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GDILIVE.COM

Service for
Bob Pray Sr.
10:30 a.m., Sat., Nov. 21
SEAS Church



OPEN: Recycling Trailer in Groton

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

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The 2021 Groton Area Snow Queen pageant was held Friday evening. Pictured are Erin Unzen, daughter of Jake and Tiffany Unzen, senior division first runner-up; Tiara DeHoet, daughter of Rebecca Barber, Miss Congeniality and Senior Snow Queen; Lydia Meier, daughter of Anna and Brett Schwan and Nicholas Meier, Junior Snow Queen; and Camryn Kurtz, daughter of Ryan and Diane Kurtz, junior division first runner-up. (Photo by Paul Kosel)

**We'll have more photos in tomorrow's edition.
Patti Woods was revealed as Frosty.**

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American Standard

Walk-In Tubs

WALK-IN BATHTUB SALE! SAVE \$1,500



Lifetime Warranty!
Finance Options Available*

Limited Time Offer! Call Today!

1-855-814-6276

Or visit: www.walkintubinfo.com/gdi



A+ RATED

✓ EXPERIENCE YOU CAN TRUST!

Only American Standard has **OVER** 140 years of experience and offers the Liberation Walk-In Bathtub.

✓ SUPERIOR DESIGN!

Ultra low easy entry and exit design, wide door, built-in safety bar and textured floor provides a safer bathing experience.

✓ PATENTED QUICK-DRAIN® TECHNOLOGY

✓ LIFETIME WARRANTY!

The **ONLY** Lifetime Warranty on the bath **AND** installation, **INCLUDING** labor backed by American Standard.

✓ 44 HYDROTHERAPY JETS!

More than any other tub we've seen.



FREE!

Savings Include an American Standard Right Height Toilet **FREE!** (\$500 Value)



FREE!

An In-Home Evaluation Will Be Scheduled At Your Earliest Convenience

Discount applied at time of purchase. Terms and Conditions Apply. * Subject to 3rd party credit approval. Minimum monthly payments required. Receive a free American Standard Cadet Toilet with full installation of a Liberation Walk-In Bath, Liberation Shower, or Deluxe Shower. Offer valid only while supplies last. Limit one per household. Must be first time purchaser. All offers subject to change prior to purchase. See www.AmericanStandardBathtubs.com for other restrictions and for licensing, warranty, and company information. * CSLB B982796; Suffolk NY:5543IH; NYC:HIC#2022748-DCA. Safety Tubs Co. LLC does not sell in Nassau NY, Westchester NY, Putnam NY, Rockland NY.



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**

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Awesome Oranges!

Grove
Navels

Petite Red
Navels

Tangerines

Petite Navel

ONLY
\$19.99*

Special limited
time offer!

SAVE \$15!
Reg. Price ~~\$34.99~~

4 favorite varieties

16 delicious oranges
fresh from the Grove

**High In
Vitamin C**

WOW! Healthy, handpicked fresh from the grove!
4 unique varieties. 16 delicious oranges!

**Call 1-866-955-2507 to order item 496X
or Visit HaleGroves.com/MN194**

Order Item #496X, mention Code HNVH-N194 for your \$15 savings.

Only \$19.99* (reg. \$34.99), plus \$5.99 shipping & handling. Satisfaction completely guaranteed. This gift ships in December at the peak of freshness. Order by Dec. 18, 2020 for GUARANTEED Christmas delivery. AZ, CA, TX & LA order by Dec. 15, 2020.

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Hale Groves, Vero
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Call now and
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*Plus \$5.99 handling per pack to the 48 contiguous states. Limited time offer, good while supplies last. Not valid with any other offer. Limit 5 boxes per customer.

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Groton Area School District															
Active COVID-19 Cases															
Updated November 20, 2020; 2:20 PM															
JK	KG	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	Staff	Total
0	2	1	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	9

Groton Area School District															
Active COVID-19 Cases															
Updated November 19, 2020; 1:04 PM															
JK	KG	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	Staff	Total
0	1	1	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	4	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).

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#271 in a series

Covid-19 Update: by Marie Miller

Huge, gigantic, gargantuan. Yep, I'm running out of words again. I feel as though I have a fair vocabulary, and yet this thing simply dwarfs my descriptive abilities. People, we're at 11,990,800 cases reported in the US. We will be well over 12 million at this time tomorrow, having added that last million at the speed of light and on a good pace to add another million in even less time. A good deal of this is because we've been packing them on for weeks now. We've been over 100,000 cases per day for 17 days now. We reached 150,000 daily new cases just four days ago, and now, we've had our first 200,000+ day with 203,900, a 1.7% increase from yesterday. This is our third consecutive record-setting day. If you want to join me in 'fraidy-cat land, consider that our doubling time—the number of days it will take us to double that case number—is just a bit over 41 days. This means if we keep up the current rate of growth—and so far, we see no signs of slowing down—we're scheduled to hit 24 million cases right around New Year's Day. Think about that.

Hospitalizations are also setting records, setting another for the eleventh consecutive day today. There are now 80,698 people hospitalized with Covid-19 in the US. This represents a 50% increase over two weeks. We continue to hear pleas from the health care sector to get serious and mitigate. Yesterday an open letter was published jointly by the American Medical Association, the American Hospital Association, and the American Nurses Association, "in strongest possible terms," urging Americans to "celebrate responsibly, in a scaled-back fashion that limits the virus's spread, to help reduce the risk of infecting friends, family and others you love." In the letter, they point out the spikes seen after Memorial Day, the Fourth of July, Labor Day, and Halloween: "The record-shattering surge underway is resulting in uncontrolled community spread and infection that has already overburdened health systems in some areas and will ultimately consume capacity of our health care system and may reduce the availability of care in many places in our country." They sound sort of desperate; since nobody has a more up-close and personal view of this pandemic than these folks, mayhap we should be listening to them.

There were 1945 deaths reported today, a 0.8% increase, and now we're at 254,239. Given the new-case numbers we're seeing, it should come as no surprise that the Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation (IHME) at the University of Washington is projecting 2300 daily deaths by December 18 and a total of 471,000 deaths by March 1. These are horrifying numbers. Sick is one thing, but dead is dead. And there is something we can do about this; public health experts have told us and told us that wearing masks, social distancing, and avoiding social gatherings really will reduce death rates. Dr. Peter Hotez, dean of tropical medicine at the Baylor College of Medicine, says, "It's not forever. Good vaccines are coming, extraordinarily effective vaccines. So we're going to have a much better place, definitely by this time next year, or even earlier—spring or summer. Therefore it's your obligation to keep yourself and your family alive. It's all hands on deck."

We reached an important milestone today—one of the good kind for a change: The first vaccine candidate has been officially submitted to the FDA for an emergency use authorization (EUA). This one is, as expected, from the partnership of Pfizer and BioNTech. The FDA plans to use an expedited review process that doesn't skip any steps, but reduces the down-time between the steps so that the EUA, if it's forthcoming, will be made as soon as possible. It is expected to take three weeks to review the data before the advisory committee, that outside panel of experts, meets to review the application itself; that meeting is scheduled for December 10. Because an EUA for a drug to be given to perfectly healthy people is quite unusual, the FDA has been clear that their standards for approval are going to be pretty daunting. It's one thing to give EUA to a drug intended to be used in critically ill patients who don't have many treatment options; there's a different calculus entirely for approving a drug to be given to people who are healthy and don't "need" treatment at all. If granted, the EUA will allow limited groups of people to get vaccinated before the full review process, which generally takes months and will likely be expedited too, is completed.

Recently, I've been seeing a retread of a tired old claim: that you need contact with lots of "germs" to stimulate your immune system and keep it strong, and that wearing masks, distancing, and staying home

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prevents you from having that beneficial contact; therefore, these mitigation measures harm your immune system, actually making you more vulnerable to coronavirus than you were before. There are two approaches I can use to respond to this.

First approach is short and to the point: Balderdash! Poppycock! Baloney! Hogwash! Rubbish! (I know it could've been shorter yet, but I want to be very clear here.)

Second approach is where I actually explain why that first answer is correct. Let's take a look at the rhetorical structure of the argument offered. It rests on two claims, (1) that exposure to "germs" strengthens your immune system and (2) that wearing a mask, distancing, and staying home prevents this kind of exposure. If either of those turns out to be false, then the whole argument falls apart, right? So, one at a time:

Does exposure to "germs" strengthen your immune system? There is growing evidence that when you were a small child it did, although we're still working out the details. There is a corps of white blood cells called CD4 cells (a kind of T cell, for those who've been keeping up with our many discussions of immune responses) that seem to respond early in life to each encounter with a virus or bacterium in the environment—the vast majority of which are harmless—by developing the ability to cross-react in a beneficial way to the particular sensitizing organism and several other organisms as well so that, as you grow up, your immune system becomes more and more competent, better and better at responding when appropriate. It is generally believed that exposure to "germs"—crawling around on the floor, playing in the dirt, "kissing" the family dog, putting toys in your mouth, etc., stimulates the naïve immune system we're all born with to get better and better at recognizing and responding to threats such that, by the time we're a few years old, we are fully equipped to swim around in this stew of microorganisms that is our world and still live a good long life unencumbered, for the most part, by fatal, or even serious, infections.

There is even this idea floating around the scientific universe—been floating a while now—called the Hygiene Hypothesis, which says those early exposures to all sorts of organisms in the environment is critical to developing normal responses which are not overreactive, thereby protecting you from developing allergies, asthma, and other diseases that result from this sort of overreaction. The thought is that our increasing tendency to make a child's environment too clean might be responsible for the growth we've seen in allergies of all kinds. This idea is quite controversial, and I'm not here to weigh in on it—in fact, I'll leave the weighing in to the real experts, a group which does not include me at all—but it's out there. At any rate, there is more general agreement that exposure to "germs" is very important to normal immunological development. (I'll add for those who are alarmed by the prospect of exposing innocent babies to all sorts of filth and decay that no one's advocating feeding decomposing food to infants or permitting them to crawl through raw sewage, just for getting over our growing obsession with disinfecting and sanitizing a child's world until it resembles a surgical suite instead of a normal home. By all means, continue with dishwashing and bathing and such. Just stop boiling and bleaching everything in sight.)

That said, if you're reading this, you're well past the age where you need that sort of immunological stimulation. Your immune system has done all the maturing it's going to do; your CD4 cells are nice and competent; and you're all ready to go. If there would happen to be some ongoing benefit of exposure to organisms at this stage in your life (a proposition offered purely on spec; we have no particular reason to think this is so), with the lifetime you've spent developing the responses you now have, there is zero evidence a few months or even a couple of years sheltered from contacts with organisms is going to put much of a dent in them.

So how about the second claim, that sheltering at home, distancing, and mask-wearing somehow places you into some sort of sanitized, unnatural, germ-free world where your only contacts with microorganisms will be infrequent and brief. Turns out, no matter how great a housekeeper you are, no matter how frequently you wash and bathe and even use those little disinfectant wipes around the house, there are still plenty of organisms around. In fact, your body is full of the little critters. Your mouth is a cornucopia of "germs." So is your nose. If I were to swab either and then rub the swab on a nutrient medium for culturing bacteria and grow it overnight, you'd be pretty horrified next morning at what's hanging out in

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there. And even if you're applying hand sanitizer to your entire body (a practice recommended by approximately no one), your skin has gobs of them too; skin swabs would yield the same unsettling results. Ninety percent of the dry weight of your stool is bacteria. No kidding! It's almost entirely bacteria, really! You wouldn't believe how many of those guys are in there! It would be a chore to wipe out those populations, and we have no interest in trying; these play a critical role in your health. (In fact when we disrupt them substantially, as can happen with indiscriminate antibiotic use, all sorts of trouble ensues—which is why you should stop demanding antibiotics from your doctor when you have a cold: They won't help, and it's bad for your happy helper organisms to be taking antibiotics you don't need. Seriously, just stop it.) Additionally, if I were to come to your house, even immediately after you had a wild orgy of cleaning and disinfecting, I'm going to guess I could swab surfaces around the place and find enough bacteria to make you nervous. And this is before you go outdoors, a wonderland of "germs." Turns out adults don't need to crawl around in the dirt or play with the dog to encounter microorganisms. There are lots of sources of contact, even in your newly pandemic-restricted world; and these mitigation measures aren't going to sanitize your life very much at all.

Now we agreed up front that, if either of these propositions turned out to be false, the whole argument falls apart, right? Well, both claims are suspect, and there's precisely nothing to this argument. Don't fall for it. Exercising precautions during the pandemic, even for months and months at a time, however unpleasant and frustrating, isn't hurting your immunity a bit. If you're worried about your immune system, do some things that will actually do it some good: Eat nutritious foods, exercise, manage your stress, and get enough sleep. Those are real immune boosters, and they can make an appreciable difference.

SirDarius Brown is 13 years old, and he has faced some extraordinary challenges already in his life. Diagnosed with speech delays and fine motor issues, he has had a great deal to overcome; but overcome it he has. He's on the honor roll at school. He took up sewing when his sister was learning, and it helped him with his motor issues. And now, he has turned a speech delay into speaking engagements. So when he was looking around in the early days of this pandemic and seeing so many "bad things happening," he wanted to help; he just didn't know how. Then he heard about the numbers of animals languishing in shelters, waiting for homes, and decided that was going to be his niche, the way he could help. He says, "I've made it my mission in life to help dogs and cats get adopted faster," explaining he wants them to find "forever loving homes."

How can a 13-year-old help with animal adoption? He has a novel approach. He sews colorful bowties for them so they will look more appealing in photos and when meeting prospective families. Brown has sewed over 500 bowties so far and his success rate is pretty good: He has helped more than 100 cats and dogs find homes. I had a look at them, and he does great work; the bowties are really appealing—bright, colorful, and well-made. His proud mom says, "I feel like he has an assignment from God to help animals and people." Some good things in addition to the happiness he feels when an adoption comes through have happened as a result of his work: He had the opportunity to meet and talk with President Barack Obama who commended him and encouraged him to continue giving back to the community. He says he is more inspired than ever by that meeting. No telling what a kid like this will do in the future. And no telling what each of us could do too if we set our minds to it. The world needs kindness more than ever.

Be well. We'll talk again.

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Area COVID-19 Cases

	Nov. 18	Nov. 19	Nov. 20	Nov. 21
Minnesota	236,949	242,043	249,906	256,700
Nebraska	103,805	106,617	109,280	111,661
Montana	49,398	50,582	51,818	53,293
Colorado	172,044	176,694	182,801	188,566
Wyoming	21,047	21,750	22,489	23,347
North Dakota	65,967	67,230	68,612	70,016
South Dakota	67,284	68,671	69,742	71,070
United States	11,360,125	11,530,345	11,718,867	11,913,945
US Deaths	248,707	250,548	252,564	254,424

Minnesota	+5,931	+5,094	+7,863	+6,794
Nebraska	+2,204	+2,812	+2,663	+2,381
Montana	+1,371	+1,184	+1,236	+1,475
Colorado	+4,331	+4,650	+6,107	+5,765
Wyoming	+1,162	+703	+739	+858
North Dakota	+1,082	1,263	+1,382	+1,404
South Dakota	+1,006	+1,387	+1,071	+1,328
United States	+154,640	+170,220	+188,522	+195,078
US Deaths	+1,487	+1,841	+2,016	+1,860

	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

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November 20th COVID-19 UPDATE

Groton Daily Independent
from State Health Lab Reports

South Dakota recorded 36 deaths today: 23 in the 80+ age group, 8 in their 70s, 4 in their 60s and 1 in their 50s. There were 21 females and 15 males.

Deaths by county: Aurora-1, Beadle-1, Bon Homme-3, Brookings-1, Buffalo-1, Butte-3, Codington-3, Davison-2, Hughes-1, Jackson-1, Kingsbury-1, Lawrence-5, McCook-1, Miner-1, Minnehaha-2, Moody-4, Roberts-1, Spink-3, Union-1.

Glacial Lakes hospital beds being occupied by COVID-19 patients as well as Minnehaha and Pennington counties: Walworth: 4 (+0) Occupied Beds; Potter: 2 (-0) Occupied Beds; Hughes: 18 (+4) Occupied Beds, 5 (+0) ICU Beds, 2 (+1) Ventilation; Hand: 4 (-1) Occupied Beds; Faulk: 3 (-2) Occupied Beds; Edmunds: 1 (-1) Occupied Bed; Brown: 33 (-3) Occupied Beds, 2 (-0) ICU, 0 (-0) Ventilation; Spink: 2 (-1) Occupied Beds; Day: 0 (-0) Occupied Beds; Marshall: 1 (+1) Occupied Beds; Grant: 4 (-1) Occupied Beds; Codington: 21 (-2) Occupied Beds, 5 (-1) ICU, 4 (+2) Ventilation; None (some counties have no hospitals): Clark, Hyde, Stanley, Sully, Campbell, McPherson, Roberts; Minnehaha: 278 (+1) Occupied Beds, 69 (+11) ICU, 43 (+3)

Ventilation; Pennington: 69 (-0) Occupied Beds, 10 (-0) ICU, 7 (-1) Ventilation.

Just looking at annual deaths in South Dakota. In 2018, death totals were: Heart 1797, Cancer 1632, CLRD 598, accident 452, Alzheimer's 437, stroke 387, diabetes 252, I&P 246, liver 185, suicide 168, total 7971. And COVID will now skew those numbers. If 76% have underlying issues, we may never know what they might have died from. Looking back at 2018 figures, Covid will look to be the third leading cause of death this year, behind heart and cancer.

Brown County:

Total Positive: +68 (3142) Positivity Rate: 10.2%

Total Tests: +664 (24,935)

Total Individuals Tested: +272 (12,962)

Recovered: +31 (2,439)

Active Cases: +36 (691)

Ever Hospitalized: +3 (179)

Deaths: +0 (12)

Percent Recovered: 77.6%

Hospital Reports:

Avera St. Luke's: Covid-19 Occupied 22 (-4); ICU 0 (-0), Ventilation 0 (0).

Sanford Aberdeen: Covid-19 Occupied 11 (+1); ICU 2 (-0), Ventilation 0 (-0)

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

Marshall County Healthcare: Covid-19 Occupied: 1 (+1).

South Dakota:

Positive: +1328 (71,070 total) Positivity Rate:

15.9%

Total Tests: 8373 (552,150 total)

Total Individuals Tested: 3600 (306,869)

Hospitalized: +71 (3993 total). 574 currently hospitalized -4)

Deaths: +36 (741 total)

Recovered: +769 (51,922 total)

Active Cases: +523 (18,407)

Percent Recovered: 73.1%

Total COVID-19 Occupied Beds: 574 (-3), Black Hills Region 103 (+3), Glacial Lakes Region 93 (-6) Sioux Empire Region 298 (-2), South Central Plains 80 (+1).

ICU Units: Total 107 (+12), BH 11 (-0), GL 12 (-1), SE 70 (+11), SCP 14 (+2).

Ventilation: Total 56 (+5), BH 7 (-1), GL 6 (+3), SE 43 (+3), SCP 0 (-0).

Staffed Hospital Bed Capacity: 21% Covid, 47% Non-Covid, 31% Available

ICU Bed Capacity: 50% Covid, 37% Non-Covid, 13% Available

Staffed Adult + Pediatric ICU Bed Capacity: 71% Occupied, 29% Available

Ventilator Capacity: 13% Covid, 15% Non-Covid, 72% Available

Beadle (25) +27 positive, +12 recovered (606 active cases)

Brookings (15) +37 positive, +22 recovered (505 active cases)

Brown (12): +67 positive, +31 recovered (691 active cases)

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Clark (1): +10 positive, +2 recovered (62 active cases)

Clay (9): +31 positive, +10 recovered (263 active cases)

Codington (37): +56 positive, +15 recovered (553 active cases)

Davison (19): +80 positive, +24 recovered (868 active cases)

Day (5): +7 positive, +5 recovered (86 active cases)

Edmunds (1): +8 positive, +5 recovered (51 active cases)

Faulk (8): +1 positive, +2 recovered (34 active cases)

Grant (5): +17 positive, +6 recovered (146 active cases)

Hanson (1): +6 positive, +2 recovered (68 active cases)

Hughes (14): +63 positive, +21 recovered (421 active cases)

Lawrence (18): +22 positive, +38 recovered (452 active cases)

Lincoln (43): +59 positive, +63 recovered (1273 active cases)

Marshall (3): +9 positive, +5 recovered (44 active cases)

McCook (11): +8 positive, +6 recovered (187 active cases)

McPherson (1): +5 positive, +7 recovery (43 active case)

Minnehaha (151): +234 positive, +190 recovered (4432 active cases)

Potter: +10 positive, +7 recovered (63 active cases)

Roberts (16): +20 positive, +5 recovered (161 active cases)

Spink (11): +17 positive, +3 recovered (143 active cases)

Walworth (10): +15 positive, +6 recovered (113 active cases)

NORTH DAKOTA

COVID-19 Daily Report, Nov. 20:

- 15.6% rolling 14-day positivity
- 1,408 new positives
- 9,392 susceptible test encounters
- 289 currently hospitalized (+13)
- 9,915 active cases (-216)
- 818 total deaths (+23)

Yesterday

Today

Global Cases
57,011,978
11,718,867 US
9,004,365 India
5,981,767 Brazil
2,137,096 France
2,023,025 Russia
1,541,574 Spain
1,456,946 United Kingdom
1,349,434 Argentina
1,308,528 Italy
1,225,490 Colombia
1,019,543 Mexico
939,931 Peru

Global Cases
57,626,994
11,913,945 US
9,050,597 India
6,020,164 Brazil
2,160,345 France
2,047,563 Russia
1,556,730 Spain
1,477,230 United Kingdom
1,359,042 Argentina
1,345,767 Italy
1,233,444 Colombia
1,025,969 Mexico
943,917 Peru

Global Deaths
1,362,424
252,564 deaths US
168,061 deaths Brazil
132,162 deaths India
100,104 deaths Mexico
53,870 deaths United Kingdom
47,870 deaths Italy
47,201 deaths France
43,417 deaths Iran

Global Deaths
1,373,258
254,424 deaths US
168,613 deaths Brazil
132,726 deaths India
100,823 deaths Mexico
54,381 deaths United Kingdom
48,569 deaths Italy
48,341 deaths France
43,896 deaths Iran

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County	Positive Cases	Recovered Cases	Negative Persons	Deceased	Community Spread	% RT-PCR Test Positivity Rate (Weekly)
Aurora	321	212	763	3	Substantial	52.13%
Beadle	2093	1462	4469	25	Substantial	32.61%
Bennett	293	217	1016	5	Substantial	10.92%
Bon Homme	1288	1106	1677	13	Substantial	41.51%
Brookings	2204	1684	7713	15	Substantial	23.64%
Brown	3142	2439	9820	12	Substantial	26.90%
Brule	512	377	1548	5	Substantial	41.57%
Buffalo	352	303	800	6	Substantial	29.69%
Butte	642	489	2420	12	Substantial	31.06%
Campbell	97	83	178	1	Moderate	31.82%
Charles Mix	703	482	3228	1	Substantial	22.72%
Clark	218	155	750	1	Substantial	11.56%
Clay	1198	926	3785	9	Substantial	29.44%
Codington	2403	1813	7305	37	Substantial	31.54%
Corson	336	277	821	3	Substantial	55.26%
Custer	480	366	1945	5	Substantial	25.52%
Davison	2156	1269	5031	19	Substantial	37.69%
Day	297	196	1338	5	Substantial	47.20%
Deuel	272	215	870	2	Substantial	34.88%
Dewey	720	386	3409	2	Substantial	30.02%
Douglas	269	193	731	5	Substantial	23.02%
Edmunds	221	169	815	1	Substantial	19.31%
Fall River	340	246	2003	7	Substantial	21.03%
Faulk	268	226	545	8	Substantial	31.25%
Grant	522	371	1682	5	Substantial	32.61%
Gregory	396	284	931	17	Substantial	32.00%
Haakon	131	105	448	3	Moderate	7.77%
Hamlin	403	249	1331	0	Substantial	18.53%
Hand	261	176	632	1	Substantial	41.30%
Hanson	207	138	520	1	Substantial	41.56%
Harding	64	59	125	0	Minimal	30.77%
Hughes	1483	1048	4717	14	Substantial	32.26%
Hutchinson	483	304	1766	3	Substantial	24.50%

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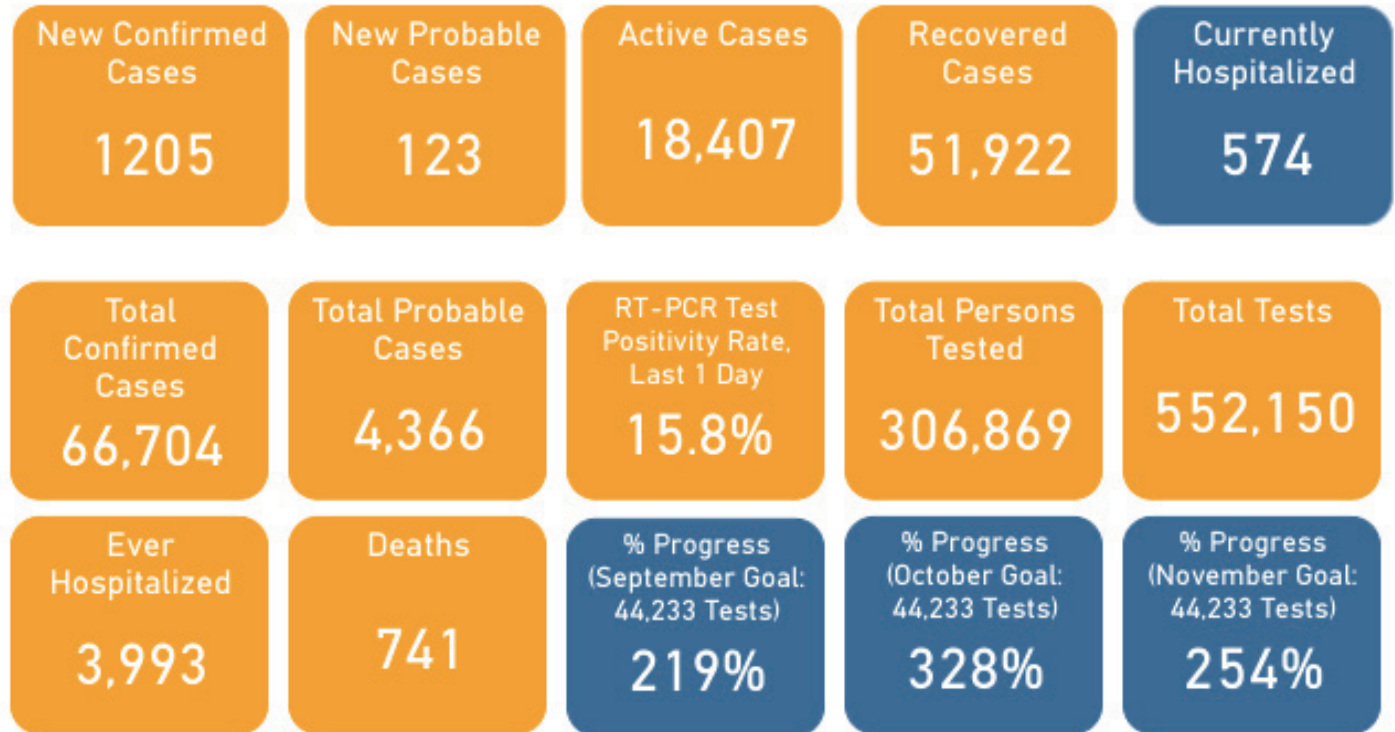
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Hyde	109	66	330	0	Substantial	51.11%
Jackson	183	140	793	6	Substantial	30.30%
Jerauld	227	162	420	13	Substantial	29.55%
Jones	53	40	148	0	Moderate	40.00%
Kingsbury	391	251	1186	8	Substantial	22.60%
Lake	754	526	2116	9	Substantial	43.88%
Lawrence	1779	1309	6417	18	Substantial	24.00%
Lincoln	4834	3518	14824	43	Substantial	36.03%
Lyman	412	320	1509	8	Substantial	24.82%
Marshall	138	91	856	3	Substantial	38.04%
McCook	546	348	1206	11	Substantial	36.01%
McPherson	122	78	444	1	Substantial	17.83%
Meade	1541	1177	5779	12	Substantial	22.83%
Mellette	149	107	595	1	Substantial	50.00%
Miner	179	139	446	4	Substantial	35.14%
Minnehaha	18247	13664	58554	151	Substantial	30.61%
Moody	374	252	1429	10	Substantial	40.00%
Oglala Lakota	1498	1104	5824	17	Substantial	29.01%
Pennington	7608	5519	28332	61	Substantial	27.42%
Perkins	139	86	518	0	Substantial	27.91%
Potter	233	170	642	0	Substantial	16.39%
Roberts	624	447	3494	16	Substantial	23.10%
Sanborn	228	127	509	1	Substantial	42.86%
Spink	504	350	1720	11	Substantial	16.22%
Stanley	207	125	665	0	Substantial	28.33%
Sully	82	53	194	2	Substantial	43.48%
Todd	803	611	3499	10	Substantial	38.46%
Tripp	440	319	1205	2	Substantial	44.81%
Turner	739	539	2047	35	Substantial	25.00%
Union	1127	846	4585	20	Substantial	21.21%
Walworth	420	297	1419	10	Substantial	31.33%
Yankton	1450	1020	6816	8	Substantial	30.93%
Ziebach	155	96	597	4	Substantial	24.00%
Unassigned	0	0	1549	0		

