Substantial	17.83%
Meade	1465	1107	5627	11	Substantial	22.83%
Mellette	135	103	583	1	Substantial	50.00%
Miner	176	136	443	3	Substantial	35.14%
Minnehaha	17452	12691	57697	139	Substantial	30.61%
Moody	355	237	1425	6	Substantial	40.00%
Oglala Lakota	1418	1040	5800	13	Substantial	29.01%
Pennington	7159	5091	27627	60	Substantial	27.42%
Perkins	120	79	513	0	Substantial	27.91%
Potter	217	152	630	0	Substantial	16.39%
Roberts	577	399	3458	13	Substantial	23.10%
Sanborn	211	111	501	1	Substantial	42.86%
Spink	468	322	1706	8	Substantial	16.22%
Stanley	184	110	654	0	Substantial	28.33%
Sully	77	51	191	1	Substantial	43.48%
Todd	719	566	3523	10	Substantial	38.46%
Tripp	417	302	1193	2	Substantial	44.81%
Turner	716	503	2010	34	Substantial	25.00%
Union	1072	807	4503	18	Substantial	21.21%
Walworth	386	278	1402	10	Substantial	31.33%
Yankton	1363	945	6743	8	Substantial	30.93%
Ziebach	149	89	596	3	Substantial	24.00%
Unassigned	0	0	1358	0		

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Nov. 18, 2020 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 138 ~ 16 of 91

South Dakota



AGE GROUP OF SOUTH DAKOTA COVID-19 CASES

Age Range	# of Cases	# of Deaths
0-9 years	2186	0
10-19 years	7201	0
20-29 years	13142	2
30-39 years	11387	9
40-49 years	9620	15
50-59 years	9529	42
60-69 years	7458	85
70-79 years	3825	129
80+ years	2936	362

SEX OF SOUTH DAKOTA COVID-19 CASES

Sex	# of Cases	# of Deaths
Female	35051	314
Male	32233	330

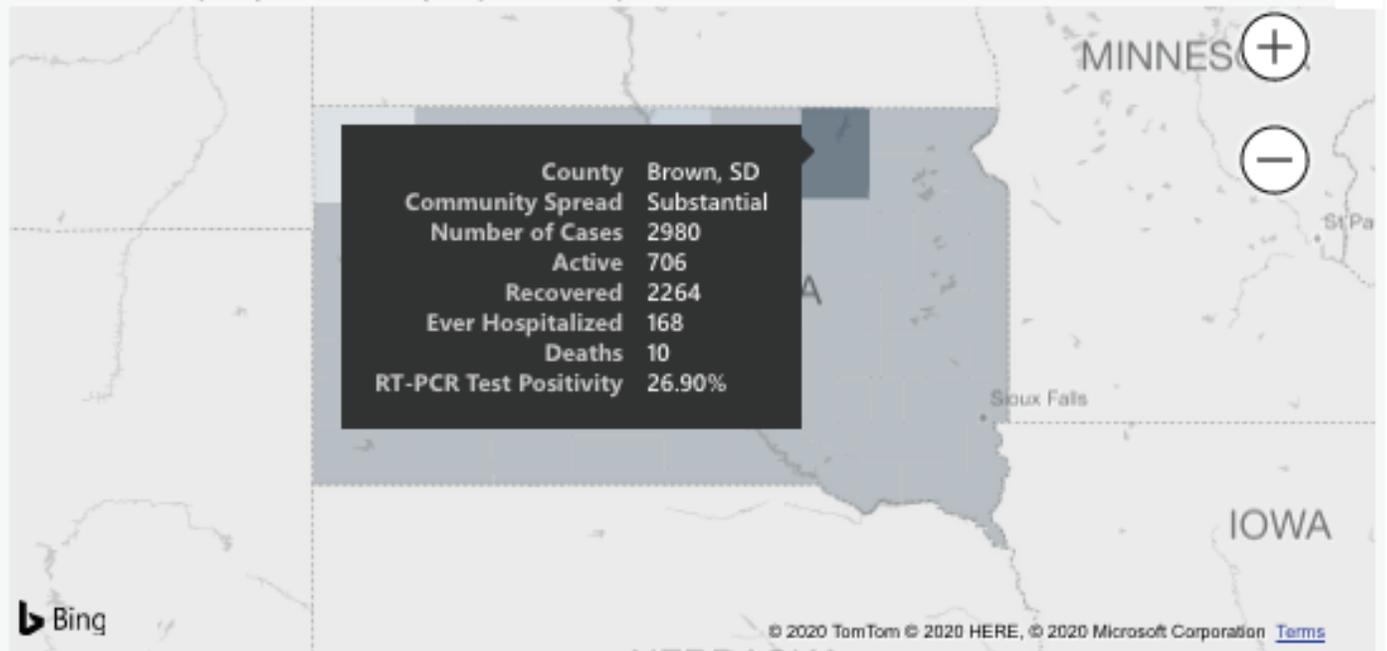
Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Nov. 18, 2020 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 138 ~ 17 of 91

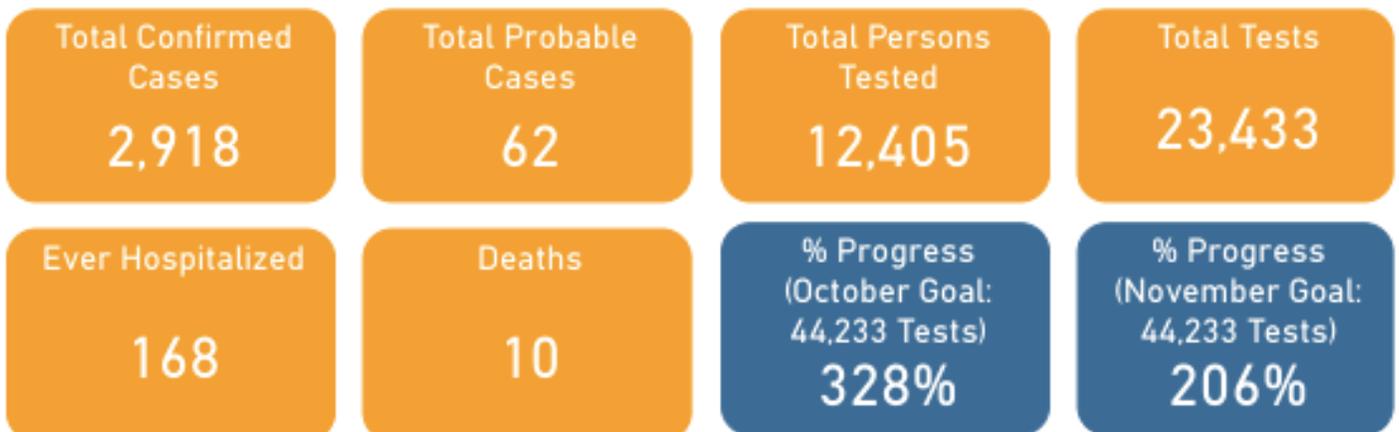
Brown County



Community Spread Map by County of Residence



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



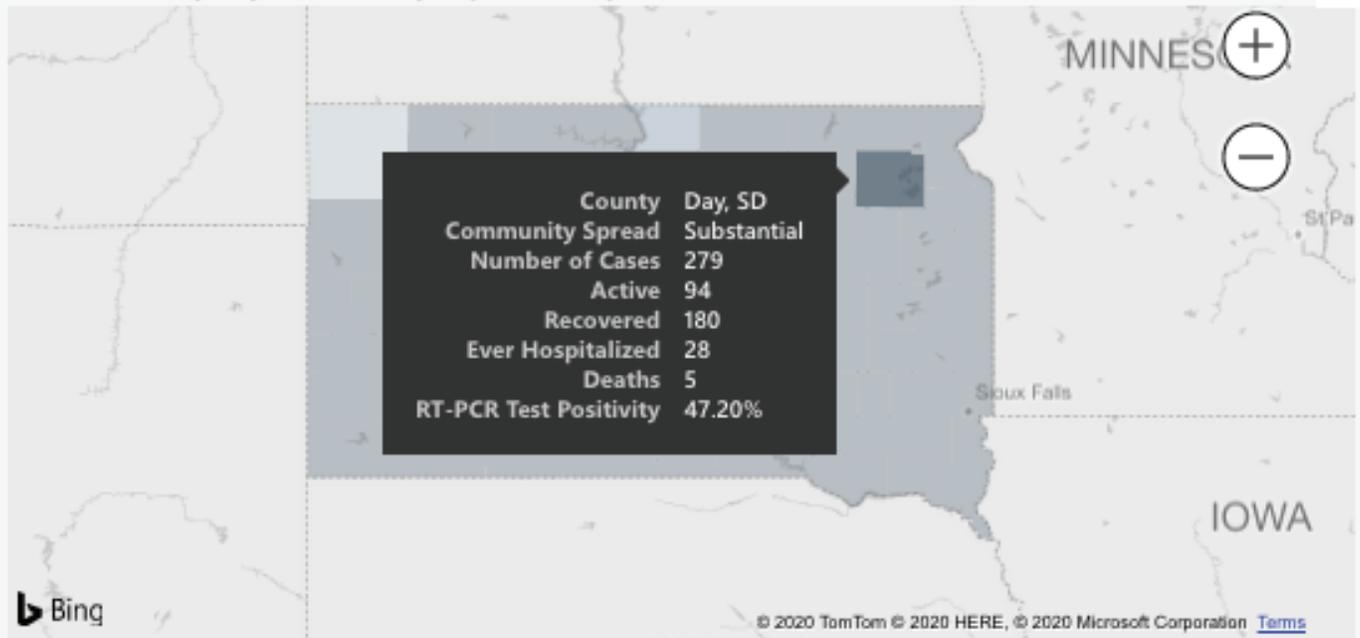
Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Nov. 18, 2020 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 138 ~ 18 of 91

Day County



Community Spread Map by County of Residence



Community Spread ● Minimal ● Moderate ● Substantial

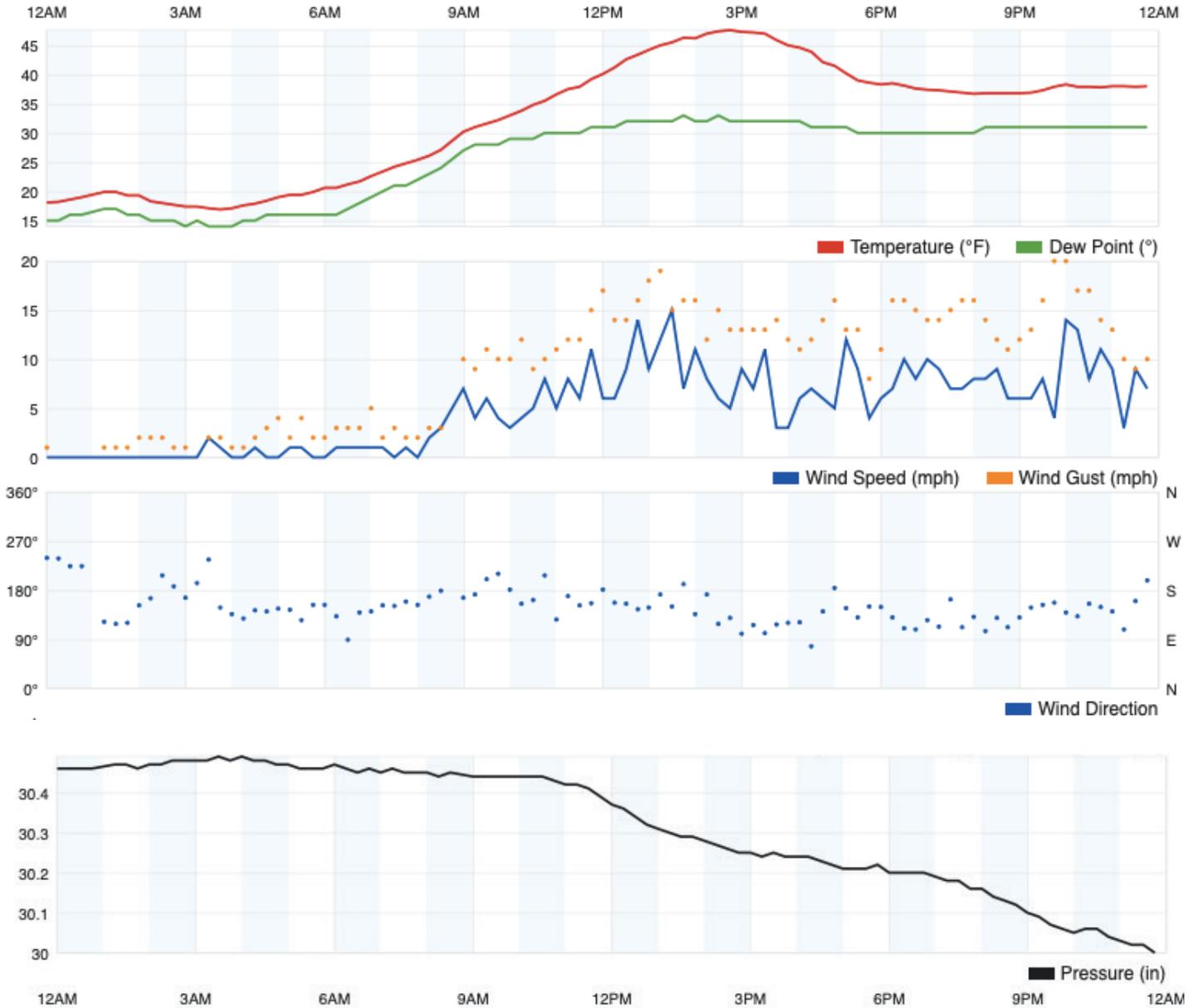
Hover over a county to see its details, or click county to update the orange boxes.



Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Nov. 18, 2020 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 138 ~ 19 of 91

Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Nov. 18, 2020 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 138 ~ 20 of 91

Today

Tonight

Thursday

Thursday
Night

Friday



Mostly Sunny

Mostly Cloudy

Sunny

Mostly Clear

Sunny

High: 59 °F

Low: 29 °F

High: 56 °F

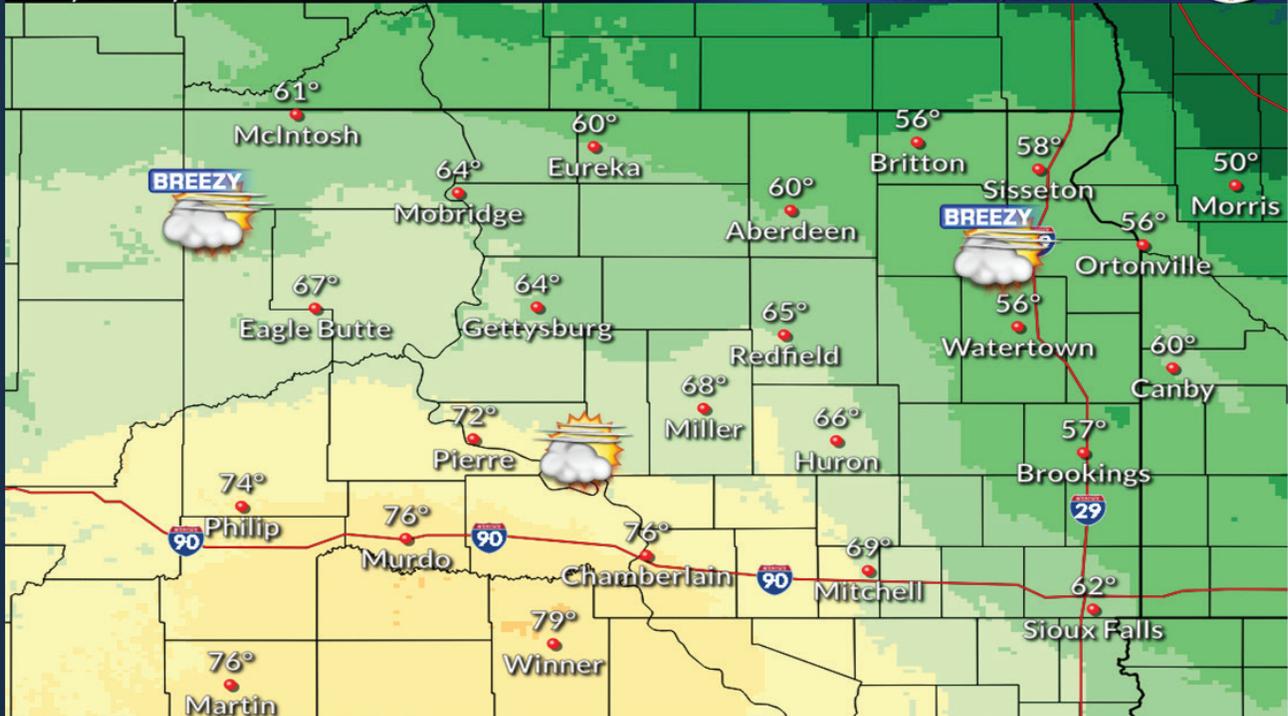
Low: 26 °F

High: 41 °F

Near Record Highs Today

Breezy southerly winds

Weather Forecast Office
Aberdeen, SD
Issued Nov 18, 2020 4:51 AM CST



f t NWSAberdeen

weather.gov/abr

Southerly breezes today will help push temperatures into the 60s and 70s from the James Valley west. The dry and warm conditions will continue into Thursday though today will be the warmer of the two.

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Nov. 18, 2020 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 138 ~ 21 of 91

Today in Weather History

November 18, 1985: Snowfall of 3-8 inches fell over western, central and northern South Dakota, with the most significant amount of 8 inches at Huron in Beadle County and White River in Mellette County. Strong winds exceeding 40 mph over the area produced near-blizzard conditions at times, with considerable blowing and drifting snow. Additional storm total snowfall amounts included; 6.0 inches in Murdo; 5.5 inches at Gettysburg, 5.0 inches near Stephan, in Eureka, and 12SSW of Harrold; and 4.0 inches in McLaughlin.

November 18, 1992: Three to eleven inches of snow fell in the northeast third of South Dakota and into west central Minnesota from the 18th into the 19th. Storm total snowfall amounts included; 11.0 inches in Browns Valley and near Bryant, 9 inches near Sisseton, Summit and Wheaton MN, 8 inches near Victor and Wilmot, 7.9 inches at Artichoke Lake MN, and 7.0 inches in Clear Lake.

1421: The notorious St. Elizabeth's flood occurred during the night of November 18, to November 19 in what is now known as the Netherlands. A strong storm on the North Sea coast caused several dikes to break allowing the lower lands to flood. Some villages around Dordrecht were lost, causing an estimated 6,000 casualties.

1929: A magnitude 7.2 earthquake off the coast of the Grand Banks, Newfoundland caused a submarine landslide that triggered a tsunami that killed people on the Burin Peninsula of Newfoundland. The under-sea landslide damaged several miles of transatlantic telegraph cables, resulting in much of the \$400,000 in damage. South Carolina and Portugal felt this tsunami.

1873 - A severe storm raged from Georgia to Nova Scotia causing great losses to fishing fleets along the coast. In Maine, the barometric pressure reached 28.49 inches at Portland. (David Ludlum)

1955 - An early season cold snap finally came to an end. Helena, MT, experienced 138 consecutive hours of subzero temperatures, including a reading of 29 below zero, which surpassed by seven degrees their previous record for the month of November. Missoula MT broke their November record by 12 degrees with a reading of 23 below zero, and Salt Lake City UT smashed their previous November record of zero with a reading of 14 below. Heavy snow in the Great Basin closed Donner Pass CA, and total crop damage from the cold wave amounted to eleven million dollars. (David Ludlum)

1957 - A tornado, 100 yards in width, travelled a nearly straight as an arrow 27-mile path from near Rosa AL to near Albertville AL, killing three persons. A home in the Susan Moore community in Blount County was picked up and dropped 500 feet away killing one person. (The Weather Channel)

1986 - The first of two successive snowstorms struck the northeastern U.S. The storm produced up to 20 inches of snow in southern New Hampshire. Two days later a second storm produced up to 30 inches of snow in northern Maine. (Storm Data)

1987 - It was a windy day across parts of the nation. Gale force winds whipped the Great Lakes Region. Winds gusting to 80 mph in western New York State damaged buildings and flipped over flatbed trailers at Churchville. In Montana, high winds in the Upper Yellowstone Valley gusted to 64 mph at Livingston. Strong Santa Ana winds buffeted the mountains and valleys of southern California. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - Thunderstorms developing along a warm front drenched Little Rock AR with 7.01 inches of rain, smashing their previous record for the date of 1.91 inches. (The National Weather Summary)

1989 - A second surge of arctic air brought record cold to parts of the north central U.S. Eleven cities in the Upper Midwest reported record low temperatures for the date, including Rochester MN with a reading of 4 degrees below zero. Strong winds ushering the arctic air into the north central U.S. produced squalls in the Lower Great Lakes Region. Snowfall totals in northern Ohio ranged up to twenty inches in Ashatabula County and Geauga County. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

Groton Daily Independent

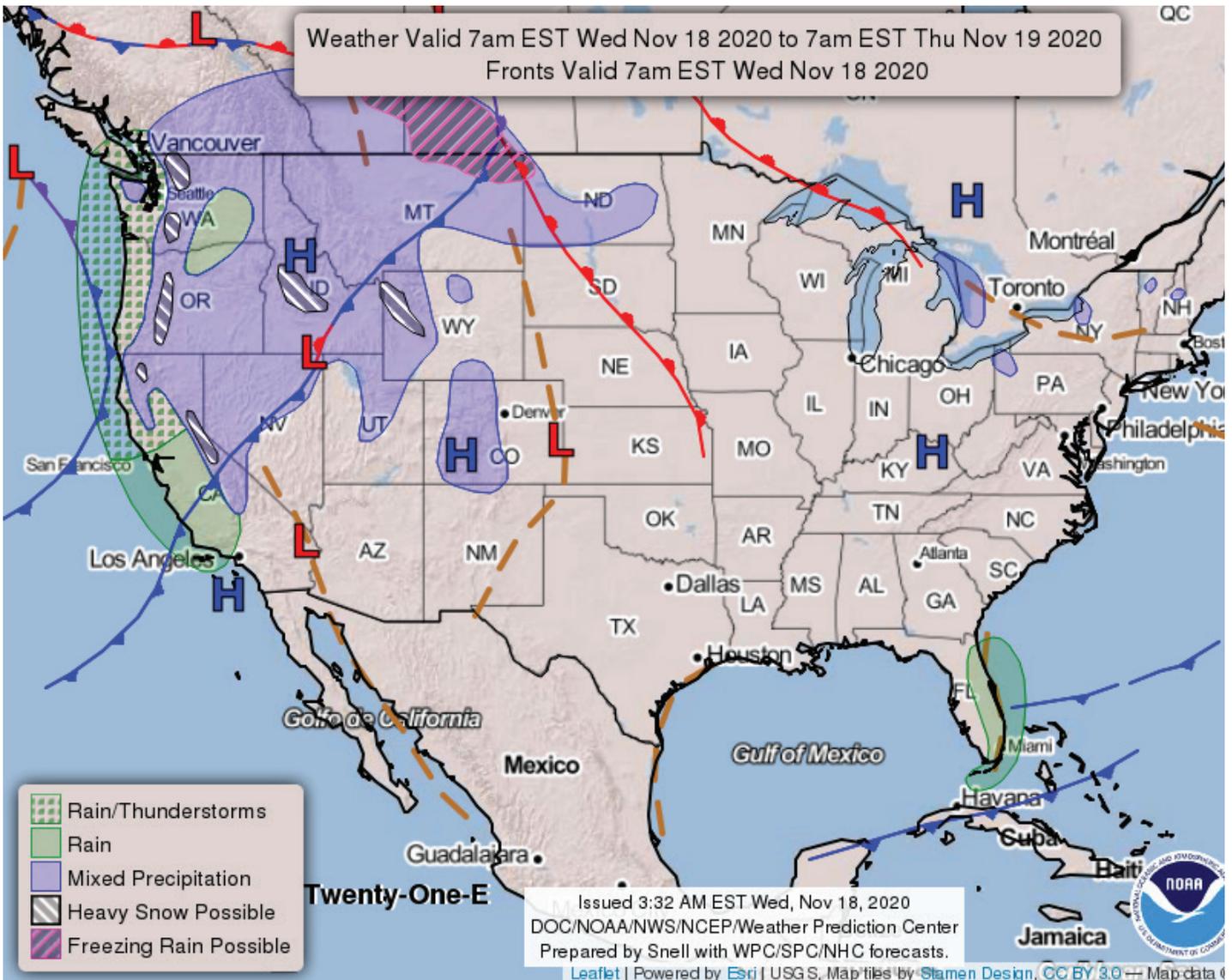
Wednesday, Nov. 18, 2020 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 138 ~ 22 of 91

Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 48 °F at 2:42 PM
Low Temp: 17 °F at 3:38 AM
Wind: 20 mph at 9:39 PM
Precip: .00

Today's Info

Record High: 71° in 1908
Record Low: -13° in 1896
Average High: 38°F
Average Low: 18°F
Average Precip in Nov.: 0.46
Precip to date in Nov.: 0.06
Average Precip to date: 20.93
Precip Year to Date: 16.40
Sunset Tonight: 5:00 p.m.
Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:39 a.m.



Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Nov. 18, 2020 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 138 ~ 23 of 91



THE DANGER OF ANGER

Sin is not a behavior to belittle. When it no longer frightens us, we have lost contact with God. A small sin can lead to a large tragedy. And, all sin has consequences.

One day, while the children of Israel were on the path to the Promised Land, they came to a place that had no water. Rather than trusting their God who had always provided for their every need, they became frightened. And, when fear, rather than faith, takes over one's life, faultfinding and blaming others for what is happening always follows.

Our Psalmist gives us a vivid report of the consequences of their "faithless" behavior: it "angered" Moses. So, the Lord told him to take his rod, gather the people together, speak to the rock in their presence, and it would provide the water they needed.

But Moses did not speak to the rock. Instead, he struck it twice with his rod. Then, in anger, he spoke harshly to the people. Rather than doing what God asked him to do, he did what he wanted to do, and it led to tragedy, and eventually his downfall.

Notice what occurs when you place a "d" in front of "anger." It becomes "danger." His disobedience aroused his anger which should have been a "danger signal." There is always a great danger when we become angry and are disobedient to God. In this instance, anger led to disobedience, which led to sin. As a result, he lost the great honor and privilege of leading his people into the Promised Land.

How sad. How tragic. Moses did many great and glorious things. He had worked hard and did well. He was so close to reaching the goal God had given him. But he disobeyed God, lost control of his emotions, and had to pay the consequences. A moment of anger can destroy anyone at any time and in any place. Remember the letter "d!"

Prayer: Thank you Lord for always providing what we need. Only You can give us victory over our emotions that will so easily destroy us. May we learn the value of patience and being faithful to You. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: At Meribah, too, they angered the Lord, causing Moses serious trouble. Psalm 106:32

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Nov. 18, 2020 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 138 ~ 24 of 91

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

SD Lottery

By The Associated Press undefined

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

Mega Millions

08-13-35-46-68, Mega Ball: 16, Megaplier: 3

(eight, thirteen, thirty-five, forty-six, sixty-eight; Mega Ball: sixteen; Megaplier: three)

Estimated jackpot: \$176 million

Powerball

Estimated jackpot: \$179 million

Sioux Falls OKs mask mandate after push from medical groups

By STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — The largest city in South Dakota reversed course and passed a 60-day mask mandate Tuesday after enforcement was removed from the ordinance and medical groups said hospitals exceeded capacity dealing with COVID-19 patients.

The Sioux Falls City Council voted 6-2 to approve the measure Tuesday night. But the council said violations of the requirement, which applies to retail businesses and public buildings, will not carry any penalty.

Sioux Falls Mayor Paul TenHaken, who cast a tie-breaking vote against a mandate last week, said prior to Tuesday night's vote that he was ready to get behind the requirement after the state's largest physicians' organization and a hospital system came out in support.

But the council said violations of the requirement, which applies to retail businesses and public buildings, will not carry any penalty.

Councilor Greg Neitzert, who voted against the ordinance, told the audience that his "yes" votes on amendments were to make the ordinance "as weak and ineffectual as I can" in case it passed and should not have been taken as a vote of support. "I want to neuter this," he said.

He warned that the ordinance would be toothless and an empty gesture.

"We're going to put this in place, and it's not going to work," Neitzert said before the vote.

"If you're for mandates, you're not getting anything tonight. If you're against mandates, you're going to be vilified," he said.

Gov. Kristi Noem opposes mask mandates or other government interventions aimed at slowing the spread of infections. Cities across the state have moved to pass their own mask requirements. Huron and Mitchell issued requirements this week. Brookings has had one in place since September. And Rapid City Mayor Steve Allender pressed for a mask requirement ahead of Thursday's City Council meeting.

South Dakota's COVID-19 deaths per capita in recent weeks have been among the worst in the nation, but the Department of Health did not report any new deaths on Tuesday. Just over 1,000 people tested positive for the coronavirus, and the number of hospitalizations increased to 582 people, pushing some facilities close to capacity.

"We are really at historical levels," said Dr. David Basel, vice president for clinical quality at Avera Medical Group. "Pretty much across all of our hospitals, they are at as high a level as they've been at any point in the last 25 years."

Avera has doubled the number of ICU beds it has available, including putting two patients in some ICU rooms. Basel said the hospital system is also monitoring more than 1,000 COVID-19 patients through home care, including about 160 who are receiving supplemental oxygen. He said Avera has just 11 ICU beds available statewide.

"I know the public is tired of hearing about masks, but until we increase the masking that we are doing, we won't be able to get this under control," he said.

TenHaken said he hopes to make the city's mask requirement part of a broader effort to control infections, especially as the holidays approach and people are more inclined to gather indoors.

Meanwhile, the Rapid City area school district is closing all schools and moving to virtual instruction because of the coronavirus surge. The district's latest data shows 94 students and 47 staff have an active case of COVID-19 while 105 staff and 676 students are in quarantine following exposure.

The school district sent an email to families Monday night saying distance learning for its 25 schools will begin Wednesday. The district will provide take-home meals, the email said. The COVID-19 team will continue to meet through the Thanksgiving break and update families after the holiday about whether the district will reopen schools, the Rapid City Journal reported.

Representatives from the state's largest hospital systems have urged people to avoid large gatherings during upcoming holidays, but offered encouraging news that vaccines and other COVID-19 treatments are being developed.

"Things are going to turn for the better, but we just need to get through the next few months," Dr. Alison Suttle, Sanford Health's Chief Medical Officer, said.

Associated Press writer Terry Wallace in Dallas contributed to this report.

The Latest: 6-day lockdown ordered in South Australia state

By The Associated Press undefined

SYDNEY — The Australian state of South Australia will begin a six-day lockdown at midnight Wednesday, with schools, universities, bars and cafes closed.

Only one person from each household will be allowed to leave home each day, and only for specific reasons. The restrictions also require most factories to close, aged-care facilities to go into lockdown, and weddings and funerals to be put on hold. Outdoor exercise is banned, and wearing masks is mandatory.

Officials announced the severe move Wednesday after a cluster of new coronavirus cases grew to 22. Premier Steven Marshall says he believes the lockdown will act as a "circuit-breaker" and reduce the risk of the outbreak spreading further.

Officials plan a further eight days of restrictions following the lockdown.

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

- Dr. Fauci recommends 'uniform wearing of masks' to help curb US outbreak
- France surpasses 2 million coronavirus cases, 4th highest in world
- British PM Johnson tests negative for virus; still in self-isolation
- Some vaccines may be nearing the finish line, but scientists say it's critical that enough people volunteer to help finish studying other candidates.
- Russian President Vladimir Putin touts coronavirus vaccines developed in Russia.
- States in the U.S. are renewing their push for more federal money to deal with the fallout from the coronavirus outbreak.

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

HERE'S WHAT ELSE IS HAPPENING:

SEOUL, South Korea — South Korea has recorded its largest daily rise in coronavirus infections in about 80 days as officials are preparing to tighten social distancing rules in the greater Seoul area.

Officials on Wednesday reported 313 new virus cases over the previous 24-hour period — the first time for the daily caseload to exceed 300 since late August.

South Korea is struggling to contain a spike in new cluster infections since it eased stringent physical distancing rules last month.

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Nov. 18, 2020 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 138 ~ 27 of 91

Under rules taking effect Thursday for two weeks, no more than 100 people can attend rallies, festivals and concerts. People will have to sit at least one seat apart at theaters, concert halls and libraries, while sporting events are limited to 30% of a stadium's capacity.

LOS ANGELES — Los Angeles County has imposed new restrictions on businesses and is readying plans for a mandatory curfew for all but essential workers if coronavirus cases keep spiking.

The county of 10 million people has seen daily confirmed cases more than double in the last two weeks to nearly 2,900.

On Tuesday, officials ordered non-essential retail businesses to limit indoor capacity to 25% and restaurants to 50% capacity outdoors. All such businesses must close by 10 p.m. The changes take effect Friday.

If daily cases rise to 4,500 and hospitalizations top 2,000, the county will impose a three-week lockdown that will restrict people to their homes for all but essential trips. A nighttime curfew would run from 10 p.m. to 6 a.m.

WASHINGTON — The White House coronavirus task force is warning of "aggressive" and "unrelenting" spread of the coronavirus as the nation heads into the Thanksgiving holiday.

A senior administration official said Tuesday that scientists and public health experts sounded alarm about the spread of the virus, which is on the upswing across the entire nation.

In its weekly report, the task force says there is "aggressive, unrelenting, expanding broad community spread across the country, reaching most counties, without evidence of improvement but rather, further deterioration."

It says existing efforts to slow the spread "are inadequate and must be increased to flatten the curve." The panel also says Thanksgiving travel and gatherings could "amplify transmission considerably."

The guidance is a departure from the public comments of President Donald Trump and Vice President Mike Pence, who have emphasized progress in vaccine development. But experts warn that tens of thousands of Americans will die before there is widespread distribution of a vaccine.

CHICAGO — Public schools in Chicago will resume in-person learning beginning in January, with officials saying remote learning instituted in March due to the coronavirus pandemic has not well-served many students.

Officials said Tuesday that pre-kindergarten and students enrolled in intensive and moderate cluster classrooms will begin in-person learning Jan. 11. Kindergarten through 8th grade students will return to classrooms Feb. 1. A return date for high school students is still under consideration.

The school district will allow parents to decide whether they want their children to return to school. Chicago Mayor Lori Lightfoot says in a statement that many students did well with remote learning but the youngest children, Black and Hispanic students, and highest-need learners haven't been served.

NEW ORLEANS — The raucous Mardi Gras parades where riders on elaborate floats toss trinkets to adoring throngs have been canceled in New Orleans because the close-packed crowds could spread the coronavirus.

At least for the 2021 season, the pandemic has put an end to the New Orleans Mardi Gras as it has long been celebrated. City spokesman Beau Tidwell said Tuesday that no parades will roll during the weeks leading up to and including Fat Tuesday because they can't meet restrictions meant to slow the spread of the novel coronavirus that causes COVID-19.

The cancellation is based largely on a 250-person cap on outdoor crowds. Tidwell says: "You can't have traditional parades with that small a group."

ANNAPOLIS, Md. — Maryland Gov. Larry Hogan is imposing limits for operating hours and capacity of businesses amid a surge in coronavirus cases. He said Tuesday that "we're in a war right now, and the

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Nov. 18, 2020 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 138 ~ 28 of 91

virus is winning.”

Beginning at 5 p.m. Friday, bars and restaurants have to close by 10 p.m. Retail businesses, religious institutions, personal services, fitness centers and social clubs will be limited to 50% capacity.

In addition, state health officials have barred barring all hospital visitation, except for end-of-life care, obstetrics, parents or guardians of minors, and support for people with disabilities.

The announcement came as Maryland reported 2,149 more confirmed coronavirus infections.

JACKSON, Miss. -- Mississippi health officials have released statistics showing that newly confirmed cases of coronavirus infections among students in the state have just about doubled in a week.

The number of students who tested positive increased from 579 during Nov. 2-6 to more than 1,000 for Nov. 9-13. Last week, schools reported 70 outbreaks, which is defined as more than three cases over the course of two weeks.

Officials said Tuesday that more than 14,000 students in Mississippi have been placed in quarantine within the last week. That's compared with about 9,000 students during the previous week.

LONDON — The British government says another 598 people across the U.K. have died after testing positive for the coronavirus, the highest daily figure since May.

Since the onset of the pandemic, daily death figures released on Tuesday have invariably been higher than the 7-day average because of an evident weekend reporting lag effect.

The daily increase takes the country's total to 52,745, the highest virus-related death toll in Europe. The actual toll is believed to be higher as the government tally only includes those who died within 28 days of testing positive for the virus and doesn't include those who died without having been tested.

The government also said another 20,051 people tested positive for the virus. That is the lowest level in two weeks and marks the fifth straight daily decline. There have been signs in recent days that the restrictions imposed across the U.K., particularly the current lockdown in England, are helping to suppress the virus' spread.

COLUMBIA, S.C. — South Carolina Attorney General Alan Wilson said he placed himself in quarantine Tuesday after finding out he was near someone who tested positive for COVID-19.

Wilson said he feels fine and has no symptoms, but will take the precaution to isolate himself and work from home to follow federal health guidelines.

Wilson's statement did not specify who the Republican attorney general was in close contact with.

COVID-19 cases in South Carolina are rising again after an outbreak this summer. The seven-day average number of new daily cases is above 1,400 for the first time since early August. During the pandemic's first peak in July, the average was more than 1,900 new cases a day.

South Carolina Lt. Gov. Pamela Evette announced she had COVID-19 back in September.

CHICAGO — Illinois Gov. J.B. Pritzker has announced new COVID-19 restrictions that will cap crowds in retail stores and temporarily close museums and casinos.

The first-term Democrat said Tuesday that he hopes the limits will help curb soaring coronavirus cases in the state.

Starting Friday, retail stores must lower capacity to 25% from the current 50%. Grocery stores will be excluded. Pritzker says hospitals are starting to see a real strain and will soon be overwhelmed if the current infection rate continues.

The new restrictions came as Illinois reported 12,601 new cases and 97 deaths. Overall, Illinois has reported nearly 600,000 cases with 10,875 deaths.

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. — The largest city in South Dakota appears ready to reverse course and pass a mask mandate Tuesday after enforcement was removed from the ordinance and medical groups said hospitals

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Nov. 18, 2020 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 138 ~ 29 of 91

have exceeded capacity dealing with COVID-19 patients.

Sioux Falls Mayor Paul TenHaken, who cast a tie-breaking vote against a mandate last week, said he was ready to get behind the requirement after the state's largest physicians' organization and a hospital system came out in support.

The ordinance faces a City Council vote Tuesday night. But the council said violations of the requirement, which applies to retail businesses and public buildings, will not carry any penalty.

Gov. Kristi Noem opposes mask mandates or other government interventions aimed at slowing the spread of infections.

Just over 1,000 people tested positive for the coronavirus in the state, and the number of hospitalizations increased to 582 people, pushing some facilities close to capacity.

PARIS — France has surpassed 2 million confirmed cases of coronavirus, the fourth-highest total in the world.

The United States leads with 11.2 million cases, followed by India with 8.8 and Brazil with 5.8.

France health chief Jerome Salomon says with 33,500 COVID-19 patients in the hospital, the situation is far from good. However, he suggested the "collective efforts are starting to bear fruit" since the nation returned to a lockdown until at least Dec. 1.

Hospitals are so stretched that 150 patients have been transferred since Oct. 23 to hospitals around France. The nation added 437 more deaths, increasing the total to 46,273.

COLUMBUS, Ohio — Ohio Gov. Mike DeWine announced a three-week retail business curfew from 10 p.m. to 5 a.m. to slow the spread of the coronavirus.

DeWine says the measure, effective Thursday, is needed to reduce cases and stop the state's hospitals from being overrun. He says the retail business curfew, paired with increased mask-wearing, could help cut contacts between people by 20% to 25%.

The Republican governor also asked Ohioans to reduce their daily contact with others.

Ohio hospital and intensive care admissions for the coronavirus are at record highs, with more than 3,600 people hospitalized Tuesday.

The seven-day rolling average of daily new cases has risen from 3,097 cases per day on Nov. 2 to 7,199 cases on Monday, according to an Associated Press analysis of data provided by The COVID Tracking Project.

PHOENIX — Arizona reported nearly 3,000 coronavirus cases on Tuesday.

The state reported 2,984 new cases with 10 more deaths, increasing the state's totals to 279,896 cases and 6,312 confirmed deaths.

The Department of Health Services says COVID-19-related hospitalizations reached 1,624 on Monday, including 385 patients in intensive care unit beds.

State Superintendent of Public Instruction Kathy Hoffman urged a statewide mask mandate and new quarantine and testing requirements for seasonal visitors. She also called for a pause of winter sports, expanded outdoor dining and limits on social gatherings.

Seven-day rolling averages of daily cases increased from 1,311 on Nov. 2 to 2,459 on Monday. The daily death average rose from 15 to 19 during the same period, while the positivity average increased from 11.8% to 16.5%.

States tightening anti-virus restrictions amid case surge

By RYAN J. FOLEY and MICHAEL KUNZELMAN Associated Press

IOWA CITY, Iowa (AP) — The deadly rise in COVID-19 cases across the U.S. is forcing state and local officials to adjust their blueprints for fighting the virus, with Republican governors adopting mask mandates — skeptically, in at least one case — and schools scrapping plans to reopen classrooms.

The steps face blowback from those who question the science behind mask wearing and social distanc-

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Nov. 18, 2020 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 138 ~ 30 of 91

ing and fear the new restrictions will kill off more jobs and trample on their civil liberties.

In Iowa, Gov. Kim Reynolds had pushed back against a mask mandate for months but imposed a limited one Tuesday, becoming the latest GOP holdout to change course on face coverings. At the same time, she claimed "there's science on both sides" about whether masks reduce the spread of the coronavirus.

With Thanksgiving coming up next week, public health officials are bracing for a holiday-fueled surge. Doctors are urging families to stick to small gatherings.

Governors in Ohio, Maryland and Illinois imposed restrictions on business hours and crowd sizes Tuesday, and their counterparts in Wisconsin and Colorado proposed economic relief packages. Los Angeles County, with a population of 10 million, ordered similar business restrictions.

A DEADLY SURGE

The key measures of the country's effectiveness in managing the pandemic are all heading in the wrong direction. Hospitalizations, deaths and cases are all skyrocketing in the U.S.

In its weekly internal report, the White House coronavirus task force warned of an "aggressive, unrelenting" spread of the coronavirus across the country "without evidence of improvement but rather, further deterioration," a senior administration official said Tuesday. The official, who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss private deliberations, said the task force concluded that existing efforts to slow the spread "are inadequate and must be increased to flatten the curve" and that Thanksgiving travel and gatherings could "amplify transmission considerably."

More than 73,000 people — an all-time high — were hospitalized with the virus in the U.S. as of Monday, an increase of over 3,000 from just a day earlier, according to the COVID Tracking Project. Hospitals are running out of space, and nurses and doctors in Kansas are converting waiting areas to patient rooms and spending upwards of eight hours on the phone trying to secure beds at other hospitals.

More than 166,000 newly confirmed infections were reported on Monday, according to Johns Hopkins University. The average number of new cases per day has more than doubled over the past few weeks.

The virus is blamed for more than 1.3 million deaths worldwide, including over 247,000 in the U.S. Deaths per day in the U.S. have climbed to an average of 1,145, up from 828 two weeks ago.

The national death toll is on pace to keep climbing in the coming days as states set new records. Wisconsin reported 92 new deaths Tuesday, shattering its daily record of 66 set last week.

MORE MASK MANDATES

Since the election, Republican governors in hard-hit Iowa, North Dakota and Utah have reversed course and put in place requirements on masks, and others have extended or expanded earlier orders.

Plenty of other elected officials and residents are balking at such requirements despite the surge. And some local law enforcement authorities have refused to enforce mask requirements.

In Utah, dozens of people opposed to a statewide mask mandate protested outside the home of Gov. Gary Herbert. In South Dakota, the state with the highest rate of COVID-19 deaths per capita in November, Republican Gov. Kristi Noem has no plans to issue mask requirements.

Doctors serving Idaho and eastern Oregon spent hours Tuesday trying to sway health districts, city leaders and the public to do more to stop the spread of coronavirus, warning that rationed care is looming in Idaho's future. But in Idaho, they were met with skepticism, as some residents in attendance either denied the existence of the virus or disputed its severity. Idaho is experiencing a severe and unchecked community spread of COVID-19 in much of the state.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention says masks can help protect you and those around you.

A more stringent mask mandate took effect on Tuesday in California, where Democratic Gov. Gavin Newsom said residents will be required to cover up outdoors, with limited exceptions.

And in New Orleans, officials took the drastic step of canceling the beloved, but traditionally packed Mardi Gras and Carnival parades that draw visitors from around the world. The city has a 250-person cap on outdoor crowds to limit the virus's spread.

"You can't have traditional parades with that small a group," city spokesman Beau Tidwell said Tuesday. The next Mardi Gras is Feb. 16; the parades usually run for about two weeks.

SCHOOL SHUTDOWNS

The rising infection rates are prompting some school districts to revert to remote learning or postpone a return to classroom instruction.

In South Dakota, the Rapid City-area school system plans to close all schools and move to virtual instruction on Wednesday. The district's latest data showed 94 students and 47 staff with an active case of COVID-19, while 105 staff and 676 students were in quarantine following exposure.

In metro Las Vegas, the Clark County school district postponed plans to resume partial in-class instruction and will continue with remote learning through at least the end of the calendar year.

West Virginia's largest teachers organization urged Republican Gov. Jim Justice to make public schools online-only. The state recorded more than 4,400 cases during the week ending Sunday, a 63% increase from the previous week. The governor already has barred in-person instruction from Thanksgiving through Dec. 3 to avoid outbreaks from holiday travel.

VACCINE VOLUNTEERS

The world received welcome news in the past week with positive preliminary results on two COVID-19 vaccines from Pfizer and Moderna, but scientists are worried that volunteers will stop coming forward take part in studies of other vaccines under development. Thousands are still needed.

Kunzelman reported from College Park, Maryland. Associated Press writers across the country contributed to this report.

Police say elderly Sioux Falls man scammed out of \$550,000

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — Authorities say an elderly Sioux Falls man was tricked out of about \$550,000 in a phone scam.

A man claiming to be with the Internal Revenue Service called the victim and told him that drugs were found in a car he owned, police spokesman Sam Clemens said. The 82-year-old man was instructed to send money to resolve the issue, Clemens said.

He sent a total of \$550,000 through money wires and gift cards, the Argus Leader reported.

The man was told by the scammers to not discuss it with anyone, Clemens said. A family member was concerned and called police to report it.

Clemens said IRS officials do not communicate through the phone and if it was a serious matter they would not say to not discuss it with anybody.

Berlin police forcefully disperse virus protesters

By DAVID RISING Associated Press

BERLIN (AP) — German police fired water cannons at demonstrators in downtown Berlin protesting coronavirus restrictions after saying that the crowd refused to listen to their entreaties to wear masks and keep their distance from one another in line with regulations.

As the cannons shot into the crowd outside the landmark Brandenburg Gate on Wednesday, police in riot gear moved through the crowd carrying away some protesters.

Some demonstrators threw fireworks and flares in response.

The protests came as German lawmakers opened debate on a bill that will provide the legal underpinning for the government to issue social distancing rules, require masks in public and close stores and other venues to slow the spread of the virus. While such measures are supported by most people in Germany, a vocal minority has staged regular rallies around the country arguing that the restrictions are unconstitutional.

The measures are expected to pass both the lower and then upper house of parliament and be quickly signed by Germany's president.

THIS IS A BREAKING NEWS UPDATE. AP's earlier story follows below.

BERLIN (AP) — Thousands of people protesting German measures to slow the spread of the coronavirus rallied Wednesday outside barricades cordoning off Berlin's government center as lawmakers debated a bill that would strengthen officials' ability to impose restrictions.

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Nov. 18, 2020 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 138 ~ 32 of 91

A series of protests directly outside the parliament building were banned due to security concerns, and fencing was put up around a wide area, including the Bundestag and nearby parliamentary offices, the federal chancellery and the presidential residence and offices, in case any protesters decided to defy the ban.

The crowds were being observed by police helicopters and water-cannon trucks stood waiting nearby in case they were needed.

Outside the metal cordons, protesters gathered by the landmark Brandenburg Gate, and on streets and bridges. Like most protests against coronavirus restrictions, the demonstrators came from all walks of life, ranging from the far-left to the far-right, while also including families, students and others.

"We want our lives back," read one sign carried by protesters. Another said "Put banks under surveillance, not citizens." One demonstrator held a flag with a picture of outgoing U.S. President Donald Trump and an image invoking the right-wing conspiracy theory "QAnon," while another had a placard showing top German virologist Christian Drosten in prison garb with the word "guilty."

The protests came as German lawmakers opened debate on a bill that will provide the legal underpinning for the government to issue social distancing rules, require masks in public and close stores and other venues to slow the spread of the virus. While such measures are supported by most people in Germany, a vocal minority has staged regular rallies around the country arguing that the restrictions are unconstitutional.

The measures are expected to pass both the lower and then upper house of parliament and be quickly signed by Germany's president.

German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas reacted sharply to the accusation from some protesters that the measures were akin to the 1933 "Enabling Act," which allowed the Nazis to enact laws without parliamentary approval.

"Everyone, naturally, has the right to criticize the measures, our democracy thrives through the exchange of different opinions," he wrote on Twitter. "But whoever relativizes or trivializes the Holocaust has learned nothing from our history."

A demonstration earlier this month in the eastern city of Leipzig ended in chaos when thousands of protesters defied police orders to wear masks and, later, to disperse. Some participants attacked police officers and journalists.

Local authorities were criticized for acting too slowly and not forcefully enough to break up the crowd in Leipzig, allowing the situation to get out of control.

Berlin police said they had given out multiple citations already Wednesday for violating mask-wearing regulations, but that their appeals for people to wear protective gear and to keep their distance from one another were largely being ignored.

Police said the order had now been given to detain people not following the regulations.

"If that does not help, the only course that remains is to disperse the gathering," police said on Twitter.

Germany, which has been praised for its handling of the first wave of the virus, has recently seen a sharp uptick in numbers of new infections and is now midway through a second partial lockdown meant to try and slow the spread. Overall the country has seen 833,000 coronavirus cases and more than 13,000 virus-confirmed deaths in the pandemic, a death toll one-fourth that of Britain's.

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

Biden's DIY transition proceeds without Trump assistance

By STEVE PEOPLES, DEB RIECHMANN and ZEKE MILLER Associated Press

WILMINGTON, Del. (AP) — President Donald Trump's refusal to cooperate with his successor is forcing President-elect Joe Biden to seek unusual workarounds to prepare for the exploding public health threat and evolving national security challenges he will inherit in just nine weeks.

Blocked from the official intelligence briefing traditionally afforded to incoming presidents, Biden gathered

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Nov. 18, 2020 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 138 ~ 33 of 91

virtually on Tuesday with a collection of intelligence, defense and diplomatic experts. None of the experts is currently affiliated with the U.S. government, raising questions about whether Biden is being provided the most up-to-date information about dangers facing the nation.

Vice President-elect Kamala Harris received a more formal briefing on Tuesday as a member of the Senate Intelligence Committee, though still has relatively limited information about the specific threats Biden will inherit.

And as the worst pandemic in a century bears down on the U.S. with renewed ferocity, the current administration is blocking Biden from collaborating with its response team. Biden's representatives instead plan to meet directly with pharmaceutical companies this week to determine how best to distribute at least two promising vaccines to hundreds of millions of Americans, the biggest logistical challenge to face a new president in generations.

The moves reflect how Biden is adjusting to a historically tense transition. With no sign that Trump is prepared to facilitate soon a peaceful transfer of power, Biden and his team are instead working through a series of backup options to do the best they can to prepare for the challenges he will face as soon as he takes office in January.

Declining to criticize Trump, Biden acknowledged Tuesday that he has "not been receiving briefings that would ordinarily come by now" as he opened his virtual meeting with the national security experts. The 12 participants, who appeared on video screens, included former Deputy CIA Director David Cohen, retired Gen. Stanley McChrystal and Avril Haines, a deputy national security adviser in the Obama administration, among others.

Biden said he was preparing to inherit "a divided country and a world in disarray."

"That's why I need you all," he said.

Two weeks after the election, Trump continues to block Biden's access to his administration's pandemic and national security briefings, falsely claiming that Biden is not the legitimate president-elect because of non-existent voter fraud. The Democrat defeated the Republican president 10 days ago, and Trump's flailing legal strategy to block the certification of the election results is quickly fizzling out.

A study released on Tuesday by the Center for Presidential Transition at the nonpartisan Partnership for Public Service warned that an abbreviated transition could impair Biden's ability to fill the more than 1,200 administration jobs requiring Senate confirmation, including key Cabinet and sub-Cabinet posts on the front lines of addressing the pandemic.

A growing group of Republicans have begun to state publicly what Trump will not: Biden will become the next president on Jan. 20. Even Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, a staunch Trump ally, referred to Biden as the American "president-elect" for the first time Tuesday.

"He isn't getting the briefings that the president-elect should be getting, but that's not going to stop him from doing everything he can to prepare and execute during this transition period," said Biden transition spokesman T.J. Ducklo.

Trump's decision to block the transfer of power has forced Biden to navigate the life-and-death business of vaccine distribution with limited information.

Biden's team plans to meet with private pharmaceutical companies on its own in the coming days to learn more about the status of their vaccine production. While neither of the two most promising vaccines has yet earned U.S. government approval, they would almost certainly be distributed under Biden's watch if and when they are formally deemed safe.

Currently under the Trump administration, the Department of Health and Human Services and the Pentagon are working in conjunction with states on a vaccine distribution plan. But the Biden transition team and Democrats in Congress also have ideas. There could be conflicting expectations for state leaders and health care systems, which will be closest to the actual work of putting shots into the arms of Americans.

Biden warned on Monday that "more people may die" if Trump continues to block his access to vaccine distribution plans and pandemic data.

"I'm very concerned that we're in the middle of this battle with people dying and hospitals overflowing

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Nov. 18, 2020 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 138 ~ 34 of 91

in every state in the country, and we have to make sure that there's a smooth handoff," Maryland Gov. Larry Hogan, a Republican who has criticized Trump, told reporters on Tuesday. "I'm hopeful that we will, and I think it's getting better, but we have a brand new team that has not been involved that doesn't really know much about what's currently happening, and that's a problem."

The heads of the American Hospital Association, the American Medical Association and the American Nurses Association issued a joint statement on Tuesday urging the Trump administration to share "all critical information related to COVID-19" with Biden.

"Confronting the challenges of the pandemic is imperative to saving American lives," they wrote. "Real-time data and information on the supply of therapeutics, testing supplies, personal protective equipment, ventilators, hospital bed capacity and workforce availability to plan for further deployment of the nation's assets needs to be shared to save countless lives."

There are obvious limits to Biden's approach.

Some of Biden's current team of advisers on national security and foreign policy have held security clearances in their past jobs, but are not privy to real-time intelligence now. Others have security clearances in their current jobs, perhaps as employees of defense contractors. But right now, no member of the transition team can share classified intelligence with the Biden transition team, especially without being in a secured location.

Former Deputy CIA Director Michael Morell, in a recent interview with the Center for Presidential Transition, said it was imperative that Biden be briefed on the agency's highly classified covert actions undertaken by the Trump administration, "because on Inauguration Day, these covert actions will become the new president's."

Meanwhile, serious foreign conflicts loom.

Trump, for example, is expected to withdraw a significant number of troops from Afghanistan in the coming weeks. The NATO leader criticized the decision on Tuesday, warning that the troop withdrawal could give terrorist groups an opening to organize attacks against the West.

Trump administration officials say they will not give Biden the classified presidential daily briefing on intelligence matters until the General Services Administration, which is run by a Trump appointee, decides to certify Biden as the official winner.

The White House has not said whether there have been conversations about this with the GSA.

Reichmann and Miller reported from Washington. Associated Press writers Ricardo Alonso-Zaldivar and Lisa Mascaro in Washington and Brian Witte in Annapolis, Maryland, contributed to this report.

Pompeo expected to visit Israeli settlement in parting gift

By JOSEPH KRAUSS Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo's expected tour of a West Bank winery this week will be the first time a top American diplomat has visited an Israeli settlement, a parting gift from an administration that has taken unprecedented steps to support Israel's claims to war-won territory.

The Psagot winery, established in part on land the Palestinians say was stolen from local residents, is part of a sprawling network of Israeli settlements in the occupied West Bank that most of the international community views as a violation of international law and a major obstacle to peace.

The award-winning winery, which offers tours and event spaces, is a focus of Israel's efforts to promote tourism in the occupied territory and a potent symbol of its fight against campaigns to boycott or label products from the settlements.

Pompeo's expected visit, reported by Israeli media but not officially confirmed, would mark a radical departure from past administrations, both Democratic and Republican, which frequently scolded Israel over settlement construction — to little effect.

President Donald Trump has already broken with his predecessors by recognizing contested Jerusalem as Israel's capital and repudiating the decades-old U.S. position that settlements are inconsistent with

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Nov. 18, 2020 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 138 ~ 35 of 91

international law. The administration has also recognized Israel's annexation of the Golan Heights, seized from Syria in the 1967 war, where Pompeo may also pay a visit.

Trump's Mideast plan, which overwhelmingly favored Israel and was immediately rejected by the Palestinians, would have allowed Israel to annex nearly a third of the West Bank, including all of its settlements.

The visit to the winery — which released a blended red wine named for the secretary last year — would be yet another gift to Israel in the final weeks of Trump's presidency, even as neither Trump nor Pompeo have acknowledged President-elect Joe Biden's victory.

The visit could also burnish Pompeo's credentials with evangelical Christians and other supporters of Israel should he pursue a post-Trump political career.

The Falic family of Florida, owners of the ubiquitous chain of Duty Free Americas shops, is a major investor in the winery. An Associated Press investigation last year found that the family has donated at least \$5.6 million to settler groups in the West Bank and east Jerusalem over the past decade. Since 2000, they have donated at least \$1.7 million to pro-Israel politicians in the U.S., both Democrats and Republicans, including Trump.

One of the owners, Simon Falic, was not able to confirm Pompeo's visit, but told the AP "it would be a great honor to welcome him and to thank him for his unwavering support of Israel."

Israel captured the West Bank and east Jerusalem in the 1967 war, territories the Palestinians want for their future state. Since then, it has built some 130 settlements and dozens of smaller outposts, ranging from clusters of mobile homes on remote hilltops to fully developed towns. Over 460,000 Israeli settlers reside in the occupied West Bank and more than 220,000 live in annexed east Jerusalem.

The Palestinians say the settlements make it nearly impossible to create a viable state — which was one of the main goals of the settlers who established them.

The settlers, most of whom oppose a Palestinian state and view Jerusalem and the West Bank as the biblical and historical heart of Israel, say they are the scapegoats for a long-standing approach to solving the conflict that was never going to succeed.

"More important than where (Pompeo) is going to visit ... is the message," said Oded Revivi, mayor of the Efrat settlement. "The message that he's bringing with him is one of not falling into the trap that (former U.S. President) Jimmy Carter has set of treating us as second-class citizens, of seeing us as an obstacle to peace."

The Palestinians say many of the settlements, including Psagot and its winery, were built on land stolen from private Palestinian owners. The residents of the nearby town of Al-Bireh — many of whom are American citizens — say the settlement gobbled up their land after Israel built a security fence around Psagot during the Palestinian intifada, or uprising, in the early 2000s.

Kainat and Karema Quraan, two sisters from Al-Bireh, say they have documents showing they own a plot of land on which some of the vineyards and a winery building were established.

"Imagine that your own land, your property, that you lived off of and your ancestors lived off of, is taken like this by strangers, by force, and you can't touch it," Kainat said.

Muneeb Traish, an Al-Bireh city council member who has U.S. citizenship, has led a legal campaign for years on behalf of the community seeking the return of the confiscated lands. He said the settlers seized a total of 1,000 dunams (250 acres), 400 of which are being used by the winery.

Falic said he was not aware of any claims to the lands on which the winery is built, and that it was recently relocated to a nearby industrial zone in the West Bank, on land purchased directly from the Israeli government.

"There should be NO controversy on products produced by Jews, in Judea," he wrote to the AP, referring to the southern West Bank by its biblical name. "The winery's location and success should not create controversy, but rather Jewish and Israeli pride."