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South Dakota



AGE GROUP OF SOUTH DAKOTA COVID-19 CASES

Age Range	# of Cases	# of Deaths
0-9 years	2350	0
10-19 years	7655	0
20-29 years	13755	2
30-39 years	11975	9
40-49 years	10173	15
50-59 years	10045	46
60-69 years	7889	97
70-79 years	4066	155
80+ years	3162	417

SEX OF SOUTH DAKOTA COVID-19 CASES

Sex	# of Cases	# of Deaths
Female	37103	364
Male	33967	377

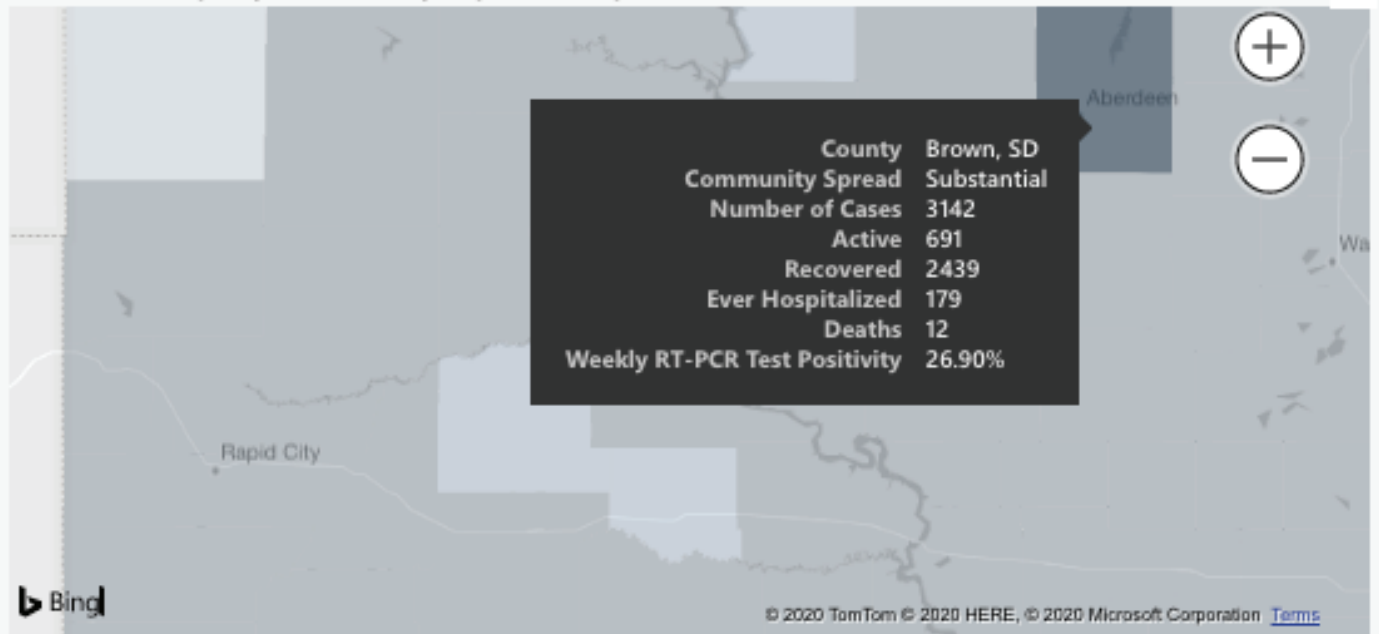
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Brown County

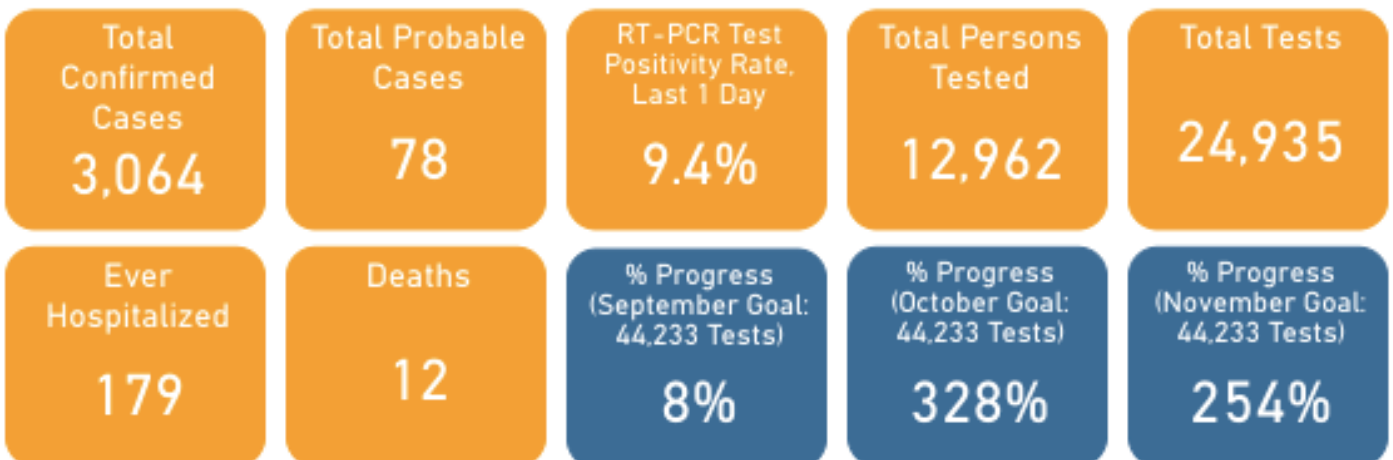


Community Spread Map by County of Residence



Community Spread ● Minimal ● Moderate ● Substantial

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



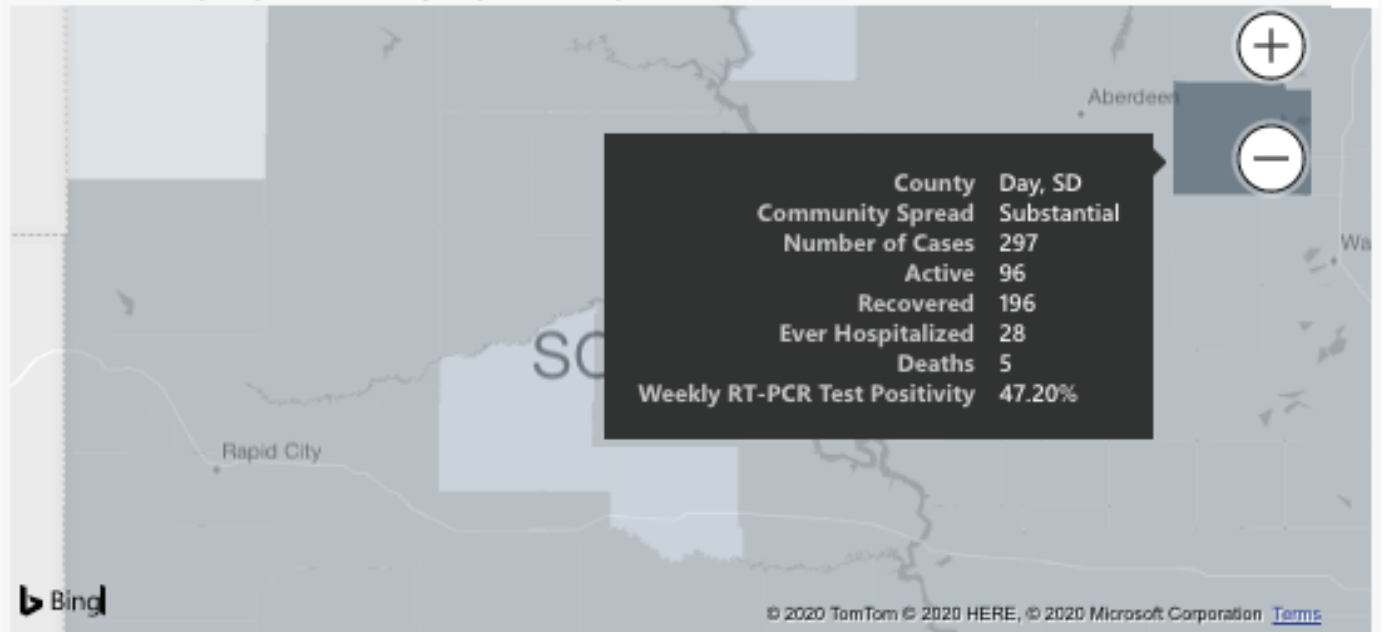
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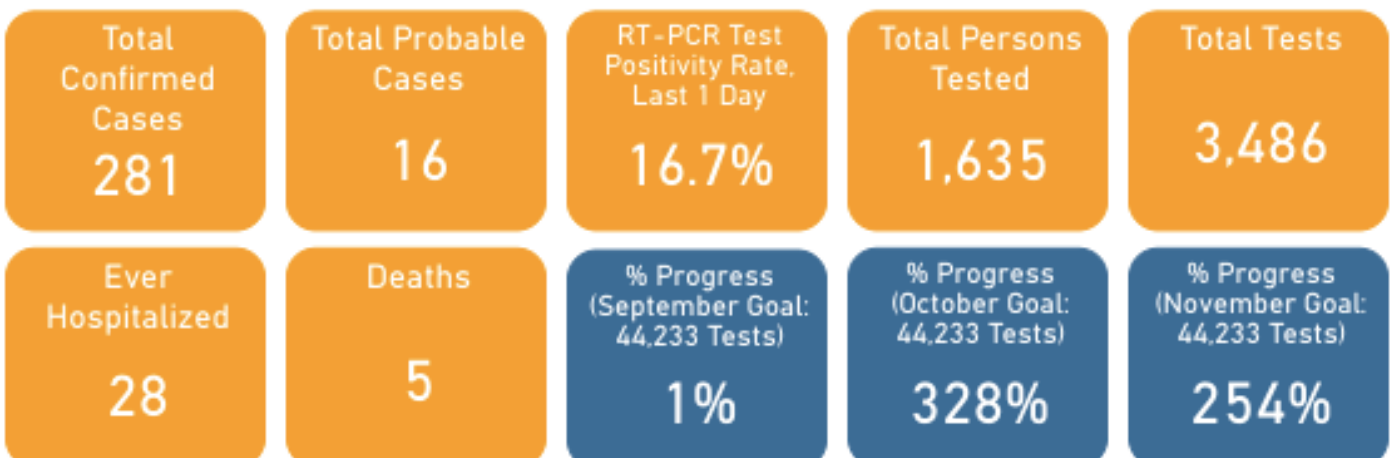
Day County



Community Spread Map by County of Residence



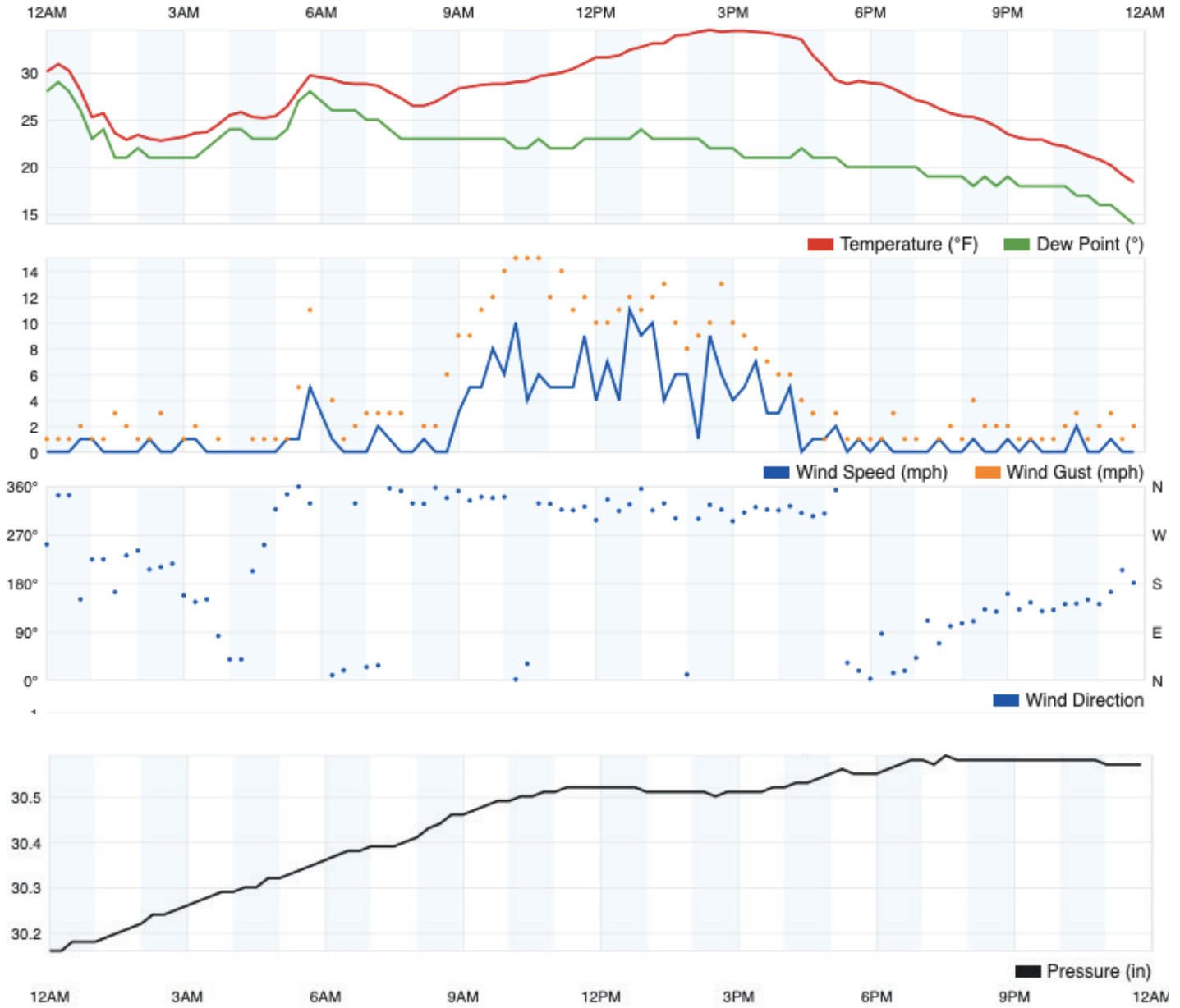
Hover over a county to see its details, or click county to update the orange boxes.



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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Today



Sunny then
Chance Rain

High: 49 °F

Tonight



Rain/Snow
Likely then
Mostly Cloudy

Low: 26 °F

Sunday



Sunny

High: 43 °F

Sunday
Night



Mostly Clear

Low: 21 °F

Monday



Partly Sunny
and Breezy

High: 44 °F

Weak System Mid-Weekend



High temperatures remain normal-above normal

Saturday: Mid-40s to low 50s

Sunday: Upper-30s to mid 40s

Monday: Low-40s to mid 50s

Lows drop below freezing



Becoming cloudy by Saturday afternoon, light rain developing

Light rain/snow mix can't be ruled out as temps cool Saturday evening into early Sunday morning across portions of central/northeast SD and west central MN.

 NATIONAL WEATHER SERVICE
OCEANIC AND ATMOSPHERIC ADMINISTRATION

Updated: 11/20/2020 1:46 PM Central

The upcoming weekend will be bookended by quiet and dry weather but a weak system will cross the region through the mid portion of the weekend and deliver some light precip to some of us. Clouds will be on the increase by Saturday afternoon with some light rain developing across portions of central South Dakota. This precip will move into northeast South Dakota and west central Minnesota by day's end. As temps cool after dark Saturday, a rain/snow mix or light snow will be possible. This system doesn't look very impactful, but there could be some light accumulations of snow around the SD/MN border area by early Sunday morning.

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Today in Weather History

November 21, 1985: Winds gusting to over 40 mph caused blizzard conditions over the western and central parts of South Dakota on the 21st and 22nd. In addition to the existing snow cover, 1-2 inches of new snow fell and when blown by the wind, reduced visibilities to zero at times. Many roads were drifted shut by the blowing and drifting snow in the western part of the state.

November 21, 2003: Heavy snow of 6 to 10 inches fell from the late afternoon to the late evening hours of the 21st and into the early morning hours on the 22nd. Some snowfall amounts included 4 inches in Browns Valley, 2S Ashton, and Britton; 5 inches at Timber Lake, Blunt, 6 SE McIntosh, and Pollock; 6 inches at Clark, McLaughlin, 14 NNE Isabel, 17 WSW Fort Pierre and Miller; 7 inches at Castlewood, 1 W Highmore, and 4 NW Onida; and 8 inches north of Goodwin, at Ree Heights, at Eagle Butte, and near Troy. Thirteen inches of snow fell in Watertown.

1992: The November 21st – 23rd tornado outbreak was the 3rd largest outbreak in recorded history and one of the longest continuous outbreaks ever recorded. There was no break in tornado activity from 1:30 pm on the 21st when the tornadoes started in Texas until 7:30 am on the 23rd when the last tornadoes lifted in North Carolina. On this date, severe thunderstorms spawned six tornadoes within 70 minutes in the Houston metro area in Texas. At one time, there were three on the ground in Harris County. The strongest, an F4, tracked 20 miles through the eastern suburbs of Houston destroying 200 homes and damaging 1,000 more. In total, 23 tornadoes struck Mississippi and Alabama. An F4 tornado killed 12 people on a 128-mile track through 7 Mississippi counties. The deadliest tornado of 1992, an F4 tornado killed 12 people on a 128-mile path through 7 counties in Mississippi, one of the bodies was blown a quarter mile into a tree.

1798 - A four day storm was in progress in the northeastern U.S. The storm dropped a foot of snow on New York City and New Haven, and as much as three feet in Maine and New Hampshire. The snowstorm ushered in a long and severe winter, in some places the ground remained covered with snow until the following May. (David Ludlum)

1967 - Excessive rains in southern California caused the most severe flooding and the most damaging mud slides in 33 years. Downtown Los Angeles received eight inches of rain, and 14 inches fell in the mountains. (David Ludlum)

1985 - Hurricane Kate made landfall during the evening hours near Mexico Beach, FL. Wind gusts to 100 mph were reported at Cape San Blas FL. It was the latest known hurricane to hit the U.S. so far north. (The Weather Channel)

1987 - Squalls in the Lower Great Lakes Region and the Upper Ohio Valley produced 14 inches of snow at Snowshoe WV, and nearly eight inches at Syracuse NY. Eleven cities in the eastern U.S. reported record low temperatures for the date. Record lows included 21 degrees at Pinson AL, 9 degrees at Syracuse NY, and 8 degrees at Binghamton NY. Gale force winds lash the Middle and Northern Atlantic Coast, and the strong northwesterly winds produced wind chill readings as cold as 30 degrees below zero. Winds gusting to 60 mph at Trumansburg NY toppled a chimney onto a nearby truck. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - High winds accompanied rain and snow in the northeastern U.S. Caribou ME received eight inches of snow in six hours, and Fort Kent ME was blanketed with a total of fourteen inches of snow. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 - The storm which produced thunderstorms and high winds in the northeastern U.S. the previous day, produced snow and high winds in New England, with blizzard conditions reported in Maine. Winds gusted to 55 mph at Boston MA, and reached 58 mph at Augusta ME, and hurricane force winds were reported off the coast of Maine. Snowfall totals ranged up to 18 inches at Vanceboro ME, with 17 inches at South Lincoln VT. There were thirty-five storm-related injuries in Maine. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

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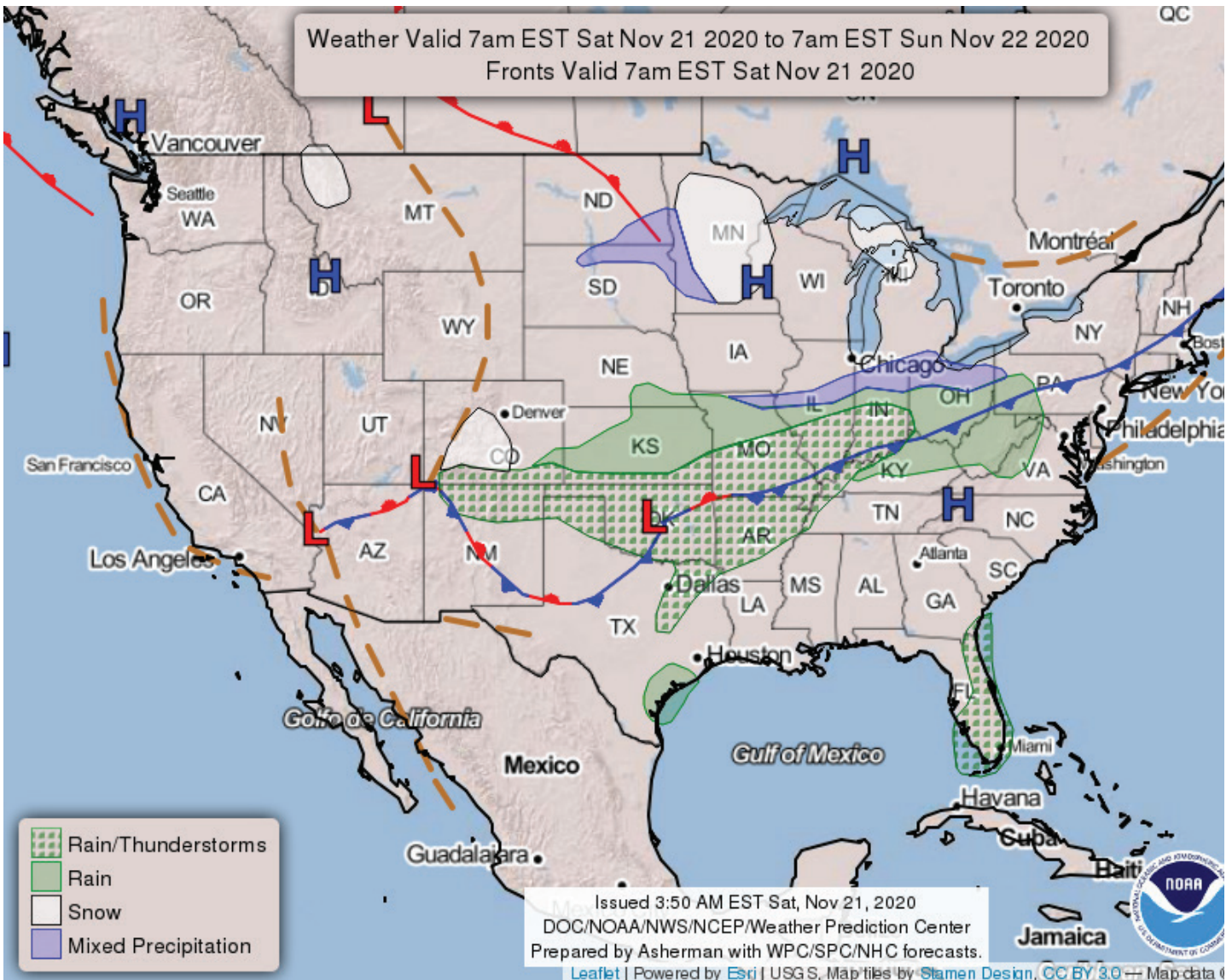
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Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 35 °F at 2:19 PM
Low Temp: 18 °F at 11:49 PM
Wind: 15 mph at 9:50 AM
Precip: .00

Today's Info

Record High: 65° in 1917, 1960
Record Low: -18° in 1964
Average High: 36°F
Average Low: 16°F
Average Precip in Nov.: 0.53
Precip to date in Nov.: 0.06
Average Precip to date: 21.00
Precip Year to Date: 16.40
Sunset Tonight: 4:58 p.m.
Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:43 a.m.



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WORKING WITH GOD

George Washington Carver was a botanist, educator, inventor, and scientist. As the son of a slave, he was aware of the difficulty facing farmers, knowing that they needed more than cotton for their fields. He became interested in peanuts. Soon he realized that there was no market for them. Needing help, he turned to God, in prayer.

One day he prayed, "Mr. Creator, why did You make the peanut?"

Later in life he said: "God led me into the laboratory and together we got down to work." Before he died, his research and influence produced over 300 products from peanuts including cosmetics, dyes, plastics, gasoline, and nitroglycerine. He published many books, including one with over 100 recipes using peanuts.

James has an interesting bit of advice. He said, "If you need wisdom - if you want to know what God wants you to do, ask Him and He will gladly tell you." True wisdom begins with respect for God and His laws, leads to right living in the sight of God, and enables us to align our goals with the goals God has for us. When we do this, we honor God, and in His time, He will honor us. We may begin with something as small as a peanut, but only God knows where it will end.

Prayer: Help us, Father, to look to You for Your wisdom and insight in all that we do, knowing it is always available. And, also give us patience and perseverance to work with You for Your glory. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: James 1:5 If you need wisdom, ask our generous God, and he will give it to you. He will not rebuke you for asking.

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2020 Groton SD Community Events

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

News from the Associated Press

Minnesota woman left warning signs about man who killed her

By NICK FERRARO St. Paul Pioneer Press

APPLE VALLEY, Minn. (AP) — In her Apple Valley condominium, Faye Brown kept a folder with the words “Harassment Documentation” written on the cover. Inside the folder, which had grown to be 2 inches thick, Brown chronicled more than a year’s worth of incidents she had with neighbor Raymond Ronald Rosenbaum.

Brown had gathered copies of the police reports and calls for service and notes on Rosenbaum’s behavior toward her, which she described as confrontational and aggressive. One of her last additions to the folder was a copy of a harassment restraining order she had filed against Rosenbaum on Sept. 8.

Brown and Rosenbaum lived directly across the hallway from each other on the second floor at Morningview Condominiums, which is a block west of Cedar Avenue off West 157th Street.

“I am completely terrified,” Brown wrote in her petition for the restraining order, which was granted by a Dakota County district judge the same day she filed it. “I cannot leave my apartment without first looking around, and then trying to quietly sneak out so as to avoid (Rosenbaum).”

Brown’s worst fears played out less than two months later. On Nov. 4, police say the 51-year-old Rosenbaum — armed with a .40-caliber handgun — shot and killed Brown in her condo and critically injured another neighbor before taking his own life in his condo.

Brown, 52, died of a gunshot wound to the torso. The surviving neighbor, who has not been identified by authorities, has been released from the hospital and is expected to make a full recovery.

Brown’s father said she called him a month before the killing and gave a chilling foreshadow of her fate, the St. Paul Pioneer Press reported.

“She said, ‘Dad, he’s going to kill me.’ I gave her all the daddy things to do, you know,” said Mike Bruzenak of Bloomington. “She had pepper spray. And I got after her about a year ago to keep notes on everything — and she certainly listened to me.”

For Bruzenak, the folder represents his daughter’s cries for help.

“She did so much work to save her life,” Bruzenak said. He adds that more should have been done by police.

Apple Valley police say they were limited in what they could do with Rosenbaum, and that his volatile behavior and refusal to accept the help they offered highlights the struggle law enforcement face when interacting with people with a history of mental health issues.

“There was nothing on this night specifically that would have led us to predict what would have happened,” police Capt. Nick Francis said. “And I think it just goes to show the true challenge of the mental health crisis in our community and our ability to interact with these folks. Mental health can change day by day and minute by minute.”

Apple Valley police have yet to publicly release a motive for the killing, other than to say that they had responded to the condominium building a number of times over incidents relating to Rosenbaum’s mental health. None of them were deemed to be criminal, Francis said.

In her court petition, Brown wrote that she believed Rosenbaum targeted her because of her position as a board member of the condominium association.

Brown wrote that Rosenbaum banged on her door on multiple occasions at odd hours, including at 4:30 a.m. on June 7, until she responded and how he would tell her about an “alleged repair” or a concern he had over something in the building.

Other times, Rosenbaum stood in the hallway “for no other reason than to stare at me coming or going from my unit,” Brown wrote.

“Several other board members have witnessed (Rosenbaum’s) behavior toward me in the common areas of the condominium as well,” she wrote. “They have asked (Rosenbaum) to leave me alone and not interact

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with me, but the behavior has only increased and escalated over the last year. It feels like any attempt to calm (Rosenbaum) down only ignites him and causes him to attack me even more."

Brown wrote that Rosenbaum's harassing and "episodic" behavior began in April 2019 with him defacing a posting by management in a common area of the building by writing that she was a liar and "unfit for the board." She claimed it intensified with Rosenbaum accusing her several times of spying on him; staring, yelling and screaming at her; installing a loud motion sensor with an alarm in his front entry doorway in the hallway; and hanging black tarps to cover all his windows.

One day, she wrote, Rosenbaum opened his door and accused Brown of "making the floors bob up and down" and since she was on the board, "I better make it stop."