Last November, the European Court of Justice ruled that European countries must label products originating in the settlements. The decision came after the Psagot winery, which produces 600,000 bottles a year and exports 70% of them, challenged an earlier ruling.

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Nov. 18, 2020 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 138 ~ 36 of 91

Israel lashed out at the decision to make the labels mandatory, saying it was unfair, discriminatory and would embolden the Palestinian-led boycott movement against Israel.

A week after the ruling, Pompeo announced that the U.S. no longer considers Israeli settlements in the West Bank to be a violation of international law, reversing four decades of American policy.

To express its gratitude, Psagot released a new wine called "Pompeo," a blend of cabernet sauvignon, syrah and merlot.

"The U.S. administration's message is extremely important and strengthens our ongoing fight against the boycott and hypocrisy campaign," Yaakov Berg, the CEO of the winery, said at the time. "We will continue this just and moral struggle."

A very different struggle is underway in Al-Bireh, where city councilman Traish and other residents plan to protest Pompeo's visit to the encroaching settlement.

"We want to say to Pompeo that instead of asking Israel to return the land to American citizens, you are here to celebrate the occupation," he said.

Associated Press writers Mohammed Daraghmeh in Al-Bireh, West Bank, and Josef Federman in Jerusalem contributed to this report.

People go hungry in Ethiopia's Tigray as conflict marches on

By CARA ANNA Associated Press

NAIROBI, Kenya (AP) — People are going hungry in Ethiopia's rebellious northern Tigray region as roads are blocked, airports are closed and the federal government marches on its capital in a final push to win a two-week war. But residents are afraid to leave for fear of being killed, an internal assessment says.

Trucks laden with food, fuel and medical supplies have been stuck outside the region's borders since the Nov. 4 announcement by Ethiopia's Nobel Peace Prize-winning Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed that a military offensive had begun in response to an attack by Tigray regional forces on a military base.

"At this stage there is simply very little left, even if you have money," according to the internal assessment by one humanitarian group, seen by The Associated Press. The assessment, based on a colleague who managed to get out, said people "will stay where they are, there is no place in Tigray where the situation is any different and they cannot cross over into the other regions of Ethiopia because of fear of what would be done to them."

Banks in Tigray were closed for days, cutting off humanitarian cash transfers to some 1 million people, or one-sixth of the Tigray population. And even before the fighting, a locust outbreak had been destroying crops.

Over 27,000 Ethiopians have fled into neighboring Sudan, burdening villages that have been praised for their generosity, though they have little to give.

But many inside Tigray can't or won't leave, frightened by the threat of ethnic violence. Abiy's office on Wednesday tried to ease those fears, saying in a statement that its "law enforcement operation" against a Tigray regional leadership it regards as illegal is "primarily" targeting members of that ruling circle.

"The people of Tigray will be the first to benefit" from the operation, the statement said, as senior government officials vow its completion within days. Abiy's government accuses the Tigray regional government of damaging bridges and digging up roads leading to its capital, Mekele, in an attempt to slow the march of federal forces.

Hundreds of wounded people have been transported and treated so far, the International Committee of the Red Cross said Wednesday, with more than 400 treated in one hospital alone in the city of Gondar in the adjoining Amhara region. The hospital has received "large numbers of critically injured patients" and has COVID-19 patients as well.

There is "immense suffering," the ICRC said after it visited a handful of health centers in the Tigray and Amhara regions. "For many of these facilities it is the first time they have received any external support since the crisis started," it said. Hospital beds, supplies for diabetic care and dialysis, even blankets, are

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Nov. 18, 2020 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 138 ~ 37 of 91

urgently needed.

Ethiopia's federal government has been promising a rapid end to the fighting from nearly the start. Now humanitarian groups, experts and even the United States government are showing signs of desperation.

"We do not know if there will be additional U.N.-coordinated relocation efforts out of Tigray," the U.S. Embassy said in a brief statement Tuesday. "U.S. citizens who cannot depart Tigray safely are advised to shelter in place."

Well over 1,000 citizens of the U.S. and other countries have been said to be trapped, along with the bulk of the Tigray region's some 6 million residents, though the U.N. says more than 200 foreigners had been evacuated as of Tuesday. The Tigray regional government on Wednesday said more than 100,000 civilians have been displaced and called for urgent humanitarian assistance.

"Humanitarian workers should be given safe passage to provide assistance to vulnerable groups," U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said in a statement overnight. "Communications services in the Tigray region should be restored immediately in part to allow independent reporting on the situation and to allow for communication with civilians, including U.S. nationals."

U.N. humanitarian chief Mark Lowcock said in a separate statement, "I call for full access to reach people in need wherever they are; safe passage for civilians seeking assistance; and the security of aid workers." Even before the conflict almost 1 million in the Tigray region needed humanitarian assistance, he said, along with millions more near its borders.

His office on Tuesday set aside \$20 million "or anticipatory action to fight hunger in Ethiopia," citing a long list of threats in the country, including "civil unrest, growing insecurity, locust infestations, and the economic fallout of the COVID-19 pandemic, which includes declining incomes and rising inflation."

Even famine is a possibility in the Tigray region, researchers warn in a new article published by The Conversation, a website for researchers. Some 80% of the people in Tigray are subsistence farmers and the fighting affects the upcoming harvest season, they wrote.

And the locust outbreak, the region's worst in decades, has "destroyed vast areas of cropped land and numerous swarms remain active in northeastern Ethiopia, where Tigray is located."

The locust outbreak is so serious that even neighboring Eritrea, which has been almost silent on the conflict despite the Tigray forces firing rockets at its capital, speaks relatively openly about the insect invasion.

The split between Ethiopia's federal government and Tigray's — each now regards the other as illegal — has included the federal government's move to divert funding from the regional government to local administrations, affecting early-warning systems for hunger, the researchers wrote.

This time of year was already the "hunger gap" for many, they said: "We fear that the grain baskets will remain empty because of the conflict."

One of the researchers, Jan Nyssen, told the AP that "I know there are stores of the (U.N. World Food Program) inside Tigray, but they were there for a normal, quote unquote, disaster."

Restocking such warehouses remains impossible, the U.N. said in a new update Wednesday.

Nyssen worries the locusts will end up posing the more severe threat. As of Nov. 3, the day before fighting erupted, their swarms had reached as far as Mekele, he said, and they were expected to move north, further into the region.

He also recalled the hunger that swept the Tigray region in the 1980s as its leaders fought the federal government. All the ingredients are here again, barring the locusts, he said.

Back then, Ethiopia's regime tried to hide the suffering, he said. "Nowadays, you can't hide it that long."

Trump fires agency head who vouched for 2020 vote security

By BEN FOX Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump fired the nation's top election security official, a widely respected member of his administration who had dared to refute the president's unsubstantiated claims of electoral fraud and vouch for the integrity of the vote.

While abrupt, the dismissal Tuesday of Christopher Krebs, the director of the Cybersecurity and Infra-

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Nov. 18, 2020 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 138 ~ 38 of 91

structure Security Agency, was not a surprise. Since his loss, Trump has been ridding his administration of officials seen as insufficiently loyal and has been denouncing the conduct of an election that led to an embarrassing defeat to Democrat Joe Biden.

That made Krebs a prime target. He had used the imprimatur of Trump's own Department of Homeland Security, where his agency was based, to issue a stream of statements and tweets over the past week attesting to the proper conduct of the election and denouncing the falsehoods spread by the Republican president and his supporters — without mentioning Trump by name.

Krebs stood by those assertions after his ouster.

"Honored to serve. We did it right," he said in a brief statement on Twitter. "Defend Today, Secure Tomorrow."

He closed with the phrase "Protect 2020," which had been his agency's slogan ahead of the election.

The firing of Krebs, a Trump appointee, came the week after the dismissal of Defense Secretary Mark Esper, part of a broader shakeup that put Trump loyalists in senior Pentagon positions.

A former Microsoft executive, Krebs ran the agency, known as CISA, from its creation in the wake of Russian interference with the 2016 election through the November election. He won bipartisan praise as CISA coordinated federal state and local efforts to defend electoral systems from foreign or domestic interference.

Hours before being dismissed, Krebs tweeted out a report citing 59 election security experts saying there is no credible evidence of computer fraud in the 2020 election outcome.

Trump responded on Twitter later in the day. He repeated unsubstantiated claims about the vote and wrote "effective immediately, Chris Krebs has been terminated as Director of the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency."

Officials with CISA and its parent agency, the Department of Homeland Security, had no immediate comment.

Members of Congress — mostly Democrats — denounced the firing.

Rep. Adam Schiff, D-Calif., chairman of the House intelligence committee, assailed Trump for "retaliating against Director Krebs and other officials who did their duty. It's pathetic, but sadly predictable that upholding and protecting our democratic processes would be cause for firing."

One of the few Republicans joining in the criticism was Sen. Ben Sasse of Nebraska, a frequent Trump critic. "Chris Krebs did a really good job, as state election officials all across the nation will tell you, and he obviously should not be fired," he said.

Biden campaign spokesman Michael Gwin noted that bipartisan election officials have dismissed Trump's claims of widespread fraud. "Chris Krebs should be commended for his service in protecting our elections, not fired for telling the truth."

Krebs kept a low profile even as he voiced confidence ahead of the November vote and, afterward, knocked down allegations that the count was tainted by fraud. The repudiation of Trump was notable coming from a component of DHS, which has been criticized for seeming to be too closely aligned with the president's political goals.

CISA issued statements dismissing claims that large numbers of dead people could vote or that someone could change results without detection.

It also distributed a statement from a coalition of federal and state officials concluding there was no evidence that votes were compromised or altered in the Nov. 3 election and that the vote was the most secure in American history.

Krebs avoided ever directly criticizing the president and tried to stay above the political fray, even as he worked to contradict misinformation coming from the president and his supporters. "It's not our job to fact check the president," he said at a briefing with reporters on the eve of the election.

CISA works with the state and local officials who run U.S. elections as well as private companies that supply voting equipment to address cybersecurity and other threats while monitoring balloting and tabulation from a control room at its headquarters near Washington. It also works with industry and utilities to protect the nation's industrial base and power grid from threats.

The agency enjoys a good reputation among its core constituency — the state and local election officials who rely on its advice and services at a time of near-constant cyberattack -- as well as on Capitol Hill, where lawmakers recently proposed an increase of its annual budget of around \$2 billion.

His removal is a "disturbing sign for American government," said California Secretary of State Alex Padilla. "Chris Krebs has been an accessible, reliable partner for elections officials across the country, and across party lines, as we have fortified our cyber defenses since 2016," Padilla said. "Our elections infrastructure has become stronger because of leaders like Chris Krebs and in spite of the actions and lies coming from the White House."

The agency emerged from rocky beginnings. Just before President Barack Obama left office, the U.S. designated election systems as critical national security infrastructure, like dams or power plants, as a result of the interference by Russia, which included the penetration of state elections systems as well as massive disinformation.

Some state election officials and Republicans, suspicious of federal intrusion on their turf, were opposed to the designation. The National Association of Secretaries of State adopted a resolution in opposition to the move in February 2017. But the Trump administration supported the designation, and, eventually, skeptical state officials welcomed the assistance.

Sorry, Grinch. Virus won't stop NORAD from tracking Santa

By LOLITA C. BALDOR Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Children of the world can rest easy. The global pandemic won't stop them from tracking Santa Claus' progress as he delivers gifts around the globe on Christmas Eve.

The North American Aerospace Defense Command has announced that NORAD will track Santa on Dec. 24, just as it has done for 65 years. But there will be some changes: Not every child will be able to get through to a volunteer at NORAD's call center to check on Santa's whereabouts, as they have in years before.

Normally, 150-160 volunteers crowd into a conference room at Peterson Air Force Base in Colorado Springs, taking two-hour shifts to answer the phones as eager children call to see if Santa and his sleigh have reached their rooftops. All together, 1,500 people over 20 hours have participated in the call center in the past, fielding more than 130,000 phone calls, beginning at 6 a.m. Eastern time on Christmas Eve.

This year, due to safety restrictions forced by the COVID-19 pandemic, the number of volunteers has been drastically cut to what NORAD expects will be fewer than 10 people per shift.

"We understand this is a time-honored tradition, and we know undoubtedly there is going to be some disappointment," said NORAD spokesman Preston Schlachter. "But we're trying to keep it safe for everyone involved."

So, some callers may be able to once again get through to a member of the military or other volunteer when they dial the NORAD Tracks Santa toll-free number, 1-877-Hi-NORAD. But others will get a recorded update on Santa's current location.

Schlachter said NORAD will largely be limiting volunteers to people who already work there and their immediate families. But that could be expanded a bit as the time gets closer. He said that this year volunteers will answer health questions and have their temperature checked when they arrive, and a cleaning crew will wipe down surfaces throughout the day. There will be wipes and other supplies available, and between shifts the entire calling area will be sanitized before the next group comes in.

Faced with concerns about the virus, officials at NORAD have worked for weeks to figure out a way to ensure that the much-beloved tradition could go on.

The military command has been fielding calls since 1955, when Air Force Col. Harry Shoup — the commander on duty at NORAD's predecessor, the Continental Air Defense Command — fielded a call from a child who dialed a misprinted telephone number in a newspaper department store ad, thinking she was calling Santa.

A fast-thinking Shoup quickly assured his caller that he was. And the tradition began.

Today, most early calls come from Japan and Europe, and as the day goes on the callers from the U.S. and Canada climb.

Besides the call center, the NORAD Tracks Santa website — noradsanta.org — as well as social media pages, Amazon Alexa, Onstar and a new mobile app will still be available with up-to-the-minute details on Santa's location. A social media team will operate from a separate conference room at the base.

The tracking Santa apps will soon be available on Google Play and the Apple App Store.

AP Analysis: 'Who am I to judge?' helps explain pope's view

By NICOLE WINFIELD Associated Press

ROME (AP) — Pope Francis' famous quip "Who am I to judge?" could go a long way toward explaining his initial attitude toward Theodore McCarrick, the defrocked and disgraced American cardinal who was the subject of a two-year Vatican investigation that was released last week.

Francis uttered the line on July 29, 2013, four months into his pontificate, when he was asked en route home from his first papal trip about reports of a sexually active gay priest whom he had just promoted. His point: If someone violated the church's teaching on sexual morals in the past but had sought forgiveness from God, who was he to pass judgment?

The comment won plaudits from the LGBT community and landed Francis on the cover of *The Advocate* magazine. But Francis' broader tendency to blindly trust his friends and resist judging them has created problems seven years later. A handful of priests, bishops and cardinals whom Francis has trusted over the years have turned out to be either accused of sexual misconduct or convicted of it, or of having covered it up.

In short, Francis' loyalty to them cost him credibility.

The Vatican report spared Francis blame for McCarrick's rise in the hierarchy, faulting instead his predecessors for having failed to recognize, investigate or effectively sanction McCarrick over consistent reports that he invited seminarians into his bed.

Francis ultimately defrocked McCarrick last year after a Vatican investigation determined he sexually abused children as well as adults. Francis commissioned the more in-depth probe after a former Vatican ambassador alleged in 2018 that some two dozen church officials were aware of McCarrick's sexual misconduct with adult seminarians but covered it up for two decades.

It's perhaps not surprising that an in-house investigation commissioned by Francis and ordered published by him would largely give him a pass. But it's also true that the most egregious failures related to the McCarrick scandal occurred well before Francis became pope.

But the report does point to problems that have come to haunt Francis during his papacy, exacerbating his initial blind spot on clergy sexual abuse that he only corrected in 2018 after he realized he had botched a serious case of abuse and cover-up in Chile.

In addition to the prelates he initially defended who have been accused of sexual misconduct or cover-up, Francis has also been betrayed by Catholic laymen: Some Italian businessmen who were "friends of Francis" and exploited that designation are now caught up in a spiraling Vatican corruption investigation involving the Holy See's \$350 million investment in a London real estate venture.

Like many leaders, Francis abhors gossip, distrusts the media and tends to follow his gut, finding it exceedingly difficult to shift gears once he has formed a positive personal opinion about someone, his collaborators say.

Francis knew McCarrick from before he was pope and probably knew that the charismatic and well-connected prelate had had a hand in his election as one of several "kingmakers" who supported him from the sidelines. (McCarrick himself didn't vote since he was over 80 and ineligible).

McCarrick told a conference at Villanova University in late 2013 that he considered the former Cardinal Jorge Mario Bergoglio a "friend" and had pressed for a Latin American pope during the closed-door meetings that preceded the conclave.

McCarrick twice visited Bergoglio in Argentina, in 2004 and 2011, when he traveled there to ordain priests

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Nov. 18, 2020 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 138 ~ 41 of 91

from the Argentine-based religious community, the Institute of the Incarnate Word, that he called home in Washington.

McCarrick told the Villanova conference that he had been persuaded to spread the word to consider Bergoglio a possible papal candidate after an unidentified, "influential" Roman told him that Bergoglio could reform the church in five years and "put us back on target."

"Talk him up," McCarrick quoted the Roman man as telling him.

The report debunked the central thesis of Archbishop Carlo Maria Vigano, the former Vatican ambassador to the U.S., whose 2018 expose of the two-decade McCarrick cover-up sparked the Vatican report in the first place.

Vigano claimed that Francis had lifted "sanctions" imposed by Pope Benedict XVI on McCarrick even after Vigano told Francis in 2013 that the American had "corrupted generations of priests and seminarians."

The report said no such lifting occurred, and actually accused Vigano of being part of the cover-up. It also suggested that in 2013, Vigano was far more concerned about persuading Francis to bring him back to Rome from his exile in Washington to help with Francis' anti-corruption effort at the Vatican than in finally bringing McCarrick to justice.

As archbishop of Buenos Aires, Francis is believed to have discounted rumors of sex abuse and cover-up in neighboring Chile surrounding the popular priest Fernando Karadima, because the bulk of the accusers were over 17, and therefore technically adults in the church's canon law system. As such, they were considered consenting adults engaging in sinful but not illegal behavior with Karadima.

While head of Argentina's bishops conference, Francis in 2010 commissioned a four-volume forensic study of the legal case against the Rev. Julio Grassi, a celebrity priest who ran homes for street children and had been criminally convicted of sexually abusing one of them.

Bergoglio's study, which purportedly ended up on the desks of some Argentine court justices who were ruling on Grassi's appeals, concluded he was innocent, that his victims were lying and that the case never should have gone to trial.

In the end, Argentina's Supreme Court in March 2017 upheld the conviction and 15-year prison sentence for Grassi. The status of Grassi's canonical investigation in Rome is unknown.

More recently, Bergoglio allowed one of his proteges in Argentina, Bishop Gustavo Zanchetta, to resign quietly for purported health reasons in 2017 after priests in the remote northern Argentine diocese of Oran complained about his authoritarian rule and diocesan officials provided reports to the Vatican alleging abuses of power, inappropriate behavior and sexual harassment of adult seminarians.

Francis gave Zanchetta a plum job in the Vatican's treasury office.

In the cases of Grassi and Zanchetta, Bergoglio was a confessor to both men, suggesting he may have been swayed in his judgment by his role as their spiritual father. In the case of Karadima, Francis was good friends with Karadima's chief protector, Santiago's archbishop, Cardinal Francisco Javier Errazuriz.

Francis' 2013 comment, "Who am I to judge?" didn't concern a priest accused of sexual misconduct with minors. Rather, the priest was alleged primarily to have arranged for a Swiss army captain to transfer with him from his diplomatic post in Bern, Switzerland, to Uruguay.

Asked about the priest en route home from Rio de Janeiro in July 2013, Francis said he had commissioned a preliminary investigation into the allegations that found nothing. He noted that many times in the church, such "sins from youth" crop up as priests advance through the ranks.

"Crimes are something different: the abuse of minors is a crime," he said. "But if a person, whether it be a lay person, a priest or a religious sister, commits a sin and then converts, the Lord forgives. And when the Lord forgives, the Lord forgets and this is very important for our lives."

Referring to reports that a homosexual network in the Vatican protected the priest, Francis said he had never heard of such a thing. But he added: "If someone is gay and is searching for the Lord and has good will, then who am I to judge?"

Nicole Winfield, chief Vatican correspondent for The Associated Press, has covered the Holy See since 2001, focusing in particular on clergy sexual abuse.

Tokyo sees record number of new cases amid nationwide spike

By MARI YAMAGUCHI Associated Press

TOKYO (AP) — Authorities in Japan's capital reported nearly 500 new cases of the coronavirus on Wednesday, the largest daily increase in Tokyo since the pandemic began, amid a nationwide spike in infections and as the country discusses with Olympic officials how to safely host next summer's games.

The Tokyo metropolitan government said there were 493 new cases, surpassing the city's previous high of 472 recorded on Aug. 1 during the peak of Japan's earlier wave of infections.

The new cases came as International Olympic Committee President Thomas Bach ended a visit to Japan to discuss how to safely host the games, which were postponed a year until next July due to the pandemic.

Japan has seen a steady climb in new cases nationwide in recent weeks, and experts have urged officials to step up preventive measures.

Wednesday's surge, from 293 the day before, raised alarm among experts ahead of an upcoming three-day weekend. With new cases in some other areas also rising to new highs, Japan's national increase is expected to top 2,000 on Wednesday for a new high.

Japan Medical Association President Toshio Nakagawa urged Tokyo residents to stay home over the weekend.

"Please do not get used to the coronavirus. Please do not underestimate the coronavirus. I ask everyone to have a three-day autumn weekend of patience," Nakagawa said, urging everyone to avoid non-essential outings. He cautioned that another state of emergency may be needed if infections continue rising.

Government officials currently are not taking any specific measures to scale back business activity.

Tokyo Gov. Yuriko Koike expressed concern about the rising number of elderly patients, but merely asked residents to stick to their usual preventative measures.

Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga this week said the situation does not currently require another state of emergency and there is no need to scale back or suspend domestic tourism and dining campaigns promoted by the government.

Japan declared a state of emergency in April and May, making nonbinding stay-at-home and business closure requests. It has managed to prevent infections from becoming as explosive as in Europe and the U.S.

Experts say the wide use of face masks and other common preventative measures, as well as cultural traditions that lack touching and kissing, might have helped keep the country's caseload low.

Bach on Tuesday issued a gentle plea to all competitors to get vaccinated before the Olympics, if a vaccine is available, to protect themselves and others. He also said a "reasonable number" of fans should be able to attend the games with or without a vaccine.

Japan has confirmed 120,815 cases overall, including 1,913 deaths, according to the health ministry.

Follow Mari Yamaguchi on Twitter at <https://www.twitter.com/mariyamaguchi>

Amid pandemic, Belgrade street kids find comfort at refuge

By JOVANA GEC Associated Press

BELGRADE, Serbia (AP) — In a small, brightly-colored backstreet house in Belgrade a teenage girl is drying her hair, while two others eat lunch in the kitchen. A group of boys are having their temperatures checked at the entrance as a precaution against coronavirus.

It's another busy day for Svratiste, or Roadhouse, Belgrade's first daily drop-in center for street kids that for years has been a rare oasis of warmth and comfort for the Serbian capital's most vulnerable inhabitants.

Since opening in 2007, Svratiste has welcomed hundreds of children — some as young as five — who have come here to warm up, wash or eat. With social isolation growing and the economic situation worsening in the pandemic, the center's role has become even more significant.

Coordinator Mina Lukic said the health crisis has made Belgrade's poor even poorer as it takes a toll on

the Balkan country's struggling economy. Prices of plastic and other scrap material that the kids and their families collect to sell have dropped dramatically in the past months, shrinking already meager earnings.

"We believe this is why we have more children visiting us in the past weeks than they used to," she said.

"The kids that come to us are all aged 5 to 15, pre-school or primary school children," she added. "What's common for all of them is that they work in the street and live in extreme poverty."

Hundreds, if not thousands of children in Belgrade fit that category. Their families typically live in make-shift slum settlements, and mostly stay out of the state's social, health care and education systems.

From an early age, the children are sent out in the streets to beg, collect scrap materials or look for other ways to find food or money. They often face abuse and very few ever go to school.

While Serbia has a nationwide network of social care centers and institutions for the underprivileged, Lukic said the street kids often slip under the radar.

"They are a separate (social) group and should be treated as such," she insisted.

Svratiste's team of 13 social workers, psychologists and other experts have welcomed more than 1,400 children over the years. Funded by donors and people who regularly bring in clothes and other aid, the group recently set up another center in a new part of town.

Normally open every day, both centers only closed down during the national state of emergency when the pandemic started in March. The activists stayed in touch with the kids and their families, who returned when the lockdown was lifted in May.

Apart from providing food and clothes, the Svratiste team has also sought to help the children socialize and get to know their town by visiting playgrounds, cinemas and theaters. A key effort has been to include them in the education system and make sure they stay. During the pandemic, the center helped with online classes that most children have no means of following.

One of their success stories has been Bosko Markovic, now 18, who first came to Svratiste five years ago. With the center's help, Markovic has finished high school and now has his eyes set on becoming a policeman, he told the Associated Press.

"They (Svratiste) have made me a better person," he said proudly.

"One Good Thing" is a series that highlights individuals whose actions provide glimmers of joy in hard times — stories of people who find a way to make a difference, no matter how small. Read the collection of stories at <https://apnews.com/hub/one-good-thing>

EXPLAINER: What's with the confusion over masks?

By ANDREW SELSKY Associated Press

A lot of the effort to slow the spread of the coronavirus comes down to a seemingly simple concept: Wearing a mask.

But the issue has proven a thorny one. Health authorities have changed their guidance on who should wear masks and when to wear them. This has led to some confusion and even suspicion.

But since the coronavirus first appeared, authorities have gained a better understanding of how it spreads and how masks can help stop that spread.

Here's a look at how what we know about masks has changed, and how government officials are increasingly getting behind the idea of mandating the use of masks.

WHAT DO THE EXPERTS SAY?

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has long advised people to wear masks because they help prevent people who are infected — whether they know it or not — from spreading the coronavirus.

But last week, the CDC added a new reason: masks can also protect wearers who are not infected, though to a lesser degree.

The agency referred to a study led by Japanese researchers that found masks block about 60% of the amount of virus that comes out of an infected person. When an uninfected person wearing a mask is near an infected person who isn't wearing one, the amount of virus the uninfected person inhaled fell by

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Nov. 18, 2020 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 138 ~ 44 of 91

up to 50%.

But when BOTH people are wearing masks, that produced the best result. The decline in virus particles reaching the second person was close to 70%.

So, if everyone wears a mask when social distancing is not feasible, the infection rate will be cut, experts say.

It's not a perfect solution. Hand-washing, keeping a distance and being in well-ventilated areas is important.

HOW IS THIS DIFFERENT FROM WHAT THEY'VE SAID BEFORE?

U.S. Surgeon General Jerome Adams tweeted on Feb. 29: "Seriously people — STOP BUYING MASKS! They are NOT effective in preventing general public from catching #Coronavirus"

But today, Adams has a different message pinned to the top of his Twitter account.

"When we can't stay six feet away from others, please, I'm begging you, wear a face covering," Adams says in the videotaped July 2 tweet.

And in July, the CDC stressed that cloth face coverings are a critical tool in the fight against COVID-19, particularly when everyone wears them.

Similarly, the World Health Organization early on had recommended against mask-wearing for the general public, saying they might lead to a false sense of security and that people who didn't know how to use them properly could infect themselves.

The World Health Organization changed its advice in June, and now says people should wear them when they can't be socially distant.

WHAT ARE THE FEDERAL REQUIREMENTS ON MASKS?

In the United States, there are none. The CDC has made only recommendations.

And the attitude from the White House has been casual at best. Before the election, President Donald Trump often ridiculed his then Democratic opponent, Joe Biden, for wearing one whenever he was out in public. The president also held rallies that brought together thousands of supporters, most of them not wearing masks.

Biden, now president-elect, has said repeatedly that there should be a nationwide mask mandate. He has also promised to ask every governor to impose mask rules. For those who refuse, he's vowed to go around them to seek similar mandates at the county or local level until the entire country is covered.

Some other countries have already mandated mask use, from requiring them everywhere in public to using them on public transportation and in stores.

HOW ARE U.S. STATES HANDLING THE SITUATION?

It's a mix. As of Tuesday, 36 states have some type of mask mandate.

Republican governors in Iowa, North Dakota and Utah — all states that are being hit hard — have recently reversed course and required at least limited mask use. Others have extended or expanded earlier orders.

Iowa Gov. Kim Reynolds cast some doubt Tuesday on the science behind masks even as she imposed a limited mask rule, noting that neighboring states with mask mandates have seen rising numbers of cases, although not as severely as Iowa.

"If you look, you can find whatever you want to support wherever you are at," she said.

In California, a more stringent mask mandate took effect on Tuesday. Democratic Gov. Gavin Newsom said residents will be required to cover up outdoors, with limited exceptions.

Follow Andrew Selsky on Twitter at <https://twitter.com/andrewselsky>

Deadline near for hand tally of presidential race in Georgia

By KATE BRUMBACK Associated Press

ATLANTA (AP) — Election officials across Georgia are staring down a Wednesday deadline to complete a hand tally of the presidential race in the state.

The hand recount of nearly 5 million votes stems from an audit required by a new state law and wasn't

in response to any suspected problems with the state's results or an official recount request. The law requires the audit to be done before the counties' certified results can be certified by the state.

The deadline for the counties to complete the audit is 11:59 p.m. Wednesday, ahead of the Friday deadline for state certification.

The hand count is meant to ensure that the state's new election machines accurately tabulated the votes and isn't expected to change the overall outcome, state election officials have repeatedly said.

Going into the count, Democrat Joe Biden led Republican President Donald Trump by a margin of about 14,000 votes. Previously uncounted ballots discovered in two counties during the hand count will reduce that margin to about 13,000, said Gabriel Sterling, who oversaw the implementation of the state's new voting system for the secretary of state's office.

Once the results are certified, if the margin between the candidates remains within 0.5%, the losing campaign can request a recount. That would be done using scanners that read and tally the votes and would be paid for by the state, Secretary of State Brad Raffensperger has said.

A law passed last year requires the audit but leaves it up to the secretary of state to select the race to be audited. Raffensperger said he chose the presidential race because of its significance and tight margin. Because of the close results, he said, a full hand recount would be needed to complete the audit.

Over the two weeks since the election, Raffensperger has been under attack from fellow Republicans, from the president on down.

Georgia's two U.S. senators, who both face stiff competition from Democrats in Jan. 5 runoff elections, last week called for Raffensperger's resignation.

"The secretary of state has failed to deliver honest and transparent elections," Sens. David Perdue and Kelly Loeffler wrote in a letter.

U.S. Rep Doug Collins, who is running Trump's Georgia recount effort, has traded barbs on social media with the secretary of state. And over the weekend, the president tweeted that Raffensperger — whom he endorsed in a runoff election two years ago — is "a so-called Republican (RINO)," using the acronym for "Republican in name only."

Raffensperger has steadfastly defended the state's handling of the election and the subsequent hand tally. He has said his office has seen no evidence of widespread voting fraud or irregularities and he was confident the audit would affirm the election results.

The Associated Press has not declared a winner in the presidential race in Georgia, where Biden led Trump by 0.3 percentage points. There is no mandatory recount law in Georgia, but state law provides that option to a trailing candidate if the margin is less than 0.5 percentage points. It is AP's practice not to call a race that is — or is likely to become — subject to a recount.

A rusty Giuliani returns to the courtroom on Trump's behalf

By MARC LEVY and MARK SCOLFORO Associated Press

WILLIAMSPORT, Pa. (AP) — Representing a client inside a courtroom for the first time in nearly three decades, Rudy Giuliani showed some rust as he tried to make the case that President Donald Trump has been robbed of re-election.

The former federal prosecutor and New York City mayor, who has taken over Trump's efforts to overturn the election results, entered a courthouse in the small Pennsylvania city of Williamsport on Tuesday with a few dozen Trump supporters cheering him from across the street.

Over the next several hours, he fiddled with his Twitter account, forgot which judge he was talking to and threw around wild, unsupported accusations about a nationwide conspiracy by Democrats to steal the election.

No such evidence has emerged since Election Day.

Giuliani needed an opposing lawyer, calling him "the man who was very angry with me, I forgot his name."

He mistook the judge for a federal judge in a separate Pennsylvania district who rejected a separate Trump campaign case: "I was accused of not reading your opinion and that I did not understand it."

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Nov. 18, 2020 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 138 ~ 46 of 91

And he tripped himself up over the meaning of "opacity."

"In the plaintiffs' counties, they were denied the opportunity to have an unobstructed observation and ensure opacity," Giuliani said. "I'm not quite sure I know what opacity means. It probably means you can see, right?"

"It means you can't," said U.S. District Judge Matthew Brann.

"Big words, your honor," Giuliani said.

At times, the Philadelphia lawyer working alongside Giuliani, Linda Kerns, took over in answering Brann's questions.

At one point, an opposing lawyer, Mark Aronchick, disputed Giuliani's repeated contentions that it was illegal for counties to help people vote.

"I don't expect that he would know the Pennsylvania election code," Aronchick said, suggesting — without saying it — that Giuliani was an unprepared out-of-towner.

The Trump campaign is seeking to prevent Pennsylvania from certifying its election. The lawsuit is based on a complaint that Philadelphia and six Democratic-controlled counties in Pennsylvania let voters make corrections to mail-in ballots that were otherwise going to be disqualified for a technicality, like lacking a secrecy envelope or a signature.

It is not clear how many ballots that could involve, although some opposing lawyers say it is far too few to overturn the election result. President-elect Joe Biden won the state by more than 70,000 votes.

On Tuesday, opposing lawyers asked Brann to throw out the case, calling the evidence cited "at best, garden-variety irregularities" that would not warrant undoing Pennsylvania's election results, which delivered the White House for Biden.

Once a hard-nosed federal prosecutor who made a name for himself going after New York mobsters in the 1980s, Giuliani had not appeared in court as an attorney since 1992, according to court records.

Giuliani was the U.S. attorney in charge of the high-profile Southern District of New York before he won his second race for New York City mayor in 1993.

He was still the mayor during the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attack but was term-limited and left office in early 2002. He ran for president in 2008.

Long in Trump's orbit, Giuliani became a fierce attack dog on Trump's 2016 campaign, lending his celebrity to the underdog effort and earning Trump's gratitude. He emerged as a major player when the president made him the public face of his legal team during special counsel Robert Mueller's Russia investigation.

Giuliani later drew blame from others close to Trump for putting unproven conspiracy theories in front of the president about work that Biden's son, Hunter, did in Ukraine. Trump was impeached in the aftermath of pushing Kiev to investigate the Bidens.

Giuliani burst back into the public eye in the stretch run of this election but has little to show for the Trump campaign's legal efforts.

And he became a punchline when he held a news conference in front of a downmarket Philadelphia landscaping company, across from an adult bookstore, when the race was called for Biden.

As he left the courtroom Tuesday night, he seemed unconcerned whether he'd lose that case — "well, obviously if we lose it, we'll appeal it" — and suggested that the Trump campaign's eggs are not in one basket.

"There are eight cases, I'm afraid to tell you," Giuliani said.

Levy reported from Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. AP reporters Jonathan Lemire and Colleen Long in Washington contributed to this report.

Follow Marc Levy on Twitter at www.twitter.com/timelywriter.

Rape, abuses in palm oil fields linked to top beauty brands

By MARGIE MASON and ROBIN McDOWELL Associated Press

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Nov. 18, 2020 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 138 ~ 47 of 91

SUMATRA, Indonesia (AP) — With his hand clamped tightly over her mouth, she could not scream, the 16-year-old girl recalls — and no one was around to hear her anyway. She describes how her boss raped her amid the tall trees on an Indonesian palm oil plantation that feeds into some of the world's best-known cosmetic brands. He then put an ax to her throat and warned her: Do not tell.

At another plantation, a woman named Ola complains of fevers, coughing and nose bleeds after years of spraying dangerous pesticides with no protective gear. Making just \$2 a day, with no health benefits, she can't afford to see a doctor.

Hundreds of miles away, Ita, a young wife, mourns the two babies she lost in the third trimester. She regularly lugged loads several times her weight throughout both pregnancies, fearing she would be fired if she did not.

These are the invisible women of the palm oil industry, among the millions of daughters, mothers and grandmothers who toil on vast plantations across Indonesia and neighboring Malaysia, which together produce 85 percent of the world's most versatile vegetable oil.

Palm oil is found in everything from potato chips and pills to pet food, and also ends up in the supply chains of some of the biggest names in the \$530 billion beauty business, including L'Oréal, Unilever, Procter & Gamble, Avon and Johnson & Johnson, helping women around the world feel pampered and beautiful.

The Associated Press conducted the first comprehensive investigation focusing on the brutal treatment of women in the production of palm oil, including the hidden scourge of sexual abuse, ranging from verbal harassment and threats to rape. It's part of a larger in-depth look at the industry that exposed widespread abuses in the two countries, including human trafficking, child labor and outright slavery.

Women are burdened with some of the industry's most difficult and dangerous jobs, spending hours waist-deep in water tainted by chemical runoff and carrying loads so heavy that, over time, their wombs can collapse and protrude. Many are hired by subcontractors on a day-to-day basis without benefits, performing the same jobs for the same companies for years — even decades. They often work without pay to help their husbands meet otherwise impossible daily quotas.

"Almost every plantation has problems related to labor," said Hotler Parsaoran of the Indonesian nonprofit group Sawit Watch, which has conducted extensive investigations into abuses in the palm oil sector. "But the conditions of female workers are far worse than men."

Parsaoran said it's the responsibility of governments, growers, big multinational buyers and banks that help finance plantation expansion to tackle issues related to palm oil, which is listed under more than 200 ingredient names and contained in nearly three out of four personal-care products — everything from mascara and bubble bath to anti-wrinkle creams.

The AP interviewed more than three dozen women and girls from at least 12 companies across Indonesia and Malaysia. Because previous reports have resulted in retaliation against workers, they are being identified only by partial names or nicknames. They met with female AP reporters secretly within their barracks or at hotels, coffee shops or churches, sometimes late at night, usually with no men present so they could speak openly.

The Malaysian government said it had received no reports about rapes on plantations, but Indonesia acknowledged physical and sexual abuse appears to be a growing problem, with most victims afraid to speak out. Still, the AP was able to corroborate a number of the women's stories by reviewing police reports, legal documents, complaints filed with union representatives and local media accounts.

Reporters also interviewed nearly 200 other workers, activists, government officials and lawyers, including some who helped trapped girls and women escape, who confirmed that abuses regularly occur.

This story was funded in part by the McGraw Center for Business Journalism at CUNY's Newmark Graduate School of Journalism

Indonesia is the world's biggest palm oil producer, with an estimated 7.6 million women working in its fields, about half the total workforce, according to the female empowerment ministry. In much-smaller

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Nov. 18, 2020 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 138 ~ 48 of 91

Malaysia, the figures are harder to nail down due to the large number of foreign migrants working off the books.

In both countries, the AP found generations of women from the same families who have served as part of the industry's backbone. Some started working as children alongside their parents, gathering loose kernels and clearing brush from the trees with machetes, never learning to read or write.

And others, like a woman who gave the name Indra, dropped out of school as teenagers. She took a job at Malaysia's Sime Darby Plantations, one of the world's biggest palm oil companies. Years later, she says her boss started harassing her, saying things like "Come sleep with me. I will give you a baby." He would lurk behind her in the fields, even when she went to the bathroom.

Now 27, Indra dreams of leaving, but it's hard to build another life with no education and no other skills. Women in her family have worked on the same Malaysian plantation since her great-grandmother left India as a baby in the early 1900s. Like many laborers in both countries, they can't afford to give up the company's basic subsidized housing, which often consists of rows of dilapidated shacks without running water.

That ensures the generational cycle endures, maintaining a cheap, built-in workforce.

"I feel it's already normal," Indra said. "From birth until now, I am still on a plantation."

Out of sight, hidden by a sea of palms, women have worked on plantations since European colonizers brought the first trees from West Africa more than a century ago. As punishment in Indonesia back then, some so-called female "coolies" were bound to posts outside the boss' house with finely ground chili pepper rubbed into their vaginas.

As the decades passed, palm oil became an essential ingredient for the food industry, which saw it as a substitute for unhealthy trans fats. And cosmetic companies, which were shifting away from animal- or petroleum-based ingredients, were captivated by its miracle properties: It foams in toothpaste and shaving gel, moisturizes soaps and lathers in shampoo.

New workers are constantly needed to meet the relentless demand, which has quadrupled in the last 20 years alone. Women in Indonesia are often "casual" workers – hired day to day, with their jobs and pay never guaranteed. Men receive nearly all the full-time permanent positions, harvesting the heavy, spiky fruit bunches and working in processing mills.

On almost every plantation, men also are the supervisors, opening the door for sexual harassment and abuse.

The 16-year-old girl who described being raped by her boss – a man old enough to be her grandfather – started working on the plantation at age 6 to help her family make ends meet.

The day she was attacked in 2017, she said the boss took her to a remote part of the estate, where her job was to ferry wheelbarrows laden with the bright orange palm oil fruits he hacked from the trees. Suddenly, she said, he grabbed her arm and started pawing her breasts, throwing her to the jungle floor. Afterward, she said, he held the ax to her throat.

"He threatened to kill me," she said softly. "He threatened to kill my whole family."

Then, she said, he stood up and spit on her.

Nine months later, after she says he raped her four more times, she sat by a wrinkled 2-week-old boy. She made no effort to comfort him when he cried, struggling to even look at his face.

The family filed a report with police, but the complaint was dropped, citing lack of evidence.

"I want him to be punished," the girl said after a long silence. "I want him to be arrested and punished because he didn't care about the baby ... he didn't take any responsibility."

The AP heard about similar incidents on plantations big and small in both countries. Union representatives, health workers, government officials and lawyers said some of the worst examples they encountered involved gang rapes and children as young as 12 being taken into the fields and sexually assaulted by plantation foremen.

One example involved an Indonesian teen who was trafficked to Malaysia as a sex slave, where she was passed between drunk palm oil workers living under plastic tarps in the jungle, eventually escaping ravaged by chlamydia. And in a rare high-profile case that sparked outrage last year, a female preacher

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Nov. 18, 2020 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 138 ~ 49 of 91

working at a Christian church inside an Indonesian estate was tied up among the trees, sexually assaulted by two workers and then strangled. The men were sentenced to life in prison.

While Indonesia has laws in place to protect women from abuse and discrimination, Rafail Walangitan of the Ministry of Women Empowerment and Child Protection said he was aware of many problems identified by the AP on palm oil plantations, including child labor and sexual harassment.

"We have to work hard on this," he said, noting the government still has a long way to go.

Malaysia's Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development said it hadn't received complaints about the treatment of women laborers so had no comment. And Nageeb Wahab, head of the Malaysian Palm Oil Association, said workers are covered by the country's labor laws, with the ability to file grievances.

Those familiar with the complexities of plantation life say the subject of sexual abuse has never drawn much attention and that female workers often believe little can be done about it.

"They are thinking it happens everywhere, so there's nothing to complain about," said Saurlin Siagan, an Indonesian activist and researcher.

Many families living on plantations struggle to earn enough to cover basic costs, like electricity and rice. Desperate women are sometimes coerced into using their bodies to pay back loans from supervisors or other workers. And younger females, especially those considered attractive, occasionally are given less demanding jobs like cleaning the boss' house, with sex expected in exchange.

In the few cases where victims do speak out, companies often don't take action or police charges are either dropped or not filed because it usually comes down to the accuser's word against the man's.

"The location of palm oil plantations makes them an ideal crime scene for rape," said Aini Fitri, an Indonesian official from the government's women and children's office in West Kalimantan province. "It could be dangerous in the darkness for people, especially for women, but also because it is so quiet and remote. So even in the middle of the day, the crime can happen."

Many beauty and personal goods companies have largely remained silent when it comes to the plight of female workers, but it's not due to lack of knowledge.

A powerful global industry group, the Consumer Goods Forum, published a 2018 report alerting the network's 400 CEOs that women on plantations were exposed to dangerous chemicals and "subject to the worst conditions among all palm oil workers." It also noted that a few local groups had cited examples of women being forced to provide sex to secure or keep jobs, but said few workers were willing to discuss the sensitive issue.

Even so, almost all of the pressure aimed at palm oil companies has focused on land grabs, the destruction of rainforests and the killing of endangered species such as orangutans.

Those concerns led to the 2004 formation of the Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil, an association that promotes and certifies ethical production, including provisions to safeguard laborers. Its members include growers, buyers, traders and environmental watchdogs. But of the nearly 100 grievances lodged in Indonesia and Malaysia in the last decade, most have not focused on labor until recently. And women are almost never mentioned.

The AP reached out to representatives affiliated with every cosmetic and personal goods maker mentioned in this story. Some didn't comment, but most defended their use of palm oil and its derivatives, with many attempting to show how little they use compared to the roughly 80 million tons produced annually worldwide. Others said they were working with local nonprofits, pointed to pledges on their websites about commitments to sustainability and human rights, or noted efforts to be transparent about the processing mills in their supply chains.

But the AP found that labor abuses regularly occur industrywide, even from mills that source from plantations bearing the RSPO's green palm stamp.

That includes Indonesian companies like London Sumatra, which withdrew from the RSPO last year after the association cited it for a series of labor abuses. London Sumatra told the AP that it adheres to labor laws and takes "the health of our workers very seriously."

In some cases, women working at various palm oil companies illegally said they were ordered to hide in the jungle when sustainability auditors arrived, while others were told to smile if they encountered any

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Nov. 18, 2020 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 138 ~ 50 of 91

visitors.

The AP used U.S. Customs records, product ingredient lists and the most recently published data from producers, traders and buyers to link the laborers' palm oil and its derivatives from the mills that process it to the Western brands' supply chains – including some that source from mills fed by plantations where women said they were raped and young girls toiled in the fields.

Abuses also were linked to product lines sought out by conscientious consumers like Tom's of Maine and Kiehl's, through the supply chains of their giant parent companies Colgate-Palmolive and L'Oréal. And Bath & Body Works was connected through its main supplier, Cargill, one of the world's biggest palm oil traders.

Coty Inc., which owns global staples like CoverGirl and is tapping into partnerships with Gen Z newcomers like Kylie Cosmetics, did not respond to multiple AP calls and emails. And Estee Lauder Companies Inc., owner of Clinique, Lancome and Aveda, acknowledged struggling with traceability issues in its RSPO filing. When asked by AP whether specific products used palm oil or its derivatives, there was no response.

Both companies, along with Shiseido and Clorox, which owns Burt's Bees Inc., keep the names of their mills and suppliers secret. Clorox said it would raise the allegations of abuses with its suppliers, calling AP's findings "incredibly disturbing."

Johnson & Johnson makes its mill list public, but refused to say whether its iconic baby lotion contains palm oil derivatives.

One case uncovered by the AP involved a widow named Maria who said her supervisor began sexually harassing her when she first started working at a Malaysian-owned company in Indonesia. She said she successfully fought off his advances until she returned home one night to find him inside, waiting for her.

"I tried to remind him about his wife and his children in the village, but he hugged me tighter while pulling my pants down. Then he raped me," she said. "After that, he left me. But almost two hours later, he came back and raped me a second time."

She said she stayed quiet at first because he threatened her life and her job. But the attacks continued, she said, including once when he jumped her while she was working in the field "crushing me so that I couldn't move."

That time, she said, she kept a semen-filled tissue as evidence. She later confronted the man and his wife and also complained to company and union officials. She attempted to file a police report, but instead was directed to seek compensation directly from the man, a union representative said. She was never paid and ended up moving to another plantation to get away from the boss, who has since quit.

Rosita Nengsih, the director of the Women, Children and Family Legal Aid Institution in the Indonesian province of West Kalimantan, said most victims are reluctant to report rapes to authorities, adding it's typical to settle complaints through so-called "peace solutions" in which the victim's family may be paid off. Sometimes parents force their daughter to marry her rapist to lessen the shame, often after pregnancy occurs.

The province where Nengsih works borders Malaysia on the island of Borneo, which is shared by the two countries. It is a porous corridor for Indonesian workers, including women and young girls hoping to earn enough in the wealthier neighboring country to pull themselves out of poverty. Many travel there illegally, sometimes falsifying documents or lying about their ages, leaving them vulnerable to exploitation.

Nengsih recalled a case involving two Indonesian girls as young as 13 who were working on a Malaysian plantation with their parents and said they were repeatedly raped by the same supervisor until both became pregnant four months apart.

"Nothing happened to the foreman," she said. "He's still free."

The conditions these workers endure stand in stark contrast to female empowerment messages promoted by industry leaders such as L'Oréal, one of the world's top cosmetic companies, and Unilever, one of the biggest palm oil buyers for consumer goods, which sources from more than 1,500 mills.

As Unilever's popular soap brand proclaims: "Dove believes that beauty is for everyone." And L'Oréal says it is working to stamp out sexual harassment "because we are all worth it."

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Nov. 18, 2020 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 138 ~ 51 of 91

In a global industry expected to reach \$800 billion within the next five years, cosmetic legacy brands – together with fast-growing celebrity and niche startups – proudly tout \$300 anti-wrinkle creams or glittery eyeshadows as sustainable and free of labor abuses, with little or no evidence.

In response, L'Oréal said it "has put particular emphasis on supporting and empowering women, who are the first victims of many of the social and environmental challenges our world faces." Unilever said progress needs to be made more quickly, but that "the safety of women in global agricultural supply chains ... including in the palm oil industry, remains a key concern."

The women in Southeast Asia's rugged, steamy plantations are a world away. Some haul tanks of toxic chemicals on their backs weighing more than 13 kilograms (30 pounds), dispensing 80 gallons each day – enough to fill a bathtub.

"Our lives are so hard," said Ola, who has been employed as a day worker in Indonesia for 10 years and wakes each day aching from repeatedly lifting heavy loads. "After spraying, my nose bleeds occasionally. I think it's connected to the pesticide."

She doesn't wear a mask because it's too hot to breathe. She said the company doesn't provide medical care to casual workers, and she has no money for a doctor.

Paraquat, one of the chemicals Ola and others spray, has been banned by the European Union and many other countries over possible links to a wide range of health issues, including an increased chance of developing Parkinson's disease.

Glyphosate, the active ingredient in popular weedkiller Roundup, also is commonly used. Roundup's parent company, Bayer, agreed earlier this year to pay more than \$10 billion to end tens of thousands of lawsuits filed in the U.S. alleging the chemical caused serious illnesses, including cancer.

Some palm oil workers who use agrochemicals daily showed the AP raw webbing between their fingers and toes, along with destroyed nails. Others had milky or red eyes and complained of dizzy spells, trouble breathing and blurry vision. Activists reported that some totally lost their sight.

The workers said pesticides routinely blow back into their faces, splash onto their backs and seep into the sweaty skin on their stomachs.

"If the liquid shakes and spills out, it's also running into my private area. Almost all women are suffering the same itching and burning," said Marodot, whose five children also work to help their father meet his daily target. "I have to keep going until I finish working, and then clean it up with water. There's too many men around."

She said she has trouble seeing, and her face is dark and cracked from years in the sun.

When handed a \$20 lipstick by a journalist, a worker named Defrida was told it contained palm oil. She twisted the silver case and stared at the glistening pink stick – first with intrigue, then with disgust.

Noting she would have to spray pesticide on 30 acres of rough jungle terrain just to afford a single tube, she pleaded with women who buy products containing palm oil: "Oh, my God!" she said. "Please pay attention to our lives."

She, along with nearly all the women interviewed, complained of pelvic pain and explained how almost every phase of their reproductive health is affected.

Some women are forced to undergo humiliating checks to prove they are bleeding in order to take leave during their periods.

Others suffering from collapsed uteruses – caused by the weakening of the pelvic floor from repeatedly squatting and carrying overweight loads – create makeshift braces by tightly wrapping scarves or old motorbike tire tubes around their mid-sections. Some workers described the pain as so agonizing that they could find relief only by lying on their backs with their legs in the air.

Despite a national health care program launched by the Indonesian government, many palm oil workers still don't have access to medical services and, even when basic care is available, it typically is not extended to female day workers. The nearest clinics can be more than a day's drive by motorbike, so most workers just use aspirin, balms or home remedies when they're sick.

Still, they are better off in many ways than migrant women working without papers in Malaysia, mostly

in the bordering states of Sarawak and Sabah on the island of Borneo.

The AP confirmed a horrific story involving a pregnant Indonesian woman who escaped captivity on a Malaysian estate owned by state-run Felda, one of the world's biggest palm oil companies. She gave birth in the jungle and foraged for food before finally being rescued. In September, U.S. Customs and Border Protection banned all palm oil imports from FGV Holdings Berhad, which is closely affiliated with Felda, after finding indications of child and forced labor and other abuses on its plantations.

Even on a day-to-day basis in Malaysia, migrant women fear arrest and deportation. Many rarely leave their plantations, even to give birth, at times risking their own lives and their babies'. And those who do venture out during emergencies can be held for weeks at the hospital until family members can collect enough money to pay exorbitant rates.

At one government facility in a border town, a menu of maternity ward prices was posted on a blue bulletin board. A natural birth costs foreign migrants about \$630 – several times more than it would cost a Malaysian citizen, an amount that could take some women at least a year to pay back.

And that's if they're able to conceive and carry their babies to full term.

Groups of women interviewed by the AP in Indonesia wondered whether their arduous jobs, combined with the chemicals they handle and breathe, caused their infertility, miscarriages and stillbirths.

Ita was among those who said her work affected her ability to deliver healthy babies. She said she hid two pregnancies from her boss, knowing she likely wouldn't be called for daily work otherwise. With two children already at home to feed, she had no choice but to keep working for \$5 a day. In contrast, a permanent full-time female worker is entitled to three months of paid maternity leave.

Every day, as her belly grew, Ita said she continued to carry back-breaking loads over acres of fields, spreading 400 kilograms (880 pounds) of fertilizer – nearly a half-ton – over the course of a day. She lost both babies in her third trimester and, with no health insurance, was left with medical bills she couldn't pay.

"The first time I miscarried, and the doctor had to pull the baby out," said Ita, who has worked on the plantation alongside her mother since the age of 15. "The second time, I gave birth at seven months and it was in critical condition, and they put it in an incubator. It died after 30 hours.

"I kept working," she said. "I never stopped after the baby died."

Sen. Grassley, 87, says he tested positive for coronavirus

By MARY CLARE JALONICK Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Iowa Sen. Chuck Grassley, the longest-serving Republican senator and third in the line of presidential succession, said he has tested positive for the coronavirus.

Grassley, 87, had announced earlier Tuesday that he was quarantining after being exposed to the virus and was waiting for test results. On Tuesday evening, he tweeted that he had tested positive.

"I'll b following my doctors' orders/CDC guidelines & continue to quarantine. I'm feeling good + will keep up on my work for the ppl of Iowa from home," he tweeted.

Grassley said he looks forward to "resuming my normal schedule soon."

The Iowa Republican, who was in the Senate and voting on Monday, did not say how he had been exposed. His office said that he was not experiencing any symptoms and was isolating in his Virginia home.

The announcement from one of the Senate's most prominent members — and one of its oldest — underscored concerns across the Capitol about the safety of lawmakers, staff and other workers in the sprawling complex as cases have spiked across the country and members have traveled back and forth from their states. At least three members of the House have tested positive in the last week, and several more are quarantining.

The increase in cases also threatens the progress of legislation and other work as the Republican Senate, in particular, tries to wrap up business in the remaining weeks of President Donald Trump's term. Grassley's absence on Tuesday helped Democrats block the nomination of Judy Shelton, Trump's controversial pick for the Federal Reserve. Republican Sen. Rick Scott of Florida was also absent as he is in quarantine after an exposure.

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Nov. 18, 2020 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 138 ~ 53 of 91

Grassley is the president pro tempore of the Senate, meaning he presides over the chamber in the absence of Vice President Mike Pence and is third in line for the presidency, behind Pence and House Speaker Nancy Pelosi. The president pro tempore is the senator in the majority party who has served the longest, and Grassley has been a senator for 40 years.

As pro tempore, Grassley opens the Senate each day. He did so on Monday, leading the Pledge of Allegiance alongside others on the floor and then giving remarks without wearing a mask. He also joined other senators on the floor later Monday evening for a procedural vote on a federal judge, that time wearing a mask but speaking to several senators at close distance.

In his remarks, Grassley said it was "more important than ever to stop the surge" of the virus around the country and the world.

"This virus is hitting rural and urban areas alike," Grassley said. "No community is immune. I ask every Iowan to continue to do their part to keep their family and neighbors safe."

Although he was not wearing a mask while he spoke, Grassley encouraged Americans to "wash your hands, limit your activity outside your household, social distance, wear a mask."

Grassley also attended leadership meetings with other Republican senators on Monday, according to Missouri Sen. Roy Blunt, another member of GOP leadership. Blunt told reporters Tuesday evening that he "was like 12 feet away" from Grassley in the meeting, which he said was in a large room.

Blunt said Grassley "has been great about wearing his mask, and I think great about taking care of himself, so I think he's done everything he can."

While most members of the Senate have consistently worn masks in hallways and meetings, members of both parties often take them off when the cameras are on — either on the Senate floor or when talking to press. Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell and Senate Democratic leader Chuck Schumer also took their masks off when speaking on the Senate floor Monday.

Still, some Democratic members have started to push back on that practice. Sen. Sherrod Brown, D-Ohio, interrupted a floor speech Monday afternoon to ask Sen. Dan Sullivan, R-Alaska, to put on his mask as he presided over the Senate, noting that he could be exposing staff nearby.

"I don't wear a mask when I am speaking, like most senators," Sullivan responded, snapping that he would put the mask on but that "I don't need your instruction."

After the exchange, Texas Sen. Ted Cruz tweeted his support for Sullivan, saying that Brown was being "a complete ass" and that his request of the Alaskan was "an ostentatious sign of fake virtue."

A spokesperson for McConnell did not return a request for comment on whether he would encourage testing for senators who may have come into contact with Grassley. McConnell has maintained that regular testing is not needed in the Senate, though the Capitol physician announced this week that there would be testing available for members of the House and their staff who had recently traveled to Washington.

Grassley's announcement comes as the longest-serving Republican in the House, Alaska Rep. Don Young, said he was recovering from the coronavirus. In a statement Monday, Young said he had been hospitalized and "I had not felt this sick in a very long time."

Young, also 87, said he had been discharged and is now "on the road to recovery."

By missing votes Tuesday, Grassley broke a 27-year streak of not missing a single Senate vote. According to his office, the last time he missed a vote was in 1993, when he was in Iowa assisting with relief efforts after severe flooding.

He said in a statement Tuesday that he had voted 8,927 times without skipping a vote — a record in the Senate.

"I'm disappointed I wasn't able to vote today in the Senate, but the health of others is more important than any record," he said.

Grassley was first elected to the U.S. House in 1974 and then to the Senate in 1980. He is chair of the Senate Finance Committee and is expected to become the top Republican on the Senate Judiciary Committee when a new Senate session begins in January.

Hurricane Iota bashes Nicaragua, Honduras after Eta floods

By MARLON GONZÁLEZ Associated Press

TEGUCIGALPA, Honduras (AP) — Hurricane Iota battered Nicaragua's Caribbean coast and flooded some stretches of neighboring Honduras that were still under water from Hurricane Eta two weeks earlier, leaving authorities struggling to assess damage after communications were knocked out in some areas.

By late Tuesday, Iota had diminished to a tropical storm and was moving inland over northern Nicaragua and southern Honduras, but forecasters warned that its heavy rains still posed a threat of flooding and mudslides. It had maximum sustained winds of 40 mph (65 kph) and was spinning westward at 12 mph (19 kph).

The storm passed about 25 miles (40 kilometers) south-southwest of Tegucigalpa, the capital of Honduras, where rivers were rising and rain was expected to intensify. In mountainous Tegucigalpa, residents of low-lying, flood-prone areas were being evacuated in anticipation of Iota's rains, as were residents of hillside neighborhoods vulnerable to landslides.

Along Honduras' remote eastern coast, people had to leave damaged and flooding homes.

"What affected us most here was the flooding. The Barra Patuca sector has been flooded for the last two weeks," said Teonela Paisano Wood, mayor of the Honduran town of Brus Laguna. "We are in danger if it keeps raining."

Mirna Wood, vice president of the Miskito ethnic group in Honduras' far east Gracias a Dios region, was in Tegucigalpa collecting donations for her community ravaged by Eta when Iota hit.

Some 40,000 people in the area had moved to shelters from low-lying land beside rivers and the sea, but other people remained stranded near the border with Nicaragua. Some were rescued by Nicaraguan authorities, she said.

In her last communication with the mayor of the community of Villeda Morales late Monday, he told her Iota was hitting them hard and the community had not completely evacuated.