A judge granted Brown's request for a restraining order after concluding there were reasonable grounds to believe that Rosenbaum had "engaged in harassment" by following, monitoring or pursuing Brown, and that he made "uninvited visits" to her and "frightened" her with threatening behavior.

The two-year court order prohibited Rosenbaum from being within 2 feet of Brown, except when passing in the hallway to access his home or common areas of the building.

Rosenbaum also called police several times. This past October, he reported that utility workers who were burying lines in the ground could be "conducting surveillance," according to the incident report.

"Ray sounded paranoid," an officer wrote in her report. "I spoke to Leanne from Crisis. Ray was not showing any signs that he can't care for himself, nor was he a threat to himself or others."

Rosenbaum's unpredictable behavior turned from harassing to dangerous the night before the shooting, according to Jeff Dally, Brown's boyfriend who lives in the condo building.

The couple had gone for a walk and upon returning home, Dally escorted Brown to her apartment.

"With all these Ray incidents, I would routinely walk her up to her place," said Dally, who is also a board member of the condominium association.

Once at his first-floor condo, he stepped outside onto his patio and "that's when a couple rocks zinged right past my head," Dally said.

He said he looked around to see where they came from and walked to the parking lot, where he saw Rosenbaum.

"I asked Ray if he knew anything about these rocks," Dally said, "and he admitted to throwing them. He admitted to doing it and he said the reason why he was doing it was because I was up on his balcony making his lights stay on. He's on the second floor and had put up motion-sensor lights."

Dally said he called the police around 6:30 p.m. and that an officer spoke with Rosenbaum, who admitted there was a confrontation but denied throwing rocks. Dally told the officer that he wanted to press charges.

"At that point, that was the first time that any altercation had become any sort of violence or physical in nature," Dally said.

According to Dally, the officer said there was no justification to arrest Rosenbaum because Dally was not hit by the rocks and there was no property damage.

"And because he denied throwing them, it was basically my word against his," Dally said.

The following night, Dally and Brown again went on a walk at a nearby park and once home, he escorted her to her condo. He wouldn't see her again.

"That was it. We said goodnight at the door and that was it," Dally said. "What happened after that, I only can get bits and pieces of information about."

According to police, around 8:30 p.m. Rosenbaum reported that Brown was going in and out of her apartment too much.

"An officer called and spoke with him and he kind of gave limited information about what his chief complaint was," Capt. Francis said. "But when it came down to it, it wasn't anything that was illegal behavior and was something that typically would be referred to apartment management."

Soon, a verbal altercation broke out in the hallway between Rosenbaum and Brown. Door slamming caught the attention of other residents, who stepped in to try to defuse the situation. But Rosenbaum grabbed his gun from his condo and began firing, according to police.

Francis said it's not clear what set off Rosenbaum.

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"It's hard to say whether or not the door opening and closing prompted him to act in that way," he said. "Just based on the information that was provided by him, it didn't lead us to believe it was anything to really put him in crisis."

For Dally, parts of his girlfriend's last moments are best not known.

"I'll be honest, there's some things maybe I don't want to know," he said. "It's a nightmare beyond words, it really is."

As the incidents continued, Brown and Dally wanted to know more about Rosenbaum, who they said didn't seem to have a job or a vehicle.

"More than anything, we were just always very, very worried about what the man was capable of," Dally said. "We wanted to know if he had a violent past."

Three months ago, Brown hired a private investigator to look into Rosenbaum's background. The investigator learned that he was from South Dakota and was divorced and had three children, who are now adults.

"That's about it, all we know," Dally said.

Besides a couple of seat-belt violations, Rosenbaum did not have any criminal convictions in Minnesota. Apple Valley investigators did not find any criminal history in other states, Francis said.

Contacted last week, Rosenbaum's sister, Paula Twiss, said that she was not ready to talk about him or what happened.

"It's a shock for all of us to even know what occurred, even happened, because that isn't our brother, my brother," she said. "It's not who he is. So we're still trying to understand what happened."

As far as his past, he was from Rapid City, South Dakota, and then moved to the Twin Cities, she said.

Dakota County property records show that Rosenbaum bought his condo in August 2017.

"At this point, I'm not going to elaborate on anything because we are still trying to put pieces together," Twiss said. "There are things we don't understand and may never understand. There are a lot of unanswered questions and a lot of things that we're still trying to process because ... it's an unfortunate situation for everybody, and I feel bad for the other family and the other person that was injured. I just don't know."

Rosenbaum was on the radar of both the police department and the company that manages the homeowners association, Eagan-based Community Association Group LLC.

In August, Brown spoke with Apple Valley crime prevention specialist Pam Walter about Rosenbaum. Walter followed up with an email in which she explained that "this type of situation is difficult for officers to respond to as they need to see clear violation/behavior in order to act on it (citation or arrest)."

She advised Brown to look into obtaining a harassment restraining order, and to continue to contact police when any repeated actions of harassment by Rosenbaum were witnessed. She told her to continue to inform the association of negative contact with Rosenbaum so they would be able to take action through warning letters or fines after repeated violations of association rules and regulations.

The association's management company did just that in October 2019, notifying Rosenbaum that the motion sensor and noise emitter that he installed outside his hallway door was an association violation. According to Brown's order-of-protection petition, they gave him five days to remove them, which he agreed to do, but not before telling the vice president of the association to "tell people to quit spying on me."

This past June, the association's counsel served Rosenbaum a letter relating to the incidents, warning him to stop harassing board members and that any further behavior "will not be tolerated and will be met with serious consequences."

Francis said last week that a police officer and a mental health professional from Dakota County Social Services did reach out to Rosenbaum through their joint coordinated response program, which began in the city in March and is aimed at bringing a more proactive response to mental health calls. Rosenbaum declined their help and offer of connecting him with services, Francis said.

"We cannot predict these and I don't know whether or not we can prevent them," he said. "But I know if we have this program up and running, we have a better chance at connecting people with the right resources to avoid these in the future."

Brown loved life and took care of others, her father said.

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After her mother died in 2017, she took on the responsibility of caring for her brother, Jeffery Hein, who is disabled and is deaf and cannot speak, he said.

"Faye took Jeffrey every weekend at first and took him everywhere to spark his wonderful imagination," Bruzenak said. "She had to slow down to every other weekend because it was taking all of her. She continued fighting for his care."

No one will feel more pain over her death than her 43-year-old brother, Bruzenak said.

"She was his life. Seeing how he lit up around her is the most powerful memory I have of her effect on the world," he said.

She recently started to talk to her father about what she wanted for the rest of her life.

"It was travel and a relationship," he said. "If there is anything here that is not tragedy, it is that she didn't know how little time she had, and she was just running full ahead into her future."

North Dakota marijuana backers eye neighbors for momentum

By JACK DURA The Bismarck Tribune

BISMARCK, N.D. (AP) —

Leaders of two ballot measure groups that have sought to legalize marijuana in North Dakota say legalization of the drug in Montana and South Dakota bodes well for their efforts.

Voters in the two neighboring states this month approved recreational marijuana, and South Dakota voters also OK'd medicinal pot. North Dakota already allows medical marijuana. The two groups that pushed marijuana legalization measures in North Dakota this year were unable to gather enough signatures for ballot placement due to the coronavirus pandemic, but they're already looking ahead.

Legalize ND, which sought to legalize marijuana through a statutory measure, gathered no signatures after March due to the pandemic, The Bismarck Tribune reported.

The group planned to collect signatures under the blue or "new normal" coronavirus risk level of Gov. Doug Burgum's "ND Smart Restart" plan for business and gathering protocols, but few counties have ever reached that level. The entire state is now orange or "high risk."

"I can't ask people to collect signatures in the middle of a pandemic, and from door-to-door contact across thousands of doors when we have literal viral vectors, I just can't," Legalize ND Chairman David Owen said.

He sees the neighboring states' passage of marijuana legalization as validating his group's yearslong assertion that "marijuana legalization is not a left-wing, right-wing issue. It's a commonsense issue."

A future North Dakota measure could be "100% successful," but the issue remains "when can we reasonably collect signatures?" Owen said.

Petitioners have a December deadline to submit 13,542 signatures for the June 2022 ballot, but supporters are looking to the 2021 Legislature, Owen said.

He would like to see a marijuana decriminalization bill "be discussed in earnest," and sees finding influential allies in the Republican-led Legislature as key. A full legalization bill is "not going to happen," he said. Supporters have some language drafted for various legislation.

The group that sought to legalize marijuana through the state constitution already is looking forward to 2022. The group couldn't meet the signature threshold for this November's ballot due to the pandemic inhibiting its efforts.

Group chairwoman Jody Vetter, of Bismarck, said supporters are "trudging forward," organizing a sponsoring committee and planning to collect signatures again for the same proposal.

The votes in Montana and South Dakota bode well for North Dakota and "the whole nation, really," Vetter said.

"In South Dakota a year and a half ago, the governor was vetoing hemp bills, so I'm really happy to hear that they were able to get medical and adult use on the ballot and passed," she said.

She plans to be involved in further decriminalization efforts but waits to see how the legislative session operates amid the pandemic.

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The Legislature's interim Judiciary Committee studied effects of legalizing marijuana. The committee produced a report that yielded no recommendations but included other states' regulatory schemes, tax structures, revenue accounting and some testimony.

The report, made public earlier this month, "speaks for itself," said Rep. Kim Koppelman, R-West Fargo, who chairs the House Judiciary Committee and sat on the interim committee.

Montana's and South Dakota's votes could affect future efforts in North Dakota, he said, also noting that North Dakota passed medical marijuana in 2016, and the 2019 Legislature "significantly lowered penalties for marijuana crimes, so North Dakota has acted."

"The question, I guess, is should it be an all-or-nothing scenario?" Koppelman said. "Should marijuana be completely legal for recreational purposes or should it be minimized as an offense, which is what we did last time, so I'm sure the discussion won't end there."

Owen said the report accomplishes little, and he criticized what he called its "funny accounting to push an agenda." He commends the report's information on other states' standards of impairment but sees contradictions with revenue accounting as to Colorado's financial impacts.

"It feels like two different people wrote this report, to be honest," Owen said.

He's pleased there were no recommendations. The study came about to parallel the expected ballot measures.

Vetter wishes the committee had sought more testimony and more recent data.

"It really didn't say too much in the study, actually," she said.

'Something very historical': Push for diverse Biden Cabinet

By ELLEN KNICKMEYER and MATTHEW DALY Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Native Americans are urging President-elect Joe Biden to make history by selecting one of their own to lead the powerful agency that oversees the nation's tribes, setting up one of several looming tests of Biden's pledge to have a Cabinet representative of Americans.

O.J. Semans is one of dozens of tribal officials and voting activists around the country pushing selection of Rep. Deb Haaland, a New Mexico Democrat and member of the Pueblo of Laguna, to become the first Native American secretary of interior. Tell Semans, a member of the Rosebud Sioux, that a well-regarded white lawmaker is considered a front-runner for the job, and Semans chuckles.

"Not if I trip him," Semans says.

African Americans, Mexican Americans, Asian Americans, Native Americans and other people of color played a crucial role in helping Biden defeat President Donald Trump. In return, they say they want attention on problems affecting their communities — and want to see more people who look like them in positions of power.

"It's nice to know that a Native American is under consideration," said Haaland, who says she is concentrating on her congressional work. "Sometimes we are invisible."

In Arizona, Alejandra Gomez was one of an army of activists who strapped on face masks and plastic face shields in 100-plus-degree heat to go door-to-door to get out the Mexican American vote. Intensive Mexican American organizing there helped flip that state to Democrats for the first time in 24 years.

"We are at a point where there was no pathway to victory" for Democrats without support from voters of color, said Gomez, co-executive director of the political group Living United for Change in Arizona. "Our terrain has forever changed in this country in terms of the electoral map.

"So we need to see that this administration will be responsive," she said.

Rep. Pramila Jayapal, D-Wash., co-chair of the Congressional Progressive Caucus, said it was important that Biden's Cabinet "reflects the country, and particularly his base that supports him," including women, racial and ethnic minorities and other groups.

The departments of defense, state, treasury, interior, agriculture, energy and health and human services and the Environmental Protection Agency are among Biden's Cabinet-level posts where women and people of color are considered among the top contenders. As with interior, where retiring New Mexico Sen. Tom

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Udall is thought to be a leading prospect, the candidacies of people of color are sometimes butting up against higher-profile white candidates.

House Majority Whip Jim Clyburn of South Carolina, whose February endorsement of Biden played a critical role in reviving the former vice president's struggling campaign, said he is confident Biden's Cabinet and White House staff will reflect the nation's diversity.

"I think Joe Biden has demonstrated he takes the concerns of African Americans seriously," said Clyburn, the highest-ranking Black member of Congress. "I expect him to be Lyndon Baines Johnson-like on civil rights."

At the Department of Agriculture and the Department of Housing and Urban Development, Ohio Rep. Marcia Fudge and California Rep. Karen Bass, respectively, are being considered. Fudge, a former chair of the Congressional Black Caucus, would be the first Black woman to lead agriculture, which oversees farm policy and billions of dollars in farm and food programs and runs the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program — better known as food stamps — that feeds millions of low-income households.

Fudge's main competitor is former North Dakota Sen. Heidi Heitkamp, who was long seen as the front-runner but faces growing opposition from progressives worried that she will favor big business interests at the sprawling department.

Clyburn, who is known to hold considerable sway with Biden, backs Fudge, calling her accomplished and experienced. "What you need is someone who understands the other side of agriculture," he said. "It's one thing to grow food, but another to dispense it, and nobody would be better at that than Marcia Fudge."

Biden has promised to pick a diverse leadership team. His running mate, California Sen. Kamala Harris, will be the nation's first female, first Black and first Asian American vice president.

In January, Biden assured a Native American candidate forum that he would "nominate and appoint people who look like the country they serve, including Native Americans."

Native Americans say they helped deliver a win in the battleground states of Wisconsin and Arizona and elsewhere, voting for Biden by margins that sometimes hit the high 80th percentiles and above. A record six Native American or Native Hawaiian lawmakers were elected to Congress.

For the Department of Interior, consideration of Udall — a political ally of Biden's for nearly 50 years who would be the second generation of his family to serve as interior secretary — is facing the historic candidacy of Haaland, a first-term congresswoman.

Asked if qualified white men with political seniority might have to step aside to make room for people of color, Udall told The Associated Press that Biden should be judged by his overall leadership team, including Cabinet secretaries and White House leaders.

"What you should look at a year or two years down the line is the leadership team at interior or EPA or agriculture," said Udall, whose late father, Stewart, served as interior secretary in the 1960s. "Do they look like a leadership team to represent America?"

The Interior Department deals with nearly 600 federally recognized tribes but also manages public lands stretching over nearly 20% of the United States, including oil and gas leasing on them. That makes the agency critical to Biden's pledge to launch ambitious programs controlling climate-destroying fossil fuel emissions.

Tribal officials concur there has never been a Native American as head of interior. The department's websites cite six Native American heads of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, which was transferred to the Interior Department from the War Department in 1849.

Haaland, vice chair of the House Committee for Natural Resources, also is getting support from many Democrats and progressives in Congress.

She told the AP that regardless of what job she had, she'd be working to "promote clean energy and protect our public lands."

The push for her appointment makes for what historian Katrina Phillips of Macalester College in St. Paul, Minnesota, says is "one of the first times we're seeing in public spheres such a broad push on Indigenous issues."

"We have finally reached the point where there's a broader American consensus ... recognizing Native

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people deserve a voice," said Phillips, a member of the Red Cliff Band of Lake Superior Ojibwe.

Government decisions on tribal issues made by "somebody that never had to live the life" would likely be different than decisions made by someone from the community, said Semans, who lives on the Rosebud Indian Reservation in South Dakota and helps run the Four Directions Native-voting project. Haaland's pick would be "something very historical."

"I have all kinds of respect for Mr. Udall. But there is not one rule or regulation that interior could change that would affect him or his family," Semans said. "Ever."

Knickmeyer reported from Oklahoma City. Follow Knickmeyer on Twitter at @knickmeyerellen and Daly at @MatthewDalyWDC.

SD Lottery

By The Associated Press undefined

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

Mega Millions

26-33-45-61-68, Mega Ball: 17, Megaplier: 3

(twenty-six, thirty-three, forty-five, sixty-one, sixty-eight; Mega Ball: seventeen; Megaplier: three)

Estimated jackpot: \$188 million

Powerball

Estimated jackpot: \$192 million

Friday's Scores

By The Associated Press

PREP VOLLEYBALL=

Class AA=

Championship State Semifinal=

Huron def. Sioux Falls Roosevelt, 25-14, 25-20, 26-24

Sioux Falls O'Gorman def. Sioux Falls Washington, 25-21, 25-22, 25-22

Consolation State Semifinal=

Aberdeen Central def. Harrisburg, 25-23, 25-23, 25-14

Watertown def. Brandon Valley, 25-21, 17-25, 25-16, 22-25, 15-11

Class A=

Championship State Semifinal=

Dakota Valley def. Parker, 25-14, 25-15, 25-18

Sioux Falls Christian def. Hamlin, 25-10, 25-13, 25-19

Consolation State Semifinal=

Madison def. Winner, 25-21, 22-25, 25-20, 25-18

Rapid City Christian def. Hill City, 25-21, 26-28, 21-25, 25-20, 15-12

Class B=

Championship State Semifinal=

Northwestern def. Colman-Egan, 25-18, 25-19, 25-20

Warner def. Chester, 23-25, 25-23, 25-18, 25-19

Consolation State Semifinal=

Bridgewater-Emery def. Corsica/Stickney, 25-17, 25-19, 14-25, 22-25, 15-11

Faulkton def. Hitchcock-Tulare, 25-18, 25-16, 25-20

Some high school volleyball scores provided by Scorestream.com, <https://scorestream.com/>

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Some governors ignore CDC advice on Thanksgiving gatherings

By TAMMY WEBBER Associated Press

Coronavirus infections are ravaging South Dakota, where more than half of tests have come back positive for weeks. Yet Gov. Kristi Noem won't require masks or take other measures to curb the spread, including urging families to limit Thanksgiving gatherings.

Oklahoma Gov. Kevin Stitt said he'll attend a college football game over the weekend and spend the holiday with his parents, noting that, "Oklahomans should be with their loved ones over Thanksgiving."

And in Tennessee, where hospital beds are filling up and some hospitals struggle to find enough nurses, Republican Gov. Bill Lee said he has no plans to impose restrictions, though he would "encourage Tennesseans to think hard" about celebrating together.

As the public health crisis spins out of control and hospitalizations and deaths soar, health experts have agonized for weeks over the potential for explosive virus spread from indoor celebrations. Yet several Republican governors in hard-hit states refuse to echo urgent pleas from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention for Americans to stay home next Thursday.

"We know what will happen. We know that three to four weeks from Thanksgiving, we will see an exacerbation of the outbreaks," said Dr. Georges Benjamin, executive director of the American Public Health Association, who called the governors' reluctance to impose restrictions or encourage people to stay home a "tragedy" motivated by politics.

The United States has had more than 11 million diagnosed infections and more than 253,000 deaths from the coronavirus since the start of the pandemic. And hospitals in many states are running out of beds and are short on nurses, including in the states where governors are reluctant to act.

"By not walking the talk .. I think they're sending a very dangerous message to their citizens," Benjamin said.

Yet some governors who for months echoed President Donald Trump's criticism of measures to control the virus are now relenting, including North Dakota Gov. Doug Burgum, who recently ordered the use of masks statewide.

And Republican and Democratic governors from several Midwestern states issued a joint video urging people to stay home for Thanksgiving and wear masks to slow the spread of the virus until a vaccine is widely available.

Ohio's Republican governor, Mike DeWine, and his wife, Fran, cancelled their annual Thanksgiving gathering at their farm in southwestern Ohio, saying it would be too risky for Fran DeWine's 94-year-old mother and two new grandchildren who are just days old.

Instead, they will celebrate with family via Zoom or FaceTime and deliver food or see family members from a distance as they pick up turkey, homemade rolls, pies and apple dumplings made by Fran DeWine.

Louisiana Gov. John Bel Edwards, a Democrat, is urging people to limit Thanksgiving gatherings, saying, "We ought to love our loved ones enough to not want to expose them to the dangers of COVID."

And Michigan's Democratic governor, Gretchen Whitmer, who has weathered backlash from residents over business closures and mask orders, said she will spend time on Thanksgiving with extended family on Zoom rather than in-person, and urges others to do the same.

Still, some governors say they're counting on residents to make up their own minds, even as cases in their states soar.

Noem even appeared to criticize measures in other states in a statement Friday, saying, "We won't stop or discourage you from thanking God and spending time together this Thanksgiving."

She said smaller gatherings "may be smarter this year" and that anyone who's sick or experiencing COVID-19 symptoms might want to stay home. CDC scientists believe that around 40% of people who are infected do not have obvious symptoms but can still spread the virus.

Iowa Gov. Kim Reynolds said it's a good idea to be especially mindful during Thanksgiving, but when asked her advice for people considering holding family gatherings she didn't discourage them.

"Just be conscientious of your surroundings, who you're bringing in and practice mitigation efforts," said Reynolds, a Republican whose state has surpassed 200,000 confirmed COVID-19 infections. "But Iowans

know what to do. They'll do the right thing. They're responsible."

Webber reported from Fenton, Michigan. Associated Press writers David Eggert in Lansing, Michigan; Andrew Welsh-Huggins in Columbus, Ohio; Scott McFetridge in Des Moines, Iowa; Melinda Deslatte in Baton Rouge, Louisiana; and Kimberlee Kruesi in Nashville, Tenn., contributed to this report.

Midwest health system CEO says he had virus, won't wear mask

By STEVE KARNOWSKI and DOUG GLASS Associated Press

MINNEAPOLIS (AP) — The head of one of the largest regional health systems in the Midwest has told his employees that he has recovered from COVID-19 and is back in the office — without a mask.

Sanford Health's president and chief executive, Kelby Krabbenhoft, said in an email Wednesday that he believes he's now immune to the disease for "at least seven months and perhaps years to come" and that he isn't a threat to transmit it to anyone, so wearing a mask would be merely for show.

The email from Krabbenhoft, who is not a physician, comes as hospitals throughout the region, including in his own network, are struggling to keep up with some of the country's worst surges of coronavirus patients. And it comes at a time when mask wearing remains a politicized issue in many states.

Sanford Health, based in Sioux Falls, South Dakota, has 46 hospitals and more than 200 clinics concentrated in South Dakota, North Dakota, Minnesota and Iowa. It employs about 50,000 people. The Dakotas have had the country's worst spread rates for several weeks, with Iowa close behind, while Minnesota is catching up.

"For me to wear a mask defies the efficacy and purpose of a mask and sends an untruthful message that I am susceptible to infection or could transmit it," Krabbenhoft wrote in the email, obtained by The Associated Press. "I have no interest in using masks as a symbolic gesture. ... My team and I have a duty to express the truth and facts and reality and not feed the opposite."

South Dakota Gov. Kristi Noem has refused to impose a statewide mask mandate. North Dakota Gov. Doug Burgum did so last week after months of pressure. Other Republican governors, including Iowa's Kim Reynolds, have started to shift on mask mandates as their hospitals fill. Minnesota's Democratic governor, Tim Walz, ordered one back in July.

Krabbenhoft did not immediately respond to a Friday interview request. But five top Sanford Health executives sent a follow-up email to employees Friday trying to walk back his statement.

"We know that words matter, and words have power, and we regret that the message left many frustrated and disappointed," said the letter from Chief Operating Officer Matt Hocks and others. They went on to say: "Whether you've had the virus or not, it is recommended that you wear a mask when you cannot be socially distanced. Our masking policy for Sanford Health remains unchanged."

In a separate statement, Executive Vice President Micah Aberson said Krabbenhoft's email was based on his own experience with COVID-19 and his personal opinions about the virus.

"They do not reflect the views of our health system as a whole," Aberson said. "Sanford Health's position is the same as it has always been — consistently wearing masks, avoiding crowds and staying home if you're sick are critical to preventing the spread of the virus."

Sanford Health requires clinic employees and hospital and clinic visitors to wear masks, according to its website. The executives' statements did not address whether Krabbenhoft would have to comply with the company's mask requirements.

The CEO did not explain in his email why he thinks he's immune for at least seven months. Scientists don't know yet whether having had the coronavirus once protects against future illness, or how long any protection might last. How long an infected person can spread the virus also is unclear, but scientists think that people usually clear it within roughly 10 days of the start of symptoms unless they have a weak immune system or certain other conditions.

Krabbenhoft did acknowledge that masks are a good idea for people who have not contracted the virus

and are therefore at risk of acquiring and then spreading it.

"It is important for them to know that masks are just plain smart to use and in their best interest," he wrote.

But Dr. Kathy Anderson, president of the North Dakota Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics, said Krabbenhoft's message was "definitely not helpful" and "an especially dangerous message to be sending right now in North Dakota."

It's hard for ordinary people to know what to believe given all the conflicting messages they're getting, Anderson said. And she said it's important for people to know he is not a physician.

"Leaders across the state and across the nation need to understand the power of leadership," Anderson said. "The power of leadership is not only in telling others what they need to do. The power of leadership is in modeling behavior that is necessary for others to follow."

Tessa Johnson, president of the North Dakota Nurses Association, called Krabbenhoft's message "disheartening."

"I think one of the things is that we have really tried hard to get the public's support for wearing a mask and social distancing," she said. "And when a public figure says the opposite, it just confuses people."

Krabbenhoft told the Sioux Falls Argus Leader for a story published Friday that he doesn't think South Dakota needs a mask mandate. He said his hospital system is well-positioned to handle any increase in COVID-19 patients before vaccines become widely available.

"At this point, we feel we've got this under control," Krabbenhoft said. "There's not a crisis."

But another major regional health system, Sioux Falls-based Avera, told a South Dakota lawmaker on Friday that it now supports mask mandates after stopping short of backing them before. In a letter to Democratic Rep. Linda Dube, an Avera executive said the organization was "compelled to change our stance" given the increase of patients with COVID-19, the fatigue of its frontline caregivers, and its support for a healthy workforce and keeping businesses and schools open.

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention advises people to wear masks because they help prevent people who are infected — whether they know it or not — from spreading the coronavirus. It also says masks can also protect wearers who are not infected, though to a lesser degree.

Associated Press reporter Stephen Groves in Sioux Falls contributed to this report.

Study: Motorcycle rally sparked COVID-19 cases in next state

By MIKE STOBBE AP Medical Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — When nearly a half-million motorcycle enthusiasts gathered in South Dakota this summer, health experts worried the gathering would ignite new outbreaks of coronavirus cases.

It did, according to a report Friday that looked at cases in neighboring Minnesota.

About one-third of counties ended up having at least one coronavirus case that was tied to August's Sturgis Motorcycle Rally, investigators reported in a study mainly conducted by Minnesota health officials and published by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Minnesota officials counted 86 cases that they said were related to the rally — 51 people who went to Sturgis and 35 who came into contact with those people later. Most did not suffer serious illnesses, but four were hospitalized and one died.

"These findings highlight the far-reaching effects that gatherings in one area might have on another area," the study authors wrote. "The motorcycle rally was held in a neighboring state that did not have policies regarding event size and mask use, underscoring the implications of policies within and across jurisdictions."

CDC officials did not immediately answer a question about any other research assessing the Sturgis rally's impact on other states.

The rally has been a source of contention between the governors of Minnesota and South Dakota. Earlier this month, Minnesota Gov. Tim Walz criticized South Dakota Gov. Kristi Noem for not taking more aggressive steps to slow the spread of the coronavirus.

Walz, a Democrat, said the Sturgis rally was “absolutely unnecessary.” Singling out Noem, who is a Republican, he said he wished the state had canceled the rally and imposed a statewide mask mandate, as Minnesota has.

In September, The Associated Press found that at least 290 people in 12 states tested positive for the coronavirus after attending the rally.

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.

Murder charges dropped in Fall River County case

HOT SPRINGS, S.D. (AP) — Relatives of a homicide victim say they are distraught after learning that murder charges have been dismissed against the defendant in the Fall River County case because a key witness was found to be incompetent to testify.

Moses Dubray was found fatally shot in January 2017 a day after he walked away from a minimum-security prison in Rapid City where he had served time for burglary.

Thirty-year-old Thomas Lucero was indicted eight months later for first-degree murder and an alternate second-degree murder charge, the Rapid City Journal reported.

Lucero was also indicted on an aggravated assault charge for allegedly using a gun to assault someone the same day Dubray was killed.

“It just sucks that there’s going to be no justice for my brother,” the victim’s sister, Irene “Jay R” Mabin, said through tears. “I wanted to know what exactly happened.”

Mabin said prosecutors told her the case was dropped because the assault victim, who is the key witness, has been deemed mentally incompetent.

Mabin said she and other family members were ready to testify and feel the prosecutors had enough evidence to proceed without the main witness.

Assistant Attorney General Scott Roetzel says the state hopes to refile charges if the key witness “becomes available.”

“This man is a dangerous man” and I will “pray for the next family he hurts,” Mabin said about Lucero. He remains behind bars on a robbery conviction from Minnehaha County. Lucero is eligible for parole in January.

Man convicted of killing father, son in 1984 granted parole

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — The South Dakota Board of Pardons and Paroles has granted the release of an 81-year-old man convicted of killing a father and son in 1984.

The board voted 5-4 Thursday to grant compassionate parole to Jennis Hofer, one of the few prisoners in the state to be considered for that type of release.

Board members say Hofer was granted parole this time because he does not pose a risk to the public, and the cost to keep him incarcerated with multiple medical conditions did not equal the interest in keeping him behind bars, the Argus Leader reported.

Hofer’s attorney, Raleigh Hansman, says Hofer will be returning home to family in Tea.

Hansman says Hofer has atrial fibrillation, congestive heart failure and diabetes and takes more than 30 pills a day. She says he has recovered from COVID-19 within the last 10 days after contracting it in prison.

Hofer pled guilty to manslaughter for fatally shooting Andrew Wipf Sr. and Andrew Wipf Jr. Deputy Attorney General Robert Mayer spoke on the behalf of the victims’ family urging the board to show compassion for the them and reject parole for Hofer.

Singapore-Hong Kong air travel bubble postponed

By ZEN SOO Associated Press

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HONG KONG (AP) — Singapore and Hong Kong on Saturday postponed the start of an air travel bubble meant to boost tourism for both cities, amid a spike in coronavirus infections in Hong Kong.

The travel bubble, originally slated to begin Sunday, will be delayed by at least two weeks, Hong Kong's minister of commerce and economic development, Edward Yau, said at a news conference.

The arrangement is meant to allow travelers between the two cities to travel without having to serve a quarantine as long as they complete coronavirus tests before and after arriving at their destinations, and fly on designated flights.

Hong Kong reported 43 new coronavirus cases on Saturday, including 13 untraceable local infections.

"For any scheme to be successful, they must fulfill the condition of securing public health, and also make sure that both sides would be comfortable and feel safe about the scheme," Yau said. "In light of the situation in Hong Kong, I think it's the responsible way to put this back for a while, and then sort of relaunch it at a suitable juncture."

Under the initial agreement, the air travel bubble was to be suspended if the number of untraceable local infections in either Singapore or Hong Kong exceeded five on a seven-day moving average. The current average of unlinked cases in Hong Kong is nearly four.

Although the average of five had not been reached in Hong Kong as of Saturday, the bubble was postponed after Yau and Singapore's transport minister, Ong Ye Kung, held discussions.

The postponement came after Hong Kong's top health official said Friday that the city had "probably entered" a new wave of cases.

Recent clusters of local infections in the city have spanned taxi drivers, a dance studio and hotels.

Hong Kong has confirmed a total of 5,561 cases, including 108 deaths. Singapore has reported 58,148 cases, but only 28 fatalities.

Prior to the postponement, Singapore said Saturday morning that travelers arriving from Hong Kong via the bubble would be required to take a coronavirus test on arrival. Originally, only people landing in Hong Kong were to be required to be tested.

Ong said in a Facebook post that the postponement is a "sober reminder that the COVID-19 virus is still with us."

"I can fully understand the disappointment and frustration of travellers who have planned their trips. But we think it is better to defer from a public health standpoint," he wrote.

Mortar shells hit Kabul residential areas; at least 8 dead

By TAMEEM AKHGAR Associated Press

KABUL, Afghanistan (AP) — About 23 mortar shells slammed into different parts of the Afghan capital on Saturday, killing at least eight people and wounding 31 others, an official said.

The shells were fired from two cars, Interior Ministry spokesperson Tariq Arian said. No one took immediate responsibility for the early morning attack that also targeted the posh Wazir Akbar Khan area of Kabul, which houses diplomatic missions.

At least one rocket landed in the Iranian Embassy compound. In a tweet, Iran's embassy in Kabul in confirmed that a rocket came down in the courtyard of the embassy compound and "a number of shrapnel" hit the embassy's main building, causing some damage to windows and equipment, without specifying the equipment.

"Fortunately the incident has no casualty and all the staff are in good health," said the tweet.

The Taliban issued a quick statement denying any responsibility for the attack. The Islamic State group affiliate also operates in the area and has claimed responsibility for recent assaults in Kabul including two devastating attacks on educational institutions that killed more than 50 people, many of them students.

As well as insurgent groups, there are several heavily armed warlords with militias living in Kabul with long-standing animosities against each other.

Pakistan, whose Prime Minister Imran Khan visited Kabul for the first time since his election in 2018, condemned the attack and warned "it is important to be vigilant against the spoilers who are working to

undermine the peace efforts." He did not identify "the spoilers."

The mortar barrage comes as representatives of the Afghan government and the Taliban continued to hold talks in Qatar, though progress has been slow. U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo is expected to press for a reduction in violence in his meetings with both Taliban and government negotiating teams later Saturday during a daylong stop in Doha. The Taliban have mostly ignored such previous requests.

Hours before the attack rattled Kabul, a bomb attached to a car killed one member of security personnel and wounded three others in an eastern neighborhood of the capital, said Kabul police spokesperson Ferdaws Faramarz.

Violence in Afghanistan has spiked in recent months with increasingly horrific attacks often claimed by the Islamic State group affiliate. Still the Taliban have been waging near daily assaults on beleaguered Afghan security forces.

There have been increasing calls for a cease-fire if peace talks are to continue. The Taliban have been steadfast in their refusal, demanding that any cease-fire be part of the negotiations.

Asia Today: South Korea mulls steps as new virus cases rise

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — South Korea has reported 386 new cases of the coronavirus in a resurgence that could force authorities to reimpose stronger social distancing restrictions after easing them in October to spur a faltering economy.

The figures released by the Korea Disease Control and Prevention Agency on Saturday raised the country's total number of confirmed cases to 30,403, including 503 deaths.

More than 270 of the new cases have come from the Seoul metropolitan area, where health workers have struggled to track transmissions in schools, private tutoring academies and religious facilities.

Infections were also reported in other major cities, including Busan, Daejeon, Gwangju and Asan.

South Korea has so far managed to weather the pandemic without major lockdowns, relying instead on an aggressive test-and-quarantine campaign and mask-wearing.

Officials eased distancing measures to the lowest level in October, which allowed high-risk venues such as nightclubs and karaoke bars to reopen and fans to return to professional sports.

But the Korean Society of Infectious Diseases said Friday that the country could be reporting more than 1,000 new infections a day in a week or two if social distancing measures aren't effectively strengthened.

"COVID-19 transmissions are occurring in large numbers simultaneously across the country, and in some regions, the pace of infections has already overwhelmed local capacities for contact tracing," the doctors' group said.

In other developments in the Asia-Pacific region:

— Japan is scaling back on the government-backed "GoTo" campaign to encourage travel and dining out, as the number of confirmed coronavirus cases reached a record for the third day straight on Saturday, at 2,418. Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga announced the decision at a government panel on coronavirus pandemic measures. Stressing the need for "utmost caution," he said the campaign's travel discounts will no longer apply to hard-hit areas, and discounts on eating out will end temporarily. Japan has never had a total lockdown. It has had fewer than 2,000 deaths so far related to the coronavirus. But worries have been growing about a spike in infections over the three-day weekend. Monday is Labor Thanksgiving, a national holiday.

— India reported 46,232 new cases, with the situation particularly alarming in New Delhi. Intensive care wards and the capital's main crematorium are near capacity, and health officials this week found the prevalence of infections in markets much higher than expected. The city has added an average of 6,700 cases each day in recent weeks. The Health Ministry on Saturday also registered 564 deaths in the past 24 hours, raising the death toll to 132,726. India hit a grim milestone Friday, passing 9 million infections, the second-most behind the U.S.

— China is starting mass testing on 3 million people in a section of the northern city of Tianjin and has tested 4,015 others in a hospital in Shanghai after the discovery of a pair of cases there. The National

Health Commission recorded seven new domestically transmitted cases Saturday, including five in Tianjin and two in Shanghai. Tianjin on Friday reported community transmission involving four different individuals and another case. In response, local authorities sealed off the residential community where the people lived as well as a hospital and a kindergarten. On Saturday, authorities began testing all residents in the Binhai district of Tianjin, according to the local government's social media page. Authorities in Shanghai sealed off a hospital after a husband and wife tested positive for the virus Friday night. China's total number of confirmed cases is now 86,414.

— After more than three weeks of no new infections or deaths in Victoria, the focus in Australia has shifted to neighboring South Australia state. On Saturday in the state capital of Adelaide, South Australia Premier Steven Marshall said there were no fresh cases of community transmission. There have been 26 new cases in a north Adelaide suburb, prompting a lockdown that will end at midnight Saturday, although a range of measures will remain to limit crowds at venues including pubs and restaurants.

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The show goes on at Madrid's opera house despite pandemic

By CIARÁN GILES Associated Press

MADRID (AP) — No one performing onstage in Spain's Teatro Real opera house is masked, and that alone looks odd these days amid a pandemic.

And that's even before the second act scene in Antonín Dvořák's "Rusalka" — about a water nymph who falls in love with a mortal — in which cast members kiss and grope in a feigned, non-socially distanced orgy.

While many of the world's major venues are shut down, including the Metropolitan Opera in New York, Covent Garden in London and La Scala in Milan, watching a performance at the Teatro Real in Madrid can almost make you forget about the coronavirus.

Located in one of the cities hit hardest by the virus, the Teatro Real is making a herculean effort for the show to go on, investing in safety measures that have allowed it to stage performances — albeit with smaller audiences — since July.

In March and April, soaring infections had Madrid's hospitals filled with COVID-19 patients. That eased in the summer, but another wave saw cases surge in the city and surrounding region. Authorities now seem to have gained the upper hand, with hospital occupancy rates falling steadily. Overall, Spain's Health Ministry has recorded more than 1.54 million cases and has attributed almost 42,300 deaths to the virus.

"The theater and culture must bet on staying open at all times," Teatro Real managing director Ignacio García-Belenguer told The Associated Press. "It's not about going against the flow or trying to be exceptional. ... It's what we believe we have to do."

With a yearly budget of 60 million euros (\$71 million), Spain's prime cultural center acknowledges it has the capacity and ability to carry on.

García-Belenguer says its financing from public subsidies, sponsors and ticketing puts Teatro Real in a unique spot to break even, unlike other opera houses that are normally mostly public or private. Extra state funding because of the pandemic will help too, he adds.

But it also has the good fortune of being in a region that has decided to take a different tack with the virus and apply fewer and more-localized restrictions, allowing bars, restaurants and cultural venues to stay open with reduced attendance.

It was closed during Spain's three months of national confinement between March and May, but preparations for reopening went on. It rolled out an array of measures that allowed it to stage a work with an audience, Giuseppe Verdi's "La Traviata," in July. Since then, it has put on two other operas, ballets and flamenco shows, and plans a full season for 2021.

Everyone entering the theater has their temperature taken automatically by machines. Hand sanitizers abound and surgical masks are supplied to all. There are ultra-violet lamps to disinfect the main theater,

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dressing rooms and clothing, and the air conditioning has been adapted to ensure a healthier air flow and temperature.

García-Belenguier says they will spend 1 million euros (\$1.2 million) on safety measures by year's end.

"I feel like I'm in a miracle," says Lithuanian soprano Asmik Grigorian, the star of "Rusalka," which is a co-production with companies in Dresden, Bologna, Barcelona and Valencia. Those sites will not be able to stage the opera for some time.

"We are always tested, (and) with masks, it's really strict in the theater," says Grigorian, who had her October 2021 debut in the Met canceled while shows in Berlin and elsewhere are uncertain.

"I have no idea where I am going after Madrid," she says. "If everything will be locked down then I'll stay in Madrid."

She and "Rusalka" director Christof Loy believe Madrid is leading the way.

"I think the governments are wrong in closing theaters," Loy said. "People need music, they need arts."

García-Belenguier compares the situation to now universally accepted security measures adopted after the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks. The "new normality," he says, demands "a deployment to minimize the health risk when someone comes to the theater, or boards a plane."

Key to staying open during the pandemic was Teatro Real's decision to set up a medical committee with specialists from five Madrid hospitals giving advice, he said.

Offstage, masks are compulsory for all. The cast, chorus and orchestra are tested every three days, with others monitored regularly. Stagehands and other workers must fill out health questionnaires every day.

There have been isolated positive tests, but in each one, the theater says it reacted promptly and often tested up to 50 people who came in contact with the infected person.

The average of 1,000-plus audience members — about 65% of normal capacity — are divided into 19 sectors with separate refreshment areas and toilets and a small army of ushers ensuring there is no roaming about.

"It is a complex system to try to reduce to the maximum the impact," García-Belenguier said.

He knows any outbreak could prove embarrassing. Memories are still fresh of the furor at a performance of Verdi's "Un Ballo in Maschera" in September, when a show was interrupted and eventually canceled after spectators in cheaper seats protested loudly that they were crammed together, while those in expensive ones appeared to have plenty of space.

The opera house was in full compliance with regulations at the time, but since then, a one-seat separation between every two is the norm.

Associated Press photographer Bernat Armangué contributed.

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Biden could announce Cabinet picks as soon as next week

By ALEXANDRA JAFFE Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President-elect Joe Biden is moving quickly to fill out his administration and could name top leaders for his Cabinet as early as next week.

Biden told reporters on Thursday that he's already decided on who will lead the Treasury Department. That pick, along with his nominee for secretary of state, may be announced before Thanksgiving, according to people close to the transition who spoke to The Associated Press on condition of anonymity to discuss internal deliberations.

The Cabinet announcements could be released in tranches, with groups of nominees focused on a specific top area, like the economy, national security or public health, being announced at once.

Such a move is intended to deliver the message that Biden is intent on preparing for the presidency even as President Donald Trump refuses to concede and attempts to subvert the election results in key

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states. Trump's roadblocks have undermined core democratic principles such as the peaceful transfer of power and are especially problematic because Biden will take office in January amid the worst public health crisis in more than a century.

"It's a huge impact. And each day it gets worse, meaning a week ago, it wasn't that big of a deal. This week, it's starting to get to be a bigger deal. Next week, it'll be bigger," said David Marchick, director of the Center for Presidential Transition at the nonpartisan Partnership for Public Service. "Every new day that's lost has a larger impact than the day before."

Still, Biden's transition work is progressing, with the president-elect holding frequent virtual meetings from his home in Wilmington, Delaware, and a music venue downtown. At this point, Biden is deeply involved in choosing his Cabinet, a process described by one person as similar to fitting puzzle pieces together.

In putting together the 15-person team, Biden is facing demands from multiple, competing interests, as well as the political realities of navigating a closely divided Senate.

He'll have to find the right mix of nominees to appease progressives demanding evidence he's committed to major reforms; fulfill his promise to build the most diverse government in modern history; and pass through a more difficult than expected nomination process with a slim margin of control for either party, depending on the outcome of two Georgia Senate runoffs in January.

Those considerations appear to be already informing Biden's calculus for secretary of state.

Two finalists to be America's top diplomat include Antony Blinken, a former deputy national security adviser and deputy secretary of state, and Chris Coons, who holds Biden's former Senate seat from Delaware and sits on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.

Blinken and Coons are close to Biden, and both have privately and, in some cases, publicly, expressed interest in the job. But with the balance of power in the Senate depending on two runoffs in Georgia, Blinken may have the upper hand, according to people close to the transition. The thinking, these people said, is that even if Coons is tapped for the post and replaced with a Democrat by Delaware's Democratic governor, the loss of his influence in the Senate may outweigh his value as secretary of state.

That Senate calculation also weighs heavily on perhaps Biden's presumptive first choice, former ambassador to the United Nations and national security adviser Susan Rice. Rice, who is also close to Biden, would almost certainly face difficulty in a confirmation process with a Republican-controlled Senate because of her past comments about the deadly 2012 attack on U.S. diplomatic compounds in Benghazi, Libya.

As Biden moves forward, his team won't have access to their counterparts at the various federal agencies or tap funds and office space for the transition until the General Services Administration ascertains that Biden is the winner.

Marchick noted that the delay in that process could ultimately undermine the number of administration staff Biden is able to get in place on time. Candidates must go through an ethics clearance process, file dozens of pages of forms, and some positions require security clearances.

The lack of ascertainment is also putting somewhat of a cash crunch on the Biden team. According to two donors familiar with the transition's efforts, they've raised about \$8 million for the transition already, hitting their original goal, but without the roughly \$6 million in federal funds afforded to Biden's transition team, they've been forced to continue fundraising.

In an email to donors this week obtained by the AP, Chris Korge, the Democratic National Committee's national finance chair, warned that the Biden transition didn't have enough money to "totally fund" their efforts and told donors that "the American people will be the big losers if we don't immediately step up and do something about it."

Speaking on a call with reporters Friday, Yohannes Abraham, an adviser to Biden's transition, warned that the delay is affecting the transition's planning.

"This isn't a game," he said. "There's no replacing the real-time information that can only come from the post-ascertainment environment that we should be in right now."

Associated Press writer Matthew Lee in Washington contributed to this report.

Trump tries to leverage power of office to subvert Biden win

By ZEKE MILLER, COLLEEN LONG and DAVID EGGERT Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump sought to leverage the power of the Oval Office on Friday in an extraordinary attempt to block President-elect Joe Biden's victory, but his pleas to Michigan lawmakers to overturn the will of their constituents appeared to have left them unswayed.

Trump summoned a delegation of the battleground state's Republican leadership, including the Senate majority leader and House speaker, in an apparent extension of his efforts to persuade judges and election officials to set aside Biden's 154,000-vote margin of victory and grant Trump the state's electors. It came amid mounting criticism that Trump's futile efforts to subvert the results of the 2020 election could do long-lasting damage to democratic traditions.

Trump's efforts extended to other states that Biden carried as well, amounting to an unprecedented attempt by a sitting president to maintain his grasp on power, or in failure, to delegitimize his opponent's victory in the eyes of his army of supporters.

Rick Hasen, an election law expert and professor who has been meticulously chronicling the 2020 race, wrote that there would be "rioting" in the streets if an effort was made to set aside the vote in Michigan, calling it tantamount to an attempted coup.

"We should worry because this is profoundly antidemocratic and is delegitimizing the victory of Joe Biden in a free and fair election," Hasen wrote on his blog. "It is profoundly depressing we still have to discuss this. But it is extremely unlikely to lead to any different result for president."

In a joint statement after the White House meeting, Michigan Senate Majority Leader Mike Shirkey and House Speaker Lee Chatfield said allegations of fraud should be investigated but indicated they were unmoved by Trump's claims thus far. "We have not yet been made aware of any information that would change the outcome of the election in Michigan and as legislative leaders, we will follow the law and follow the normal process regarding Michigan's electors, just as we have said throughout this election," they said.

"The candidates who win the most votes win elections and Michigan's electoral votes," they added, saying they used the meeting with Trump to press him for more pandemic aid money for their state.

The president on Friday again falsely claimed victory, declaring as an aside during a White House announcement on drug pricing, "I won, by the way, but you know, we'll find that out."

Trump's roughly hourlong meeting with the Michigan legislators came days after he personally called two local canvassing board officials who had refused to certify the results in Wayne County, Michigan's most populous county and one that overwhelmingly favored Biden. The two GOP officials eventually agreed to certify the results. But following Trump's call, they said they had second thoughts.

The Board of State Canvassers is to meet Monday to certify the statewide outcome and it was unclear whether Republican members of that panel would similarly balk.

Some Trump allies have expressed hope that state lawmakers could intervene in selecting Republican electors, as the president and his attorneys have pushed baseless allegations of fraud that have been repeatedly rejected in courtrooms across the country. It was with that in mind that Trump invited the Michigan legislators. He was also said to be considering extending a similar invitation to lawmakers from Pennsylvania.

"The president could be calling Republican legislators and others to the White House to try and squeeze them," tweeted former Trump national security adviser John Bolton. "Republicans at all levels — state, county, election boards, legislatures — must resist this political pressure."

White House press secretary Kayleigh McEnany told reporters that the meeting with Michigan officials was "not an advocacy meeting" and insisted Trump "routinely meets with lawmakers from across the country." But such meetings are in fact rare, particularly as Trump has maintained a low profile since the election.

As he departed Detroit for Washington on Friday morning, Shirkey was swarmed by activists bearing signs that read "Respect the Vote" and "Protect Democracy."

Chatfield tweeted before the meeting with Trump: "No matter the party, when you have an opportunity

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to meet with the President of the United States, of course you take it. I won't apologize for that."

Trump's effort to set aside the Michigan vote was sure to fail. Experts on Michigan election law said the Board of State Canvassers' authority was limited in scope.

"Their duties are to receive the canvass and certify the canvass, that's it," said John Pirich, a former assistant attorney general who teaches at Michigan State University College of Law. "They have absolutely no power to investigate allegations, theories or any half-brained kind of arguments that are being thrown around."

The Michigan Legislature would be called on to select electors if Trump succeeded in persuading the board not to certify the results.

Democratic Gov. Gretchen Whitmer could seek a court order forcing board members to certify the election and could remove those who refused, said Steve Liedel, another election attorney.

Trump's play for Michigan was among a series of last-ditch tactics in battleground states that his team is using to challenge his defeat. They also have suggested in a legal challenge that Pennsylvania set aside the popular vote there and pressured county officials in Arizona to delay certifying vote tallies. There have been multiple lawsuits in battleground states that have failed so far to reverse any votes.

In two Democratic-leaning counties in Wisconsin that are recounting votes, Trump's campaign sought to discard tens of thousands of absentee ballots that it alleged should not have been counted.

The objections were twice denied by the three-member Dane County Board of Canvassers on bipartisan votes. Trump was expected to make the same objections in Milwaukee County ahead of a court challenge once the recount concludes.

Former Bush administration official Christine Todd Whitman called Trump's efforts "the actions of a third-world dictator. It is not who we are as Americans, and we do not want the public coming away from this thinking this is the norm. There is no basis for trying to overturn this."

The increasingly desperate and erratic moves by Trump and his allies have no reasonable chance of changing the outcome of the 2020 election, in which Biden has now received more votes than any other presidential candidate in history and has clinched the 270 Electoral College votes needed to win.

Some Republicans have embraced Trump's faulty narrative and are helping him spread it. In Georgia, where a hand audit found Biden had still won, Gov. Brian Kemp said a court order made it so he had to certify the results. But he suggested Trump demand a recount and wanted answers to the alleged "irregularities."

In Minnesota, a state Biden won handily, some GOP officials are now raising concerns over "data abnormalities."

Biden legal adviser Bob Bauer said Trump's efforts were harmful to democracy.

"It's an abuse of office," he said. "It's an open attempt to intimidate election officials, it's absolutely appalling. ... It's also pathetic."

Eggert reported from Lansing. Associated Press writers John Flesher in Detroit, Alanna Durkin Richer in Boston, Christina A. Cassidy in Atlanta, Alexandra Jaffe in Wilmington and Jacques Billeaud in Phoenix contributed to this report.

Analysis: With silence, GOP enables Trump's risky endgame

By LISA MASCARO AP Congressional Correspondent

WASHINGTON (AP) — Republicans in Congress are engaged in a risky but calculated bet that once President Donald Trump has exhausted his legal challenges to the election, he will come to grips with his loss to President-elect Joe Biden.

But the opposite is happening.

As one Trump court case after another falls by the wayside, Trump is doubling down on efforts to disrupt the election outcome. Rather than accept the reality of the vote, the president is using the weight of his office to try to squash it. He summoned Michigan state lawmakers to the White House on Friday after

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personally reaching out to GOP officials ahead of next week's deadline to certify election results. Others from Pennsylvania may similarly be invited in.

Republicans are standing by as it all unfolds. What started as a GOP strategy to give the president the time and space he needed to process his defeat is now spiraling into an unprecedented challenge to the election outcome like nothing since the Civil War.

"It's hit the point where the Republican Party's letting Trump's pout go on too long," said presidential historian Douglas Brinkley, a professor at Rice University in Texas.

With their silence, the Republican lawmakers are falling in one step deeper with the president they have spent four years trying to appease. A few have spoken up. But mostly the Republicans are enabling Trump as he wages an unsubstantiated attack on the election that threatens to erode civic trust and impede Biden's transition to the White House. It could define careers for years to come.

"It's making future stars of the Republican Party look tiny and small," Brinkley said. "All of these senators are going to carry a dark mark on their legacy for coddling Trump after he lost."

Republicans started with a simple premise: If Trump had concerns about fraudulent voting, as he widely claimed, go to court and make the case.

It was a way to buy time, give Trump a chance to bring evidence, and perhaps convince some of his most ardent supporters of the outcome. Biden now has won 80 million votes to Trump's 74 million.

But in one state after another, from Arizona to Georgia, the Trump cases are failing. Trump forced recounts Friday in two counties in Wisconsin. More legal action is expected there and cases are pending elsewhere. Nowhere has evidence been presented of widespread voter fraud on a scale that could alter the outcome.

The Republican lawmakers will soon be forced into a moment of truth with key upcoming deadlines.

States are expected to certify election results by Dec. 6, and Republican lawmakers have been eyeing the Dec. 14 Electoral College deadline as their own offramp from Trump's presidency.

That's when GOP lawmakers believe they can start saying publicly what many of them already suggest in private — that Biden, in fact, won the election.

But there's no guarantee their gamble will work. Rather than glide toward that outcome, Trump is digging in — moving beyond the GOP argument that it's about counting legal votes and halting illegal ones to more broadly trying to overturn results.

Trump has talked openly about stacking the Electoral College, where electors are typically determined by the outcome in the states, with his backers.

"I won, by the way," Trump said Friday at the White House. "We'll find that out."

Almost none of the top Republican leaders in the House or Senate responded directly Friday when asked by The Associated Press if they believe the states have any reason not to certify their election results.

Only Rep. Liz Cheney, the No. 3 Republican in the House, and the daughter of the former vice president, said if Trump is unsatisfied with the outcome of the legal battles, he can appeal.

"If the president cannot prove these claims or demonstrate that they would change the election result," Cheney said in a statement to The AP, "he should fulfill his oath to preserve, protect and defend the Constitution of the United States by respecting the sanctity of our electoral process."

One key lawmaker, Sen. Pat Toomey, from battleground Pennsylvania, "believes that states should certify their results" in accordance with election laws, his spokesman said.

Once the states certify, he said, "these results should be accepted by all parties involved." In Pennsylvania, the state law "is unambiguous: The winner of the state's popular vote is awarded the state's electoral college votes."

With the Capitol still partly shuttered due to the COVID-19 crisis and emptying out for the upcoming Thanksgiving holiday, lawmakers are able to deflect many questions about their positions.

Sen. Josh Hawley, R-Mo., said Friday he wasn't really familiar with what Trump was doing inviting the Michigan lawmakers to the White House.

"I don't really have concerns with him talking about the situation with elected officials," Hawley said at the Capitol as he opened the Senate for a perfunctory session.

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Asked if Trump could overturn the election, Hawley was noncommittal: "Anything's possible."

Republicans are calculating that it's better not to provoke the president — he may do something more severe — but let time take its course.

It's a strategy they have used throughout the Trump presidency, keeping him close so as not to alienate his supporters — whom they need for their own reelections — and not getting too involved when he strains the nation's civic norms.

With the upcoming Senate runoff elections in Georgia that will decide which party controls the Senate in January, Republicans are beholden to Trump's supporters to turn out the vote.

Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell tried to portray the extraordinary week as ordinary.

"In all the presidential elections we go through this process," he said. "What we all say about it is irrelevant."

McConnell said once the state certifications occur, "if they occur," the elections will wrap up.

"One of the beauties of the American electoral system is that we have 50 separate ways to conduct them," he said. "The decisions as to how elections end happen in 50 different places."

The office of Rep. Kevin McCarthy, the House GOP leader, referred to his comments earlier this week when he said, "the states should finish their work."

Meanwhile, the state tallies continue to roll in.

Georgia certified its results Friday after a hand recount found that Biden won by a margin of 12,670 votes, the first Democratic presidential candidate to win the state since 1992. Michigan is scheduled to certify its results Monday. Pennsylvania will soon follow.

The electors are set to present their votes Jan. 6, two weeks before the Jan. 20 inauguration.

EDITOR'S NOTE: AP Congressional Correspondent Lisa Mascaro has covered Congress since 2010. Follow her at <https://twitter.com/LisaMascaro>

'Something very historical': Push for diverse Biden Cabinet

By ELLEN KNICKMEYER and MATTHEW DALY Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Native Americans are urging President-elect Joe Biden to make history by selecting one of their own to lead the powerful agency that oversees the nation's tribes, setting up one of several looming tests of Biden's pledge to have a Cabinet representative of Americans.

O.J. Semans is one of dozens of tribal officials and voting activists around the country pushing selection of Rep. Deb Haaland, a New Mexico Democrat and member of the Pueblo of Laguna, to become the first Native American secretary of interior. Tell Semans, a member of the Rosebud Sioux, that a well-regarded white lawmaker is considered a front-runner for the job, and Semans chuckles.

"Not if I trip him," Semans says.

African Americans, Mexican Americans, Asian Americans, Native Americans and other people of color played a crucial role in helping Biden defeat President Donald Trump. In return, they say they want attention on problems affecting their communities — and want to see more people who look like them in positions of power.