"We are facing an incredible emergency," Wood said. "There is no food. There is no water."

In Nicaragua where the storm hit Monday night as a Category 4 hurricane, the extent of the damage was unclear because much of the affected region was without electricity as well as phone and internet service, and strong winds hampered radio transmissions. Iota made landfall just 15 miles (25 kilometers) south of where Hurricane Eta hit on Nov. 3, also as a Category 4 storm.

Preliminary reports from the coast included toppled trees and electric poles and roofs stripped from homes and businesses, said Guillermo González, director of Nicaragua's emergency management agency. More than 40,000 people were in shelters.

Later, Nicaraguan Vice President and first lady Rosario Murillo said that a brother and sister, ages 11 and 8, had drowned in the community of La Pinuela trying to cross the swollen Solera River. There were reports of others missing in the same area.

Panama reported that one person was killed and another missing in its western Indigenous autonomous Ngabe Bugle area near the border with Costa Rica.

Aid agencies struggled to reach their local contacts, and the government said in a statement that at least 35 towns in the east and north had no phone service. Nicaragua's telecommunications ministry said phone and broadband provider Columbus Networks was offline because of flooding in the coastal city of Puerto Cabezas, also known as Bilwi.

Eta caused more than 130 deaths as it triggered flash floods and mudslides in parts of Central America and Mexico. It left tens of thousands homeless in Honduras, which reported 74 deaths and nearly 57,000 people in shelters, mostly in the north.

Even before Iota hit Nicaragua, it scraped over the tiny Colombian island of Providencia, more than 155 miles (250 kilometers) off Nicaragua's coast. Colombian President Ivan Duque said one person was killed and 98% of the island's infrastructure was "affected."

Providencia is inhabited almost exclusively by the descendants of African slaves and British colonizers, who speak an English version of Creole as their native language. The island has no direct flights to the

mainland, but it has become an increasingly popular tourist destination thanks to its quiet beaches and rich marine life. On Tuesday, Colombian officials said they were sending a ship with 15 tons of aid to the island.

Iota is the record 30th named storm of this year's historically busy Atlantic hurricane season. It's also the ninth storm to rapidly intensify this season, a dangerous phenomenon that is happening more often.

Iota also developed later in the season than any other Category 5 storm on record, beating a Nov. 8, 1932, Cuba hurricane, said Colorado State University hurricane researcher Phil Klotzbach.

The hurricane season officially ends Nov. 30.

Associated Press writers Christopher Sherman in Mexico City, and Manuel Rueda in Bogota, Colombia, contributed to this report.

Michigan GOP backtracks after blocking vote certification

By ED WHITE Associated Press

DETROIT (AP) — In an abrupt about-face, Michigan's largest county on Tuesday night unanimously certified election results showing Democrat Joe Biden defeating President Donald Trump, hours after Republicans first blocked formal approval of voters' intentions.

The initial move was quickly condemned by Democrats, election experts and spectators at the Wayne County Board of Canvassers online meeting as a dangerous attempt to block the results of a free and fair election.

"We depend on democratic norms, including that the losers graciously accept defeat. That seems to be breaking down," said Joshua Douglas, a law professor at the University of Kentucky.

The state vote certification process is usually a routine task, and the ultimate resolution in Wayne County propels Biden toward formal victory in Michigan. Still, Tuesday's chaotic developments are likely to sow more doubt among Trump's supporters in the election results and could galvanize Republicans in other states to try to look for ways to slow down the final steps in making his loss official.

Republicans are also trying to stop formal certification of the election results in other swing states, including Arizona, Nevada and Pennsylvania.

Biden crushed Trump in Wayne County, a Democratic stronghold, by more than a 2-1 margin and won Michigan by 146,000 votes, according to unofficial results. His victory reversed Trump's surprise 2016 gains in the industrial Midwest and put Biden on the path to clearing the 270 Electoral College votes needed to win the White House.

Still, Trump and his allies have launched an array of baseless attacks on the integrity of the election and numerous lawsuits aimed at slowing down the formal vote certification process. Each state certifies its election results and the Electoral College meets Dec. 14 to codify the results.

In Michigan, Trump allies and Republican poll challengers have spent days launching unsuccessful litigation. They claimed fraud during absentee ballot counting at a Detroit convention center, but two judges found no evidence and refused to stop the canvassing process.

It's against that backdrop that the Wayne County Board of Canvassers met Tuesday. In a rare and extraordinary move, they did not bless the will of Detroit-area voters. Instead, the panel split in a 2-2 vote, with Republicans voting against certification of the results.

Monica Palmer, one of the two Republicans, said poll books in certain precincts in Detroit — a majority-Black city — were out of balance. Jonathan Kinloch, a Democrat on the panel, said the discrepancies were the result of "human error" and called it "reckless and irresponsible" to not certify the results.

There has been no evidence of widespread voting fraud in Michigan, or in any other state. Federal and state officials from both parties have declared the 2020 election safe and secure.

Still, Trump has spent the two weeks since Election Day raising false claims of voter fraud and refusing to concede to Biden. He relished the initial developments in Michigan, tweeting, "Having courage is a beautiful thing."

But the broader condemnation was swift, including from the meeting's online spectators, who blasted

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Nov. 18, 2020 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 138 ~ 56 of 91

Palmer and fellow Republican William Hartmann during a public comment period over Zoom.

The Rev. Wendell Anthony, a well-known pastor and head of the Detroit branch of the NAACP, called their actions a "disgrace."

"You have extracted a Black city out of a county and said the only ones that are at fault is the city of Detroit, where 80% of the people who reside here are African Americans. Shame on you!" Anthony said, his voice rising.

Ned Staebler, a vice president at Wayne State University in Detroit, said, "The stain of racism that you, William Hartmann and Monica Palmer, have just covered yourself in is going to follow you throughout history."

Law student Joseph Zimmerman, a veteran, told the canvassers "it breaks my heart" to see them undermine the "sacred right" to vote.

After the meeting, Hartmann said the intense criticism didn't cause him to change his vote. Rather, he said he acted because the board had agreed to ask the secretary of state to investigate Detroit's election results.

Certification of the Nov. 3 election results in each of Michigan's 83 counties is a step toward statewide certification by the Michigan Board of State Canvassers and the eventual awarding of 16 electoral votes.

"Glad to see common sense prevailed in the end," Detroit Mayor Mike Duggan said after the Wayne County reversal. "Thank you to all those citizens who spoke up so passionately. You made the difference!"

Michigan Democratic Party chair Lavora Barnes called the initial 2-2 vote "blatant racism."

At least six election-related lawsuits have been filed in Michigan, the latest one landing Sunday in federal court. The issues that Trump's allies have raised 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.

On Tuesday, the Arizona Republican Party asked a judge to bar Maricopa County, the state's most populous, from certifying until the court issues a decision about the party's lawsuit seeking a new hand-count of a sampling of ballots. In a more rural county, Mohave, election certification was delayed until Nov. 23 in a sign of solidarity with the remaining election challenges in the state.

Trump's personal lawyer, Rudy Giuliani, stepped into a courtroom for the first time in decades Tuesday to argue in Pennsylvania that the certification there should be delayed over concerns of voter fraud, though there was no widespread fraud reported.

Follow Ed White at <http://twitter.com/edwitez>

FDA allows 1st rapid virus test that gives results at home

By MATTHEW PERRONE AP Health Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — U.S. regulators on Tuesday allowed emergency use of the first rapid coronavirus test that can be performed entirely at home and delivers results in 30 minutes.

The announcement by the Food and Drug Administration represents an important step in U.S. efforts to expand testing options for COVID-19 beyond health care facilities and testing sites. However, the test will require a prescription, likely limiting its initial use.

The FDA granted emergency authorization to the single-use test kit from Lucira Health, a California manufacturer.

The company's test allows users to swab themselves to collect a nasal sample. The sample is then swirled in a vial of laboratory solution that plugs into a portable device. Results are displayed as lights labeled positive or negative.

To date, the FDA has authorized nearly 300 tests for coronavirus. The vast majority require a nasal swab performed by a health professional and must be processed at laboratories using high-tech equipment. A handful of tests allow people to collect their own sample at home — a nasal swab or saliva — that's then shipped to a lab, which usually means waiting days for results.

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Nov. 18, 2020 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 138 ~ 57 of 91

Health experts have called for options to allow people to test themselves at home, reducing turnaround times and the potential spread of the virus to others, including health care workers. Rapid test results are critical to quickly quarantining those who are infected and tracing their contacts. But for months, U.S. testing has been plagued by slow results due to bottlenecks at testing laboratories. There are other rapid tests but most require a small, special machine operated by a health professional to develop results.

"Now, more Americans who may have COVID-19 will be able to take immediate action, based on their results, to protect themselves and those around them," Dr. Jeff Shuren, director of the FDA's devices center, said in a statement.

Lucira did not immediately respond to a request for additional details after business hours Tuesday.

The Lucira COVID-19 test grew out of research the company was doing to develop an at-home flu test, according to the company's website. Lucira adapted its technology to detect COVID-19 after the outbreak.

The test uses technology similar to genetic laboratory-based tests that are the standard tool for COVID-19 screening. That's different than most rapid tests currently used in the U.S., which look for viral proteins called antigens — not the virus itself.

Anyone that tests positive should isolate and seek care from a health professional, the FDA said in its release. Those who test negative but still have coronavirus symptoms should consult a doctor; a negative result does not rule out COVID-19 infection.

The FDA said Lucira's test was also authorized for use in doctor's offices and testing sites. Currently all U.S. testing sites must report results to state and federal health authorities tracking the pandemic. Doctors will be required to report the home test results.

"If the results are not reported back, it may be difficult to figure out what is happening in the community at large," said Dr. Alberto Gutierrez, former head of the FDA's testing office, in an interview before the announcement.

More than two dozen companies have been racing for months to develop the first, rapid home-based test for COVID-19. However, the FDA outlined a number of study requirements for manufacturers.

These hurdles have less to do with COVID-19 specifically, and more to do with decades-long concerns about whether people without any medical training can accurately screen themselves and interpret the results.

The FDA has only ever approved one home test for an infectious disease — an HIV test. And even commonplace over-the-counter tests— such as home pregnancy kits — were subject to years of scrutiny before FDA allowed their use in the 1970s.

Experts say that careful approach is warranted for coronavirus.

"I think increased testing closer to patients, including in the home, is the way of the future," said Dr. Robin Patel of the Mayo Clinic, in an interview before the announcement was made. "But there are considerations that have to be addressed to make sure that this is done in a safe and effective way."

FDA regulators authorized the new test using their emergency powers to quickly speed the availability of experimental products during public health crises. In normal times, the FDA requires evidence of safety and effectiveness before clearing a new test. But during public health emergencies the agency can lower those standards.

The FDA release did not disclose the test's accuracy or the study results that regulators used to make the decision.

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.

States tightening anti-virus restrictions amid case surge

By RYAN J. FOLEY and MICHAEL KUNZELMAN Associated Press

IOWA CITY, Iowa (AP) — The deadly rise in COVID-19 cases across the U.S. is forcing state and local officials to adjust their blueprints for fighting the virus, with Republican governors adopting mask mandates

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Nov. 18, 2020 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 138 ~ 58 of 91

— skeptically, in at least one case — and schools scrapping plans to reopen classrooms.

The steps face blowback from those who question the science behind mask wearing and social distancing and fear the new restrictions will kill off more jobs and trample on their civil liberties.

In Iowa, Gov. Kim Reynolds had pushed back against a mask mandate for months but imposed a limited one Tuesday, becoming the latest GOP holdout to change course on face coverings. At the same time, she claimed “there’s science on both sides” about whether masks reduce the spread of the coronavirus.

With Thanksgiving coming up next week, public health officials are bracing for a holiday-fueled surge. Doctors are urging families to stick to small gatherings.

Governors in Ohio, Maryland and Illinois imposed restrictions on business hours and crowd sizes Tuesday, and their counterparts in Wisconsin and Colorado proposed economic relief packages. Los Angeles County, with a population of 10 million, ordered similar business restrictions.

A DEADLY SURGE

The key measures of the country’s effectiveness in managing the pandemic are all heading in the wrong direction. Hospitalizations, deaths and cases are all skyrocketing in the U.S.

In its weekly internal report, the White House coronavirus task force warned of an “aggressive, unrelenting” spread of the coronavirus across the country “without evidence of improvement but rather, further deterioration,” a senior administration official said Tuesday. The official, who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss private deliberations, said the task force concluded that existing efforts to slow the spread “are inadequate and must be increased to flatten the curve” and that Thanksgiving travel and gatherings could “amplify transmission considerably.”

More than 73,000 people — an all-time high — were hospitalized with the virus in the U.S. as of Monday, an increase of over 3,000 from just a day earlier, according to the COVID Tracking Project. Hospitals are running out of space, and nurses and doctors in Kansas are converting waiting areas to patient rooms and spending upwards of eight hours on the phone trying to secure beds at other hospitals.

More than 166,000 newly confirmed infections were reported on Monday, according to Johns Hopkins University. The average number of new cases per day has more than doubled over the past few weeks.

The virus is blamed for more than 1.3 million deaths worldwide, including over 247,000 in the U.S. Deaths per day in the U.S. have climbed to an average of 1,145, up from 828 two weeks ago.

The national death toll is on pace to keep climbing in the coming days as states set new records. Wisconsin reported 92 new deaths Tuesday, shattering its daily record of 66 set last week.

MORE MASK MANDATES

Since the election, Republican governors in hard-hit Iowa, North Dakota and Utah have reversed course and put in place requirements on masks, and others have extended or expanded earlier orders.

Plenty of other elected officials and residents are balking at such requirements despite the surge. And some local law enforcement authorities have refused to enforce mask requirements.

In Utah, dozens of people opposed to a statewide mask mandate protested outside the home of Gov. Gary Herbert. In South Dakota, the state with the highest rate of COVID-19 deaths per capita in November, Republican Gov. Kristi Noem has no plans to issue mask requirements.

Doctors serving Idaho and eastern Oregon spent hours Tuesday trying to sway health districts, city leaders and the public to do more to stop the spread of coronavirus, warning that rationed care is looming in Idaho’s future. But in Idaho, they were met with skepticism, as some residents in attendance either denied the existence of the virus or disputed its severity. Idaho is experiencing a severe and unchecked community spread of COVID-19 in much of the state.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention says masks can help protect you and those around you. A more stringent mask mandate took effect on Tuesday in California, where Democratic Gov. Gavin Newsom said residents will be required to cover up outdoors, with limited exceptions.

And in New Orleans, officials took the drastic step of canceling the beloved, but traditionally packed Mardi Gras and Carnival parades that draw visitors from around the world. The city has a 250-person cap on outdoor crowds to limit the virus’s spread.

“You can’t have traditional parades with that small a group,” city spokesman Beau Tidwell said Tuesday.

The next Mardi Gras is Feb. 16; the parades usually run for about two weeks.

SCHOOL SHUTDOWNS

The rising infection rates are prompting some school districts to revert to remote learning or postpone a return to classroom instruction.

In South Dakota, the Rapid City-area school system plans to close all schools and move to virtual instruction on Wednesday. The district's latest data showed 94 students and 47 staff with an active case of COVID-19, while 105 staff and 676 students were in quarantine following exposure.

In metro Las Vegas, the Clark County school district postponed plans to resume partial in-class instruction and will continue with remote learning through at least the end of the calendar year.

West Virginia's largest teachers organization urged Republican Gov. Jim Justice to make public schools online-only. The state recorded more than 4,400 cases during the week ending Sunday, a 63% increase from the previous week. The governor already has barred in-person instruction from Thanksgiving through Dec. 3 to avoid outbreaks from holiday travel.

VACCINE VOLUNTEERS

The world received welcome news in the past week with positive preliminary results on two COVID-19 vaccines from Pfizer and Moderna, but scientists are worried that volunteers will stop coming forward take part in studies of other vaccines under development. Thousands are still needed.

Kunzelman reported from College Park, Maryland. Associated Press writers across the country contributed to this report.

Trump fires agency head who vouched for 2020 vote security

By BEN FOX Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump on Tuesday fired the nation's top election security official, a widely respected member of his administration who had dared to refute the president's unsubstantiated claims of electoral fraud and vouch for the integrity of the vote.

While abrupt, the dismissal of Christopher Krebs, the director of the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency, was not a surprise. Since his loss, Trump has been ridding his administration of officials seen as insufficiently loyal and has been denouncing the conduct of an election that led to an embarrassing defeat to Democrat Joe Biden.

That made Krebs a prime target. He had used the imprimatur of Trump's own Department of Homeland Security, where his agency was based, to issue a stream of statements and tweets over the past week attesting to the proper conduct of the election and denouncing the falsehoods spread by the president and his supporters — without mentioning Trump by name.

Krebs stood by those assertions after his ouster.

"Honored to serve. We did it right," he said in a brief statement on Twitter. "Defend Today, Secure Tomorrow."

He closed with the phrase "Protect 2020," which had been his agency's slogan ahead of the election.

The firing of Krebs, a Trump appointee, came the week after the dismissal of Defense Secretary Mark Esper, part of a broader shakeup that put Trump loyalists in senior Pentagon positions.

A former Microsoft executive, Krebs ran the agency, known as CISA, from its creation in the wake of Russian interference with the 2016 election through the November election. He won bipartisan praise as CISA coordinated federal state and local efforts to defend electoral systems from foreign or domestic interference.

Hours before being dismissed, Krebs tweeted out a report citing 59 election security experts saying there is no credible evidence of computer fraud in the 2020 election outcome.

Trump responded on Twitter later in the day. He repeated unsubstantiated claims about the vote and wrote "effective immediately, Chris Krebs has been terminated as Director of the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency."

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Nov. 18, 2020 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 138 ~ 60 of 91

Officials with CISA and its parent agency, the Department of Homeland Security, had no immediate comment.

Members of Congress — mostly Democrats — denounced the firing.

Rep. Adam Schiff, D-Calif., chairman of the House intelligence committee, assailed Trump for “retaliating against Director Krebs and other officials who did their duty. It’s pathetic, but sadly predictable that upholding and protecting our democratic processes would be cause for firing.”

One of the few Republicans joining in the criticism was Sen. Ben Sasse of Nebraska, a frequent Trump critic. “Chris Krebs did a really good job, as state election officials all across the nation will tell you, and he obviously should not be fired,” he said.

Biden campaign spokesman Michael Gwin noted that bipartisan election officials have dismissed Trump’s claims of widespread fraud. “Chris Krebs should be commended for his service in protecting our elections, not fired for telling the truth.”

Krebs kept a low profile even as he voiced confidence ahead of the November vote and, afterward, knocked down allegations that the count was tainted by fraud. The repudiation of Trump was notable coming from a component of DHS, which has been criticized for seeming to be too closely aligned with the president’s political goals.

CISA issued statements dismissing claims that large numbers of dead people could vote or that someone could change results without detection.

It also distributed a statement from a coalition of federal and state officials concluding there was no evidence that votes were compromised or altered in the Nov. 3 election and that the vote was the most secure in American history.

Krebs avoided ever directly criticizing the president and tried to stay above the political fray, even as he worked to contradict misinformation coming from the president and his supporters. “It’s not our job to fact check the president,” he said at a briefing with reporters on the eve of the election.

CISA works with the state and local officials who run U.S. elections as well as private companies that supply voting equipment to address cybersecurity and other threats while monitoring balloting and tabulation from a control room at its headquarters near Washington. It also works with industry and utilities to protect the nation’s industrial base and power grid from threats.

The agency enjoys a good reputation among its core constituency — the state and local election officials who rely on its advice and services at a time of near-constant cyberattack -- as well as on Capitol Hill, where lawmakers recently proposed an increase of its annual budget of around \$2 billion.

His removal is a “disturbing sign for American government,” said California Secretary of State Alex Padilla.

“Chris Krebs has been an accessible, reliable partner for elections officials across the country, and across party lines, as we have fortified our cyber defenses since 2016,” Padilla said. “Our elections infrastructure has become stronger because of leaders like Chris Krebs and in spite of the actions and lies coming from the White House.”

The agency emerged from rocky beginnings. Just before President Barack Obama left office, the U.S. designated election systems as critical national security infrastructure, like dams or power plants, as a result of the interference by Russia, which included the penetration of state elections systems as well as massive disinformation.

Some state election officials and Republicans, suspicious of federal intrusion on their turf, were opposed to the designation. The National Association of Secretaries of State adopted a resolution in opposition to the move in February 2017. But the Trump administration supported the designation, and, eventually, skeptical state officials welcomed the assistance.

Sen. Grassley, 87, says he tested positive for coronavirus

By MARY CLARE JALONICK Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Iowa Sen. Chuck Grassley, the longest-serving Republican senator and third in the line of presidential succession, said Tuesday that he has tested positive for the coronavirus.

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Nov. 18, 2020 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 138 ~ 61 of 91

Grassley, 87, had announced earlier Tuesday that he was quarantining after being exposed to the virus and was waiting for test results. On Tuesday evening, he tweeted that he had tested positive.

"I'll b following my doctors' orders/CDC guidelines & continue to quarantine. I'm feeling good + will keep up on my work for the ppl of Iowa from home," he tweeted.

Grassley said he looks forward to "resuming my normal schedule soon."

The Iowa Republican, who was in the Senate and voting on Monday, did not say how he had been exposed. His office said that he was not experiencing any symptoms and was isolating in his Virginia home.

The announcement from one of the Senate's most prominent members — and one of its oldest — underscored concerns across the Capitol about the safety of lawmakers, staff and other workers in the sprawling complex as cases have spiked across the country and members have traveled back and forth from their states. At least three members of the House have tested positive in the last week, and several more are quarantining.

The increase in cases also threatens the progress of legislation and other work as the Republican Senate, in particular, tries to wrap up business in the remaining weeks of President Donald Trump's term. Grassley's absence on Tuesday helped Democrats block the nomination of Judy Shelton, Trump's controversial pick for the Federal Reserve. Republican Sen. Rick Scott of Florida was also absent as he is in quarantine after an exposure.

Grassley is the president pro tempore of the Senate, meaning he presides over the chamber in the absence of Vice President Mike Pence and is third in line for the presidency, behind Pence and House Speaker Nancy Pelosi. The president pro tempore is the senator in the majority party who has served the longest, and Grassley has been a senator for 40 years.

As pro tempore, Grassley opens the Senate each day. He did so on Monday, leading the Pledge of Allegiance alongside others on the floor and then giving remarks without wearing a mask. He also joined other senators on the floor later Monday evening for a procedural vote on a federal judge, that time wearing a mask but speaking to several senators at close distance.

In his remarks, Grassley said it was "more important than ever to stop the surge" of the virus around the country and the world.

"This virus is hitting rural and urban areas alike," Grassley said. "No community is immune. I ask every Iowan to continue to do their part to keep their family and neighbors safe."

Although he was not wearing a mask while he spoke, Grassley encouraged Americans to "wash your hands, limit your activity outside your household, social distance, wear a mask."

Grassley also attended leadership meetings with other Republican senators on Monday, according to Missouri Sen. Roy Blunt, another member of GOP leadership. Blunt told reporters Tuesday evening that he "was like 12 feet away" from Grassley in the meeting, which he said was in a large room.

Blunt said Grassley "has been great about wearing his mask, and I think great about taking care of himself, so I think he's done everything he can."

While most members of the Senate have consistently worn masks in hallways and meetings, members of both parties often take them off when the cameras are on — either on the Senate floor or when talking to press. Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell and Senate Democratic leader Chuck Schumer also took their masks off when speaking on the Senate floor Monday.

Still, some Democratic members have started to push back on that practice. Sen. Sherrod Brown, D-Ohio, interrupted a floor speech Monday afternoon to ask Sen. Dan Sullivan, R-Alaska, to put on his mask as he presided over the Senate, noting that he could be exposing staff nearby.

"I don't wear a mask when I am speaking, like most senators," Sullivan responded, snapping that he would put the mask on but that "I don't need your instruction."

After the exchange, Texas Sen. Ted Cruz tweeted his support for Sullivan, saying that Brown was being "a complete ass" and that his request of the Alaskan was "an ostentatious sign of fake virtue."

A spokesperson for McConnell did not return a request for comment on whether he would encourage testing for senators who may have come into contact with Grassley. McConnell has maintained that regular testing is not needed in the Senate, though the Capitol physician announced this week that there would be testing available for members of the House and their staff who had recently traveled to Washington.

Grassley's announcement comes as the longest-serving Republican in the House, Alaska Rep. Don Young, said he was recovering from the coronavirus. In a statement Monday, Young said he had been hospitalized and "I had not felt this sick in a very long time."

Young, also 87, said he had been discharged and is now "on the road to recovery."

By missing votes Tuesday, Grassley broke a 27-year streak of not missing a single Senate vote. According to his office, the last time he missed a vote was in 1993, when he was in Iowa assisting with relief efforts after severe flooding.

He said in a statement Tuesday that he had voted 8,927 times without skipping a vote — a record in the Senate.

"I'm disappointed I wasn't able to vote today in the Senate, but the health of others is more important than any record," he said.

Grassley was first elected to the U.S. House in 1974 and then to the Senate in 1980. He is chair of the Senate Finance Committee and is expected to become the top Republican on the Senate Judiciary Committee when a new Senate session begins in January.

Hurricane Iota roars onto Nicaragua as 2nd blow in 2 weeks

By MARLON GONZÁLEZ Associated Press

TEGUCIGALPA, Honduras (AP) — Hurricane Iota battered Nicaragua with screeching winds and pounding surf Tuesday, chasing tens of thousands of people from their homes along the same stretch of the Caribbean coast that was devastated by an equally powerful hurricane just two weeks ago.

The extent of the damage was unclear because much of the affected region was without electricity and phone and internet service, and strong winds hampered radio transmissions.

Preliminary reports from the coast included toppled trees and electric poles and roofs stripped from homes and businesses, said Guillermo González, director of Nicaragua's emergency management agency. More than 40,000 people were in shelters.

Later, Nicaragua Vice President and first lady Rosario Murillo said that a brother and sister, ages 11 and 8, had drowned in the community of La Pinuela trying to cross the swollen Solera River. There were reports of others missing in the same area.

A day earlier, Iota intensified into a Category 5 storm, but it weakened as it neared the coast and made landfall with maximum sustained winds of 155 mph (250 kph). The system came ashore as a Category 4 hurricane about 30 miles (45 kilometers) south of the Nicaraguan city of Puerto Cabezas, also known as Bilwi. That was just 15 miles (25 kilometers) south of where Hurricane Eta made landfall Nov. 3, also as a Category 4 storm.

By Tuesday night, Iota had diminished to a tropical storm and was moving inland over northern Nicaragua and southern Honduras. It had maximum sustained winds of 40 mph (65 kph) and was spinning westward at 12 mph (19 kph).

The storm passed about 25 miles (40 kilometers) south-southwest of Tegucigalpa, the capital of Honduras, where rivers were rising and rain was expected to intensify.

Aid agencies struggled to reach their local contacts, and the government said in a statement that at least 35 towns in the east and north had no phone service. Nicaragua's telecommunications ministry said phone and broadband provider Columbus Networks was offline because of flooding in Bilwi.

Along Honduras' remote eastern coast Tuesday, people continued evacuating from damaged and flooding homes.

Mirna Wood, vice president of the Miskito ethnic group in Honduras' far east Gracias a Dios region, was in Tegucigalpa collecting donations for her community ravaged by Eta when Iota hit.

Some 40,000 people in the area had moved to shelters from low-lying land beside rivers and the sea, but other people remained stranded near the border with Nicaragua. Some were rescued by Nicaraguan authorities, she said.

In her last communication with the mayor of the community of Villeda Morales late Monday, he told her

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Nov. 18, 2020 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 138 ~ 63 of 91

Iota was hitting them hard and the community had not completely evacuated.

"We are facing an incredible emergency," Wood said. "There is no food. There is no water."

In the community of Brus Laguna, some 500 people were in a shelter there and another 900 were being moved elsewhere, Mayor Teonela Paisano Wood said.

"We're in danger if it keeps raining," Paisano Wood said.

In mountainous Tegucigalpa, residents of low-lying, flood-prone areas were being evacuated in anticipation of Iota's rains, as were residents of hillside neighborhoods vulnerable to landslides.

Panama reported that one person was killed and another missing in its western indigenous autonomous Ngabe Bugle area near the border with Costa Rica.

As the storm moved westward, flooding became a top concern. The Tola River topped its banks, and western Nicaragua, along the Pacific coast, was forecast to receive the most rain. Nicaragua's meteorology director, Marcio Baca, said areas where the soil was already saturated would receive 6 to 7 inches of additional rain.

Eta triggered flash floods and mudslides in parts of Central America and Mexico and killed more than 130 people.

"This hurricane is definitely worse" than Eta, Jason Bermúdez, a university student from Bilwi, said as high winds preceded Iota's arrival. Many houses lost roofs, fences and fruit trees.

"We will never forget this year," Bermúdez said.

Even before Iota hit Nicaragua, it scraped over the tiny Colombian island of Providencia, more than 155 miles (250 kilometers) off Nicaragua's coast. Colombian President Ivan Duque said one person was killed and 98% of the island's infrastructure was "affected."

Providencia is inhabited almost exclusively by the descendants of African slaves and British colonizers, who speak an English version of Creole as their native language. The island has no direct flights to the continent, but it has become an increasingly popular tourist destination thanks to its quiet beaches and rich marine life. On Tuesday, Colombian officials said they were sending a ship with 15 tons of aid to the island.

In the aftermath of Eta, tens of thousands of Hondurans were homeless. The country reported 74 deaths and nearly 57,000 people in shelters, mostly in the north.

One of the hardest hit areas was La Lima, a San Pedro Sula suburb that flooded when the Chamelecon river topped its banks. Many people whose homes flooded moved to shelters or stayed with relatives. Some stayed behind in an attempt to protect what few possessions remained. Authorities tried to force most of them to move to shelters ahead of Iota's arrival.

On Monday, Wendy Guadalupe Contreras Paz, 34, was living under a tarp with her four children and seven other relatives along a main boulevard in La Lima.

"I lost everything, I couldn't take anything," Contreras said. "But my mom and my grandmother have some things, and that's why we're living here, to be closer to the house and keep them from stealing the few little things they have left."

Iota is the record 30th named storm of this year's historically busy Atlantic hurricane season. It's also the ninth storm to rapidly intensify this season, a dangerous phenomenon that is happening more often. Such activity has focused attention on climate change, which scientists say causes wetter, stronger and more destructive storms.