"It's nice to know that a Native American is under consideration," said Haaland, who says she is concentrating on her congressional work. "Sometimes we are invisible."

In Arizona, Alejandra Gomez was one of an army of activists who strapped on face masks and plastic face shields in 100-plus-degree heat to go door-to-door to get out the Mexican American vote. Intensive Mexican American organizing there helped flip that state to Democrats for the first time in 24 years.

"We are at a point where there was no pathway to victory" for Democrats without support from voters of color, said Gomez, co-executive director of the political group Living United for Change in Arizona. "Our terrain has forever changed in this country in terms of the electoral map.

"So we need to see that this administration will be responsive," she said.

Rep. Pramila Jayapal, D-Wash., co-chair of the Congressional Progressive Caucus, said it was important

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that Biden's Cabinet "reflects the country, and particularly his base that supports him," including women, racial and ethnic minorities and other groups.

The departments of defense, state, treasury, interior, agriculture, energy and health and human services and the Environmental Protection Agency are among Biden's Cabinet-level posts where women and people of color are considered among the top contenders. As with interior, where retiring New Mexico Sen. Tom Udall is thought to be a leading prospect, the candidacies of people of color are sometimes butting up against higher-profile white candidates.

House Majority Whip Jim Clyburn of South Carolina, whose February endorsement of Biden played a critical role in reviving the former vice president's struggling campaign, said he is confident Biden's Cabinet and White House staff will reflect the nation's diversity.

"I think Joe Biden has demonstrated he takes the concerns of African Americans seriously," said Clyburn, the highest-ranking Black member of Congress. "I expect him to be Lyndon Baines Johnson-like on civil rights."

At the Department of Agriculture and the Department of Housing and Urban Development, Ohio Rep. Marcia Fudge and California Rep. Karen Bass, respectively, are being considered. Fudge, a former chair of the Congressional Black Caucus, would be the first Black woman to lead agriculture, which oversees farm policy and billions of dollars in farm and food programs and runs the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program — better known as food stamps — that feeds millions of low-income households.

Fudge's main competitor is former North Dakota Sen. Heidi Heitkamp, who was long seen as the front-runner but faces growing opposition from progressives worried that she will favor big business interests at the sprawling department.

Clyburn, who is known to hold considerable sway with Biden, backs Fudge, calling her accomplished and experienced. "What you need is someone who understands the other side of agriculture," he said. "It's one thing to grow food, but another to dispense it, and nobody would be better at that than Marcia Fudge."

Biden has promised to pick a diverse leadership team. His running mate, California Sen. Kamala Harris, will be the nation's first female, first Black and first Asian American vice president.

In January, Biden assured a Native American candidate forum that he would "nominate and appoint people who look like the country they serve, including Native Americans."

Native Americans say they helped deliver a win in the battleground states of Wisconsin and Arizona and elsewhere, voting for Biden by margins that sometimes hit the high 80th percentiles and above. A record six Native American or Native Hawaiian lawmakers were elected to Congress.

For the Department of Interior, consideration of Udall — a political ally of Biden's for nearly 50 years who would be the second generation of his family to serve as interior secretary — is facing the historic candidacy of Haaland, a first-term congresswoman.

Asked if qualified white men with political seniority might have to step aside to make room for people of color, Udall told The Associated Press that Biden should be judged by his overall leadership team, including Cabinet secretaries and White House leaders.

"What you should look at a year or two years down the line is the leadership team at interior or EPA or agriculture," said Udall, whose late father, Stewart, served as interior secretary in the 1960s. "Do they look like a leadership team to represent America?"

The Interior Department deals with nearly 600 federally recognized tribes but also manages public lands stretching over nearly 20% of the United States, including oil and gas leasing on them. That makes the agency critical to Biden's pledge to launch ambitious programs controlling climate-destroying fossil fuel emissions.

Tribal officials concur there has never been a Native American as head of interior. The department's websites cite six Native American heads of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, which was transferred to the Interior Department from the War Department in 1849.

Haaland, vice chair of the House Committee for Natural Resources, also is getting support from many Democrats and progressives in Congress.

She told the AP that regardless of what job she had, she'd be working to "promote clean energy and

protect our public lands.”

The push for her appointment makes for what historian Katrina Phillips of Macalester College in St. Paul, Minnesota, says is “one of the first times we’re seeing in public spheres such a broad push on Indigenous issues.”

“We have finally reached the point where there’s a broader American consensus ... recognizing Native people deserve a voice,” said Phillips, a member of the Red Cliff Band of Lake Superior Ojibwe.

Government decisions on tribal issues made by “somebody that never had to live the life” would likely be different than decisions made by someone from the community, said Semans, who lives on the Rosebud Indian Reservation in South Dakota and helps run the Four Directions Native-voting project. Haaland’s pick would be “something very historical.”

“I have all kinds of respect for Mr. Udall. But there is not one rule or regulation that interior could change that would affect him or his family,” Semans said. “Ever.”

Knickmeyer reported from Oklahoma City. Follow Knickmeyer on Twitter at @knickmeyerellen and Daly at @MatthewDalyWDC.

Free agency opens: Fox and Kings agree on \$163 million deal

By TIM REYNOLDS AP Basketball Writer

On the first night of free agency, De’Aaron Fox was the first huge winner.

Huge, as in \$163 million — or even more.

Fox and the Sacramento Kings agreed on a max deal Friday night, agent Chris Gaston said. It’s a five-year pact that will pay Fox \$163 million, and that figure could rise to nearly \$200 million if Fox makes an All-NBA team or receives other league honors.

Fox’s numbers have improved in each of his three NBA seasons. He averaged 11.6 points as a rookie, then 17.3 points two seasons ago and finally 21.1 points last season for the Kings. His field goal percentage has also risen in each of the last two seasons.

Fox’s extension will kick in for the 2021-22 season and start at \$28.1 million.

Free agency opened in the NBA on Friday at 6 p.m. EST. No deals can be signed until 12:01 p.m. Sunday, and many of the biggest available names — such as the Lakers’ Anthony Davis and Fred VanVleet, who has seen his star rise meteorically with the Toronto Raptors — did not make immediate decisions.

Davis is expected to remain with the Lakers; the question there is how the new deal will be structured. VanVleet is expected to command at least \$80 million over the next four seasons, if not more, and Toronto has made clear that they would like to keep the undrafted guard who became a huge part of the Raptors’ run to the 2019 NBA championship.

A breakdown of moves Friday:

ATLANTA

Danilo Gallinari — one of the top wings on the free-agent market — agreed to a three-year contract worth \$61.5 million, a person with knowledge told AP. ESPN and the Atlanta Journal-Constitution first reported the agreement.

Gallinari averaged 18.7 points for Oklahoma City last season and is a 38% career shooter from 3-point range.

The Hawks were one of the teams who entered free agency with considerable cap space, and have been looking for veteran talent to add to the group that includes Trae Young and Kevin Huerter.

Gallinari, a 32-year-old Italian, has also played with the Knicks, Nuggets and Los Angeles Clippers. He was originally the sixth overall pick in the 2008 draft by New York.

BROOKLYN

Joe Harris has agreed to re-sign with the Nets, keeping one of the NBA’s best shooters in Brooklyn.

The Nets checked off what general manager Sean Marks called their biggest priority in free agency on Friday night by agreeing to a deal with the swingman.

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Priority Sports, which represents Harris, announced the deal on Twitter. ESPN reported that Harris would get \$75 million over four years.

Harris finished his fourth season in Brooklyn by averaging a career-best 14.5 points in 69 games in 2019-20.

DALLAS

The Mavericks and Trey Burke have agreed on a \$10 million, three-year contract to bring the guard back after he played well in the NBA bubble.

Burke originally joined Dallas in the trade with New York headlined by Kristaps Porzingis in early 2019. The Mavericks didn't re-sign Burke before last season, and he ended up in Philadelphia.

The 76ers waived Burke in February before the coronavirus shutdown, and Dallas signed him before the restart after center Willie Cauley-Stein opted out of the finish to the season.

DENVER

The last time Facundo Campazzo and Nikola Jokic shared a court in a real game together was during last year's Basketball World Cup in China. Campazzo was dazzling and Argentina prevailed, ending the championship hopes for Jokic and Serbia.

Soon, they'll be teammates in another title quest.

Campazzo agreed to a two-year deal with the Denver Nuggets on Friday's opening day of free agency, according to a person with direct knowledge of the deal. The person spoke to The Associated Press on condition of anonymity because the contract remains unfinished until at least Sunday, when the NBA moratorium on new signings will be lifted.

The New York Times first reported the agreement between Campazzo and the Nuggets.

The 5-foot-10 Campazzo has played in the Olympics twice, the Basketball World Cup twice, has a pair of EuroLeague championships and is known for passes that are spectacular. And now, he's decided it's time to try the NBA with a Denver team that rallied from 3-1 playoff deficits twice last season to make it to the Western Conference finals — where they fell to the eventual champion Los Angeles Lakers.

DETROIT

Jerami Grant is headed to Detroit on a three-year, \$60 million deal, player representative Mike Kneisley of The Neustadt Group said.

Grant is coming off a season where he averaged 12.0 points for Denver, which wanted him back.

The Pistons received commitments Friday night from centers Mason Plumlee and Jahlil Okafor, people familiar with those deals told AP. ESPN, which first reported the Plumlee agreement, said he would sign a three-year deal for \$25 million.

Plumlee later posted a thank-you letter to Denver fans on his Twitter account, saying he "has no doubt" that big things await the Nuggets. He also said he's excited to join the Pistons, calling them "one of the league's most storied franchises."

L.A. CLIPPERS

Marcus Morris is staying with the Clippers on a four-year deal, a person with knowledge told AP. ESPN, which first reported the agreement, said it was a \$64 million contract.

Morris averaged 16.7 points last season, starting the season in New York before getting traded to the Clippers.

"Run it back!" Morris tweeted.

Also Friday, Patrick Patterson will return on a one-year contract, AP was told. Patterson averaged 4.9 points last season for the Clippers. ESPN first reported the Clippers' agreement with Patterson.

L.A. LAKERS

The defending NBA champions are adding Montrezl Harrell as a free agent from the Clippers, a person with knowledge of the deal told AP.

That move, when finalized, will give the Lakers the top two finishers in last season's Sixth Man of the Year voting. Harrell won the award; Dennis Schroder, who was acquired by the Lakers in a trade with Oklahoma City earlier this week, was second.

MIAMI

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The Heat got quick agreements from point guard Goran Dragic and center Meyers Leonard on two-year deals, the second year in both cases being team options. Dragic will make about \$18 million next season, Leonard about \$9 million.

"I simply appreciate that they care about the little things," Leonard said.

Dragic flew back to Miami from his native Slovenia on Friday and intends to sign his new contract quickly. He said the fact that the Heat will have much of its roster back from a year ago, when the team won the Eastern Conference title, was particularly important to him.

"This is a family here," Dragic said. "We know we have a good team. We know we have chemistry. We have unfinished business."

MINNESOTA

The Timberwolves reached a \$60 million agreement with restricted free agent shooting guard Malik Beasley that's for three years plus a team option for a fourth year, a person with knowledge of the deal confirmed to AP.

Beasley, who was acquired from the Denver Nuggets in a four-team trade in February, was charged last month with drug possession and threats of violence in Hennepin County District Court, after allegedly aiming a rifle at a family in their vehicle outside his Minnesota home where a large amount of marijuana and other guns were seized during a police search.

Beasley averaged 20.7 points in 14 games after arriving in Minnesota.

The Timberwolves also finalized and confirmed three draft-night trades, including the deal with Oklahoma City reuniting them with point guard Ricky Rubio.

NEW YORK

Alec Burks is the first free agent addition under Knicks President Leon Rose.

The swingman agreed to a \$6 million, one-year deal, first reported by ESPN and confirmed by his agent.

Burks split last season between Golden State and Philadelphia, averaging a career-best 15 points.

The Knicks went into free agency with about \$35 million to spend after waiving a number of veterans Thursday.

ORLANDO

A person with knowledge of the negotiations said the Magic and guard Dwayne Bacon agreed on a one-year deal for about \$2.5 million this coming season. The Magic hold a team option for 2021-22, the person who spoke to AP said.

Bacon is a Central Florida native, born in Lakeland, not far from Orlando. He played college ball at Florida State and spent his first three pro seasons in Charlotte. Steve Clifford, now the Magic coach, was his coach there in his rookie year.

PHILADELPHIA

Veteran center Dwight Howard is going to join the 76ers on a one-year deal worth the veteran's minimum of \$2.6 million, agent Charles Briscoe told AP.

Howard heads to Philadelphia after helping the Los Angeles Lakers win this past season's NBA title.

PORTLAND

Derrick Jones Jr., the league's reigning Slam Dunk champion, agreed to a two-year deal with the Trail Blazers. The Athletic first reported the agreement, which a person with knowledge later confirmed to AP.

Jones Jr. was a major part of Miami's rotation for the last two seasons, and averaged a career-best 8.5 points per game for the Heat this past year.

UTAH

Jordan Clarkson is staying and Derrick Favors is coming back, according to people with direct knowledge of the transactions.

Clarkson agreed to a four-year, \$52 million deal; he averaged 15.6 points in 42 games after getting traded to Utah last December. And Favors — a post player who spent most of his NBA career in Utah before playing with New Orleans last season — returned on a deal that will pay him nearly \$30 million for three seasons.

WASHINGTON

Davis Bertans is staying with the Wizards on a five-year deal worth \$80 million, a person with knowledge

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of the details told AP.

Bertans picked a good time for his best season, averaging 15.4 points in 54 games. He skipped the restart at Walt Disney World rather than risk injury before free agency.

The 6-foot-10 forward from Latvia has shot better than 42% from 3-point range each of the last two seasons.

The fifth year of his deal, first reported by ESPN, is an early termination option.

AP Basketball Writer Brian Mahoney in New York and AP Sports Writers Schuyler Dixon in Dallas and Paul Newberry in Atlanta contributed to this report.

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

Who needs Russia? Loudest attacks on US vote are from Trump

By ERIC TUCKER and DAVID KLEPPER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Russia didn't have to lift a finger.

In the weeks before the U.S. presidential election, federal authorities warned that Russia or other foreign countries might spread false information about the results to discredit the legitimacy of the outcome.

Turns out, the loudest megaphone for that message belonged not to Russia but to President Donald Trump, who has trumpeted a blizzard of thoroughly debunked claims to proclaim that he, not President-elect Joe Biden, was the rightful winner.

The resulting chaos is consistent with longstanding Russian interests to sow discord in the United States and to chip away at the country's democratic foundations and standing on the world stage. If the 2016 election raised concerns about foreign interference in U.S. politics, the 2020 contest shows how Americans themselves, and their leaders, can be a powerful source of disinformation without other governments even needing to do the work.

"For quite a while at this point, the Kremlin has been able to essentially just use and amplify the content, the false and misleading and sensational, politically divisive content generated by political officials and American themselves" rather than create their own narratives and content, said former CIA officer Cindy Otis, vice president for analysis at the Alethea Group, which tracks disinformation.

U.S. officials had been on high alert for foreign interference heading into Nov. 3, especially after a presidential election four years earlier in which Russian intelligence officers hacked Democratic emails and Russian troll farms used social media to sway public opinion.

Public service announcements from the FBI and the Department of Homeland Security's cybersecurity arm warned of the ways Russia or other countries could interfere again, including by creating or altering websites after the election to spread false information about the results "in an attempt to discredit the electoral process and undermine confidence in U.S. democratic institutions."

Yet many of the false claims about voting, elections and the candidates in the months and weeks ahead of the election — and in the days since — originated not from foreign actors eager to destabilize the U.S. but from domestic groups and Trump himself.

"Almost all of this is domestic," said Alex Stamos, the director of the Stanford Internet Observatory and a member of the Election Integrity Partnership, a group of leading disinformation experts who studied online misinformation relating to the 2020 election.

Stamos said that while there were some small indications of foreign interference on social media, it amounted to "nothing that has been all that interesting" compared with the flood of claims shared by Americans themselves.

Though Russian hackers had targeted state and local networks in the weeks before the election, Election Day came and went without the feared attacks on voting infrastructure, and federal officials and other experts have said there is no evidence voting systems were compromised or any votes were lost or changed.

That's not to say Russia was entirely silent during the election, or in the immediate aftermath. For instance, English-language websites the U.S. government has linked to Russia have amplified stories sug-

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gesting voting problems or fraud.

Intelligence officials warned in August that Russia was engaged in a concerted effort to disparage Biden and singled out a Ukrainian parliamentarian who has met with Trump's personal lawyer, Rudy Giuliani.

Giuliani has been central to Trump's election attacks, arguing a Pennsylvania court case on Tuesday and appearing at a news conference on Thursday that was rife with debunked claims, including a fictitious story that a server hosting evidence of voting irregularities was in Germany.

Trump retweeted a post that criticized the news media for not more aggressively covering the news conference. More broadly, he has helped drive the spread of inaccurate information through a disinformation machine that relies on social media, conservative radio and television outlets and the amplification power of his millions of followers.

Signal Labs, a San Francisco media intelligence firm, identified and tracked millions of social media posts about voting by mail in the months before the election and found huge spikes immediately following several of Trump's tweets.

One example: On July 30, Trump tweeted misinformation about mail ballots three separate times, including stating without evidence that mail ballots would be an "easy way" for foreign adversaries to interfere, calling the process inaccurate and fraudulent and repeating a false distinction that absentee ballots are somehow more secure than mail ballots when both are treated the same.

Together, those three tweets were reposted by other users more than 100,000 times and liked more than 430,000 times — leading the spread of mail ballot misinformation that day and helping Trump dominate the online discussion the entire week, according to Signal's analysis.

Many of the false claims seen on Election Day originated with American voters themselves, whose posts about baseless allegations of voter fraud were then reposted to millions more people by Trump allies. That amplification allows isolated or misleading claims to spread more widely.

"You're not talking about grassroots activity so much anymore," Stamos said. "You're talking about top-down activity that is facilitated by the ability of these folks to create these audiences."

Researchers at Harvard University's Berkman Klein Center for Internet & Society analyzed social media posts and news stories about voter fraud and determined that "Fox News and Donald Trump's own campaign were far more influential in spreading false beliefs than Russian trolls or Facebook clickbait artists."

One of the researchers, Harvard Law School professor Yochai Benkler, said that when his team looked at sudden increases in online chatter about voter fraud, they almost always followed a comment from Trump or top allies.

Justin Levitt, an election law expert at Loyola Law School, said that, unlike four years ago, "now we don't need a foreign military unit to attack us. We have a chief executive doing exactly that" and working to spread disinformation.

"It's even more dangerous this time," he added, "than it was in 2016."

Klepper reported from Providence, Rhode Island. Associated Press writer Colleen Long in Washington contributed to this report.

Police: 8 injured in Wisconsin mall shooting; suspect sought

By NAM HUH Associated Press

WAUWATOSA, Wis. (AP) — Police searched Friday evening for the suspect in a shooting at a suburban Milwaukee mall that left seven adults and a teenager injured.

Wauwatosa Police Chief Barry Weber gave no motive for the attack at the Mayfair Mall in a brief update about three hours after the 2:50 p.m. incident near an entrance to the Macy's store. He said the extent of the eight victims' injuries was unknown, but all were alive. He added that the shooter was "no longer at the scene" when authorities arrived.

"Preliminary statements from witnesses indicate that the shooter is a white male in his 20s or 30s," Weber told reporters. "Investigators are working on determining the identity of that suspect."

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As of 9:30 p.m., Wauwatosa police said in a tweet that authorities still had not identified or arrested the suspect. But in the latest update, the department offered its first explanation of what may have led to the shooting.

"Preliminary investigation has led us to believe that this shooting was not a random act, and was the result of an altercation," said police, who added that the mall was now cleared and secure.

Authorities said the mall will be closed Saturday and investigators will remain there overnight.

"Our thoughts go out to our community, especially those who were injured and affected by the incident today," Wauwatosa police said in a tweet. "Events like this shake a community, and we remain committed to protecting those who live in and visit Wauwatosa."

Witnesses told WISN-TV that they had heard what they believed to be eight to 12 gunshots. Some people remained in the mall while police searched for a suspect. The station interviewed several people outside the mall who said they had friends sheltered inside stores while the search was ongoing.

Jill Wooley was inside Macy's with her 79-year-old mother when they heard the series of gunshots just outside the store entrance.

"We heard the first shot fired and knew immediately it was a gunshot," Wooley told CBS58 in Milwaukee. "We both just dropped to the floor."

Wooley said she didn't see anyone but the shots were "very close." She added that they ran in the opposite direction to the basement of the store, where they then hid.

Trish Cox's 19-year-old nephew works at Finish Line sporting goods store. She said she was worried because the store's phone wasn't being answered and was frantic as she waited while FBI agents cleared the mall.

An agent who wouldn't give his name said the mall was being "methodically" cleared. Heavily armed FBI personnel were visible at the mall.

Mall operator Brookfield Properties said in a statement they were "disheartened and angered that our guests and tenants were subject to this violent incident today." They declined further comment.

In a tweet Friday evening, Wisconsin Gov. Tony Evers noted that he's "thinking about all the customers and workers affected by this act of violence and are grateful for the first responders who helped get people to safety. As we learn more, we offer our support for the entire Wauwatosa community as they grapple with this tragedy."

The Mayfair Mall was the site of a February shooting in which a city police officer, Joseph Mensah, shot and killed Alvin Cole, a Black 17-year-old. Police said Cole was fleeing from police; Mensah, who is also Black, said he shot Cole because Cole pointed a gun at him. The mall was the target of sporadic protests over several months in the wake of the shooting.

The Milwaukee County district attorney declined to file charges against Mensah, but the city this week agreed to a separation agreement in which Mensah will be paid at least \$130,000 to leave the force.

Associated Press writers Scott Bauer in Madison and Steve Karnowski in Minneapolis and freelance journalist Rich Rovito contributed to this report.

EXPLAINER: What's with all the election audits?

By ANTHONY IZAGUIRRE Associated Press

As they seek to overturn — or at least cast doubts on — the results of the Nov. 3 presidential election, President Donald Trump and his Republican allies have zeroed in on a routine and common process: post-election audits.

Until now, the Trump campaign's flurry of legal challenges hasn't unearthed any evidence of widespread voter fraud, and election experts as well as state and federal officials have said there was none.

Still, Trump and Republicans are calling for audits in states where the president lost, even as they dismiss the results of audits that were already completed.

WHAT IS A POST-ELECTION AUDIT?

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Most states have laws requiring audits after elections, regardless of the margin of victory. That's not because they think something is wrong. They just want to make sure voting equipment functioned properly and election procedures were followed.

Usually, officials will take part of their paper ballots and match them against results from their electronic voting machines. That's to make sure there are no errors or potential instances of fraud.

If there are discrepancies, state laws trigger a more thorough accounting of votes, although how that's done varies by state.

A post-election audit is different from a recount, which happens when there are a small number of votes separating the candidates or when requested by a candidate.

WHERE ARE REPUBLICANS ASKING FOR AUDITS?

It's happening in several states at once.

In Arizona, where President-elect Joe Biden won, the state Republican Party asked for a new hand count of a sample of ballots in Maricopa County, which includes Phoenix and is where most of the state's population lives. The reasons cited? Lawyers for the GOP say they want to see if voting machines were hacked, even though there is no evidence of fraud or hacking of voting machines in Arizona.

The request came after the county had already finished its own audit and found no problems after a hand-count of ballots. On Thursday, a judge rejected the Republican bid to postpone certification of the county's election results and dismissed the party's legal challenge that sought the new audit.

Maricopa County officials certified their results Friday. Biden won the county by more than 45,000 votes, and bested Trump statewide by a margin of more than 10,000 votes.

Then there is Georgia, where election officials did a high-profile audit of the presidential race as required by state law. The audit — a hand tally of about 5 million votes — wasn't in response to any suspected problems. A new law in Georgia mandates an audit of any one race after every election. Secretary of State Brad Raffensperger, a Republican, said he chose to audit the presidential race because of its significance and because of the tight margin between Trump and Biden.

A few thousand previously uncounted ballots were discovered during the audit, narrowing Biden's lead over Trump. Biden still ended up taking the state.

WHAT HAPPENED IN MICHIGAN?

Things unfolded a little differently in Michigan.

It began when two Republican election board members of the district that includes majority-Black Detroit, voted to block a routine certification of the votes. They cited discrepancies between the number of ballots that were given to voters — for voting either by mail or in person — and the number of votes cast.

It was a stunning and unexpected move, especially since Biden beat Trump in Wayne County by a more than 2-1 margin, according to unofficial results. Biden won Michigan by 154,000 votes, or 2.8 percentage points.

The Republicans' claim drew complaints of racism from Democrats and election experts who also noted there has been no sign of widespread voting fraud in Michigan or elsewhere. The two Republican board members later reversed themselves following assurances that there would be an audit, which Democratic Secretary of State Jocelyn Benson said would be done in Wayne County and in any other community with "significant clerical errors."

Since then, the Wayne County board Republicans have signed affidavits saying they still do not believe the results should have been certified. State officials have said they cannot revoke their votes.

IT'S NOT ONLY ABOUT THE PRESIDENTIAL RACE

In Alaska, Republican Lt. Gov. Kevin Meyer, has said he plans to seek an audit of votes cast on a state-wide ballot initiative to do away with party primaries. That's after Trump and some of his supporters cast doubt on the technology used to tabulate votes — again, with no evidence of serious irregularities.

Dominion Voting Systems, one of the largest voting technology providers in the country, denied what it called "false assertions about vote-switching and software issues" with its systems.

In this instance, it's not the Trump campaign asking for an audit. Rather, Meyer said the machines

proved accurate during the primary, but that he is seeking an audit because "so many people think our Dominion machines are faulty, corrupt and easily manipulated, and I think a lot of this is misinformation that's coming from the national level."

The audit would happen after results are certified, and wouldn't change the outcome.

WHAT HAPPENS NOW?

There have been no widespread findings of fraud in any state during the 2020 elections. At most, election officials have cited routine instances of human error or minor technical problems.

Trump's own election security agency declared the 2020 presidential election to have been the most secure in history. (Though days after that statement was issued, Trump fired the agency's leader.)

At this point it's unlikely that any audit in any state could uncover problems large enough to sway election results.

Associated Press coverage of voting rights receives support in part from Carnegie Corporation of New York. The AP is solely responsible for this content.

Trump tries to leverage power of office to subvert Biden win

By ZEKE MILLER, COLLEEN LONG and DAVID EGGERT Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump sought to leverage the power of the Oval Office on Friday in an extraordinary attempt to block President-elect Joe Biden's victory, but his pleas to Michigan lawmakers to overturn the will of their constituents appeared to have left them unswayed.

Trump summoned a delegation of the battleground state's Republican leadership, including the Senate majority leader and House speaker, in an apparent extension of his efforts to persuade judges and election officials to set aside Biden's 154,000-vote margin of victory and grant Trump the state's electors. It came amid mounting criticism that Trump's futile efforts to subvert the results of the 2020 election could do long-lasting damage to democratic traditions.

Trump's efforts extended to other states that Biden carried as well, amounting to an unprecedented attempt by a sitting president to maintain his grasp on power, or in failure, to delegitimize his opponent's victory in the eyes of his army of supporters.

Rick Hasen, an election law expert and professor who has been meticulously chronicling the 2020 race, wrote that there would be "rioting" in the streets if an effort was made to set aside the vote in Michigan, calling it tantamount to an attempted coup.

"We should worry because this is profoundly antidemocratic and is delegitimizing the victory of Joe Biden in a free and fair election," Hasen wrote on his blog. "It is profoundly depressing we still have to discuss this. But it is extremely unlikely to lead to any different result for president."

In a joint statement after the White House meeting, Michigan Senate Majority Leader Mike Shirkey and House Speaker Lee Chatfield said allegations of fraud should be investigated but indicated they were unmoved by Trump's claims thus far. "We have not yet been made aware of any information that would change the outcome of the election in Michigan and as legislative leaders, we will follow the law and follow the normal process regarding Michigan's electors, just as we have said throughout this election," they said.

"The candidates who win the most votes win elections and Michigan's electoral votes," they added, saying they used the meeting with Trump to press him for more pandemic aid money for their state.

The president on Friday again falsely claimed victory, declaring as an aside during a White House announcement on drug pricing, "I won, by the way, but you know, we'll find that out."

Trump's roughly hourlong meeting with the Michigan legislators came days after he personally called two local canvassing board officials who had refused to certify the results in Wayne County, Michigan's most populous county and one that overwhelmingly favored Biden. The two GOP officials eventually agreed to certify the results. But following Trump's call, they said they had second thoughts.

The Board of State Canvassers is to meet Monday to certify the statewide outcome and it was unclear whether Republican members of that panel would similarly balk.

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Some Trump allies have expressed hope that state lawmakers could intervene in selecting Republican electors, as the president and his attorneys have pushed baseless allegations of fraud that have been repeatedly rejected in courtrooms across the country. It was with that in mind that Trump invited the Michigan legislators. He was also said to be considering extending a similar invitation to lawmakers from Pennsylvania.