Iota developed later in the season than any other Category 5 storm on record, beating a Nov. 8, 1932, Cuba hurricane, said Colorado State University hurricane researcher Phil Klotzbach.

The hurricane season officially ends Nov. 30.

Associated Press writers Seth Borenstein in Bethesda, Maryland; Christopher Sherman in Mexico City; and Manuel Rueda in Bogota, Colombia, contributed to this report.

In court, Giuliani argues to block Biden win in Pennsylvania

By MARK SCOLFARO and MARC LEVY Associated Press

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Nov. 18, 2020 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 138 ~ 64 of 91

WILLIAMSPORT, Pa. (AP) — Rudy Giuliani, President Donald Trump's personal attorney, returned to federal court Tuesday after a long hiatus to accuse Democrats in control of big cities of hatching a nationwide conspiracy to steal the election, even though no such evidence has emerged in the two weeks since Election Day.

The court case is over the Trump campaign's federal lawsuit seeking to prevent the battleground state of Pennsylvania from certifying its election. Withering questions from the judge gave Trump's opponents hope that the lawsuit will be one of many filed by the Trump campaign around the country to be tossed out of court.

During several hours of arguments, U.S. District Judge Matthew Brann told Giuliani that agreeing with him would disenfranchise the more than 6.8 million Pennsylvanians who voted.

"Can you tell me how this result could possibly be justified?" Brann questioned. Giuliani responded, "the scope of the remedy is because of the scope of the injury."

Meanwhile, lawyers defending the Democratic secretary of state, Philadelphia and several counties said the Trump campaign's arguments lack any constitutional basis or were rendered irrelevant by a state Supreme Court decision Tuesday.

They asked Brann to throw out the case, calling the evidence cited "at best, garden-variety irregularities" that would not warrant undoing Pennsylvania's election results, which delivered a victory for President-elect Joe Biden.

The Trump campaign's lawsuit is based on a complaint that Philadelphia and six Democratic-controlled counties in Pennsylvania let voters make corrections to mail-in ballots that were otherwise going to be disqualified for a technicality, like lacking a secrecy envelope or a signature.

It is not clear how many ballots that could involve, although some opposing lawyers say it is far too few to overturn the election result.

But Giuliani, the former New York City mayor, spent most of his time in court claiming baselessly that a wide-ranging scheme in Pennsylvania and elsewhere stole the election from Trump in battleground states won by Biden.

Democrats in control in major cities in those states — Giuliani name-checked Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, Atlanta, Las Vegas, Phoenix, Milwaukee and Detroit — prevented Republican observers from watching election workers process mail-in ballots so the workers could falsify enough ballots to ensure Trump lost, Giuliani claimed, without evidence to back it up.

"The best description of this situation is widespread, nationwide voter fraud, of which this is a part. ... This is not an isolated case, this is a case that is repeated in at least 10 other jurisdictions," Giuliani said, without citing any evidence.

Later, he claimed, "they stole the election."

The dozens of affidavits Trump's lawyers filed in the case, however, do not assert widespread fraud, but rather the potential for something fishy to occur because partisan poll watchers weren't given an opportunity to view the results.

Brann did not rule Tuesday. He canceled a Thursday hearing to air the Trump campaign's evidence and instead gave the parties three more days to file arguments in the case. Next Tuesday is the deadline for Pennsylvania's counties to certify their election results.

Trump's campaign has not been shy in previous weeks about publicizing what they say is evidence of election fraud.

But there is no evidence of widespread fraud in the 2020 election, and officials of both political parties have stated publicly that the election went well.

The Trump campaign argues that Republican-controlled counties in Pennsylvania did not allow voters to correct ballots and claims the inconsistent practice in Democratic-controlled counties violated constitutional rights of due process and equal protection under the law.

Two of the Trump campaign's co-plaintiffs are voters whose ballots were disqualified by counties that did not notify them about the problems.

If no county allowed voters to correct problems with mail-in ballots "it's very likely that the results would

have been very, very different," argued Linda Kerns, a Philadelphia lawyer working alongside Giuliani.

Brann attacked that argument.

"How does making it easier for some people to vote burden the plaintiffs' right to vote?" Brann questioned.

Mark Aronchick, a lawyer defending Philadelphia and Montgomery, Chester and Allegheny counties, disputed Giuliani's repeated contentions that it was illegal for counties to help people vote. A county should help people vote, he contended.

"What's wrong with that? What world are we living in here?" Aronchick argued.

During the hearing, Trump's campaign notched yet another loss: the Pennsylvania Supreme Court, in a 5-2 party-line decision, backed a Philadelphia judge's ruling that city officials had given Republican observers sufficient access to the vote counting, without allowing them within 6 feet.

The Associated Press has declared Biden the winner of the presidential contest, but Trump has refused to concede and is blocking Biden's efforts toward a smoother transition of power.

With Georgia the only uncalled state, Biden has collected at least 290 electoral votes — just enough that overturning Pennsylvania's result would not open an avenue to a second term for Trump.

Biden's margin in Pennsylvania is now about 81,000 votes, or more than 1 percentage point.

Associated Press writer Maryclaire Dale in Philadelphia contributed to this report.

Historic deal revives plan for largest US dam demolition

By GILLIAN FLACCUS Associated Press

PORTLAND, Ore. (AP) — An agreement announced Tuesday paves the way for the largest dam demolition in U.S. history, a project that promises to reopen hundreds of miles of waterway along the Oregon-California border to salmon that are critical to tribes but have dwindled to almost nothing in recent years.

If approved, the deal would revive plans to remove four massive hydroelectric dams on the lower Klamath River, creating the foundation for the most ambitious salmon restoration effort in history. The project on California's second-largest river would be at the vanguard of a trend toward dam demolitions in the U.S. as the structures age and become less economically viable amid growing environmental concerns about the health of native fish.

Previous efforts to address problems in the Klamath Basin have fallen apart amid years of legal sparring that generated distrust among tribes, fishing groups, farmers and environmentalists, and the new agreement could face more legal challenges. Some state and federal lawmakers criticized it as a financially irresponsible overreach by leaders in Oregon and California.

"This dam removal is more than just a concrete project coming down. It's a new day and a new era," Yurok Tribe chairman Joseph James said. "To me, this is who we are, to have a free-flowing river just as those who have come before us. ... Our way of life will thrive with these dams being out."

A half-dozen tribes across Oregon and California, fishing groups and environmentalists had hoped to see demolition work begin as soon as 2022. But those plans stalled in July, when U.S. regulators questioned whether the nonprofit entity formed to oversee the project could adequately respond to any cost overruns or accidents.

The new plan makes Oregon and California equal partners in the demolition with the nonprofit entity, called the Klamath River Renewal Corporation, and adds \$45 million to the project's \$450 million budget to ease those concerns. Oregon, California and the utility PacifiCorp, which operates the hydroelectric dams and is owned by billionaire Warren Buffett's company Berkshire Hathaway, will each provide one-third of the additional funds.

The Federal Energy Regulatory Commission must approve the deal. If accepted, it would allow PacifiCorp and Berkshire Hathaway to walk away from aging dams that are more of an albatross than a profit-generator, while addressing regulators' concerns. Oregon, California and the nonprofit would jointly take over the hydroelectric license from PacifiCorp while the nonprofit will oversee the work.

Buffett said the reworked deal solves a "very complex challenge."

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Nov. 18, 2020 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 138 ~ 66 of 91

"I recognize the importance of Klamath dam removal and river restoration for tribal people in the Klamath Basin," Buffett said in a statement. "We appreciate and respect our tribal partners for their collaboration in forging an agreement that delivers an exceptional outcome for the river, as well as future generations."

Removed would be the four southernmost dams in a string of six constructed in southern Oregon and far Northern California beginning in 1918.

They were built solely for power generation. They are not used for irrigation and not managed for flood control. The lowest dam on the river, the Iron Gate, has no "fish ladder," or concrete chutes that fish can pass through.

That's blocked hundreds of miles of potential fish habitat and spawning grounds, and fish populations have dropped precipitously in recent years. Salmon are at the heart of the culture, beliefs and diet of a half-dozen regional tribes, including the Yurok and Karuk — both parties to the agreement — and they have suffered deeply from that loss.

Coho salmon from the Klamath River are listed as threatened under federal and California law, and their population in the river has fallen anywhere from 52% to 95%. Spring chinook salmon, once the Klamath Basin's largest run, has dwindled by 98%.

Fall chinook, the last to persist in any significant numbers, have been so meager in the past few years that the Yurok canceled fishing for the first time in the tribe's memory. In 2017, they bought fish at a grocery store for their annual salmon festival.

"It is bleak, but I want to have hope that with dam removal and with all the prayers that we've been sending up all these years, salmon could come back. If we just give them a chance, they will," said Chook-Chook Hillman, a Karuk tribal member fighting for dam removal. "If you provide a good place for salmon, they'll always come home."

PacifiCorp has been operating the dams under an extension of its expired hydroelectric license for years. The license was originally granted before modern environmental laws and renewing it would mean costly renovations to install fish ladders. The utility has said energy generated by the dams no longer makes up a significant part of its portfolio.

In the original deal, PacifiCorp was to transfer its license and contribute \$200 million to bow out of the removal project and avoid further costs and liability. An additional \$250 million comes from a voter-approved California water bond.

U.S. regulators, however, agreed only on the condition that PacifiCorp remain a co-licensee along with the Klamath River Renewal Corporation — a nonstarter for the utility.

Residents have been caught in the middle. As tribes watched salmon dwindle, some homeowners around a huge reservoir created by one of the dams have sued to stop the demolition.

They say their waterfront property values have already fallen by half because of news coverage associated with demolition and they worry about losing a water source for fighting wildfires in an increasingly fire-prone landscape. Many also oppose the use of ratepayer funds for the project.

U.S. Rep. Doug LaMalfa, a California Republican, said the agreement puts taxpayers in the two states on the hook. Some state lawmakers in Oregon said Gov. Kate Brown violated her constitutional authority by authorizing the deal without legislative or voter approval.

Further upstream, farmers who rely on two other dams are watching carefully. The removal of the lower four dams won't affect them directly, but they worry it could set a precedent for dam removal on the Klamath.

More than 1,720 dams have been dismantled around the U.S. since 2012, according to American Rivers, and 26 states undertook dam removal projects in 2019 alone. The Klamath River project would be the largest such project by far if it proceeds.

The Latest: Trump to spend Thanksgiving at White House

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Latest on President-elect Joe Biden (all times local):

6:45 p.m.

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Nov. 18, 2020 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 138 ~ 67 of 91

President Donald Trump and the first lady will be spending Thanksgiving at the White House instead of attending the annual dinner at his Mar-a-Lago club in Florida.

The first lady's spokesperson, Stephanie Grisham, confirmed the plans in a "Holiday Scheduling Update" on Twitter on Tuesday evening.

Trump and his family typically spend the holiday in Palm Beach and have Thanksgiving dinner in a ballroom alongside dues-paying members who purchase tickets to attend.

A spokesperson for the Trump Organization did not respond to questions Tuesday about whether the Mar-a-Lago event would be held given the spike in coronavirus cases and pleas from public health officials for Americans to limit the number of people they socialize with indoors this holiday season to limit the spread.

HERE'S WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT PRESIDENT-ELECT JOE BIDEN'S TRANSITION TO THE WHITE HOUSE:

A new study is warning that the Trump administration's refusal to recognize President-elect Joe Biden's victory could have long-term consequences for the incoming president's agenda, particularly when it comes to the coronavirus pandemic.

Read more:

- Georgia elections chief battles fellow Republicans, Trump
- Murphy's choice: Fed official has say on transition launch
- Biden filling top White House team with campaign veterans
- Financially troubled startup helped power Trump campaign

HERE'S WHAT ELSE IS GOING ON:

4 p.m.

Kamala Harris has returned to the Capitol for the first time as vice president-elect.

Harris, who is still a senator from California, voted against Judy Shelton, a controversial nominee for the Federal Reserve Board of Governors. Her vote on Tuesday helped stall Shelton's confirmation.

Harris also received a classified intelligence briefing and met with her Senate staff. Harris is a member of the Senate Intelligence Committee, and her continued attendance at intelligence briefings comes as the Trump administration blocks President-elect Joe Biden from receiving such briefings. President Donald Trump has refused to acknowledge Biden's victory, and the traditional transition process is not moving forward.

Asked about Trump's false claims he won the election, Harris told reporters: "The American people want leaders that respect our democracy and our democratic process."

3:35 p.m.

The Trump administration's refusal to recognize President-elect Joe Biden's victory could have long-term consequences for the incoming president's agenda, particularly in responding to the COVID-19 pandemic.

A new study warns that an abbreviated transition could impair Biden's ability to fill the more than 1,200 administration jobs requiring Senate confirmation, including key Cabinet and sub-Cabinet posts on the front lines of addressing the outbreak.

The paper from the Center for Presidential Transition at the nonpartisan Partnership for Public Service examined the different pace of confirmations for President George W. Bush, whose transition didn't begin until after the Florida recount concluded on Dec. 13, 2000, and President Barack Obama. Obama was able to confirm twice the number of Senate-approved appointments, including national security postings, at the 100-day mark than his predecessor, who had a shorter period to plan to assume the White House.

The study states: "Further delays by the General Services Administration in recognizing the outcome of the Nov. 3 election could impede the ability of President-elect Joe Biden to make timely and critical appointments for key COVID-19 and national security-related positions, thereby weakening the government's ability to protect our nation and distribute life-saving vaccines."

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Nov. 18, 2020 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 138 ~ 68 of 91

2:10 p.m.

Leaders of the American Hospital Association, American Medical Association and American Nurses Association say the Trump administration must share critical COVID-19 information with President-elect Joe Biden's transition team "to save countless lives."

The groups said in a letter sent to the White House on Tuesday that, in order to plan, the Biden team needs information on medication and testing supplies, personal protective equipment, ventilators, hospital bed capacity and workforce availability.

The letter says, "All information about the capacity of the Strategic National Stockpile, the assets from Operation Warp Speed, and plans for dissemination of therapeutics and vaccines needs to be shared as quickly as possible ... so that there is no lapse in our ability to care for patients."

It was signed by Richard Pollack, president of the American Hospital Association; Dr. James Madara, the AMA's CEO; and Debbie Dawson Hatmaker, acting CEO of the nurses association.

1:45 p.m.

The Congressional Hispanic Caucus is asking to meet with president-elect Joe Biden to discuss plans and staff for his incoming administration.

In a letter obtained by The Associated Press, the five leaders of the CHC write that they are hoping to "discuss matters urgent to the Caucus, including the composition of your administration and forthcoming legislative agenda."

They also say they'd like to work with Biden on "critical issues affecting Hispanics," which include an "equitable recovery to COVID-19," immigration, equitable education and health care access, racial justice and civil rights protections.

Biden has pledged that tackling immigration will be one of his top priorities as president, but it's unclear where the issue falls on a long list of legislative promises Biden has made throughout his campaign.

He has, however, already named a number of Latinos to key positions in his White House staff, including Anthony Bernal and Julissa Reynoso Pantaleon, who will both have top roles on Jill Biden's staff, and Julie Chavez Rodriguez, who will be director of the White House Office of Intergovernmental Affairs.

1:20 p.m.

Israel's president and prime minister spoke with Joe Biden on Tuesday for the first time since his victory in the U.S. election, joining other world leaders in referring to him as the president-elect despite President Donald Trump's refusal to concede.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, a close ally of Trump, congratulated Biden after the election was called earlier this month but did not refer to him as president-elect then and has avoided commenting on the election results.

Israelis have welcomed Trump's "maximum pressure" campaign against Iran and his unprecedented support for Israel in the conflict with the Palestinians. Biden's plans to return to the Iran nuclear agreement and press for the revival of the Mideast peace process could set him on a collision course with Netanyahu, who had icy relations with the Obama administration.

"In a warm conversation, the president-elect reiterated his deep commitment to the state of Israel and its security," Netanyahu's office said in a statement.

Netanyahu "said that the special bond between Israel and the US is a fundamental component of Israel's security and its policy. The two agreed to meet soon in order to discuss the many issues on the agenda and reiterated the need to continue bolstering the steadfast alliance between the U.S. and Israel," the statement said.

Israel's ceremonial president, Reuven Rivlin, also spoke with Biden and congratulated him on the election, calling him "a long-standing friend of the state of Israel." He added: "Our friendship is based on values that are beyond partisan politics and that we have no doubt that, under your leadership, the United States is committed to Israel's security and success."

Toilet paper limits, empty shelves are back as virus surges

By JOSEPH PISANI and ANNE D'INNOCENZIO AP Retail Writers

NEW YORK (AP) — Looking for toilet paper? Good luck.

A surge of new coronavirus cases in the U.S. is sending people back to stores to stockpile again, leaving shelves bare and forcing retailers to put limits on purchases.

Walmart said Tuesday it's having trouble keeping up with demand for cleaning supplies in some stores. Supermarket chains Kroger and Publix are limiting how much toilet paper and paper towels shoppers can buy after demand spiked recently. And Amazon is sold out of most disinfectant wipes and paper towels.

A similar scene played out back in March, when the pandemic first hit and people hunkered down in their homes.

But Geoff Freeman, president and CEO of the Consumer Brands Association, formerly the Grocery Manufacturers Association, said he doesn't expect things to be as bad this go-around since lockdowns are being handled on a regional basis and everyone is better prepared.

"A more informed consumer combined with a more informed manufacturer and a more informed retailer should provide all of us with a greater sense of ease and ensure we can meet this growing demand," Freeman said.

The biggest supply issue seems to be paper products: 21% of shelves that stock paper towels and toilet paper are empty, the highest level in at least a month, according to market research company IRI. Cleaning supplies have remained level at 16%. Before the pandemic, 5% to 7% of consumer goods were typically out of stock, IRI said.

Contributing to the problem is the fact that roughly 10% of the workforce at manufacturing plants where the products are made are calling out sick, mainly because they've been in contact with others who were tested positive to COVID-19, Freeman said.

Kelly Anderson of Colorado Springs, Colorado, said she needs more supplies now that in-person school in her area was canceled earlier this month and her two children are at home more. She's noticed others are stocking up, too: Safeway and Walmart were nearly wiped out of bottled water and disinfectant wipes during a recent visit, both of which had been easy to find since the summer.

It's also been harder to find a time slot to get her groceries delivered. Anderson says she's had to wait as many as two days instead of same-day delivery. But that's still not as bad as earlier this year

"March seems like a million years ago, but I do remember freaking out," she said. "I couldn't get groceries delivered for a week."

Walmart said while supplies are stressed in some areas, it thinks it will be able to handle any stockpiling now than earlier this year. Amazon said its working with manufacturers to get items such as disinfecting wipes, paper towels and hand sanitizer in stock.

States plead for more federal help as virus outbreak worsens

By GEOFF MULVIHILL and RACHEL LA CORTE Associated Press

With more shutdowns looming and a vaccine months away from wide distribution, governors across the U.S. are pleading for more help from Washington ahead of what is shaping up to be a bleak winter.

Renewed restrictions on indoor businesses, overloaded hospitals and the coming end of unemployment benefits for millions of Americans have led governors to paint a dire picture of the months ahead unless the federal government steps in with more money and leadership to help them shore up their damaged budgets and beat back the resurgence of the coronavirus.

Between now and June 2022, state and local governments could be facing a shortfall of \$400 billion or more by some estimates.

On a conference call Tuesday of Democratic governors from the Midwest, Wisconsin Gov. Tony Evers called for a sequel to the Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security Act adopted by Congress in March.

"There are workers and families and farmers and small businesses that are going to need our help, and

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Nov. 18, 2020 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 138 ~ 70 of 91

frankly, we can't do it alone," he said. "We're going to need a robust federal support system to help our states and economies recover beyond the federal CARES funds that expire at the end of the year."

Casey Katims, federal liaison for Washington Gov. Jay Inslee, said the situation there is too dire for the state to wait until President-elect Joe Biden is sworn in Jan. 20.

"We need help by the end of this year," Katims said.

In a news conference Tuesday, Maryland Gov. Larry Hogan, a Republican, made a similar push. "Everyone on both sides of the aisle in Washington needs to come together and finally get this done for the American people," he said.

And in Colorado on Tuesday, Gov. Jared Polis, a Democrat, called a special legislative session to craft a \$220 million state virus-related stimulus measure. "Even as cases have exploded across the country, Congress and the president have not yet passed much needed relief for people. Here in Colorado, we want to do the best with what we have to take care of our own," he said.

The cost of distributing tens of millions of doses of a vaccine in 2021 is also emerging as a major concern for governors. State health authorities have called on Congress to provide \$8.4 billion.

A new infusion of federal money does not appear to be on the way anytime soon. A lame-duck session of Congress and a presidential administration on its way out have chilled the prospects for a deal.

Congressional Democrats and Republicans generally say a new stimulus bill is needed, but they disagree on the scope of it. Some Republicans are opposed to another round of checks directly to most taxpayers, and some don't want Washington to "bail out" state and local governments that had financial struggles before the pandemic.

On Tuesday, Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell said the Democrats' approach includes "huge sums of money for state and city governments with no linkage to demonstrated COVID needs."

"Democrats still want coronavirus relief for the entire country held hostage over a massive slush fund for their own use," the Kentucky Republican said.

The virus is blamed for almost a quarter-million deaths and over 11 million confirmed infections in the U.S.

Last spring, Congress and President Donald Trump agreed to a series of measures worth nearly \$3 trillion to deal with the outbreak. The aid included a big boost, since expired, to weekly unemployment benefits, along with grants and loans for businesses and assistance to state and local governments.

States have used the money for testing and contact tracing, assisting businesses, helping residents with utility bills and rent and expanding broadband access for students attending school remotely. But they have not generally been allowed to use it for one of their major needs: replacing declining tax revenue to keep regular government services running.

The needs have become more urgent as the virus rampages across virtually every state. California and Texas each have exceeded 1 million cases.

As intensive care units fill up, some Republican governors once reluctant to impose mask mandates have reversed course, and some cities and states are threatening fines against businesses that violate restrictions on social gatherings.

Biden this week called for Congress to immediately adopt a version of a \$2.4 trillion stimulus bill passed by the House, but not the Senate, in May: "This is about keeping Americans afloat."

A vaccine appears to be on the horizon after two companies announced that early trials show their versions are at least 90% effective. But the powerful freezers needed to store the doses, protective equipment for the workers and the task of getting the vaccine into every community and administering the shots are becoming logistical and financial challenges.

The Center on Budget and Policy Priorities estimates that state, local, territorial and tribal government budgets will be short collectively by \$275 billion to \$415 billion through June 2022 if they use all their reserve money to help deal with the virus. Moody's Analytics said that for states alone, the shortfall could range from \$196 billion to \$396 billion, depending on how bad the virus outbreak gets.

Kansas Gov. Laura Kelly, a Democrat, said she is pushing the state's GOP-dominated congressional delegation for more federal help. She said that Kansas is on course to award federally funded grants totaling \$57.5 million to about 3,000 businesses, but that twice as many have applied for help.

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Nov. 18, 2020 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 138 ~ 71 of 91

Illinois Gov. J.B. Pritzker signed a budget over the summer with a \$5 billion deficit, which he and lawmakers assumed would be covered by a second federal coronavirus relief package.

"Every state ... every city is suffering from failure of revenues because of COVID-19," said Pritzker, a Democrat. "The federal government is really the only resource that we all have to turn to."

Mulvihill reported from Davenport, Iowa, and La Corte from Olympia, Washington. Associated Press writers John Hanna in Topeka, Kansas; Patty Nieberg in Denver; John O'Connor in Springfield, Illinois; Keith Ridler in Boise, Idaho; and Brian Witte in Annapolis, Maryland, contributed to this report.

Pentagon to cut troop levels to 2,500 in Iraq, Afghanistan

By ROBERT BURNS and LOLITA C. BALDOR Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Acting Defense Secretary Christopher Miller said Tuesday the U.S. will reduce troop levels in Iraq and Afghanistan by mid-January, asserting that the decision fulfills President Donald Trump's pledge to bring forces home from America's long wars even as Republicans and U.S. allies warn of the dangers of withdrawing before conditions are right.

The plan will accelerate troop withdrawals from Iraq and Afghanistan in Trump's final days in office, despite arguments from senior military officials in favor of a slower, more methodical pullout to preserve hard-fought gains. Trump has refused to concede his election loss to Democrat Joe Biden, who takes office Jan. 20, just five days after the troop withdrawals are to finish.

Miller, who refused to take questions from reporters after reading a prepared statement before TV cameras at the Pentagon, said the U.S. will reduce troop levels in Afghanistan from more than 4,500 to 2,500, and in Iraq from about 3,000 to 2,500.

Speaking a week after taking over for former Defense Secretary Mark Esper, who was fired by Trump, Miller notably did not say that the drawdown plan had been recommended or endorsed by Gen. Mark Milley, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, or by other senior military officers. He said only that military commanders had agreed to execute it.

Miller said the U.S. remains ready to respond if conditions in Afghanistan or Iraq deteriorate.

"If the forces of terror, instability, division and hate begin a deliberate campaign to disrupt our efforts, we stand ready to apply the capabilities required to thwart them," he said in a roughly eight-minute statement — his first extended public remarks since taking office.

The withdrawal plan falls short of Trump's oft-repeated vow to end America's long wars. It also runs counter to his guidance that troop withdrawals be based on the conditions on the ground, not a date on the calendar.

In Afghanistan, in particular, military and defense leaders have consistently said the Taliban has not yet met requirements to reduce violent attacks against Afghan government forces. Some have worried that too-fast troop reductions would strengthen the negotiating hand of the Taliban and weaken the position of an already-weak Afghan government.

The decision has already received a cool reception from some Republican leaders on Capitol Hill, and a somewhat uncharacteristically blunt critique from NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg.

"I believe these additional reductions of American troops from terrorist areas are a mistake," said Rep. Mac Thornberry of Texas, who is the ranking Republican on the House Armed Services Committee. He said the Taliban, whose hold on power in Kabul was destroyed when U.S. troops invaded the country in October 2001, have "done nothing — met no condition — that would justify this cut."

Rep. Adam Smith, a Washington Democrat and chairman of the House Armed Services Committee, endorsed the Trump decision.

"Our primary goal has been, and continues to be, the prevention of transnational terrorists from launching an attack against the United States from Afghanistan," Smith said. "In order to contain the terrorist threat as we draw down our troop levels, it is critical that we coordinate the drawdown closely with our allies, as well as our partners in the Afghan government, to protect our interests and those of our allies in Afghanistan."

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Nov. 18, 2020 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 138 ~ 72 of 91

Stoltenberg earlier Tuesday warned that NATO could pay a heavy price for leaving Afghanistan too early. NATO has fewer than 12,000 troops from dozens of nations helping to train and advise the Afghan national security forces. The 30-nation alliance relies heavily on the United States armed forces for transport, logistics and other support.

"We now face a difficult decision. We have been in Afghanistan for almost 20 years, and no NATO ally wants to stay any longer than necessary. But at the same time, the price for leaving too soon or in an uncoordinated way could be very high," Stoltenberg said in a statement.

Trump's national security adviser Robert O'Brien said the president is keeping his promise to the American people to get U.S. troops out of war zones. "By May, it is President Trump's hope that they will all come home safely and in their entirety," O'Brien told reporters at the White House shortly after Miller made the announcement at the Pentagon.

"I want to reiterate that this policy is not new," O'Brien said. "This has been the president's policy since he took office."

Trump has said, however, that his decisions about U.S. troop levels in Afghanistan would be based on conditions on the ground, not on the calendar. He has accused his predecessor, Barack Obama, of setting a timetable for troop withdrawals in Iraq and Afghanistan that worked against the achievement of military goals. Now, however, Trump is openly declaring a timetable for troop reductions in both countries, even as violence remains high in Afghanistan.

The accelerated withdrawal goes against the longstanding advice of Trump's military leadership, including Marine Gen. Frank McKenzie, top U.S. commander for the Middle East. But officials suggested that commanders will be able to live with the partial pullout, which allows them to keep counterterrorism troops in Afghanistan and gives them time to remove critical equipment.

McKenzie and others have repeatedly argued that a hasty withdrawal could undercut negotiations to finalize ongoing peace negotiations between the Taliban and representatives of Afghan society, including the Afghan government. And they also warn that U.S. forces should remain in the country to keep Islamic State militants in check.

Biden has sounded less absolute about troop withdrawal. He has said some troops could stay in Afghanistan to focus on the counterterrorism mission. In response to a questionnaire before the election, he said: "Americans are rightly weary of our longest war; I am, too. But we must end the war responsibly, in a manner that ensures we both guard against threats to our homeland and never have to go back."

Associated Press writer Amer Medhani contributed to this report.

Biden's DIY transition proceeds without Trump assistance

By STEVE PEOPLES, DEB RIECHMANN and ZEKE MILLER Associated Press

WILMINGTON, Del. (AP) — President Donald Trump's refusal to cooperate with his successor is forcing President-elect Joe Biden to seek unusual workarounds to prepare for the exploding public health threat and evolving national security challenges he will inherit in just nine weeks.

Blocked from the official intelligence briefing traditionally afforded to incoming presidents, Biden gathered virtually on Tuesday with a collection of intelligence, defense and diplomatic experts. None of the experts are currently affiliated with the U.S. government, raising questions about whether Biden is being provided the most up-to-date information about dangers facing the nation.

Vice President-elect Kamala Harris received a more formal briefing on Tuesday as a member of the Senate Intelligence Committee, though still has relatively limited information about the specific threats Biden will inherit.

And as the worst pandemic in a century bears down on the U.S. with renewed ferocity, the current administration is blocking Biden from collaborating with its response team. Biden's representatives instead plan to meet directly with pharmaceutical companies this week to determine how best to distribute at least two promising vaccines to hundreds of millions of Americans, the biggest logistical challenge to face

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Nov. 18, 2020 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 138 ~ 73 of 91

a new president in generations.

The moves reflect how Biden is adjusting to a historically tense transition. With no sign that Trump is prepared to facilitate soon a peaceful transfer of power, Biden and his team are instead working through a series of backup options to do the best they can to prepare for the challenges he will face as soon as he takes office in January.