"The president could be calling Republican legislators and others to the White House to try and squeeze them," tweeted former Trump national security adviser John Bolton. "Republicans at all levels — state, county, election boards, legislatures — must resist this political pressure."

White House press secretary Kayleigh McEnany told reporters that the meeting with Michigan officials was "not an advocacy meeting" and insisted Trump "routinely meets with lawmakers from across the country." But such meetings are in fact rare, particularly as Trump has maintained a low profile since the election.

As he departed Detroit for Washington on Friday morning, Shirkey was swarmed by activists bearing signs that read "Respect the Vote" and "Protect Democracy."

Chatfield tweeted before the meeting with Trump: "No matter the party, when you have an opportunity to meet with the President of the United States, of course you take it. I won't apologize for that."

Trump's effort to set aside the Michigan vote was sure to fail. Experts on Michigan election law said the Board of State Canvassers' authority was limited in scope.

"Their duties are to receive the canvass and certify the canvass, that's it," said John Pirich, a former assistant attorney general who teaches at Michigan State University College of Law. "They have absolutely no power to investigate allegations, theories or any half-brained kind of arguments that are being thrown around."

The Michigan Legislature would be called on to select electors if Trump succeeded in persuading the board not to certify the results.

Democratic Gov. Gretchen Whitmer could seek a court order forcing board members to certify the election and could remove those who refused, said Steve Liedel, another election attorney.

Trump's play for Michigan was among a series of last-ditch tactics in battleground states that his team is using to challenge his defeat. They also have suggested in a legal challenge that Pennsylvania set aside the popular vote there and pressured county officials in Arizona to delay certifying vote tallies. There have been multiple lawsuits in battleground states that have failed so far to reverse any votes.

In two Democratic-leaning counties in Wisconsin that are recounting votes, Trump's campaign sought to discard tens of thousands of absentee ballots that it alleged should not have been counted.

The objections were twice denied by the three-member Dane County Board of Canvassers on bipartisan votes. Trump was expected to make the same objections in Milwaukee County ahead of a court challenge once the recount concludes.

Former Bush administration official Christine Todd Whitman called Trump's efforts "the actions of a third-world dictator. It is not who we are as Americans, and we do not want the public coming away from this thinking this is the norm. There is no basis for trying to overturn this."

The increasingly desperate and erratic moves by Trump and his allies have no reasonable chance of changing the outcome of the 2020 election, in which Biden has now received more votes than any other presidential candidate in history and has clinched the 270 Electoral College votes needed to win.

Some Republicans have embraced Trump's faulty narrative and are helping him spread it. In Georgia, where a hand audit found Biden had still won, Gov. Brian Kemp said a court order made it so he had to certify the results. But he suggested Trump demand a recount and wanted answers to the alleged "irregularities."

In Minnesota, a state Biden won handily, some GOP officials are now raising concerns over "data abnormalities."

Biden legal adviser Bob Bauer said Trump's efforts were harmful to democracy.

"It's an abuse of office," he said. "It's an open attempt to intimidate election officials, it's absolutely appalling. ... It's also pathetic."

Eggert reported from Lansing. Associated Press writers John Flesher in Detroit, Alanna Durkin Richer in Boston, Christina A. Cassidy in Atlanta, Alexandra Jaffe in Wilmington and Jacques Billeaud in Phoenix contributed to this report.

Court: Tennessee can enforce Down syndrome abortion ban

By KIMBERLEE KRUESI Associated Press

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (AP) — A federal appeals court ruled Friday that Tennessee can begin outlawing abortions because of a prenatal diagnosis of Down syndrome, as well as prohibit the procedure if it's based on the race or gender of the fetus.

Tennessee Republican Gov. Bill Lee enacted the so-called "reason bans" earlier this year as part of a sweeping anti-abortion measure. The law gained national attention because it banned abortion as early as six weeks — making it one of the strictest in the country — but it included several other anti-abortion components.

The law was immediately blocked by a lower federal court just hours after Lee signed it into law.

However, the 6th Circuit Court of Appeals' decision will allow the state to enforce the reason bans while abortion rights groups continue their court battle against that law.

The plaintiffs, which include Tennessee abortion providers being represented by reproductive rights groups, had argued the ban was improperly vague, but the court disagreed.

Currently, more than a dozen states have similar reason bans in place.

"These bans are just another way anti-abortion politicians are attempting to limit the constitutional right to abortion care and to create stigma," said Nancy Northup, president and CEO of the Center for Reproductive Rights, in a statement. "Decisions about whether and when to continue or to end a pregnancy are best made by the individual and their family."

The Attorney General's office said in a statement that they "appreciate the Sixth Circuit lifting the lower court's injunction" and looked forward to continuing defending the statute.

"Our law prohibits abortion based on the race, gender, or diagnosis of Down syndrome of the child and the court's decision will save lives," Lee said in a statement. "Protecting our most vulnerable Tennesseans is worth the fight."

Immediately following the appeals court ruling, the plaintiffs' attorneys filed a request in lower federal court for a temporary restraining order to block the reason bans once again, but this time argued the law illegally prohibits a patient from "obtaining constitutionally protected pre-viability abortion care."

"(The) Sixth Circuit only addressed plaintiffs' vagueness claims and explicitly declined to issue any ruling with respect to plaintiffs' claims that the Reason Bans violate patients' constitutional right to pre-viability abortion," the attorneys wrote.

The court had not issued a ruling on that as of Friday evening.

Down syndrome is a genetic abnormality that causes developmental delays and medical conditions such as heart defects and respiratory and hearing problems.

According to the National Down Syndrome Society, about one in every 700 babies in the United States — or about 6,000 a year — is born with the condition, which results from a chromosomal irregularity.

The rarity of the condition has prompted abortion rights groups to paint the Down syndrome bans as part of yet another thinly veiled effort by lawmakers to continue chipping away at a patient's right to an abortion.

Birthday time: Biden turns 78, will be oldest U.S. president

By AAMER MADHANI Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President-elect Joe Biden turned 78 on Friday. In two months, he'll take the reins of a politically fractured nation facing the worst public health crisis in a century, high unemployment and a reckoning on racial injustice.

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As he wrestles with those issues, Biden will be attempting to accomplish another feat: demonstrating to Americans that age is but a number and he's up to the job.

Biden will be sworn in as the oldest president in the nation's history, displacing Ronald Reagan, who left the White House in 1989 when he was 77 years and 349 days old.

The president-elect spent his birthday in Delaware at work on the government transition, including a meeting with Congress' top two Democrats: House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and Sen. Chuck Schumer. During the closed-door portion of the meeting, Pelosi presented Biden with a white orchid, one of her signature flowers, an aide said.

The age and health of both Biden and President Donald Trump — less than four years Biden's junior — loomed throughout a race that was decided by a younger and more diverse electorate and at a moment when the nation is facing no shortage of issues of consequence.

Out of the gate, Biden will be keen to demonstrate he's got the vigor to serve.

"It's crucial that he and his staff put himself in the position early in his presidency where he can express what he wants with a crispness that's not always been his strength," said Ross Baker, a political scientist at Rutgers University who has advised legislators from both parties. "He has got to build up credibility with the American people that he's physically and mentally up to the job."

Throughout the campaign, Trump, 74, didn't miss a chance to highlight Biden's gaffes and argue that the Democrat lacked the mental acuity to lead the nation. Both critics and some backers of Biden worried that he was sending the wrong message about his stamina by keeping a relatively light public schedule while Trump barnstormed battleground states. Biden attributed his light schedule to being cautious during the coronavirus pandemic.

Some of Biden's rivals in the Democratic primary also made a case on age -- while skipping Trump's vitriol -- by raising the question of whether someone of Biden's and Trump's generation was the right person to lead a nation dealing with issues like climate change and racial inequality.

Brian Ott, a Missouri State University communications professor who studies presidential rhetoric, said Biden was hardly impressive as a campaigner but has proved far more effective with his public remarks since Election Day.

Ott said Biden's victory speech was poignant, and his empathy showed in a virtual discussion that he held earlier this week with frontline health care workers. The president-elect's experience -- a combination of age and nearly 50 years in politics -- conveys more clearly through the prism of governing than the chaos of campaigning, he said.

"The rhetoric of governing, unlike the rhetoric of campaigning, is collaborative rather than adversarial," Ott said.

Biden's relatively advanced age also puts a greater premium on the quality of his staff, Baker said. His choice of Sen. Kamala Harris, nearly 20 years younger than him, as his running mate effectively acknowledged his age issue. Biden has described himself as a transitional president but hasn't ruled out running for a second term.

"He's well served in making it known from day one that she's ready to go," Baker said of Harris. "She's got to be in the images coming out of the White House. They also need to, in terms of their messaging, highlight her inclusion in whatever the important issue or debate is going on in the White House."

Biden, in a September interview with CNN, promised to be "totally transparent" about all facets of his health if elected, but he hasn't said how he'll do that.

The campaign has made the case that Biden isn't your average septuagenarian.

His physician, Dr. Kevin O'Connor, in a medical report released by the campaign last December, described Biden as "healthy, vigorous ... fit to successfully execute the duties of the Presidency, to include those as Chief Executive, Head of State and Commander in Chief."

O'Connor reported that Biden works out five days a week. The president-elect told supporters that during the pandemic he has relied on home workouts involving a Peloton bike, treadmill and weights.

In 1988, Biden suffered two life-threatening brain aneurysms, an experience that he wrote in his memoir

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shaped him into the "kind of man I want to be." O'Connor also noted in his report that Biden has an irregular heartbeat, but it has not required any medication or other treatment. He also had his gallbladder removed in 2003.

A September article by a group of researchers in the Journal on Active Aging concluded that both Biden and Trump are "super-agers" and are likely to outlive their American contemporaries and maintain their health beyond the end of the next presidential term.

Some of Biden's White House predecessors left behind breadcrumbs about the dos and don'ts of demonstrating presidential vigor, said Edward Frantz, a presidential historian at the University of Indianapolis.

Reagan made sure the public saw him chopping wood and riding horses. Trump, after being diagnosed with the coronavirus, quickly returned to a busy campaign schedule -- holding dozens of crowded rallies in battleground states in the final weeks of the campaign. Those events flouted coronavirus guidelines on social distancing, wearing masks and avoiding large gatherings.

In 1841, William Harrison, 68, attempted to show off his vigor by delivering a lengthy inaugural address without a coat or hat. Weeks later, Harrison, then the oldest president elected in U.S. history, developed a cold that turned into pneumonia that would kill him just a month into his presidency. It's disputed whether Harrison's illness was related to his inaugural address.

NY's Cuomo to receive International Emmy for virus briefings

By MARINA VILLENEUVE Associated Press

ALBANY, N.Y. (AP) — New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo is set to soon receive an International Emmy award for his once-daily televised briefings on the coronavirus pandemic that killed tens of thousands of New Yorkers this spring.

The International Academy of Television Arts & Sciences, whose members include media and entertainment figures from over 60 countries and 500 companies, announced Friday it plans to present the award to the Democratic governor in a live-streamed show Monday.

International Academy President & CEO Bruce L. Paisner said Cuomo is being honored with the academy's Founders Award for using his briefings to inform and calm the public. Previous recipients include former Vice President Al Gore, Oprah Winfrey, and director Steven Spielberg.

"The governor's 111 daily briefings worked so well because he effectively created television shows, with characters, plot lines, and stories of success and failure," he said. "People around the world tuned in to find out what was going on, and New York tough became a symbol of the determination to fight back."

Cuomo used his more than 100 Powerpoint-driven slideshows and his sometimes emotional, sometimes acerbic style to provide daily updates and detail his administration's efforts to shutter the economy and avoid predictions of as many as 100,000 people hospitalized at once.

The pandemic peaked in early-to-mid April, when over 18,000 people were hospitalized at once and hospitals and nursing homes reported as many as 800 deaths in one day.

New York has reported at least 34,187 deaths of people due to COVID-19, according to data from John Hopkins University & Medicine. And at least 6,600 residents have died in nursing homes, according to state data, which doesn't state how many nursing home residents died in hospitals.

The number of daily infections, hospitalizations and deaths plummeted as Cuomo slowly reopened the state's economy this summer, when about 1% of tests were coming up positive.

New York is now seeing far fewer deaths and hospitalizations than this spring. Still, the state's daily average of COVID-19 cases over the past seven days has more than doubled in two weeks as cases surge nationwide.

Georgia officials certify election results showing Biden win

By KATE BRUMBACK Associated Press

ATLANTA (AP) — Georgia's governor and top elections official on Friday certified results showing Joe Biden won the presidential race over Republican President Donald Trump, bringing the state one step closer

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to wrapping up an election fraught with unfounded accusations of fraud by Trump and his supporters.

Secretary of State Brad Raffensperger certified results reported by the state's 159 counties that show Biden with 2.47 million votes, President Donald Trump with 2.46 million votes and Libertarian Jo Jorgensen with 62,138. That leaves Biden leading by a margin of 12,670 votes, or 0.25%.

Later Friday, Gov. Brian Kemp certified the state's slate of 16 presidential electors. In an announcement streamed online, Kemp did not clearly endorse the results. Instead he said the law requires him to "formalize the certification, which paves the way for the Trump campaign to pursue other legal options and a separate recount if they choose."

The Republican governor hasn't stepped forward to defend the integrity of this year's elections amid attacks by Trump and other members of his own party, who claim without evidence that the presidential vote in Georgia was tainted by fraud. Kemp has neither endorsed Trump's fraud claims nor backed Raffensperger, a fellow Republican, in his assertion that the election was conducted fairly.

Trump's endorsement two years ago helped Kemp win a heated Republican primary and eke out a narrow general election victory over Democrat Stacey Abrams. Even after losing the White House, Trump is expected to remain a powerful influence with GOP voters in the upcoming Senate runoffs in Georgia as well as in 2022, when Kemp will have to seek reelection.

The counties' results were affirmed by a hand count of the 5 million ballots cast in the race, according to results released by the secretary of state's office. The tally resulted 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. Raffensperger said the hand tally confirmed Biden's victory.

Kemp said Friday that he was concerned that the audit looked only at ballots, not the signatures on the absentee ballot applications or absentee ballot envelopes.

"As a former Secretary of State, he is the first to know and confirm that a signature is matched twice prior to an absentee ballot being counted," Deputy Secretary of State Jordan Fuchs said in a statement.

In fact, the signatures on absentee ballot applications and envelopes are required to be checked when they are received. The audit is only meant to ensure that the voting machines counted the ballots correctly, Raffensperger's office has said.

Two years ago, when he was secretary of state, Kemp pushed back forcefully against an outcry from Democrats who accused him of suppressing voter turnout to improve his odds of winning the gubernatorial election. At the time, he insisted that Georgia's laws "prevent elections from being stolen from anyone."

At a news conference at the state Capitol on Friday morning, before the results were certified, Raffensperger reiterated his confidence in the 2020 elections.

"Working as an engineer throughout my life, I live by the motto that numbers don't lie," he said. "As secretary of state, I believe that the numbers that we have presented today are correct. The numbers reflect the verdict of the people, not a decision by the secretary of state's office or of courts or of either campaign."

Raffensperger's office stumbled earlier in the day when it prematurely announced the certification while it was still unfinished. Forty minutes later, a corrected news release was sent out saying that certification was still to come. The momentary slip was yet another moment of drama in a race that has been full of it.

Now that the results are certified, Trump's campaign will have two business days to request a recount since the margin is within 0.5%. That recount would be done using scanning machines that read and tally the votes and would be paid for by the counties, the secretary of state's office has said.

The hand count for the audit produced some slight differences from the previous machine tally, but no individual county showed a variation in margin larger than 0.73%, and the variation in margin in 103 of the state's 159 counties was less than 0.05%, the secretary of state's office said. During the audit, several counties discovered previously uncounted ballots and had to recertify their results.

"It's quite honestly hard to believe that during the audit thousands of uncounted ballots were found weeks after a razor-thin outcome in a presidential election," Kemp said. "This is simply unacceptable."

Raffensperger said Friday that he plans to propose legislative changes aimed at increasing trust in the results, including allowing state officials to intervene in counties that have systemic problems in adminis-

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tering elections, requiring photo ID for absentee voting and adding stricter controls to allow for challenges to voters who might not live where they say.

"These measures will improve the security of our elections, and that should lead to greater public trust," he said.

Kemp said he also looked forward to working with lawmakers to address election concerns.

Raffensperger, a self-described "passionate conservative," has endured intense criticism and insults from fellow Republicans — from the president to the chair of the state Republican Party — over his handling of the election. He acknowledged their feelings on Friday.

"Like other Republicans, I'm disappointed our candidate didn't win Georgia's electoral vote. Close elections sow distrust. People feel their side was cheated," he said.

Biden is the first Democratic presidential nominee to carry the state since 1992.

Associated Press reporters Ben Nadler and Sudhin Thanawala in Atlanta, and Russ Bynum in Savannah, Georgia, contributed to this report.

Justice Dept. plans 3 more executions in lame-duck period

By MICHAEL BALSAMO Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Justice Department has scheduled three more federal executions during the lame-duck period before President-elect Joe Biden takes office, including two just days before his inauguration.

The announcement comes a day after the federal Bureau of Prisons carried out the eighth federal execution this year after a 17-year hiatus, and it is likely to increase pressure on Biden to take a public stance on whether his administration would continue to schedule executions once he is sworn in. Advocacy groups have called on the Trump administration to pause all executions until Biden takes office.

Representatives for the Biden transition team did not immediately respond to a request for comment Friday night.

In a court filing Friday night, the Justice Department said it was scheduling the executions of Alfred Bourgeois for Dec. 11 and Cory Johnson and Dustin Higgs for Jan. 14 and 15. Two other executions had already been scheduled for this year, including the first woman scheduled to be executed by the federal government in about six decades — though on Thursday, a federal judge ruled that execution could not proceed before the end of the year.

Prosecutors say Bourgeois tortured, sexually molested, and then beat his two-and-a-half-year-old daughter to death. Court records say Bourgeois repeatedly beat the young girl and punched her in the face, whipped her with an electrical cord and beat her with a belt so hard that it broke. He also allegedly burned her feet with a cigarette lighter and hit her in the head with a baseball bat until her head swelled.

Johnson was one of three crack cocaine dealers convicted in a string of murders. Prosecutors said he killed seven people in an attempt to expand the territory of a Richmond, Virginia, gang and silence informants. His co-defendants James H. Roane Jr. and Richard Tipton, members of same drug gang, are also on death row.

Johnson's lawyers argue their client is intellectually disabled, and thus it would be unconstitutional to put him to death. The Supreme Court has held that it is unlawful to execute a person who is of such a low intelligence that they can't function in society.

But they argue that "no jury or court has ever listened to the evidence at a hearing to decide if he has intellectual disability."

"We are not aware of any other federal death penalty prisoner who has never had a single evidentiary hearing at which he could present his intellectual disability evidence. The government should not proceed with Mr. Johnson's execution in the absence of a thorough and fair opportunity for him to present this evidence," the lawyers, Ronald J. Tabak and Donald P. Salzman, said in a statement.

Higgs was convicted of ordering the 1996 murders of three women, Tamika Black, Mishann Chinn and

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Tanji Jackson, at a federal wildlife center near Beltsville, Maryland. Prosecutors say Higgs and two others abducted the women after Higgs became enraged because one of the women rebuffed his advances at party.

Higgs' attorney, Sean Nolan, said his client didn't kill anyone, had ineffective attorneys and didn't deserve the death penalty. Higgs' co-defendant, who prosecutors said carried out the killings, was not sentenced to death and Nolan said it is "arbitrary and inequitable to punish Mr. Higgs more severely than the person who committed the murders."

"Mr. Higgs deserves clemency because of the unfair sentencing disparity ... and because, despite the tragedy and hardship of his early life, he has been a model prisoner and is an active parent who is essential to the well-being of his son," Nolan said.

1st drug for rare rapid-aging disease extends kids' lives

By LINDA A. JOHNSON AP Medical Writer

The first drug was approved Friday for a rare genetic disorder that stunts growth and causes rapid aging in children, after studies showed it can extend their lives.

Kids with the genetic disorder progeria typically die in their early teens, usually from heart disease. But in testing, children taking the drug Zokinvy lived 2 1/2 years longer on average.

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration approved the capsules for progeria and a related condition.

Research on the treatment was mainly funded by the Progeria Research Foundation in Peabody, Massachusetts, with help from drug developer Eiger BioPharmaceuticals.

"This is just the first. We'll find more and better treatments," said Dr. Leslie Gordon, the foundation's medical director.

Gordon, a pediatric disease researcher at Hasbro Children's Hospital in Providence, Rhode Island, created the foundation in 1999 with her sister and husband, soon after their son Sam was diagnosed. He died in 2014 at age 17.

Just an estimated 400 people worldwide have progeria or its related condition, including 20 in the U.S. The disorder causes stunted growth, stiff joints, hair loss and aged-looking skin. Children with the disease suffer strokes and hardening of heart arteries, and die at 14 1/2 on average.

The disorder is not inherited but due to a chance gene mutation that causes a damaging buildup in cells of a protein called progerin, for which the disorder is named. The drug blocks production and accumulation of the protein, slowing its damage and the premature aging.

Until testing began in 2007, doctors could only try to ease some symptoms.

Meghan Waldron of Deerfield, Massachusetts, was diagnosed with progeria by age 2. She wasn't growing or gaining weight and her hair was falling out. She was one of the first children to get the drug.

"Pretty soon," she said, "there were obvious improvements."

She started growing a little more — she's now 3 feet, 7 inches tall — and tests showed a slowing of hardening of her arteries.

The 19-year-old Waldron backpacked in Europe alone last year after graduation from high school, where she ran track and cross country.

"My physical health is pretty good," other than some joint stiffness, said Waldron, a sophomore creative writing student at Emerson College in Boston. "It's just something I live with."

She still takes the drug as part of a long-term follow-up study.

"I am so excited" about its approval, she said.

The FDA action was based on two studies in which a total of 62 kids took the drug twice a day. Their outcomes were compared with 81 untreated children around the world, matched by age and other characteristics.

The participants were followed for up to 11 years, and those who took the drug lived 2 1/2 years longer on average.

In all, four studies of the drug have been done at Boston Children's Hospital, with 22 children and young

adults taking the drug since 2010 or earlier. The oldest is 24 and has been taking it for 13 years.

Eiger, a small Palo Alto, California, drug developer, isn't disclosing the price yet for Zokinvy, also known as lonafarnib, but it will be expensive since there are so few patients. Eiger will offer financial assistance so all patients can get it.

Zokinvy's most common side effects were vomiting, diarrhea, nausea, abdominal pain and fatigue.

The foundation's Gordon worked with National Institutes of Health Director Dr. Francis Collins on laboratory research that found the genetic cause of progeria in 2003.

She said research "coming up the pike" could possibly give patients "longer lives, stronger hearts and move towards a cure."

Follow Linda A. Johnson on Twitter: @LindaJ_onPharma

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Who needs Russia? Loudest attacks on US vote are from Trump

By ERIC TUCKER and DAVID KLEPPER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Russia didn't have to lift a finger.

In the weeks before the U.S. presidential election, federal authorities warned that Russia or other foreign countries might spread false information about the results to discredit the legitimacy of the outcome.

Turns out, the loudest megaphone for that message belonged not to Russia but to President Donald Trump, who has trumpeted a blizzard of thoroughly debunked claims to proclaim that he, not President-elect Joe Biden, was the rightful winner.

The resulting chaos is consistent with longstanding Russian interests to sow discord in the United States and to chip away at the country's democratic foundations and standing on the world stage. If the 2016 election raised concerns about foreign interference in U.S. politics, the 2020 contest shows how Americans themselves, and their leaders, can be a powerful source of disinformation without other governments even needing to do the work.

"For quite a while at this point, the Kremlin has been able to essentially just use and amplify the content, the false and misleading and sensational, politically divisive content generated by political officials and American themselves" rather than create their own narratives and content, said former CIA officer Cindy Otis, vice president for analysis at the Alethea Group, which tracks disinformation.

U.S. officials had been on high alert for foreign interference heading into Nov. 3, especially after a presidential election four years earlier in which Russian intelligence officers hacked Democratic emails and Russian troll farms used social media to sway public opinion.

Public service announcements from the FBI and the Department of Homeland Security's cybersecurity arm warned of the ways Russia or other countries could interfere again, including by creating or altering websites after the election to spread false information about the results "in an attempt to discredit the electoral process and undermine confidence in U.S. democratic institutions."

Yet many of the false claims about voting, elections and the candidates in the months and weeks ahead of the election — and in the days since — originated not from foreign actors eager to destabilize the U.S. but from domestic groups and Trump himself.

"Almost all of this is domestic," said Alex Stamos, the director of the Stanford Internet Observatory and a member of the Election Integrity Partnership, a group of leading disinformation experts who studied online misinformation relating to the 2020 election.

Stamos said that while there were some small indications of foreign interference on social media, it amounted to "nothing that has been all that interesting" compared with the flood of claims shared by Americans themselves.

Though Russian hackers had targeted state and local networks in the weeks before the election, Election Day came and went without the feared attacks on voting infrastructure, and federal officials and other ex-

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perts have said there is no evidence voting systems were compromised or any votes were lost or changed.

That's not to say Russia was entirely silent during the election, or in the immediate aftermath. For instance, English-language websites the U.S. government has linked to Russia have amplified stories suggesting voting problems or fraud.

Intelligence officials warned in August that Russia was engaged in a concerted effort to disparage Biden and singled out a Ukrainian parliamentarian who has met with Trump's personal lawyer, Rudy Giuliani.

Giuliani has been central to Trump's election attacks, arguing a Pennsylvania court case on Tuesday and appearing at a news conference on Thursday that was rife with debunked claims, including a fictitious story that a server hosting evidence of voting irregularities was in Germany.

Trump retweeted a post that criticized the news media for not more aggressively covering the news conference. More broadly, he has helped drive the spread of inaccurate information through a disinformation machine that relies on social media, conservative radio and television outlets and the amplification power of his millions of followers.

Signal Labs, a San Francisco media intelligence firm, identified and tracked millions of social media posts about voting by mail in the months before the election and found huge spikes immediately following several of Trump's tweets.

One example: On July 30, Trump tweeted misinformation about mail ballots three separate times, including stating without evidence that mail ballots would be an "easy way" for foreign adversaries to interfere, calling the process inaccurate and fraudulent and repeating a false distinction that absentee ballots are somehow more secure than mail ballots when both are treated the same.

Together, those three tweets were reposted by other users more than 100,000 times and liked more than 430,000 times — leading the spread of mail ballot misinformation that day and helping Trump dominate the online discussion the entire week, according to Signal's analysis.

Many of the false claims seen on Election Day originated with American voters themselves, whose posts about baseless allegations of voter fraud were then reposted to millions more people by Trump allies. That amplification allows isolated or misleading claims to spread more widely.

"You're not talking about grassroots activity so much anymore," Stamos said. "You're talking about top-down activity that is facilitated by the ability of these folks to create these audiences."

Researchers at Harvard University's Berkman Klein Center for Internet & Society analyzed social media posts and news stories about voter fraud and determined that "Fox News and Donald Trump's own campaign were far more influential in spreading false beliefs than Russian trolls or Facebook clickbait artists."

One of the researchers, Harvard Law School professor Yoichi Benkler, said that when his team looked at sudden increases in online chatter about voter fraud, they almost always followed a comment from Trump or top allies.

Justin Levitt, an election law expert at Loyola Law School, said that, unlike four years ago, "now we don't need a foreign military unit to attack us. We have a chief executive doing exactly that" and working to spread disinformation.

"It's even more dangerous this time," he added, "than it was in 2016."

Klepper reported from Providence, Rhode Island. Associated Press writer Colleen Long in Washington contributed to this report.

Spokesman: Trump's eldest son tests positive for coronavirus

By JONATHAN LEMIRE Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Donald Trump Jr., the eldest son of President Donald Trump, was quarantining Friday after learning he has been infected with the coronavirus, a spokesperson said.

The younger Trump learned his diagnosis at the beginning of the week and has had no symptoms, said the spokesperson, who was granted anonymity to discuss private medical information.

Trump Jr. is following all medically recommended guidelines for COVID-19, the disease caused by the

virus, the spokesperson added.

The 42-year-old is the latest member of the president's family to become infected with a virus that has killed more than 250,000 Americans and infected nearly 12 million others.

President-elect Joe Biden made President Trump's response to the virus a top issue in the recently concluded race for the White House, though Trump has yet to acknowledge the outcome.

President Trump, first lady Melania Trump and their son Barron have all recovered from their coronavirus infections in October. The president spent three days in a military hospital where he was treated with experimental drugs; the first lady weathered her illness at the White House.

Donald Trump Jr.'s girlfriend, Kimberly Guilfoyle, tested positive for the coronavirus in July.

Biden wants Congress to pass virus aid in lame-duck session

By STEVE PEOPLES and WILL WEISSERT Associated Press

WILMINGTON, Del. (AP) — President-elect Joe Biden is pushing Congress to approve billions of dollars in emergency COVID-19 assistance before he takes office, saying in a meeting Friday with the top Democrats in the House and Senate that such a package should be approved during the lame-duck session.

Biden held his first in-person meeting since winning the presidential election with House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and Senate Democratic leader Chuck Schumer, hosting them at his makeshift transition headquarters in a downtown Wilmington, Delaware, theater.

Biden's new governing team is facing intense pressure to approve another coronavirus relief bill and come up with a clear plan to distribute millions of doses of a prospective vaccine. That comes as Biden is just days away from unveiling the first of his Cabinet picks, which are subject to Senate confirmation.

"In my Oval Office, mi casa, you casa," Biden, who sat with Schumer, Pelosi and Vice President-elect Kamala Harris, all wearing masks and spaced out around a bank of tables, said during the brief portion of the meeting journalists witnessed. "I hope we're going to spend a lot of time together."

According to a readout of the meeting later released by Biden's team, the group "agreed that Congress needed to pass a bipartisan emergency aid package in the lame duck session," which is the period after Election Day but before Congress adjourns for the year.

It added that the "package should include resources to fight the COVID-19 pandemic, relief for working families and small businesses, support for state and local governments trying to keep frontline workers on the payroll, expanded unemployment insurance, and affordable health care for millions of families."

The sense of urgency in the meeting was echoed in comments earlier Friday by Biden transition aide Jen Psaki, who warned that "there's no more room for delay."

Pelosi said before meeting with Biden and Schumer that she'd make clear "the urgency of crushing the virus," and how to use the lame-duck session to approve COVID-19 relief and legislation that can keep the government funded.

But prospects for new virus aid this year remain uncertain. Pelosi said talks with Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell and GOP leadership on Thursday did not produce any consensus on an aid package.

"That didn't happen, but hopefully it will," she said.

Also Friday, McConnell, a Kentucky Republican, proposed that Congress shift \$455 billion of unspent small-business lending funds toward a new COVID-19 aid package. His offer came after a meeting with Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin and White House chief of staff Mark Meadows.

Psaki said Biden, Pelosi and Schumer had already begun working together on COVID-19 relief even before Friday's meeting.

"They're in lockstep agreement that there needs to be emergency assistance and aid during the lame-duck session to help families, to help small businesses," she said. "There's no more room for delay, and we need to move forward as quickly as possible."

Biden, Pelosi and Schumer also discussed the agenda for the first 100 days of the Biden presidency, "including taking aggressive action to contain COVID-19, providing resources to small businesses, families, schools, and state and local governments to power our economic recovery, and investing in the middle

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class," according to the readout.

The president-elect has also promised to work closely with congressional Republicans to execute his governing agenda, but so far, he has focused his congressional outreach on leading Democrats.

The meeting came two days after House Democrats nominated Pelosi to be speaker. She seemed to suggest these would be her final two years in the leadership post.

President Donald Trump continues to block a smooth transfer of power to Biden, refusing to allow his administration to cooperate with the transition team. Specifically, the Trump administration is denying Biden access to detailed briefings on national security and pandemic planning that leaders in both parties say are important for preparing Biden to govern immediately after his Jan. 20 inauguration.

Trying to bypass the Trump administration altogether, Biden on Thursday met virtually with a collection of Republican and Democratic governors.

The Trump administration's Health and Human Services Secretary Alex Azar said Friday on "CBS This Morning" that Biden's charge that the transition delays would cost American lives is "absolutely incorrect."

"Every aspect of what we do is completely transparent — no secret data or knowledge," Azar said.

Trump, meanwhile, is intensifying his brazen attempts to sow doubt on the election results. The outgoing president's unprecedented campaign to spread misinformation now includes pressuring Michigan officials to block the certification of their state's election results.

Biden won Michigan by more than 150,000 votes, a margin 15 times larger than Trump's victory in the state four years ago.

Election law experts see Trump's push as the last, dying gasps of his campaign and say Biden is certain to walk into the Oval Office come January. But there is great concern that Trump's effort is doing real damage to public faith in the integrity of U.S. elections.

___ Associated Press Congressional Correspondent Lisa Mascaro contributed to this report from Washington.

Daily COVID-19 deaths in US reach highest level since May

By DAVID CRARY and PAUL J. WEBER Associated Press

The surging coronavirus is taking an increasingly dire toll across the U.S. just as a vaccine appears close at hand, with the country now averaging over 1,300 COVID-19 deaths per day — the highest level since the calamitous spring in and around New York City.

The overall U.S. death toll has reached about 254,000, by far the most in the world. Confirmed infections have eclipsed more than 11.8 million, after the biggest one-day gain on record Thursday — almost 188,000. And the number of people in the hospital with COVID-19 hit another all-time high at more than 80,000.

With health experts deeply afraid Thanksgiving travel and holiday gatherings next week will fuel the spread of the virus, many states and cities are imposing near-lockdowns or other restrictions. California ordered a 10 p.m.-to 5-a.m. curfew starting Saturday, covering 94% of the state's 40 million residents.

The Texas border county of El Paso, where more than 300 people have died from COVID-19 since October, is advertising jobs for morgue workers capable of lifting bodies weighing 175 pounds (79 kilograms) or more. Officials are offering more than \$27 an hour for work described as not only physically arduous but "emotionally taxing as well."

The county had already begun paying jail inmates \$2 an hour to help move corpses and has ordered at least 10 refrigerated trucks as morgues run out of room.

COVID-19 deaths in the U.S. are at their highest level since late May, when the Northeast was emerging from the first wave of the crisis. They peaked at about 2,200 a day in late April, when New York City was the epicenter and bodies were being loaded onto refrigerated trucks by forklift.

Among the newly infected was President Donald Trump's eldest son, Donald Trump Jr., who a spokesman said Friday has no symptoms and has been quarantining since learning of his diagnosis earlier this week.

Amid the bleak new statistics, Pfizer said Friday it is asking U.S. regulators to allow emergency use of its COVID-19 vaccine, setting in motion a process that could make the first, limited shots available as early

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as next month, with health care workers and other high-risk groups likely to get priority.

But it could take months before the vaccine becomes widely available. Pfizer has said the vaccine appears 95% effective at preventing the disease.

In Texas, Republican Gov. Greg Abbott has ruled out another shutdown and singled out El Paso county leaders for not enforcing restrictions already in place. The state's attorney general, Ken Paxton, likened the county's chief administrator to a "tyrant" after Paxton won an appeals court ruling blocking local leaders from shutting down gyms and other nonessential businesses.

Ohio Gov. Mike DeWine, also a Republican, failed to persuade leaders of the GOP-controlled legislature to reject a bill that would limit his administration's power to deal with the crisis.

At issue is a Senate bill that would ban the state health department from issuing mandatory quarantine orders enforced against people who are not sick or exposed to disease — such as the order announced by the governor Tuesday setting a 10 p.m. curfew.

DeWine said he will veto the bill when it reaches his desk. Republicans in both the House and Senate have enough votes to override the veto if they choose.

"This bill is a disaster," DeWine said Thursday. "This is not a bill that can become law."

In California, the curfew affects 41 of the state's 58 counties. Its impact will depend heavily on voluntary compliance. Some county sheriffs said they won't enforce it the rules for people not on essential errands to stay home after 10 p.m.

The curfew is less strict than the near-total ban on nonessential business and travel that Democratic Gov. Gavin Newsom imposed in March, which he credited with flattening the rate of COVID-19 cases.

Rocco Temasamani, who was selling jewelry Friday at San Diego's Ocean Beach, said the curfew will do little to curb the coronavirus and will instead anger people who consider it government overreach.

He thinks the order will rankle supporters of President Donald Trump who are already agitated by the president's claims of election fraud and back his hands-off approach to regulating behavior during the pandemic.

"It's really, really throwing gasoline on a fire," said Temasamani, who was skeptical that police will enforce the curfew.

Michael Maring, an auto mechanic from El Centro, California, who was visiting San Diego, said he will obey the curfew, despite his fondness for 2 a.m. bike rides, because he doesn't want trouble with police. Like Temasamani, he thinks authorities will be reluctant to enforce the new measure.

In Kansas, new cases have risen to an average of over 2,700 per day, nearly four times higher than a month ago.

"Our hospitals are overwhelmed with coronavirus patients. Health care workers are burned out," Democratic Gov. Laura Kelly said Friday.

In rural western Kansas, the number of people seeking testing at a Kearny County clinic doubled over the past week to about 80 per day, said Dr. Lane Olson, a family practice doctor.

He said nurses had to make multiple calls this week before the University of Kansas Hospital, about 360 miles (580 kilometers) away in Kansas City, Kansas, agreed to take one of his coronavirus patients whose oxygen levels were falling. Then several more calls were needed to find an air transport company that could fly her there.

In the state capital, Topeka, the emergency department at Stormont Vail Hospital has taken over a back hallway and a waiting room, with some patients waiting hours to be moved to a regular room. The crunch has area officials considering opening a field hospital.

In Arizona, four Democratic mayors urged Republican Gov. Doug Ducey to impose a statewide requirement for people to wear masks in public. The move came as health officials reported more than 4,000 additional COVID-19 cases for the second consecutive day.

Ducey's chief of staff, Daniel Scarpinato, pushed back on the request, saying the mayors are doing little to enforce their own mask ordinances or ensure that existing safety measures put in place by the governor are being enforced.

Pfizer, BioNTech seek emergency use of COVID-19 shots in US

By LAURAN NEERGAARD AP Medical Writer

Pfizer formally asked U.S. regulators Friday to allow emergency use of its COVID-19 vaccine, starting the clock on a process that could bring limited first shots as early as next month and eventually an end to the pandemic -- but not until after a long, hard winter.

The action comes days after Pfizer Inc. and its German partner BioNTech announced that its vaccine appears 95% effective at preventing mild to severe COVID-19 disease in a large, ongoing study.

The companies said that protection plus a good safety record means the vaccine should qualify for emergency use authorization, something the Food and Drug Administration can grant before the final testing is fully complete. In addition to the FDA submission, they have already started "rolling" applications in Europe and the U.K. and intend to submit similar information soon.

With the coronavirus surging around the U.S. and the world, the pressure is on for regulators to make a speedy decision.

"Help is on the way," Dr. Anthony Fauci, the top U.S. infectious disease expert said on the eve of Pfizer's announcement, adding that it's too early to abandon masks and other protective measures. "We need to actually double down on the public health measures as we're waiting for that help to come."

Friday's filing sets off a chain of events as the FDA and its independent advisers debate if the shots are ready. If so, still another government group will have to decide how the initial limited supplies are rationed out to anxiously awaiting Americans.

How much vaccine is available and when is a moving target, but initial supplies will be scarce and rationed. Globally, Pfizer has estimated it could have 50 million doses available by year's end.

About 25 million may become available for U.S. use in December, 30 million in January and 35 million more in February and March, according to information presented to the National Academy of Medicine this week. Recipients will need two doses, three weeks apart. The U.S. government has a contract to buy millions of Pfizer-BioNTech doses, as well as other candidates than pan out, and has promised shots will be free.

Not far behind is competitor Moderna Inc.'s COVID-19 vaccine. Its early data suggests the shots are as strong as Pfizer's, and that company expects to also seek emergency authorization within weeks.

Here's what happens next:

MAKING THE DATA PUBLIC

The public's first chance to see how strong the evidence really is will come Dec. 10 at a public meeting of the FDA's scientific advisers.

So far, what's known is based only on statements from Pfizer and BioNTech. Of 170 infections detected to date, only eight were among people who'd received the actual vaccine and the rest had gotten a dummy shot. On the safety side, the companies cite results from 38,000 study participants who've been tracked for two months after their second dose. That's a milestone FDA set because historically, vaccine side effects don't crop up later than that.

"We'll drill down on these data," said FDA adviser Dr. Paul Offit of the Children's Hospital of Philadelphia.

Think of it like science on trial. A few days before the meeting, the FDA will release its own internal analysis. That sets the stage for the advisers' daylong debate about any signs of safety concerns and how the new vaccine technology works before rendering a verdict.

They'll recommend not just whether FDA should allow broader use of the vaccine generally but if so, for whom. For example, is there enough proof the vaccine works as well for older, sicker adults as for younger, healthier people?

There's still no guarantee. "We don't know what that vote's going to be," said former FDA vaccine chief Norman Baylor.

EMERGENCY USE ISN'T THE SAME AS FULL APPROVAL

If there's an emergency green light, "that vaccine is still deemed investigational. It's not approved yet," Dr. Marion Gruber, chief of FDA's vaccine office, told the National Academy of Medicine this week.

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That means anyone offered an emergency vaccination must get a "fact sheet" describing potential benefits and risks before going through with the shot, she said.

There will be a lot of unknowns. For example, the 95% protection rate is based on people who developed symptoms and then were tested for the virus. Can the vaccinated get infected but have no symptoms, able to spread the virus? How long does protection last?

That's why the 44,000-person study needs to keep running -- something difficult considering ethically, participants given dummy shots at some point must be offered real vaccine, complicating the search for answers.

"I'm curious," said Barry Colvin, 52, of White Plains, New York, who is taking part in that study at NYU Langone Health.

But he's not in a great hurry to find out which group he's in. "You need to hang in there for a while to understand and answer a lot of the other questions that remain unknown."

Additionally at least for now, pregnant women won't qualify because they weren't studied. Pfizer only recently began testing the vaccine in children as young as 12.

A decision on Pfizer-BioNTech's vaccine won't affect other COVID-19 vaccine candidates in the pipeline, which will be judged separately.

MANUFACTURING

Brewing vaccine is more complex than typical drug manufacturing, yet the millionth dose to roll out of Pfizer's Kalamazoo, Michigan, factory must be the same purity and potency as every dose before and after.

That means the FDA decision isn't just based on study data, but on its determination that the vaccine is being made correctly.

The Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine -- and Moderna's shots -- are made with brand-new technology. They don't contain the actual coronavirus. Instead, they're made with a piece of genetic code for the "spike" protein that studs the virus.

That messenger RNA, or mRNA, instructs the body to make some harmless spike protein, training immune cells to recognize it if the real virus eventually comes along.

GETTING INTO PEOPLE'S ARMS

Another government group -- advisers to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention -- decides who is first in line for scarce doses. Health and Human Services Secretary Alex Azar said he hopes that decision can be made at the same time as FDA's.

The Trump administration's Operation Warp Speed has worked with states to line up how many doses they'd need to cover the populations offered vaccine first.

Pfizer will ship those supplies as ordered by the states -- only after FDA gives the OK.

Company projections of how much it will ship each month are just predictions, Baylor warned.

"It's not like a pizza," he said. Manufacturing is so complex that "you don't necessarily end up with what you thought."

AP video journalist Kathy Young contributed to this report.

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

Trump makes late-term bid to lower prescription drug costs

By RICARDO ALONSO-ZALDIVAR Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Trying to close out major unfinished business, the Trump administration issued regulations Friday that could lower the prices Americans pay for many prescription drugs.

But in a time of political uncertainty, it's hard to say whether the rules will withstand expected legal challenges from the pharmaceutical industry or whether President-elect Joe Biden's administration will accept, amend or try to roll them back entirely.

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"The drug companies don't like me too much. But we had to do it," President Donald Trump said in announcing the new policy at the White House. "I just hope they keep it. I hope they have the courage to keep it," he added, in an apparent reference to the incoming Biden administration, while noting the opposition from drug company lobbyists.

The two finalized rules, long in the making, would:

— Tie what Medicare pays for medications administered in a doctor's office to the lowest price paid among a group of other economically advanced countries. That's called the "most favored nations" approach. It is adamantly opposed by critics aligned with the pharmaceutical industry who liken it to socialism. The administration estimates it could save \$28 billion over seven years for Medicare recipients through lower copays. It would take effect Jan. 1.

— Require drugmakers, for brand-name pharmacy medications, to give Medicare enrollees rebates that now go to insurers and middlemen called pharmacy benefit managers. Insurers that deliver Medicare's "Part D" prescription benefit say that would raise premiums. The nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office estimates it would increase taxpayer costs by \$177 billion over 10 years. The Trump administration disputes that and says its rule could potentially result in 30% savings for patients. It would take effect Jan. 1, 2022.

The pharmaceutical industry said Trump's approach would give foreign governments the "upper hand" in deciding the value of medicines in the U.S. and vowed to fight it.

"The administration is willing to upend the entire system with a reckless attack on the companies working around the clock to end this pandemic," the Pharmaceutical Research and Manufacturers of America said in a statement, adding that it is "considering all options to stop this unlawful onslaught on medical progress and maintain our fight against COVID-19."

The U.S. Chamber of Commerce said the "most favored nation" rule would lead to harmful price controls that could jeopardize access to new lifesaving medicines at a critical time.

Trump also announced he is ending a Food and Drug Administration program that was designed to end the sale of many old, and potentially dangerous, unapproved drugs that had been on the market for decades.

Sales of hundreds of these drugs, including some known to be harmful, have been discontinued under the program. But an unintended consequence has been sharply higher prices for consumers for these previously inexpensive medicines after they were approved by the FDA.

Trump came into office accusing pharmaceutical companies of "getting away with murder" and complaining that other countries whose governments set drug prices were taking advantage of Americans.

As a candidate in 2016, Trump advocated for Medicare to negotiate prices. As president, he dropped that idea, objected to by most Republicans. Instead, Trump began pursuing changes through regulations.

He also backed a bipartisan Senate bill that would have capped what Medicare recipients with high bills pay for medications while generally limiting price increases. Ambitious in scope, the legislation from Sens. Chuck Grassley, R-Iowa, and Ron Wyden, D-Ore., did not get a full Senate vote.

Health and Human Services Secretary Alex Azar, a former drug company executive, said the rules will "break this model where patients suffer, where prices increase every year," while corporate insiders enrich themselves.

Addressing the prospect of legal battles, Azar said, "We feel that both regulations are extremely strong and any industry challenging them is declaring themselves at odds with American patients and President Trump's commitment to lowering out-of-pocket costs."

The international pricing rule would cover many cancer drugs and other medications delivered by infusion or injection in a doctor's office.

It would apply to 50 medications that account for the highest spending under Medicare's "Part B" benefit for outpatient care. Ironically, the legal authority for Trump's action comes from the Affordable Care Act, the Obama-era health care overhaul he's still trying to repeal.

The rule also changes how hospitals and doctors are paid for administering the drugs, in an effort to try to remove incentives for using higher cost medications.

Relying on international prices to lower U.S. costs is an approach also favored by Democrats, including Biden. But Democrats would go much further, authorizing Medicare to use lower prices from overseas to

wrest industry concessions for all expensive medications, not just those administered in clinical settings.

Embodied in a House-passed bill from Speaker Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., this strategy would achieve much larger savings, allowing Medicare to pay for new benefits such as vision and dental coverage. It also would allow private insurance plans for workers and their families to get Medicare's lower prices.

Trump has taken other action to lower prescription drug costs by opening a legal path for importing medicines from abroad. Also, Medicare drug plans that cap insulin costs at \$35 a month are available during open enrollment, currently underway.

Prices for brand-name drugs have continued to rise during Trump's tenure, but at a slower rate. The FDA has put a priority on approving generics, which cost less.

AP Medical Writer Linda Johnson in Fairless Hills, Pa., contributed to this report.

Virus News: Another case record, positive news on vaccine

By The Associated Press undefined

Here is what's happening Friday with the coronavirus pandemic in the U.S.:

THREE THINGS TO KNOW TODAY

The development of a vaccine took another step forward Friday when Pfizer asked U.S. regulators to allow emergency use of its COVID-19 vaccine. It's a required step and critical milestone for the vaccine to be approved and distributed to people.

The Biden transition team is expressing concern that President Donald Trump's refusal to concede the election will create obstacles in fighting the pandemic. Dr. Atul Gawande, a member of Joe Biden's coronavirus task force, said issues surrounding protective equipment supplies, staff shortages and vaccine inventories need to be resolved as soon as possible.

College campuses will soon begin clearing out for the Thanksgiving holiday, including many that are ending the fall semester next week. To keep students from spreading the virus in their hometowns as they leave campus, some schools are requiring or offering virus tests. Schools like Notre Dame require tests and those who don't do so can't register for future classes.

THE NUMBERS: The meteoric rise in new COVID-19 infections has shown no signs of slowing down. There were more than 187,000 new cases Thursday — a record high — and the country is averaging more than 165,000 a day over the past week.

DEATH TOLL: The number of people dying from the virus has hit a six-month high, venturing into territory not seen since May when the nation was emerging from the crisis in the Northeast. The average number of Americans dying from the virus each day over the past week is now 1,335, and the overall death toll stands at more than 252,000 based on data collected by Johns Hopkins University.

QUOTABLE: "The employee must regularly lift and/or move over 100 pounds, lift dead bodies weighing 175 pounds or more using acceptable removal techniques. ... Must be able to tolerate the sight of and/or odor of mangled and/or decomposed deceased" — An El Paso County job posting for morgue workers in a city where more than 300 people have died since October.

ICYMI: Nurses, doctors and other medical workers are calling out sick in large numbers nationwide, putting a further strain on resources in hospitals. The Mayo Clinic Health System, a Midwest network of hospitals and clinics run by the world-renowned Mayo Clinic, reported that 905 staff members have tested positive for the virus.

ON THE HORIZON: The Thanksgiving holiday next week will present another major challenge for the country in its response to the virus. The federal government is pleading with Americans to not travel and keep gatherings confined to their immediate family but people will inevitably not heed the warnings and head to airports and family gatherings.

Find AP's full coverage of the coronavirus pandemic at <https://apnews.com/hub/coronavirus-pandemic>

Biden could announce Cabinet picks as soon as next week

By ALEXANDRA JAFFE Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President-elect Joe Biden is moving quickly to fill out his administration and could name top leaders for his Cabinet as early as next week.

Biden told reporters on Thursday that he's already decided on who will lead the Treasury Department. That pick, along with his nominee for secretary of state, may be announced before Thanksgiving, according to people close to the transition who spoke to The Associated Press on condition of anonymity to discuss internal deliberations.

The Cabinet announcements could be released in tranches, with groups of nominees focused on a specific top area, like the economy, national security or public health, being announced at once.

Such a move is intended to deliver the message that Biden is intent on preparing for the presidency even as President Donald Trump refuses to concede and attempts to subvert the election results in key states. Trump's roadblocks have undermined core democratic principles such as the peaceful transfer of power and are especially problematic because Biden will take office in January amid the worst public health crisis in more than a century.

"It's a huge impact. And each day it gets worse, meaning a week ago, it wasn't that big of a deal. This week, it's starting to get to be a bigger deal. Next week, it'll be bigger," said David Marchick, director of the Center for Presidential Transition at the nonpartisan Partnership for Public Service. "Every new day that's lost has a larger impact than the day before."

Still, Biden's transition work is progressing, with the president-elect holding frequent virtual meetings from his home in Wilmington, Delaware, and a music venue downtown. At this point, Biden is deeply involved in choosing his Cabinet, a process described by one person as similar to fitting puzzle pieces together.

In putting together the 15-person team, Biden is facing demands from multiple, competing interests, as well as the political realities of navigating a closely divided Senate.

He'll have to find the right mix of nominees to appease progressives demanding evidence he's committed to major reforms; fulfill his promise to build the most diverse government in modern history; and pass through a more difficult than expected nomination process with a slim margin of control for either party, depending on the outcome of two Georgia Senate runoffs in January.

Those considerations appear to be already informing Biden's calculus for secretary of state.

Two finalists to be America's top diplomat include Antony Blinken, a former deputy national security adviser and deputy secretary of state, and Chris Coons, who holds Biden's former Senate seat from Delaware and sits on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.

Blinken and Coons are close to Biden, and both have privately and, in some cases, publicly, expressed interest in the job. But with the balance of power in the Senate depending on two runoffs in Georgia, Blinken may have the upper hand, according to people close to the transition. The thinking, these people said, is that even if Coons is tapped for the post and replaced with a Democrat by Delaware's Democratic governor, the loss of his influence in the Senate may outweigh his value as secretary of state.

That Senate calculation also weighs heavily on perhaps Biden's presumptive first choice, former ambassador to the United Nations and national security adviser Susan Rice. Rice, who is also close to Biden, would almost certainly face difficulty in a confirmation process with a Republican-controlled Senate because of her past comments about the deadly 2012 attack on U.S. diplomatic compounds in Benghazi, Libya.

As Biden moves forward, his team won't have access to their counterparts at the various federal agencies or tap funds and office space for the transition until the General Services Administration ascertains that Biden is the winner.

Marchick noted that the delay in that process could ultimately undermine the number of administration staff Biden is able to get in place on time. Candidates must go through an ethics clearance process, file dozens of pages of forms, and some positions require security clearances.

The lack of ascertainment is also putting somewhat of a cash crunch on the Biden team. According to two donors familiar with the transition's efforts, they've raised about \$8 million for the transition already, hitting their original goal, but without the roughly \$6 million in federal funds afforded to Biden's transition

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team, they've been forced to continue fundraising.

In an email to donors this week obtained by the AP, Chris Korge, the Democratic National Committee's national finance chair, warned that the Biden transition didn't have enough money to "totally fund" their efforts and told donors that "the American people will be the big losers if we don't immediately step up and do something about it."

Speaking on a call with reporters Friday, Yohannes Abraham, an adviser to Biden's transition, warned that the delay is affecting the transition's planning.

"This isn't a game," he said. "There's no replacing the real-time information that can only come from the post-ascertainment environment that we should be in right now."

Associated Press writer Matthew Lee in Washington contributed to this report.

Wall Street slips amid worries about worsening pandemic

By STAN CHOE, DAMIAN J. TROISE and ALEX VEIGA AP Business Writers

Stocks closed broadly lower on Wall Street Friday following another choppy day of trading as worries about the worsening pandemic undercut growing optimism about a coming coronavirus vaccine.

The S&P 500 fell 0.7%, erasing its gains from a day earlier. The benchmark index, which climbed to an all-time high on Monday, posted its first weekly decline after two weeks of gains. The index is still up 8.8% so far this month.

Technology, financial and industrial companies drove much of the selling, which turned volatile in the final hour of regular trading. Treasury yields were mostly lower, a sign of caution in the market. Stock indexes around the world made modest moves.

Traders are balancing cautious optimism that a working coronavirus vaccine will be widely distributed next year against jitters over surging virus cases and the economic impact of new restrictions being put in place across the U.S. on people and businesses to limit the spread.

"It's a market concerned about growth," said Quincy Krosby, chief market strategist at Prudential Financial. "That's the big uncertainty."

The S&P 500 fell 24.33 points to 3,557.54. The Dow Jones Industrial Average slid 219.75 points, or 0.7%, to 29,263.48. The Nasdaq composite gave up an early gain and dropped 49.74 points, or 0.4%, to 11,854.97.

Small company stocks held up better than the rest of the market. The Russell 2000 small-cap index rose 1.21 points, or 0.1%, to 1,785.34.

Wall Street suddenly began to teeter-totter this week after a big November rally swept both the S&P 500 and Dow to record highs. Evidence is piling up for investors both for hope about the economy's prospects next year and for fear about the damage accruing in the shorter term.

Adding to the optimistic side of the ledger Friday was Pfizer and BioNTech saying they'll submit an application with U.S. regulators for emergency use of their vaccine candidate. Data suggests it may be 95% effective at preventing mild to severe COVID-19 disease.

If approved, a limited number of doses could begin being administered as early as next month, though widescale vaccinations likely wouldn't happen until after a potentially brutal winter. Other vaccines are also under development, and the hope is that one or more could get the economy running closer to normal next year.

On the pessimistic side, more governments around the world are bringing back restrictions on daily life to slow the spread of the virus. Surging coronavirus counts and hospitalizations also threaten to frighten consumers enough to keep them hunkered at home and drag on the economy.

"The market is supposed to be forward-looking, but the reality is it's hard to look past what's been going on the past couple of weeks," said J.J. Kinahan, chief strategist with TD Ameritrade. "The other thing that's a major concern is people going into lockdowns in major parts of the country. What is that going to be for businesses?"

California's governor announced late Thursday an overnight curfew on most residents in the state, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention is asking Americans not to travel for Thanksgiving and authori-

ties from Lisbon to Sri Lanka announced varying degrees of restrictions.

"On the road to the other side of the pandemic are detours and we're in one of those detours," Krosby said.

The U.S. Treasury Department also said late Thursday that it will not extend several emergency loan programs set up with the Federal Reserve during the worst of the spring's turmoil to help prop up markets and the economy.

The announcement got some immediate pushback from the Fed, which has been keeping the accelerator floored on its support for the economy while asking politicians in the White House and Congress to do the same. The central bank said it "would prefer that the full suite of emergency facilities" created during the pandemic remain.

But Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin said closing the emergency loan programs could allow Congress to re-appropriate \$455 billion to other relief programs. Democrats and Republicans in Washington have been deadlocked in efforts to deliver another round of financial support for the economy following the expiration of supplemental benefits for laid-off workers and other stimulus approved during the spring.

The majority of stocks in the S&P 500 fell, with technology companies taking the heaviest losses. Apple dropped 1.1%, while Intuit dropped 3.8%.

Travel-related stocks also fell. Cruise lines were among the biggest decliners. Norwegian Cruise Line slid 4.9% and Carnival fell 4.5%.