Declining to criticize Trump, Biden acknowledged Tuesday that he has "not been receiving briefings that would ordinarily come by now" as he opened his virtual meeting with the national security experts. The 12 participants, who appeared on video screens, included former Deputy CIA Director David Cohen, retired Gen. Stanley McChrystal and Avril Haines, a deputy national security adviser in the Obama administration, among others.

Biden said he was preparing to inherit "a divided country and a world in disarray."

"That's why I need you all," he said.

Two weeks after the election, Trump continues to block Biden's access to his administration's pandemic and national security briefings, falsely claiming that Biden is not the legitimate president-elect because of non-existent voter fraud. The Democrat defeated the Republican president 10 days ago, and Trump's flailing legal strategy to block the certification of the election results is quickly fizzling out.

A study released on Tuesday by the Center for Presidential Transition at the nonpartisan Partnership for Public Service warned that an abbreviated transition could impair Biden's ability to fill the more than 1,200 administration jobs requiring Senate confirmation, including key Cabinet and sub-Cabinet posts on the front lines of addressing the pandemic.

A growing group of Republicans have begun to state publicly what Trump will not: Biden will become the next president on Jan. 20. Even Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, a staunch Trump ally, referred to Biden as the American "president-elect" for the first time Tuesday.

"He isn't getting the briefings that the president-elect should be getting, but that's not going to stop him from doing everything he can to prepare and execute during this transition period," said Biden transition spokesman T.J. Ducklo.

Trump's decision to block the transfer of power has forced Biden to navigate the life-and-death business of vaccine distribution with limited information.

Biden's team plans to meet with private pharmaceutical companies on its own in the coming days to learn more about the status of their vaccine production. While neither of the two most promising vaccines has yet earned U.S. government approval, they would almost certainly be distributed under Biden's watch if and when they are formally deemed safe.

Currently under the Trump administration, the Department of Health and Human Services and the Pentagon are working in conjunction with states on a vaccine distribution plan. But the Biden transition team and Democrats in Congress also have ideas. There could be conflicting expectations for state leaders and health care systems, which will be closest to the actual work of putting shots into the arms of Americans.

Biden warned on Monday that "more people may die" if Trump continues to block his access to vaccine distribution plans and pandemic data.

"I'm very concerned that we're in the middle of this battle with people dying and hospitals overflowing in every state in the country, and we have to make sure that there's a smooth handoff," Maryland Gov. Larry Hogan, a Republican who has criticized Trump, told reporters on Tuesday. "I'm hopeful that we will, and I think it's getting better, but we have a brand new team that has not been involved that doesn't really know much about what's currently happening, and that's a problem."

The heads of the American Hospital Association, the American Medical Association and the American Nurses Association issued a joint statement on Tuesday urging the Trump administration to share "all critical information related to COVID-19" with Biden.

"Confronting the challenges of the pandemic is imperative to saving American lives," they wrote. "Real-time data and information on the supply of therapeutics, testing supplies, personal protective equipment, ventilators, hospital bed capacity and workforce availability to plan for further deployment of the nation's assets needs to be shared to save countless lives."

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Nov. 18, 2020 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 138 ~ 74 of 91

There are obvious limits to Biden's approach.

Some of Biden's current team of advisers on national security and foreign policy have held security clearances in their past jobs, but are not privy to real-time intelligence now. Others have security clearances in their current jobs, perhaps as employees of defense contractors. But right now, no member of the transition team can share classified intelligence with the Biden transition team, especially without being in a secured location.

Former Deputy CIA Director Michael Morell, in a recent interview with the Center for Presidential Transition, said it was imperative that Biden be briefed on the agency's highly classified covert actions undertaken by the Trump administration, "because on Inauguration Day, these covert actions will become the new president's."

Meanwhile, serious foreign conflicts loom.

Trump, for example, is expected to withdraw a significant number of troops from Afghanistan in the coming weeks. The NATO leader criticized the decision on Tuesday, warning that the troop withdrawal could give terrorist groups an opening to organize attacks against the West.

Trump administration officials say they will not give Biden the classified presidential daily briefing on intelligence matters until the General Services Administration, which is run by a Trump appointee, decides to certify Biden as the official winner.

The White House has not said whether there have been conversations about this with the GSA.

Reichmann and Miller reported from Washington. Associated Press writers Ricardo Alonso-Zaldivar and Lisa Mascaro in Washington and Brian Witte in Annapolis, Maryland, contributed to this report.

Twitter, Facebook CEOs vow election action; GOP touts curbs

By MARCY GORDON AP Business Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — As the CEOs of Twitter and Facebook gave assurances of vigorous action against election disinformation, Republicans at a Senate hearing Tuesday pounded the social media companies over political bias, business practices and market dominance, laying the ground for curbs on their long-held legal protections.

Twitter's Jack Dorsey and Facebook's Mark Zuckerberg defended at the Senate Judiciary Committee hearing the safeguards against the use of their platforms to spread falsehoods and incite violence in the contest between President Donald Trump and Democrat Joe Biden. Responding to concern from Democrats on the panel, they pledged continued vigorous action for two special elections in Georgia that could determine in January which party controls the U.S. Senate.

Republican senators, including Committee Chairman Sen. Lindsey Graham, revived complaints of censorship and anti-conservative bias against the social media platforms. They were reticent to address head-on the issue of election disinformation, an awkward topic for Republicans given that many of them have refused to knock down Trump's unfounded claims of voting irregularities and fraud, even as misinformation disputing Biden's victory has flourished online.

The actions that Twitter and Facebook took to quell the spread of disinformation angered Trump and his supporters.

Different grievances but a common adversary. Democrats, including President-elect Biden, also call for stripping away some of the protections that have shielded tech companies from legal responsibility for what people post.

They have focused their concern on hate speech and incitement on social media platforms that can spawn violence.

Sen. Mazie Hirono, a Democrat from Hawaii, asked Zuckerberg: "At what point will you stop giving in to baseless claims of anti-conservative bias and start exercising your control over Facebook to stop driving division?"

Graham pushed the case for Congress to curb the tech companies' legal shield. "I think there's Repub-

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Nov. 18, 2020 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 138 ~ 75 of 91

lican and Democrat concern about the power that's being used by social media outlets to tell us what we can see and what we can't, what's true and what's not," Graham said.

Republicans and Democrats also are making common cause on Big Tech's market dominance, endorsing stronger enforcement of antitrust laws and for some, the breakup of giants like Facebook and Google.

"Your companies are the most powerful in the world," Sen. Josh Hawley, a Missouri Republican, told Dorsey and Zuckerberg.

"It is time we took action against these modern-day robber barons," Hawley said, referring to the 19th century industrial moguls whose ruthless practices built fortunes.

Hawley exulted in a tweet: "Under oath, Zuckerberg admits Facebook DOES have 'tools' to track its users across the internet, across platforms, across accounts — all without user knowledge. I ask how many times this tool has been used domestically against Americans. Zuck won't say."

Zuckerberg, fending off Hawley's accusations that Facebook coordinates its content moderation policies with rivals such as Google, said "We do coordinate and share on security-related topics" such as terrorism and foreign government influence — but not on policing content.

Despite fears over security in the runup to Election Day and social media companies bracing for the worst, the election turned out to be the most secure in U.S. history, federal and state officials from both parties say — repudiating Trump's unsubstantiated claims of fraud.

Twitter and Facebook have both slapped a misinformation label on some content from Trump, most notably his assertions linking voting by mail to fraud. On Monday, Twitter flagged Trump's tweet proclaiming "I won the Election!" with this note: "Official sources called this election differently."

Twitter has in many cases prevented users from retweeting Trump's tweets, while Facebook allows its users to continue sharing Trump's false claims.

Dorsey and Zuckerberg testified to the hearing via video. Dorsey said that Twitter flagged some 300,000 tweets between Oct. 27 and Nov. 11 for content that was disputed and potentially misleading, representing 0.2% of all U.S. election-related tweets sent during the period.

Zuckerberg said Facebook joined with election officials to remove false claims about polling conditions and displayed warnings on more than 150 million pieces of content after review by independent fact-checkers. Facebook also prohibited misrepresentations about how or when to vote as well as attempts to use threats on the coronavirus to scare people into not voting, he said.

Zuckerberg acknowledged that "election interference remains an ongoing threat."

Facebook moved two days after the election to ban a large group called "Stop the Steal" that Trump supporters were using to organize protests against the vote count. The 350,000-member group echoed Trump's baseless allegations of a rigged election rendering the results invalid.

For days after the election as the vote counting went on, copycat "Stop the Steal" groups were easily found on Facebook. As of Monday, Facebook appeared to have made them harder to find, though it was still possible to locate them, including some groups with thousands of members.

AP Technology Writers Barbara Ortutay in Oakland, California, and Matt O'Brien in Providence, Rhode Island, contributed to this report.

Follow Gordon at <https://twitter.com/mgordonap>.

Theo Epstein steps down after 9 seasons leading Cubs

By ANDREW SELIGMAN AP Sports Writer

CHICAGO (AP) — Listening in on fans' conversations during his walks home from Wrigley Field, Theo Epstein could sense their excitement as the Chicago Cubs set themselves up to capture that long-awaited World Series championship.

It was as if they were all in it together.

"It felt like the lines between fans and front office members and players were blurred because we were

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Nov. 18, 2020 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 138 ~ 76 of 91

all part of this club that was in on a secret," he said. "We all kind of knew what was about to happen, maybe before the rest of the baseball world did."

Epstein, who transformed the long-suffering Cubs and helped bring home a drought-busting championship in 2016, is stepping down after nine seasons as the club's president of baseball operations, the team announced Tuesday. General manager Jed Hoyer is being promoted to take Epstein's place.

Epstein said after the season he anticipated remaining on the job for at least one more year, with his contract set to expire in 2021. But he said Tuesday it became apparent this past summer "for a number of reasons" it was time to move on.

"It became really clear that we'd be facing some significant long-term decisions this winter, decisions with long-term impacts," Epstein said. "Those types of decisions are really best made by somebody who's going to be here for a long time, not just for one more year. ... Jed clearly is that person."

Chairman Tom Ricketts said it was a "sad day for me personally" and called Epstein a "great partner and truly a great friend."

"Really, I think the legacy that Theo leaves behind is an organization that expects to win, not an organization that is surprised to win," Ricketts added.

Though the COVID-19 pandemic wreaked financial havoc on baseball, Ricketts said money "had nothing to do" with Epstein's decision. Epstein, who won't be paid for 2021 by the Cubs, said Ricketts did not bring up his salary when they discussed his future. He also said he was not asked to resign.

The 46-year-old Epstein, who grew up near Boston and helped the Red Sox break an 86-year drought with World Series championships in 2004 and 2007, is one of five executives to win titles with multiple organizations. He, Pat Gillick, John Schuerholz and Dave Dombrowski are the only ones to do so with teams in each league.

Epstein hopes to stay involved with baseball while he plots his next move. He plans to run a team again, though probably not next season. He would like to be part of an ownership group at some point.

"Baseball team owners can be transformed into forces for civic good and help a lot of people and be involved in a lot of the important conversations in the city and be a solution for a lot of issues in cities," Epstein said. "So that does appeal to me. A lot of things would have to go right for that to happen. Usually, for that type of thing to happen you need access to a lot of capital. ... Who knows? Maybe I have plans for some of those things down the line, but a lot would have to go right for that to happen."

For now, Epstein will remain in Chicago with his wife and two sons. He said he would likely become a season-ticket holder, maybe even a bleacher bum. And he vowed to buy beers for any Cubs fan he sees in a bar following the coronavirus pandemic, until the team wins a World Series under Hoyer.

Epstein oversaw a massive rebuild when he came to Chicago following the 2011 season. He overhauled the farm system as well as the scouting and analytics operations, helping to produce one of the most successful stretches in the franchise's history with a big assist from Hoyer.

With homegrown stars Kris Bryant and Javier Báez, shrewd trades for players such as Anthony Rizzo and Jake Arrieta, the signing of Jon Lester and the hiring of former manager Joe Maddon, the Cubs transformed into perennial contenders. They reached the NL championship series three times in Epstein's nine seasons.

In 2016, they won 103 games to run away with the NL Central and took out the Los Angeles Dodgers in the NLCS for their first pennant since 1945. The Cubs fell behind 3-1 to the Indians in the World Series before beating them in seven games, ending a title drought dating to 1908.

The Cubs' 505 regular-season victories since 2015 trail only Los Angeles (528) and the Houston Astros (510). Chicago, the Dodgers, New York Yankees and Astros are the only clubs with at least five playoff appearances in the past six seasons. But the Cubs have not advanced in the playoffs since the 2017 team lost to Los Angeles in the NLCS.

In the pandemic-shortened 2020 season, Chicago won the NL Central but got swept by Miami in the first round of the playoffs.

"If you look at my track record in Boston and then here, in the first six years or so, we did some pretty epic things," Epstein said. "And then the last couple years weren't as impressive. Maybe what that tells

me is I think I'm great at and really enjoy building and transformation and triumphing. Maybe I'm not as good and not as motivated by maintenance."

Hoyer and Epstein worked together in Boston when the Red Sox won two World Series and reunited when Epstein took the job with the Cubs. In between, Hoyer led San Diego's baseball operations.

"I have been so fortunate to work alongside Theo for 17 of the last 19 years," Hoyer said in a statement. "I could not have had a better mentor or a more loyal and trusted friend. He has already changed two storied franchises with his passion, creativity, intellect and leadership. I have no question that the next chapters in his career will be equally impressive and impactful."

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

Controversial Fed nominee Shelton stalls in Senate test vote

By ANDREW TAYLOR and CHRISTOPHER RUGABER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The nomination of Judy Shelton, President Donald Trump's controversial pick for the Federal Reserve, is stalled in the Senate after Vice President-elect Kamala Harris returned to the chamber to cast a key vote in a tally Tuesday.

Two key Republicans were absent because of COVID-related concerns. The 47-50 vote came as the Republican-controlled Senate continues to focus its energies in the post-election lame-duck session on confirming Trump's appointees.

Shelton is an unusually caustic critic of the Fed and was opposed by two GOP senators, Susan Collins of Maine and Mitt Romney of Utah, in Tuesday's vote. Harris has been focused on the transition to the Biden administration but returned to the chamber for her first vote since winning the vice presidency.

Senator-elect Mark Kelly, D-Ariz., is likely to join the Senate when the chamber returns from its Thanksgiving break. That could leave Shelton short of support for confirmation even if Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., seeks a revote next month.

Another Republican opponent, Lamar Alexander of Tennessee, missed Tuesday's vote, and his return could cement Shelton's fate, even after Rick Scott, R-Fla., and Charles Grassley, R-Iowa, return to the chamber after quarantining because of exposure to the coronavirus.

McConnell initially voted "aye" but changed his vote to reserve the option to call a second tally if he can line up the votes. Another potential supporter, Bill Cassidy, R-La., missed Tuesday's vote. All in all, accounting for absences and the arrival of Kelly, who defeated Martha McSally, R-Ariz., Shelton would appear to be one vote short, assuming there won't be a revote this week. The Senate is slated to be recessed next week for Thanksgiving.

Trump spokesman Judd Deere tweeted Tuesday that the White House remains "confident that Judy Shelton will be confirmed upon reconsideration."

Shelton's nomination has been sharply partisan for a nominee to the Federal Reserve's Board of Governors. The Fed seeks to maintain a degree of political independence, though it is often criticized by members of Congress and in recent years by Trump. The vice chair of the Fed's board, Richard Clarida, was approved by a vote of 69-26 in August 2018.

White House economic adviser Larry Kudlow is said to be a strong supporter of Shelton's. The Trump White House has at times struggled to get its nominees on the Fed board. Its previous two picks, economics commentator Stephen Moore and the late Herman Cain, a former GOP presidential candidate, both withdrew without a Senate vote in the face of strong opposition.

Shelton, also a conservative economics commentator, is opposed by Senate Democrats, most economists and many former Fed officials for her past support of the gold standard and for writings that questioned the Fed's political independence. Under the gold standard, the U.S. dollar's value is tied to gold. Under that approach, the Fed would have less leeway to adjust interest rates, even in a severe recession.

"I think her views are too extreme," said Richard Fisher, former president of the Dallas Federal Reserve, said Tuesday on CNBC after the Senate vote. "I just don't think it would send the right signal to have her

as governor at this time.”

Shelton was approved by the Senate Banking Committee on a 13-12 party-line vote in July. Senate Democrats criticized her for appearing to flip-flop on many positions, including near-zero interest rates. She opposed ultra-low rates during President Barack Obama’s presidency but supported them after Trump took office and demanded that the Fed lower its short-term benchmark rate.

“Shelton has shown herself to be an economic weathervane, pointing whichever direction she believes the partisan winds are blowing,” said Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y.

As a member of the Fed’s powerful board of governors, Shelton would vote on the Fed’s rate decisions and on banking regulation. The governors also vote on whether to institute emergency measures, such as the Fed’s decisions in March to start buying corporate bonds for the first time and institute a raft of programs to bolster financial markets.

Still, on her own, it’s unlikely that Shelton would have much effect on Fed policy, economists have pointed out. The central bank operates by consensus and Fed governors rarely dissent from interest rate decisions, though Fed bank presidents do. For now, the Fed has pegged its benchmark rate to nearly zero and Fed officials have said they expect it to remain there until at least 2023. Shelton has been picked to fill a term that expires in 2024.

This story has been updated to correct that the party-line vote on Shelton’s nomination was in the Senate Banking Committee, not the Senate Finance Committee.

Iraqi military says rocket attack in Baghdad kills child

By QASSIM ABDUL-ZAHRA Associated Press

BAGHDAD (AP) — Rockets struck Iraq’s capital Tuesday with four landing inside the heavily fortified Green Zone, Iraq’s military said, killing a child and wounding at least five people, signaling an end to an informal truce announced by Iran-backed militias in October.

Two Iraqi security officials said one of the rockets that hit the Green Zone struck close to Iraq’s National Security Service, just 600 meters (2,000 feet) from the American Embassy. Some of the rockets were intercepted by the C-RAM air defense system installed by the U.S. earlier this year, they said.

Iraq’s military said three rockets landed outside the Green Zone, one hitting close to Baghdad Medical City hospital, one at the gate of a public park, and a third exploded in the air. One child was killed and five civilians were wounded, the military statement said.

Officials said two Iraqi security forces personnel were also wounded inside the Green Zone. They spoke on condition of anonymity in line with regulations. There was no immediate claim of responsibility.

The military said the incident would not go without “prosecution and accountability.”

U.S. troops invaded Iraq in 2003 and left in 2011 but returned in 2014 after the Islamic State group overran large parts of Iraq.

Frequent attacks targeting the U.S. Embassy and vehicles transporting equipment for U.S. troops have led Washington to threaten to close its Baghdad diplomatic mission and sparked a diplomatic crisis prior to the U.S. presidential election.

The attack comes after a recent announcement by the Pentagon that it would reduce troop levels in Iraq from 3,000 to 2,500.

In mid-October, Iran-backed, mostly Shiite, militia groups said they would temporarily halt attacks targeting the American presence in Iraq, including the embassy. That came with the condition that U.S.-led coalition troops withdraw from the country in line with a non-binding resolution passed in the Iraqi Parliament in January.

The resolution was passed by mostly Shiite lawmakers and urged the government to take action and expel U.S.-led coalition troops from the country.

The resolution followed the Washington-directed airstrike that killed top Iranian Gen. Qassim Soleimani, the head of Iran’s elite Quds Force, and powerful Iraqi militia leader Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, outside

Baghdad airport.

U.S. officials, supportive of withdrawals in principle, have insisted they take place based on a scheduled timeline. Most Iraqi government officials agree with a gradual drawdown and face pressure from Iran-aligned groups who prefer an immediate exit.

A planned drawdown has been underway in Iraq for months, with coalition troops withdrawing from several Iraqi bases.

Iraqi forces have increasingly been conducting anti-Islamic State operations without U.S. assistance, triggering the coalition to begin a scheduled drawdown in March that was conceived late last year. Assistance has become increasingly limited to high-level capabilities that Iraqi security forces lack, such as surveillance and air support.

Volunteers still needed to test variety of COVID-19 vaccines

By LAURAN NEERGAARD AP Medical Writer

Two COVID-19 vaccines might be nearing the finish line, but scientists caution it's critical that enough people volunteer to help finish studying other candidates in the U.S. and around the world.

Moderna Inc. and competitor Pfizer Inc. recently announced preliminary results showing their vaccines appear more than 90% effective, at least for short-term protection against COVID-19.

If those early results hold up and U.S. regulators agree the shots are safe, emergency use of small, rationed supplies could start in late December. Other countries with contracts for early doses would undertake their own reviews.

But multiple vaccines will be needed to meet global demand and help end the pandemic, raising concern that studies that still need to sign up thousands of volunteers could run short if people wait for an already OK'd option instead.

"We don't want to see that happen," said Dr. James Cutrell, an infectious disease expert at UT Southwestern Medical Center in Dallas.

Supplies aside, other COVID-19 vaccines under development may work differently in different populations and "we likely will benefit from having a menu of vaccine options," Cutrell said.

"We still need volunteers," stressed National Institutes of Health Director Francis Collins, urging Americans to sign up.

Additionally, participants in the Moderna and Pfizer studies who originally got dummy shots would almost certainly be offered the real vaccine if the U.S. Food and Drug Administration allows emergency use. But no one knows how long protection would last, meaning those studies also must continue to track recipients somehow.

"It's one thing to be effective two months after your last vaccination and another thing to be effective a year" later, said Dr. Jesse Goodman of Georgetown University, a former director of the FDA's vaccine division. "It's going to be really important to complete these clinical trials and the trials of the other vaccines so we can make comparisons."

The promising Moderna and Pfizer news bodes well for some of their competitors, said Dr. Anthony Fauci, the U.S. government's top infectious disease expert whose team at NIH helped develop the Moderna candidate.

Those shots target the "spike" protein that studs the surface of the coronavirus, and the early results prove that's enough to generate "a protective response," Fauci said. "Conceptually this looks good" for other spike-focused vaccines made in different ways.

Here's a scorecard of the frontrunners in the global vaccine race:

GENETIC CODE VACCINES

The Moderna-NIH vaccine and the candidate developed by Pfizer and its German partner BioNTech aren't made with the coronavirus itself, meaning there's no chance anyone could catch it from the shots.

Instead, the vaccines are made with a brand-new technology that injects a piece of genetic code for the spike protein. That messenger RNA, or mRNA, instructs the body to make some harmless spike protein,

enough to prime the immune system to react if it later encounters the real virus.

There are no licensed mRNA vaccines for people, so scientists had no idea if or how well the COVID-19 candidates might work.

Both manufacturers are working to scale up production in factories in the U.S. and Europe. They can't simply partner with other vaccine companies to take on some of the work because the technology is so different than the way most of today's shots are made.

"It is not a very easy or quick swap," said Moderna CEO Stéphane Bancel.

TROJAN HORSE VACCINES

A different way to target the spike protein: Use another, harmless virus to carry the spike gene into the body. Once again, the body produces some spike protein and primes the immune system.

Britain's Oxford University and AstraZeneca are making their version of this "viral vector" vaccine with a cold virus, or adenovirus, that normally infects chimpanzees. Studies of tens of thousands of people are underway in the U.K., U.S. and several other countries.

Johnson & Johnson is using a human adenovirus for its version, and is the only option in advanced U.S. testing aiming to show if a single dose rather than two would be enough.

China's government authorized emergency use of CanSino Biologics' adenovirus shots in the military ahead of any final testing. Russia likewise began offering an adenovirus vaccine ahead of late-stage tests.

PROTEIN VACCINES

Novavax makes its vaccine candidate by growing harmless copies of the coronavirus spike protein in the laboratory and packaging them into virus-sized nanoparticles.

There are protein-based vaccines against other diseases, so it's not as novel a technology as some of its competitors. Novavax has begun a large final-stage study in Britain, and is set soon to begin another in the U.S.

"KILLED" VACCINES

Spike-focused vaccines aren't the only option. Making vaccines by growing a disease-causing virus and then killing it is a tried-and-true approach — it's the way Jonas Salk's famed polio shots were made.

China has three so-called "inactivated" COVID-19 vaccine candidates in final testing in several countries, and has allowed emergency use in some people ahead of the results. An Indian company is testing its own inactivated candidate.

Safely brewing and then killing the virus takes longer than newer technologies. But inactivated vaccines give the body a sneak peek at the germ itself rather than just that single spike protein.

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.

Volunteers still needed to test variety of COVID-19 vaccines

By LAURAN NEERGAARD AP Medical Writer

Two COVID-19 vaccines might be nearing the finish line, but scientists caution it's critical that enough people volunteer to help finish studying other candidates in the U.S. and around the world.

Moderna Inc. and competitor Pfizer Inc. recently announced preliminary results showing their vaccines appear more than 90% effective, at least for short-term protection against COVID-19.

If those early results hold up and U.S. regulators agree the shots are safe, emergency use of small, rationed supplies could start in late December. Other countries with contracts for early doses would undertake their own reviews.

But multiple vaccines will be needed to meet global demand and help end the pandemic, raising concern that studies that still need to sign up thousands of volunteers could run short if people wait for an already OK'd option instead.

"We don't want to see that happen," said Dr. James Cutrell, an infectious disease expert at UT Southwestern Medical Center in Dallas.

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Nov. 18, 2020 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 138 ~ 81 of 91

Supplies aside, other COVID-19 vaccines under development may work differently in different populations and “we likely will benefit from having a menu of vaccine options,” Cutrell said.

“We still need volunteers,” stressed National Institutes of Health Director Francis Collins, urging Americans to sign up.

Additionally, participants in the Moderna and Pfizer studies who originally got dummy shots would almost certainly be offered the real vaccine if the U.S. Food and Drug Administration allows emergency use. But no one knows how long protection would last, meaning those studies also must continue to track recipients somehow.

“It’s one thing to be effective two months after your last vaccination and another thing to be effective a year” later, said Dr. Jesse Goodman of Georgetown University, a former director of the FDA’s vaccine division. “It’s going to be really important to complete these clinical trials and the trials of the other vaccines so we can make comparisons.”

The promising Moderna and Pfizer news bodes well for some of their competitors, said Dr. Anthony Fauci, the U.S. government’s top infectious disease expert whose team at NIH helped develop the Moderna candidate.

Those shots target the “spike” protein that studs the surface of the coronavirus, and the early results prove that’s enough to generate “a protective response,” Fauci said. “Conceptually this looks good” for other spike-focused vaccines made in different ways.

Here’s a scorecard of the frontrunners in the global vaccine race:

GENETIC CODE VACCINES

The Moderna-NIH vaccine and the candidate developed by Pfizer and its German partner BioNTech aren’t made with the coronavirus itself, meaning there’s no chance anyone could catch it from the shots.

Instead, the vaccines are made with a brand-new technology that injects a piece of genetic code for the spike protein. That messenger RNA, or mRNA, instructs the body to make some harmless spike protein, enough to prime the immune system to react if it later encounters the real virus.

There are no licensed mRNA vaccines for people, so scientists had no idea if or how well the COVID-19 candidates might work.

Both manufacturers are working to scale up production in factories in the U.S. and Europe. They can’t simply partner with other vaccine companies to take on some of the work because the technology is so different than the way most of today’s shots are made.

“It is not a very easy or quick swap,” said Moderna CEO Stéphane Bancel.

TROJAN HORSE VACCINES

A different way to target the spike protein: Use another, harmless virus to carry the spike gene into the body. Once again, the body produces some spike protein and primes the immune system.

Britain’s Oxford University and AstraZeneca are making their version of this “viral vector” vaccine with a cold virus, or adenovirus, that normally infects chimpanzees. Studies of tens of thousands of people are underway in the U.K., U.S. and several other countries.

Johnson & Johnson is using a human adenovirus for its version, and is the only option in advanced U.S. testing aiming to show if a single dose rather than two would be enough.

China’s government authorized emergency use of CanSino Biologics’ adenovirus shots in the military ahead of any final testing. Russia likewise began offering an adenovirus vaccine ahead of late-stage tests.

PROTEIN VACCINES

Novavax makes its vaccine candidate by growing harmless copies of the coronavirus spike protein in the laboratory and packaging them into virus-sized nanoparticles.

There are protein-based vaccines against other diseases, so it’s not as novel a technology as some of its competitors. Novavax has begun a large final-stage study in Britain, and is set soon to begin another in the U.S.

“KILLED” VACCINES

Spike-focused vaccines aren’t the only option. Making vaccines by growing a disease-causing virus and

then killing it is a tried-and-true approach — it's the way Jonas Salk's famed polio shots were made.

China has three so-called "inactivated" COVID-19 vaccine candidates in final testing in several countries, and has allowed emergency use in some people ahead of the results. An Indian company is testing its own inactivated candidate.

Safely brewing and then killing the virus takes longer than newer technologies. But inactivated vaccines give the body a sneak peek at the germ itself rather than just that single spike protein.

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.

Georgia elections chief battles fellow Republicans, Trump

By JEFF AMY Associated Press

ATLANTA (AP) — Georgia's secretary of state is a man on an island, and the political flood is rising fast as President Donald Trump and his allies vent their outrage at the fellow Republican and make unsupported claims that mismanagement and fraud tainted the state's presidential election.

Trump spent the weekend attacking Brad Raffensperger on social media, at one point calling him "a so-called Republican (RINO)," an acronym for "Republican in name only." Raffensperger punched back, disputing Trump's claims that he made it easier for Democrats to cheat using mail-in ballots.

The secretary also called U.S. Rep Doug Collins, who is running Trump's Georgia recount effort, a "liar," and says South Carolina Republican Sen. Lindsey Graham called him in an apparent effort to pressure him to improperly discard ballots. Graham dismissed the allegation as "ridiculous."

The current battle is a switch for Raffensperger. The 65-year-old, bespectacled engineer spent most of his first two years in office taking abuse from Democrats, who filed lawsuits alleging that Georgia, under then-Secretary of State Brian Kemp, engaged in illegal voter suppression in 2018. Kemp, the Republican who narrowly won the governorship over Democrat Stacey Abrams that year, denies the claims.

Also left in Raffensperger's lap was a breakneck race to replace Georgia's outdated voting machines in time for 2020 — an undertaking complicated in its closing stretch by the coronavirus pandemic.

Through it all, Raffensperger — currently in quarantine after his wife tested positive for coronavirus — has insisted he's an impartial administrator of Georgia elections with no desire or agenda to sway the outcome.

Trump and his allies claimed Raffensperger didn't do enough to root out "illegal" votes.

"The secretary of state has failed to deliver honest and transparent elections," GOP Sens. David Perdue and Kelly Loeffler — both of whom failed to win enough votes to avoid January runoffs with their Democratic opponents — said last week in a statement, without offering any evidence to back up their assertion. "He has failed the people of Georgia, and he should step down immediately."

Collins, responding to Raffensperger's "liar" label, fired back Monday on Twitter: "In a year of political division in Georgia, few things have unified Republicans and Democrats — one of them is Brad Raffensperger's incompetence as Secretary of State."

Raffensperger has sought to weather the beating by appeasing Trump supporters. After the Trump campaign asked for a hand recount of all 5 million votes cast in Georgia, Raffensperger chose the presidential election for an audit, which Georgia law now requires for one statewide race each election cycle. The law envisioned just a sample of these votes to be checked in a hand count. But because the margin in the presidential race is so narrow, Raffensperger said hand-counting all the ballots that were legally cast is the only way to provide confidence in the result.

Not shying away from the fact that he's a Republican, Raffensperger has said publicly that he wished Trump had won. But he's also held firm in saying that he has seen no evidence of widespread fraud or voting irregularities — and that he expects Biden's lead to hold up once the audit is complete.

"We're going to continue the process and, as a Republican, I think that I'll probably be disappointed in the result," Raffensperger told The Associated Press. "But as the secretary of state, I can be very comfortable in the counting of the ballots."

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Nov. 18, 2020 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 138 ~ 83 of 91

The elections chief has largely been left to fight on his own.

The state's eight GOP U.S. House members have demanded — again without citing any evidence — that the secretary of state investigate Trump's claims. Lt. Gov. Geoff Duncan and state House Speaker David Ralston are exceptions: They've joined Kemp in pushing investigations, but have stopped short of attacking Raffensperger.

A few Republicans have even publicly supported him.

"From the standpoint of what I've seen, there just is no widespread fraud in the election process leading up to the general election," said Saxby Chambliss, a Georgia Republican who served two terms in the U.S. Senate.

Groups suing the secretary of state over voting access include the New Georgia Project, a group Abrams founded to mobilize minority, youth and female voters. Executive Director Nse Ufot is loath to give Raffensperger too much credit, faulting him for not doing more to encourage mail voting, for example.

"All he had to do was show up and not blatantly suppress Black votes and he would have been an improvement over his predecessor," Ufot said.

Other Democrats are somewhat more supportive.

"I think on the whole he responded very well to changing the operations of the election to accommodate the pandemic," said David Worley, a former Georgia Democratic Party chairman who now serves on the state elections board. Worley said Raffensperger has been a better manager and less partisan than Kemp was as secretary of state.

Before winning statewide office, Raffensperger made a fortune in engineering and won election in 2011 to the city council in the affluent Atlanta suburb of Johns Creek.

"There's no hidden agenda," said Ivan Figueroa, who served on the council with Raffensperger. "He speaks his mind straight. You can trust what he says."

In 2014, Raffensperger won election to the state legislature. In 2018, when Kemp opted to run for governor, Raffensperger successfully ran to replace him, defeating Democratic U.S. Rep. John Barrow.

Last December, Raffensperger angered Democrats still smarting over Abrams' loss by purging more than 300,000 voters under a Georgia law that removes residents from the rolls if they don't vote in a seven-year period or respond to contacts. A new law will extend the deadline to nine years.

Raffensperger's biggest task has been to roll out a new voting system purchased from Dominion Voting Systems that cost more than \$100 million. Dominion has been the target of unsupported conspiracy claims spread by Trump and his supporters in recent days.

The new equipment got a rocky rollout during a June primary that was blemished by hourslong waits, in part because the COVID-19 pandemic shrunk the number of polling places and workers.

November's vote was smoother, with most people voting before Election Day after Raffensperger set up an online system for requesting mail-in ballots.

Ethiopia's PM vows 'final and crucial' offensive in Tigray

By CARA ANNA Associated Press

NAIROBI, Kenya (AP) — Ethiopia's prime minister on Tuesday declared "the final and crucial" military operation will launch in the coming days against the government of the country's rebellious Tigray region, while the United Nations warned of a "full-scale humanitarian crisis" with refugees fleeing and people in Tigray starting to go hungry.

In a warning to Americans still in the Tigray region, the U.S. Embassy in Ethiopia said those who can't leave safely "are advised to shelter in place." More than 1,000 citizens of various foreign countries are estimated to be trapped.

Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed said a three-day deadline given to the Tigray region's leaders and special forces "has expired today."

Now, "we are marching to Mekele to capture those criminal elements," Ethiopia's minister in charge of democratization, Zadiq Abraha, said in a phone interview with The Associated Press. "This will be a very

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Nov. 18, 2020 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 138 ~ 84 of 91

brief operation." Mekele, he said, will be the final stage.

Abiy, last year's Nobel Peace Prize winner, continues to reject international pleas for dialogue and de-escalation in the two-week conflict in the Horn of Africa that has spilled into neighboring Eritrea and sent more than 27,000 frightened Ethiopian refugees pouring into Sudan.

Some 4,000 refugees keep arriving every day, a "very rapid" rate, U.N. refugee agency spokesman Babar Baloch told reporters in Geneva. "It's a huge number in a matter of days ... It overwhelms the whole system," he said, adding that the remote part of Sudan hasn't seen such an influx in two decades.

Inside the Tigray region, cut off from the world with roads and airports closed, food and fuel and medical supplies are running desperately short.

"Our partners warn that supplies will soon be exhausted, putting millions at risk of food insecurity and disease," spokesman Stephane Dujarric said.

Alarmed African neighbors including Uganda and Kenya are calling for a peaceful resolution, but Abiy's government regards the Tigray regional government as illegal after it defiantly held a local election in September. The Tigray regional government objects to the postponement of national elections until next year because of the COVID-19 pandemic and considers Abiy's federal government illegal, saying its mandate has expired.

Ethiopia's federal government on Tuesday also confirmed carrying out new airstrikes outside Mekele, calling them "precision-led and surgical" and denying the Tigray government's assertion that civilians had been killed.

Tigray TV showed what appeared to be a bombed-out residential area, with damaged roofs and craters in the ground.

"I heard a sound of some explosions. Boom, boom, boom, as I entered the house," the station quoted a resident as saying. "When I got out later, I saw all this destruction. Two people have been injured. One of the injured is the landlord, and the other is a tenant just like us."

Communications with the Tigray region remain almost completely cut off, making it difficult to verify either side's claims.

When asked when communications might resume, the minister, Zadig, asserted, "It's not up to us. The TPLF destroyed telecom infrastructure in Tigray. ... By keeping people incommunicado, they're trying to keep the Tigray people hostage with propaganda."

He also denied the TPLF assertion that Eritrean forces had joined the conflict at the federal government's request, saying that "there is no foreign government, no foreign army operating inside Ethiopia." And no foreign government is giving military support from outside, either, he said.

Hungry, exhausted and scared, refugees from the Tigray region continued to flow into Sudan with terrifying accounts of war.

"These people are coming with knives and sticks, wanting to attack citizens. And behind them is the Ethiopian army with tanks. The knives and the sticks aren't the problem, it's the tanks," said one refugee, Thimon Abrah. "They struck and burned the entire place."

"When a man, or even a child is slaughtered, this is revenge," said another, Tedey Benjamin. "This is a tribal war."

Ethiopia's prime minister on Monday night said his government is ready to "receive and reintegrate" the refugees and that federal forces would protect them.

But many refugees say those same forces sent them fleeing.

Associated Press journalists Mohamed Awad in al-Qadarif, Sudan, and Jamey Keaten in Geneva, contributed to this report.

Rapper Lil Wayne charged with federal gun offense in Florida

By CURT ANDERSON AP Legal Affairs Writer

ST. PETERSBURG, Fla. (AP) — Rapper Lil Wayne was charged Tuesday in Florida with possession of a

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Nov. 18, 2020 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 138 ~ 85 of 91

firearm by a convicted felon, a federal offense that carries a potential sentence of up to 10 years in prison.

Documents filed in Miami federal court say the rapper, whose real name is Dwayne Michael Carter Jr., had a gun and ammunition on Dec. 23 of last year despite knowing he had the previous felony on his record.

Authorities said the 38-year-old rapper acknowledged owning the gold-plated handgun after his luggage was searched upon arriving in Miami on a private plane. A search warrant, first reported by the Miami Herald at the time, said Carter told investigators the gun was a Father's Day gift.

Carter's attorney, Howard Srebnick, said in an email that there are legal questions about whether mere possession of a weapon by a felon not judged to be dangerous fits the definition of a crime.

"Carter is charged with possessing a gold-plated handgun in his luggage on a private plane. There is no allegation that he ever fired it, brandished it, used it or threatened to use it," Srebnick said. "There is no allegation that he is a dangerous person."

Investigators also reported finding suspected illegal drugs in the luggage, but Carter has not been charged with a drug offense.

An initial court date on the weapons charge is set for Dec. 11 in Miami federal court.

The charge stems from a weapons conviction of Carter in New York more than a decade ago, for which he was sentenced to eight months in prison. Convicted felons are barred under federal law from owning firearms.

As Lil Wayne, Carter has sold over 120 million records, has won five Grammys and numerous other music awards. He owns a home in Miami Beach and is CEO of his own record label, Young Money Entertainment.

Play 'Thoughts of a Colored Man' to get a Broadway run

By MARK KENNEDY AP Entertainment Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Playwright Keenan Scott II's play "Thoughts of a Colored Man," a work about the outer and inner lives of Black men, is heading to the bright lights of Broadway.

The play will be given a Shubert theater and will open whenever Broadway restarts. It will be directed by Steve H. Broadnax III. Both playwright and director are Black and will be making their Broadway debuts.

"Thoughts of a Colored Man" is made up of related vignettes and set over the course of a single day in Brooklyn, where seven Black men discuss gentrification, violence, racial and sexual identity and what it means to be part of a community.

"I think people can expect to be moved and to laugh. There's so much laughter in this show, but there's also so much revealed about the Black male experience in America," producer Brian Moreland told The Associated Press. "They will laugh, they will cry, and they'll be able to ask questions that they've never been able to ask before."

In addition to Moreland, the producing lineup includes Ron Simons, Diana DiMenna, Samira Wiley and Sheryl Lee Ralph. It's a predominately Black list with what will be a mostly Black cast, both rarities on Broadway.

The play made its world premiere last year at Syracuse Stage and also was produced at Baltimore Center Stage. Broadway remains closed due to the coronavirus pandemic at least until June 2021. Moreland said Scott's play was something he instantly felt belonged on Broadway.

"I felt like it was something that needed to be seen. It was a work that was much larger than anything I've ever experienced," said Moreland, whose producing credits on Broadway include "Sea Wall/A Life," "The Lifespan of a Fact" and "The Sound Inside."

The pandemic silenced several shows with Black-led casts, including "Tina: The Tina Turner Musical," the revival of "A Soldier's Play" and "Ain't Too Proud – The Life and Times of The Temptations."

Putting a Black-led play on Broadway is one of the most concrete steps toward a more inclusive theatrical community coming in the wake of the death of George Floyd and a summer of protests.

While discussions of transferring "Thoughts of a Colored Man" to Broadway predated the protests, Moreland said the show's championing of diversity and inclusion fits perfectly in an era of Black Lives Matter and outcries over young Black deaths.

"It made this show so much more ready for the world to hear these men, for the world to hear Scott's voice. It just made people ready to listen," he said. "To have a young playwright — a young Black male — be able to speak truths about a neighborhood and an experience and a point of view in life, to share hopes and dreams — it's revelatory."

The theater community has made other steps toward inclusivity, including the launch of The Industry Standard Group, the first commercial theater investment and producing organization in the country run completely by people of color. Several theater companies — including The Public Theater, Second Stage Theater, Roundabout Theatre Company and Lincoln Center Theater — have appointed or elevated theater artists of color.

There also has been the creation of Musicians United for Social Equity, working to develop pipelines for musicians of color, and a pledge by the Stewart/Whitley casting office to bring greater racial equity to their staff and working environment.

According to the annual study, "The Visibility Report: Racial Representation on NYC Stages," nearly 80% of Broadway and off-Broadway shows' writers were white and 85.5% of directors during the 2017-18 season. Over 61% of all roles on New York City stages went to white actors, a rate double the population of white people in New York City.

Mark Kennedy is at <http://twitter.com/KennedyTwits>

Murphy's choice: Fed official has say on transition launch

By AAMER MADHANI Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The head of an obscure federal agency that is holding up the presidential transition knew well before Election Day that she might soon have a messy situation on her hands.

Before Nov. 3, Emily Murphy, the head of the General Services Administration, held a Zoom call with Dave Barram, the man who was in her shoes 20 years earlier.

The conversation, set up by mutual friends, was a chance for Barram, 77, to tell Murphy a little about his torturous experience with "ascertainment" — the task of determining the expected winner of the presidential election, which launches the official transition process.

Barram led the GSA during the 2000 White House race between Republican George W. Bush and Democrat Al Gore, which was decided by a few hundred votes in Florida after the U.S. Supreme Court weighed in more than a month after Election Day.

"I told her, 'I'm looking at you and I can tell you want to do the right thing,'" recalled Barram, who declined to reveal any details of what Murphy told him. "I'll tell you what my mother told me: 'If you do the right thing, then all you have to do is live with the consequences of it.'"

It's been 10 days since President-elect Joe Biden crossed the 270 electoral vote mark to defeat President Donald Trump and win the presidency. Unlike the 2000 election, when the winner of the election was truly unknown for weeks, this time it is clear that Biden won, although Trump is refusing to concede.

But Murphy has yet to certify Biden as the winner, stalling the launch of the official transition process. When she does ascertain that Biden won, it will free up money for the transition and clear the way for Biden's team to begin placing transition personnel at federal agencies.

Trump administration officials also say they will not give Biden the classified presidential daily briefing on intelligence matters until the GSA makes the ascertainment official.

Murphy declined to be interviewed for this article. A GSA spokesperson, who refused to be identified by name because of the sensitivity of the matter, confirmed that Murphy and Barram spoke prior to the election about his experience in the close 2000 election.

The White House has not said whether there have been conversations about ascertainment between officials there and at GSA.

On social media and cable, Murphy is being castigated by those on the left who say she is thwarting the democratic transfer of power. Some Trump backers, for their part, say she's doing right by the Republican

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Nov. 18, 2020 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 138 ~ 87 of 91

president, who has filed a barrage of lawsuits making baseless claims of widespread voter fraud.

Murphy, 47, leads a 12,000-person agency tasked with managing the government's real estate portfolio and serving as its global supply chain manager. Before last week, she was hardly a household name in politics.

The University of Virginia-trained lawyer and self-described "wonk" had spent most of the last 20 years honing a specialized knowledge of government procurement through a series of jobs as a Republican congressional staffer and in senior roles at the GSA and the Small Business Administration. She did shorter stints in the private sector and volunteered for Trump's transition team in 2016.

She worked her way up through partisan politics to a position that isn't in the spotlight, but is undeniably a powerful cog of governance.

"I am not here to garner headlines or make a name for myself," Murphy said at her Senate confirmation hearing in October 2017. "My goal is to do my part in making the federal government more efficient, effective and responsive to the American people."

Yet, during her time in government, Murphy has also found controversy.

Murphy took the reins of GSA in late 2017 and soon found herself entangled in a congressional battle over the future of the FBI's crumbling headquarters in downtown Washington. Trump scrapped a decade-old plan to raze the building and move the agency outside the capital.

Some House Democrats believed that Trump, who operates a hotel on federally leased property nearby, was worried about competition moving into the FBI site should it be torn down and that he nixed the plan out of personal interest. Murphy seemed to give a less than precise answer to a lawmaker who asked about conversations with Trump and his team about the FBI headquarters.

The GSA inspector general found that Murphy in a 2018 congressional hearing gave answers that were "incomplete and may have left the misleading impression that she had no discussions with the President or senior White House officials in the decision-making process about the project."

In an earlier stint at GSA during the George W. Bush administration, Murphy butted heads with GSA Administrator Lurita Doan.

Murphy, who then held the title of chief acquisitions officer, was one of several political appointees who spoke up in 2007 after a deputy to Karl Rove, then Bush's chief political adviser, gave a briefing to GSA political appointees in which he identified Democrats in Congress whom the Republican Party hoped to unseat in 2008.

Murphy was among attendees who later told a special counsel that Doan had asked how the GSA could be used "to help our candidates." Murphy left the agency soon after the episode. Bush forced Doan to resign the following year.

Danielle Brian, executive director of the nonprofit Project on Government Oversight, said the episode had given her hope that Murphy, upon taking over at GSA, would be able to resist pressure from Trump.

"She was essentially a whistleblower," Brian said. "I really thought she had the potential to stand up to a president. It doesn't appear to be the case."

Barram, the Bush-Gore-era GSA administrator, said he felt sympathy for Murphy.

"Republican lawmakers are asking her to be more courageous than they are," Barram said. "Sure, it's her decision to make, and she's going to have to make it one of these days. But they could make it easier if five or 10 of them come out and say: 'Biden's won. Let's congratulate our old Senate colleague.'"

Peace was swift in Ethiopia under Abiy. War was, too.

By CARA ANNA Associated Press

NAIROBI, Kenya (AP) — Abiy Ahmed left Ethiopians breathless when he became the prime minister in 2018, introducing a wave of political reforms in the long-repressive country and announcing a shocking peace with enemy Eritrea.

The young prime minister was cheered as he toured Ethiopia in his feverish first days, including when he visited the powerful Tigray region, whose leaders had dominated the national ruling coalition for decades.

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Nov. 18, 2020 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 138 ~ 88 of 91

The international community, dazzled, showered Abiy with praise. Not even two years after taking power, he was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize.

Now — a year later — Abiy is waging war in Tigray, accusing its forces of a deadly attack on a military base after what he said was a series of provocations. His shine is threatening to wear off as his country's long-brewing troubles explode onto the world stage, and he rejects international pressure for dialogue.

Abiy contends there's no one to talk to, asserting that the Tigray regional leaders are criminals who recently held an election his government called illegal and that their actions have threatened Ethiopia's sovereignty.

Well over 25,000 refugees have fled the fighting into Sudan, bringing word of vicious attacks by armed forces and even rival ethnic groups.

Abiy on Tuesday vowed a "final and crucial" military offensive as he tries to hold together a nation of 110 million people with scores of ethnic groups, some of which might try to defy him as the Tigray leaders have.

"If Tigray is not solved somehow, I don't think the situation of the country will be solved," Mekonnen Gebreslasie Gebrehiwot, who leads an association of ethnic Tigrayans, told The Associated Press from his home in Belgium.

On Tuesday, the Nobel committee said in a statement that it is "deeply concerned" about the situation in Ethiopia, and it called for all parties involved to "end the escalating violence." The United States, the African Union, Pope Francis and the United Nations secretary-general all have expressed their deep concern and urged a peaceful resolution.

But there is no clear path back to peace in a region that's seen little of it. "This conflict dashes our hopes for the region," prominent Horn of Africa citizens wrote in a letter circulated late last week.

For much of the world, Abiy's transformation from peacemaker to war-wager was as swift as his rise to power.

But for months, human rights groups had warned that Abiy's administration was beginning to embrace the repressive ways of the past, including locking up critics and shutting off the internet.

Even as the Nobel committee awarded Abiy last year, it defended its choice. "No doubt some people will think this year's prize is being awarded too early," it said, noting "troubling examples" of ethnic violence. But it believed "it is now that Abiy Ahmed's efforts deserve recognition and need encouragement."

For many, Abiy represented a welcome break from the past when he rose to power in one of Africa's most powerful countries, a key U.S. security ally in the strategic Horn of Africa.

His government welcomed opposition figures home from exile, and released others from prison, including some who had been sentenced to death. He swept through the region, brokering peace, and toured the United States to excited diaspora crowds.

He was seen by many as a unifier, the son of a Christian and Muslim and of mixed ethnic heritage. He surprised Ethiopians by apologizing for the government's past abuses. He appeared to be drawing from his painful past.

In his Nobel address, the former soldier recalled his fighting experience on the Eritrean border two decades ago. "War is the epitome of hell for all involved," he said.

But for some, it was hard to miss a warning amid his calls for unity in Ethiopia, where some ethnic groups have pushed hard for more autonomy, sometimes with violence.

Speaking specifically to his countrymen from the Nobel lectern, Abiy said: "The evangelists of hate and division are wreaking havoc in our society using social media. They are preaching the gospel of revenge and retribution."

He added that Ethiopia and Eritrea made peace because they were the "victims of a common enemy," which was poverty.

But now Tigray regional leaders assert that Ethiopia and Eritrea have instead found a common enemy in them.

Terrible accounts have begun to emerge from shaken refugees. "These people are coming with knives and sticks, wanting to attack citizens. And behind them is the Ethiopian army with tanks," said one refu-

gee, Thimon Abrah. "And we're here, waiting, for any sort of solution."

Abiy on Monday said his government would welcome, protect and reintegrate those who have fled. But those fleeing are wary of any promises from his government, which they say attacked them. The government has repeatedly denied that.

For Ethiopians at home and in the diaspora, there is anger, sadness and suspicion as the United Nations warns of alarming rhetoric and the targeting of ethnic groups.

Abiy has vowed to limit the conflict to combatants. But he also rejects compromise, promising that the fighting will only end once the region's leaders from the Tigray People's Liberation Front are arrested and their arsenal destroyed.

"Abiy overreached," Tsedale Lemma, the editor of the Addis Standard newspaper, wrote last week in The New York Times, calling the prime minister's sidelining of the region's leadership his first "cardinal mistake."

But the official overseeing the new state of emergency in Tigray defended the prime minister's unyielding stance.

"He faces the very threat to his own nation," Redwan Hussein told reporters late last week. "The only thing he has to do is to defend it. So if there is a second Nobel Peace Prize, then he has to win it again because he is still salvaging his country."

Bach issues gentle plea for Olympians to get vaccinated

By STEPHEN WADE AP Sports Writer

TOKYO (AP) — As he toured the Athletes Village on Tuesday, IOC President Thomas Bach issued a gentle plea to all competitors to get vaccinated before the Tokyo Olympics — if a vaccine is available.

Bach, who is visiting Tokyo this week for the first time since the Olympics were postponed, again said the vaccine would not be a requirement, but he urged athletes and fans to help protect themselves and others.

"The IOC will appeal to the athletes and other participants — in particular all those who are living here in the village — to have a vaccination," Bach said, wearing a white mask with the Olympic rings on the right side. "But it will be their free decision."

"I'm sure many, many of the athletes and the participants will follow this advice, or maybe don't even need it and will do it on their own."

Bach also said a "reasonable number" of fans should be able to attend the Tokyo Olympics with or without a vaccine. And, before heading to the new \$1.4 billion National Stadium in central Tokyo, he said confidently that the postponed games will open on July 23.

Bach was greeted by a few protesters outside the stadium chanting: "Get out IOC. Get out Olympics."

Japan has controlled the virus comparatively well, with about 1,900 deaths attributed to COVID-19 in a country of about 125 million. However, cases have been rising lately, particularly in Tokyo and the northern island of Hokkaido.

In a more private setting, Bach has spoken directly about Olympic athletes' responsibility to consider the vaccine.

In an on-line session last month with the IOC's Athletes' Commission, Bach was asked — among other things — if athletes would be "forced" to be vaccinated. The Associated Press obtained a 90-minute recording of the session, which included more than 100 athletes or their representatives. It was monitored by Kirsty Coventry, a two-time Olympic gold medalist and chairperson of the Athletes' Commission.

In that session, Bach said "we are not there yet" in terms of requiring a vaccine, but he made his feelings clear that athletes owe it to each other — and themselves — when thinking about a vaccination.

"Every athlete should look at his fellow athletes and take this into consideration," Bach said to the commission. "Because the vaccination is not just about the individual. It's a protection for the entire community."

"And there I think each and everyone of us has a responsibility in this crisis, a responsibility not just for us individually but for all of the people who surround us and who are our fellow team members, who are fellow Olympians."

Two vaccine makers have said preliminary results from their late-stage studies suggest their experimen-

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Nov. 18, 2020 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 138 ~ 90 of 91

tal vaccines are strongly protective. Early results provide strong signals that the vaccine could prevent a majority of disease when large groups of people are vaccinated.

Not all athletes are likely to want to take the vaccine. For some it will be a question of individual liberty. Others will fear vaccines against COVID-19 are being rushed, and possibly unsafe. Some could fear falling ill after taking the vaccine, jeopardizing their Olympic chances.

"We can solve this crisis like other challenges only if we are in solidarity, and if we all take responsibility," Bach said in the online conference with athletes in early October, acknowledging some athletes would see taking the vaccine as a "sacrifice."

In Tokyo, Bach said that nurses, doctors and health care workers should be first in line for a vaccine, ahead of healthy, young athletes.

As well as the 11,000 Olympic athletes, there could be tens of thousands of officials, judges, VIPs, and media and broadcasters traveling to Japan for the games.

Tokyo Olympic officials and the International Olympic Committee have said that athletes testing positive at the games could be barred from competing, similar to the way a doping suspect is removed.

More AP sports: <https://apnews.com/apf-sports> and https://twitter.com/AP_Sports

Today in History

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Wednesday, Nov. 18, the 323rd day of 2020. There are 43 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On Nov. 18, 1978, U.S. Rep. Leo J. Ryan, D-Calif., and four others were killed in Jonestown, Guyana, by members of the Peoples Temple; the killings were followed by a night of mass murder and suicide by more than 900 cult members.

On this date:

In 1883, the United States and Canada adopted a system of Standard Time zones.

In 1916, the World War I Battle of the Somme pitting British and French forces against German troops ended inconclusively after 4 1/2 months of bloodshed.

In 1928, Walt Disney's first sound-synchronized animated cartoon, "Steamboat Willie" starring Mickey Mouse, premiered in New York.

In 1963, the Bell System introduced the first commercial touch-tone telephone system in Carnegie and Greensburg, Pennsylvania.

In 1966, U.S. Roman Catholic bishops did away with the rule against eating meat on Fridays outside of Lent.

In 1985, the comic strip "Calvin and Hobbes," created by Bill Watterson, was first published. (The strip ran for 10 years.)

In 1987, the congressional Iran-Contra committees issued their final report, saying President Ronald Reagan bore "ultimate responsibility" for wrongdoing by his aides. A fire at London King's Cross railway station claimed 31 lives.

In 1991, Shiite (SHEE'-eyet) Muslim kidnappers in Lebanon freed Anglican Church envoy Terry Waite and Thomas Sutherland, the American dean of agriculture at the American University of Beirut.

In 1999, 12 people were killed when a bonfire under construction at Texas A-and-M University collapsed. A jury in Jasper, Texas, convicted Shawn Allen Berry of murder for his role in the dragging death of James Byrd Jr., but spared him the death penalty.

In 2003, the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court ruled 4-to-3 that the state constitution guaranteed gay couples the right to marry.

In 2004, Britain outlawed fox hunting in England and Wales.

In 2009, two days before turning 92, Sen. Robert C. Byrd, D-W.Va., set a record for longest-serving

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, Nov. 18, 2020 ~ Vol. 29 - No. 138 ~ 91 of 91

lawmaker in congressional history at 56 years, 320 days. (That record was broken in 2013 by U.S. Rep. John Dingell, D-Mich.)

Ten years ago: President Barack Obama rallied former diplomatic and military chiefs from both parties to pressure reluctant Republican senators into ratifying a nuclear weapons deal with Russia. (The Senate ratified the treaty the following month.) General Motors stock resumed trading on Wall Street, signaling the rebirth of an American corporate icon that had collapsed into bankruptcy and was rescued with a \$50 billion infusion from taxpayers. Felix Hernandez of the Seattle Mariners was chosen as the AL Cy Young Award winner.

Five years ago: The Islamic State group announced that it had killed a Norwegian man and a Chinese man after earlier demanding ransoms for the two. Raphael Holiday was executed by the state of Texas; he'd been convicted of setting a fire that killed his 18-month-old daughter and her two young half-sisters at an East Texas home in Sept. 2000. Jake Arrieta of the Chicago Cubs aced out Dodgers stars Zack Greinke and Clayton Kershaw for the NL Cy Young Award while Houston lefty Dallas Keuchel won the AL honor.

One year ago: The Trump administration said it no longer considered Israeli settlements in the West Bank to be a violation of international law; the position marked a reversal of four decades of American policy, and undermined efforts by the Palestinians to gain statehood. China said a 55-year-old man had been diagnosed with bubonic plague after killing and eating a wild rabbit; two other plague cases had already been discovered in the capital Beijing. Beauty company Coty said it was buying a 51 percent share of reality TV star Kylie Jenner's beauty business in a deal that valued her company at about \$1.2 billion.

Today's Birthdays: Actor Brenda Vaccaro is 81. Author-poet Margaret Atwood is 81. Actor Linda Evans is 78. Actor Susan Sullivan is 78. Country singer Jacky Ward is 74. Actor Jameson Parker is 73. Actor-singer Andrea Marcovicci is 72. Rock musician Herman Rarebell is 71. Singer Graham Parker is 70. Actor Delroy Lindo is 68. Comedian Kevin Nealon is 67. Pro Football Hall of Fame quarterback Warren Moon is 64. Actor Oscar Nunez is 62. Actor Elizabeth Perkins is 60. Singer Kim Wilde is 60. Actor Tim Guinee is 58. Rock musician Kirk Hammett (Metallica) is 58. Rock singer Tim DeLaughter (dee-LAW'-ter) is 55. Actor Romany Malco is 52. Actor Owen Wilson is 52. Actor Dan Bakkedahl is 52. Singer Duncan Sheik is 51. Actor Mike Epps is 50. Actor Peta Wilson is 50. Actor Chloe Sevigny (SEH'-ven-ee) is 46. Country singer Jessi Alexander is 44. Actor Steven Pasquale is 44. Rock musician Alberto Bof (Lukas Nelson & Promise of the Real) is 43. Rapper Fabolous is 43. Actor-director Nate Parker is 41. Rapper Mike Jones is 40. Actor Mekia Cox is 39. Actor-comedian Nasim Pedrad (nah-SEEM' peh-DRAHD') is 39. Actor Allison Tolman is 39. Actor Christina Vidal is 39. Actor Damon Wayans Jr. is 38. Country singer TJ Osborne (Brothers Osborne) is 36. Fashion designer Christian Siriano is 35. Actor Nathan Kress is 28.