On the winning side was Williams-Sonoma, which rose 6.6% after reporting stronger profit and revenue for the latest quarter than analysts expected.

The yield on the 10-year Treasury slipped to 0.83% from 0.84% late Thursday.

European markets closed moderately higher and Asian markets ended mixed.

AP Business Writer Yuri Kageyama contributed.

Raptors denied permission to play in Canada, head to Tampa

By ROB GILLIES and TIM REYNOLDS Associated Press

TORONTO (AP) — The Toronto Raptors will start the NBA season next month in Tampa, Florida, because of travel restrictions by the Canadian government stemming from the pandemic.

The Raptors had been looking at other sites for several weeks, including Sunrise, Florida, the home of the NHL's Florida Panthers. But with NBA training camp less than two weeks away and a season starting Dec. 22, the Raptors were pressed to make a final decision.

Instead, they will play home games at Amalie Arena, home of the Stanley Cup champion Tampa Bay Lightning.

"Ultimately, the current public health situation facing Canadians, combined with the urgent need to determine where we will play means that we will begin our 2020-21 season in Tampa, Florida," Raptors President Masai Ujiri said in a statement Friday.

An official familiar with the Canadian government's decision told The Associated Press there is too much COVID-19 circulating in the United States to allow for cross-border travel that is not essential.

The official, speaking on condition of anonymity and not authorized to talk publicly about the matter, said there's a chance that the decision could be reviewed next year.

The Raptors, the NBA's lone Canadian team, and the league needed an exemption to a requirement that anyone entering Canada for nonessential reasons must isolate for 14 days. The U.S.-Canada border remains closed to nonessential travel.

Dr. Andrew Morris, a professor of infectious diseases at the University of Toronto and the medical director of the Antimicrobial Stewardship Program at Sinai-University Health Network, said the Canadian government made the right decision.

"With the current situation it is almost impossible for the government to reasonably sanction travel back and forth travel outside a bubble," Morris said.

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So, for the Raptors, it's now time for Florida to be home away from home again.

Toronto was the first NBA team to arrive in Florida last summer to begin preparations for the restarted season inside a bubble at Walt Disney World near Orlando. The Raptors began with a training camp at Florida Gulf Coast University in Fort Myers, then went to Disney a couple weeks later — doing so because the virus and travel rules would have kept them from getting their team together in Canada.

And now, they're on their way back to the Sunshine State. The league will release the first half of the schedule around Dec. 1; the second half of the schedule is likely to come in January or February, and there is a possibility that the team — for now, anyway — could return to Toronto at that point.

"So we'll be away from our home and our fans for now," Ujiri wrote in his statement. "They say absence makes the heart grow fonder. I'm not sure that's possible for us — we love Toronto and Canada, and we know we have the best fans in the NBA. For now, I'll ask you to cheer for us from afar, and we'll look forward to the day we are all together again."

The Raptors will remain in the NBA's Atlantic Division. Assuming the Raptors play all 36 of their home games this season in Tampa, seven teams — Atlanta, Miami, Washington, Orlando, Charlotte, Brooklyn and Philadelphia will be scheduled to visit there twice. The league's other 15 teams will all go there once.

The plan for the Raptors to come to Sunrise, about 30 miles north of Miami, was fairly far along as well. The team had worked out several arrangements with the NHL's Panthers, including even sharing the club's practice facility. Other U.S. cities known to have had interest in serving as the Raptors' temporary home were: Nashville, Tennessee; Newark, New Jersey; and Kansas City, Missouri.

The Canadian government denied the Blue Jays' request to play in Toronto this year because health officials didn't think it was safe for players to travel back and forth from the U.S., one of the countries hit hardest by the coronavirus. The number of cases in both nations, but particularly in the U.S., has surged since.

The Blue Jays failed to persuade the federal government to grant exemptions and played home games in Buffalo, New York, this year. The Canadian government required a comprehensive public health plan and written support from local health officials. The plan was reviewed by the Public Health Agency of Canada.

Other Canadian pro teams have also had to seek alternative arrangements: the country's three Major League Soccer teams all had temporary U.S. homes this season, and an idea bandied about for the NHL this season is to have all seven Canadian teams in one division.

And Friday's news came hours before an announcement that Toronto was going back into lockdown because of a coronavirus spike. The provincial Ontario government announced that Toronto and the Peel Region suburb will go into lockdown — restricting dining, shopping and other events — starting Monday. The stricter measures come as Ontario reports 1,418 new cases of COVID-19 Friday, including 393 in Toronto.

Reynolds reported from Miami.

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

Bosnia marks 25 years since inking of US-brokered peace deal

By SABINA NIKSIC Associated Press

SARAJEVO, Bosnia-Herzegovina (AP) — As their ethnic leaders gathered around a table outside Dayton, Ohio, to initial a U.S.-brokered peace deal a quarter-century ago, Edisa Sehic and Janko Samoukovic still were enemies in a war in Bosnia that killed over 100,000 people.

But the two, one an ethnic Bosniak woman and the other an ethnic Serb man, have often come together in recent years to visit schools and town halls where they talk about the futility of war from their first-hand experiences.

In many ways, Bosnia today is a country at peace, a testament to the success of the Dayton Accords, which ended more than 3 1/2 years of bloodshed when they were endorsed 25 years ago on Saturday.

But more than a generation after the shooting and shelling stopped, full peace still feels elusive in

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Bosnia, where the April 1992-Dec. 1995 war gave rise to an ethnic cleansing campaign and Europe's first genocide since World War II.

The country's three ethnic groups — Muslim Bosniaks, Orthodox Serbs and Catholic Croats — live in fear of renewed conflict as their nationalist leaders continue to stoke ethnic animosities for political gain.

Some Bosnians hope the election of Joe Biden as the next U.S. president will bolster change by renewing Western interest in the country, one of Europe's poorest. Biden visited Bosnia in 2009 as vice president, becoming the last key U.S. leader to do so.

When the Dayton peace agreement was reached in 1995, Sehic was a soldier with the Bosnian government army and Samoukovic was fighting with Bosnian Serb troops seeking to dismember the country and unite the territory they claimed for their own with neighboring Serbia.

The war was sparked by the break-up of Yugoslavia, which led Bosnia to declare its independence despite opposition from ethnic Serbs, who made up about one-third of its ethnically and religiously mixed population.

Armed and backed by neighboring Serbia, Bosnian Serbs conquered 60% of Bosnia's territory in less than two months, committing atrocities against their Bosniak and Croat compatriots. Ethnic Croats and Bosniaks also fought against each other for a period of 11 months.

Before the war was over, some 100,000 people had been killed and upward of 2 million, or over a half of the country's population, were driven from their homes.

Samoukovic, a Bosnian Serb who like Sehic, was 23-years-old in 1992, did not crave war. He chose to not leave his home in Pazaric, a small town on the outskirts of Sarajevo. But he and his father were soon arrested by Bosniaks and taken to a makeshift internment camp where prisoners were beaten, used as forced labor and deprived of food.

Sehic, a Muslim, had taken up arms in the early days of the conflict after her older brother was severely injured while defending Maglaj, their hometown in central Bosnia, from advancing Bosnian Serb forces.

She met her husband on the frontline and mourned his death in battle three months after giving birth to their daughter and six months before the war's end. Bosniaks were by far the greatest victims in the conflict in terms of numbers, accounting for about 80% of the people killed in the conflict.

The General Framework Agreement for Peace in Bosnia, reached at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base outside Dayton, was considered a major U.S. foreign policy achievement for the administration of President Bill Clinton.

The agreement was formally signed in Paris on December 14, 1995 by the presidents of Bosnia, Croatia and Serbia - Alija Izetbegovic, Franjo Tudjman and Slobodan Milosevic, respectively. Clinton and 50 other world leaders attending the signing ceremony.

Under the accords, nearly 60,000 international troops were deployed to Bosnia in December 1995 as part of a NATO-led mission to maintain peace and demarcate territory awarded to two semi-autonomous entities created by the agreement: Serb-run Republika Srpska and a federation shared by Bosniaks and Croats.

"When the (peace) agreement was reached, I was happy that there will be no more blood and death around us, hopeful that together we can start building a better future," Sehic said. "But as time went by, I realized that the shooting had stopped, but little else had changed."

While it brought an end to the fighting, the Dayton Accords formalized the ethnic divisions by establishing a complicated and fragmented state structure linked by weak joint institutions.

The deal "was essentially an armistice struck between a collection of warlords who are still present in the country, but had refashioned themselves as political leaders," said Jasmin Mujanovic, a U.S.-based political scientist of Bosnian origin.

In the immediate post-war years, the international community kept Bosnia on a reform course, pressuring its leaders to accept painful compromises in return for financial and other support.

But over a decade ago, as the international focus shifted to other global crises, Bosnia was mostly left to its own devices, exposed to the growing influence of Russia, China and Turkey.

Increasingly employing divisive nationalist rhetoric as a smoke screen, the political elites of all ethnic stripes have taken control of all levers of government for the benefit of their partisan loyalists.

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Their "criminal-political syndicates ... have been blocking significant democratic reforms for decades," Mujanovic said.

Facing the imminent danger of economic collapse, Bosnia is in dire need of constitutional reform, but the process "cannot even commence" without direct engagement of the United States, Mujanovic believes.

Some in Bosnia, where nearly half of the population lives under or close to the poverty line, hope that U.S. interest will increase under Biden.

"I hope that we shall be on the agenda of the Biden administration so that we can finally put behind what happened (during the war) and look into the future," said Haris Silajdzic, Bosnia's war-time foreign minister and a Bosniak member of its government's delegation in Dayton, Ohio, in 1995.

While agreeing that only the U.S. can help fix Bosnia's broken constitution, Mujanovic said real change will also require "the will, the pressure and engagement" of the country's citizens.

It is sometimes an uphill battle.

Samoukovic says his own son, now 26, was attracted by the lure of aggressive nationalist rhetoric when he was in high school but has since come to appreciate his father's embrace of reconciliation.

Bosnians could leave the war behind "if people listened to our stories instead of having politicians on the evening news constantly filling their ears with hate speech," Samoukovic said. "But most politicians don't care about our happiness, they do whatever what works for them."

Sehic, for her part, says she is driven by a sense of responsibility to make sure that neither her daughter "nor any other child will live through the same horrors as I did."

Pence pitches Georgia senators as last line of GOP defense

By BILL BARROW and JEFF AMY Associated Press

GAINESVILLE, Ga. (AP) — Vice President Mike Pence campaigned with Georgia's two Republican senators Friday, trying to hold off their Democratic challengers in Jan. 5 runoffs that will determine who controls the Senate at the outset of President-elect Joe Biden's administration.

The trip highlights a critical juncture for the Republicans and Pence, who is trying to balance his own political future against his loyalties to a president who has yet to concede defeat.

Pence appeared with Sens. David Perdue and Kelly Loeffler on the outskirts of metro Atlanta's sprawling footprint, on the same day Georgia's Republican secretary of state certified that Biden is the first Democratic presidential nominee to carry the state since 1992.

Although Pence has joined President Donald Trump in not yet conceding to Biden, the vice president held fast Friday to more careful language than the president's repeated and baseless claims of widespread voter fraud.

"As our election contest continues, here in Georgia and in courts across the country, I'll make you a promise," Pence said in a prepared speech he delivered in Canton and Gainesville, towns north of Atlanta. "We're going to keep fighting until every legal vote is counted. We're going to keep fighting until every illegal vote is thrown out."

That position has grown increasingly fraught as more states certify election returns, and even federal judges appointed by Trump reject the president's specious claims of a fraudulent election. Pence, almost certainly a future presidential candidate himself, cannot yet afford to distance himself from Trump, but also must be careful not to attach himself to mistruths that undermine confidence in U.S. elections.

While Pence was on a bus tour in Georgia, a partial recount loomed in Wisconsin. Also Friday, the president called Michigan's Republican legislative leaders to a White House meeting, an extraordinary move that raises questions over whether the president is pressuring GOP state officials to select slates of electors to the Electoral College who might subvert the voters' will at the ballot box.

Pence focused Friday on securing the Republican Senate majority by helping Perdue and Loeffler defeat Democrats Jon Ossoff and Raphael Warnock, respectively. Having won 50 Senate seats in the new Congress, Republicans need one more for control. A Democratic sweep of the Georgia runoffs would yield a 50-50 Senate, giving Vice President-elect Kamala Harris the tie-breaking vote to tilt the chamber to Democrats.

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With some irony, the Republicans' chief argument in the runoff contest has been to warn against giving Democrats complete control, a position that tacitly acknowledges that Biden will be sworn in as president on Jan. 20. Pence implied as much when he said Friday that a "Republican Senate majority could be the last line of defense for all that we've done."

Speaking before Pence, Perdue explicitly acknowledged Biden's win when he warned that if Georgia doesn't elect him and Loeffler, Democrats will "have the White House, the Senate and the House of Representatives. They'll do anything they want."

Perdue led Ossoff in the general election but narrowly missed the majority that Georgia law requires to win statewide elections. Warnock and Loeffler were the top finishers in an all-party special election to fill the final two years of former Sen. Johnny Isakson's term. Republican Gov. Brian Kemp appointed Loeffler to the post after Isakson announced his retirement last year.

Pence is the latest in a flurry of potential future Republican presidential candidates to come to Georgia, following Florida Sens. Marco Rubio and Rick Scott, and Arkansas Sen. Tom Cotton. Like those senators, Pence gave no nod to his own future, but he repeatedly flaunted something none of his would-be 2024 primary rivals have: such a close association with Trump.

"I bring greetings from the 45th president of the United States of America, President Donald Trump," Pence boasted in Gainesville, assuring the crowd Trump was "a little bit jealous" he couldn't come to Georgia himself Friday.

Voters at both rallies seemed at various points more amped for Trump than the Georgia senators or the vice president, chanting "Four more years" and "Stop the steal." Pence assured them he "couldn't wait" to "get back to the White House" and tell Trump about their enthusiasm.

"I'm here to see Pence because I support Trump," said John Weaver, a 46-year-old Ellijay resident who came to the Canton rally. Weaver said he believes Trump won.

Loeffler devoted part of her speeches to attacking Warnock, echoing recent television advertising by calling him a "radical's radical."

"We are on the front line defending the majority, but we're also the firewall against socialism in this country," she said in Canton.

Neither Warnock nor Ossoff are socialists, but Republicans believe the misleading, inaccurate labeling is the best way to encourage conservative Georgians to cast runoff ballots and perhaps to coax support from GOP-leaning voters, especially in the Atlanta suburbs and exurbs, who backed Biden because of their distaste for Trump.

Pence's exurban itinerary Friday underscores Republican math in Georgia: both are in heavily Republican counties that are growing fast.

Atlanta's closer-in suburbs have flipped to Democrats, who have moved into the exurbs as well. To win these runoffs, Republicans must maximize their remaining advantages in the exurban ring in the same way that Democrats must wring every vote from Atlanta and nearer suburbs.

Illinois teen charged in protest slayings posts \$2M bail

KENOSHA, Wis. (AP) — A 17-year-old from Illinois who is charged with killing two people during a protest in Wisconsin and whose case has become a rallying cry for some conservatives posted \$2 million bail Friday and was released from custody.

Kyle Rittenhouse is accused of fatally shooting Joseph Rosenbaum and Anthony Huber and wounding Gaige Grosskreutz during a demonstration Aug. 25 that followed the police shooting of Jacob Blake in Kenosha. He posted bond through his attorney at about 2 p.m., Kenosha County Sheriff's Sgt. David Wright said.

Rittenhouse, of Antioch, Illinois, told police he was attacked while he was guarding a business and that he fired in self-defense.

He faces multiple charges, including intentional homicide, reckless endangerment and being a minor in possession of a firearm. Wisconsin law doesn't permit minors to carry or possess a gun unless they're hunting. He is due back in court on Dec. 3 for a preliminary hearing.

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His case has taken on political overtones. Supporters of the Black Lives Matter movement have painted Rittenhouse as a trigger-happy white supremacist. Conservatives upset over property destruction during recent protests have portrayed him as a patriot exercising his right to bear arms during unrest. A legal defense fund for him has attracted millions of dollars in donations, and his mother got a standing ovation from women at a Waukesha County GOP function in September.

Huber's father, John Huber, asked Kenosha County Circuit Court Commissioner Loren Keating during a hearing Nov. 2 to set Rittenhouse's bail between \$4 million and \$10 million. Huber said Rittenhouse thinks he's above the law and noted the effort to raise money on his behalf. He also suggested militia groups would hide him from police if he were released.

Rittenhouse's attorney, Mark Richards, asked for \$750,000 bail.

Keating ultimately set bail at \$2 million, saying Rittenhouse was a flight risk given the seriousness of the charges against him.

What does emergency use of a COVID-19 vaccine mean?

By The Associated Press undefined

What does emergency use of a COVID-19 vaccine mean?

It's when regulators allow shots to be given to certain people while studies of safety and effectiveness are ongoing.

Before any vaccine is permitted in the U.S., it must be reviewed by the Food and Drug Administration, which requires study in thousands of people. Normally, the process to approve a new vaccine can take about a decade. But the federal government is using various methods to dramatically speed up the process for COVID-19 vaccines.

During a health crisis, the FDA can loosen its normal scientific standards to allow emergency use of experimental drugs, devices, vaccines and other medical products. The first vaccines to get the provisional green light in the U.S. are almost certain to be made available under this process, known as emergency use authorization.

Instead of the usual requirement of "substantial evidence" of safety and effectiveness for approval, the FDA can allow products onto the market as long as their benefits are likely to outweigh their risks. It has already used its emergency powers to authorize hundreds of coronavirus tests and a handful of treatments during the pandemic.

But the agency has almost no experience granting emergency use for vaccines and has laid out extra standards it will use to make decisions on upcoming COVID-19 shots.

In October, FDA officials told vaccine makers they should have two months of safety follow-up from half of the people enrolled in their studies before requesting emergency authorization. That data is expected to be enough for FDA to allow vaccinations of certain high-risk groups, such as front-line health workers and nursing home residents.

Full approval of a vaccine will likely require six months of safety follow-up as well as extensive inspections of company manufacturing sites. The leading vaccine makers are not expected to complete that process until next spring or summer. Only then is the FDA expected to grant full approval, which would allow vaccinations of the general population.

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

Who will be the first to get COVID-19 vaccines?

What does COVID-19 vaccine effectiveness mean?

How can I volunteer for a COVID-19 vaccine study?

NOT REAL NEWS: A look at what didn't happen this week

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The Associated Press undefined

A look at false and misleading claims and videos circulating after the presidential election and news about COVID-19 vaccines. None of these are legit, even though they were shared widely on social media. The Associated Press checked them out. Here are the facts:

Officials debunk multiple claims of dead people voting in Georgia

CLAIM: The identities of deceased Georgia residents Linda Kesler, Deborah Jean Christiansen and James Blalock were used to illegally cast ballots in the 2020 election.

THE FACTS: No one voted using the identities of these deceased individuals, according to election officials in their respective counties. The rumors started on Nov. 11, when President Donald Trump's campaign published a press release and posted their obituaries on its Facebook page. "Mr. James Blalock of Covington, Georgia, a World War II veteran, voted in the election," read one of the posts. "The only problem? He passed away 14 years ago, in January 2006. Sadly, Mr. Blalock is a victim of voter fraud." Since then, the claims have racked up hundreds of thousands of interactions on Facebook. The obituaries were also picked up by Fox News host Tucker Carlson, who devoted an entire segment to the fraud accusations. That broadcast was amplified by Trump, whose tweet sharing the video was retweeted more than 47,000 times. Linda Kesler, a resident of Nicholson, who died in 2003, is listed as deceased in county voting records and didn't vote this year, Jackson County election officials told The Associated Press. Lynda Kesler, who has a similar name but a different address, birthday and zip code, did vote, they said. Deborah Jean Christiansen, a Roswell resident who died in 2019, cast her last vote in 2018, according to Fulton County election officials. Her voter registration was canceled in 2019 and the county did not mail her a ballot for the Nov. 3 election, they said. A different woman also named Deborah Jean Christiansen, who was born in the same year, did vote in Cobb County in 2020, according to county Elections Director Janine Eveler. However, that woman has a different birthday and social security number, Eveler said. James Blalock, a resident of Covington, who died in 2006, was purged from the Secretary of State database that year and did not cast a vote in the 2020 election, Newton County election officials said in a statement. "His widow, Mrs. James E. Blalock Jr. has always voted under that name and continued to do so through this year's election," the statement read. Carlson issued an on-air correction and apology on his Fox News show Tucker Carlson Tonight for falsely claiming Blalock voted. "We've got some good news tonight, and an apology: One of the people who voted in last week's election isn't dead," he said on Nov. 13. He later broadened his apology without specifying names, saying, "some of the specific dead voters reported to us as deceased are in fact alive." A potential ballot cast in the name of Edward Skwiot, a fourth deceased individual identified by the Trump campaign, remains under investigation as local authorities try to determine what happened. A spokesman for the Georgia Secretary of State told the AP he couldn't comment on the active investigation.

— Associated Press writer Ali Swenson in Seattle contributed this item.

Fabricated tale claims ballot fraud by Philadelphia mob boss

CLAIM: The campaign for President-elect Joe Biden paid Joseph "Skinny Joey" Merlino, a mob boss in Philadelphia, to fill out 300,000 blank ballots.

THE FACTS: A video with over 180,000 views on Facebook claims in its caption, "Reports are coming in that the MOB in PA was HIRED by the Biden team to crate fake ballots by the thousands!" The claim originated with a Nov. 14 article published by the Buffalo Chronicle, which has a history of publishing false stories, according to an analysis by NewsGuard, a company that rates the trustworthiness of news sites. The Buffalo Chronicle story relies on anonymous sources to claim Merlino and his associates filled out the ballots with Sharpie markers and were paid \$3 million in cash by political operatives. It suggests, without providing evidence, that "Democratic Party operatives working inside Philadelphia's election office" gave Merlino "crates of raw ballots" which he took to two houses in South Philadelphia so they could be filled out for Biden, then transported them to a backroom at the Philadelphia Convention Center. John Merin-

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golo, Merlino's attorney, called the claims "fiction." The New York lawyer told The Associated Press "we categorically deny everything," and added that the account can be debunked by the fact that his client is not allowed to leave Florida where he is under supervised release after leaving federal prison. Merlino pleaded guilty to a gambling charge in 2018 after a jury deadlocked in a criminal case that accused him of racketeering and fraud charges. Jane Roh, a spokesperson for the Philadelphia District Attorney's office wrote in an email to the AP, "Nothing fitting the description of what is being alleged here has been reported to the District Attorney's Office Election Task Force for criminal investigation." Roh noted that the Buffalo Chronicle "has an established history of publishing disinformation" and the article in question "appears to be false." The news site did not respond to a request for comment. Election experts told the AP a voter fraud scheme like the one alleged in the article would be impossible to pull off. Matthew Weil, director of the Elections Project at the Bipartisan Policy Center, said that if this claim had actually happened, there would be 300,000 more ballots cast and counted than voters who checked in to vote or cast an absentee ballot. "That's obviously false and would be easy to catch during the canvass," Weil said. Voters who show up to vote in-person in Philadelphia use a ballot marking device to mark their paper ballots, and Weil pointed out, "300,000 ballots made in two private homes and then infiltrated into the system would not look like these." If the alleged fraud scheme involved fabricating mailed ballots, Weil said the scheme would also require "the outer envelope, internal privacy sleeve, and a voter's signature." Even if it were possible to somehow fabricate ballots — which experts say it is not — University of Pennsylvania political scientist Marc Meredith told the AP, "there are a lot of safeguards" that would prevent such a fraud scheme from going unnoticed by him and others who analyze election data. "A scheme like you describe would have to leave a paper trail that is clearly not present in the data," Meredith said.

— Associated Press writers Jude Joffe-Block in Phoenix and Marco Martínez Chacón in Mexico City contributed this item.

More votes were not cast in Detroit in 2020 than there are people

CLAIM: There are "far more votes" in Detroit than people.

THE FACTS: According to unofficial election results on the City of Detroit's website, on Nov. 5, there were 250,138 votes cast and 504,714 registered voters. Detroit has an estimated population of 670,000. False claims swirled after the Wayne County Board of Canvassers met to certify election results showing Democrat Joe Biden defeating President Donald Trump. One Twitter user posted on Tuesday: "How did Wayne County of Detroit, Michigan have more votes than people registered to vote?" President Donald Trump also tweeted the false claim about Detroit, while falsely stating he won the state of Michigan: "In Detroit, there are FAR MORE VOTES THAN PEOPLE. Nothing can be done to cure that giant scam. I win Michigan!" The issue appeared to grow from a deadlock down party lines that occurred as the four members of the Wayne County Board of Canvassers met to certify election results Tuesday night. Monica Palmer, one of the two Republicans on the board of canvassers, said poll books in some Detroit precincts were out of balance, meaning the number of names recorded in poll books did not match the number of ballots counted. She and the other Republican board member initially cited the discrepancies as a reason not to certify Detroit's election results -- which Democrats, election experts and spectators at the Wayne County Board of Canvassers meeting condemned as a dangerous attempt to block the results of a free and fair election. According to Detroit Mayor Mike Duggan, only 357 votes out of 250,000 votes cast appeared to be out of balance. "The idea that the out of balance precincts reflects any problem with the voting is utter nonsense," Duggan said in a press conference Wednesday. "It is not any indication of any kind of fraud in the voting process." It is not uncommon for there to be slight inconsistencies between the number of ballots and the number of voter names in a poll book. Typically these issues are due to human error, according to Tammy Patrick, a former Arizona election official who now works for the Democracy Fund, a foundation that works on voting issues. "That's not a sign that there's anything necessarily wrong with the system," Patrick explained in a call with the AP. "It's just a sign that elections are conducted by people and for people, and so that kind of interaction with the system is where you can have discrepan-

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cies occur." In the 2016 presidential election, some Detroit precincts were out of balance, and a Michigan Bureau of Elections audit attributed the discrepancies to human errors, not voter fraud.

— Associated Press writer Arijeta Lajka in New York contributed this item.

Debunked theory used to claim Trump won 410 electoral votes

CLAIM: An image of a map showing President Donald Trump actually won 410 electoral votes reflects election data from a server the U.S. Army seized from the election software company ScytI in Frankfurt, Germany.

THE FACTS: Social media users have been sharing false reports claiming a server with U.S. election data was confiscated in Germany. Most posts said the server belonged to the software company ScytI, which is based in Barcelona, and some suggested the server housed information from Dominion Voting Systems. Social media posts also claimed the recovered server had raw data showing Trump had actually won the election with 410 electoral votes, including a tweet from Manga Anantatmula, a Republican congressional candidate in Virginia who lost her race by a 43-point margin. "The raw data in the server seized by the US military shows Trump won by a landslide 410!!!!" reads Anantatmula's tweet. "VOID all results in landslide states and declare the R-candidates winners!!" One America News Network reported on Anantatmula's tweet, as well as an image she tweeted of a mostly red map with electoral votes adding up to 410 for Trump, and just 128 for President-elect Joe Biden. But the map in question does not show official data. It has the logo "270 TO WIN" and can be made by anyone using the 270towin.com website. The Associated Press reached out to Anantatmula for comment but did not hear back. The false claims followed a Zoom call last week that featured Republican Rep. Louie Gohmert of Texas, suggesting that election software company ScytI maintained data that could be "gleaned" to prove Republican votes had been switched to Democratic ones in the Nov. 3 election, and that "U.S. Army forces" had seized a ScytI server from the company's Frankfurt office. In his remarks, which were widely shared on social media, Gohmert acknowledged that the information about the alleged raid came from a tweet and he said, "I don't know the truth." The Associated Press reached out to Gohmert's spokesperson but did not hear back. When asked by The Associated Press if the Army had engaged in an operation to recover servers in Germany, an Army spokesperson responded Saturday, "Those allegations are false." As the false conspiracy spread, ScytI released a statement that said: "We do not have servers or offices in Frankfurt" and "The US army has not seized anything from ScytI in Barcelona, Frankfurt or anywhere else." It also said ScytI does not "tabulate, tally or count votes in the US." Jonathan Brill, the president and general manager for ScytI's U.S. division, told the AP the company had temporary backup servers in Frankfurt last year for the European Parliament election, but "these back-up servers were closed in September 2019." Brill said when it comes to the U.S. elections, "ScytI products sold to US customers are fully housed in the US, utilizing Amazon Web Services and have never been housed in Germany." ScytI and Dominion do not have ties to one another, according to statements from both companies.

— Jude Joffe-Block

Lung tissue from aborted fetus not used in AstraZeneca vaccine development

CLAIM: Researchers used lung tissue from an aborted male fetus in the creation of COVID-19 AstraZeneca vaccine.

THE FACTS: As news continues to break around the results of new COVID-19 vaccines, a widely shared video made false claims about the vaccine developed through a partnership between the British pharmaceutical company AstraZeneca and Oxford University. The video, which had more than 160,000 views, falsely claimed: "CONFIRMED- aborted Male fetus in Covid 19 vaccine." In the video, an unidentified woman shows the packaging from a box of AstraZeneca and Oxford's COVID-19 vaccine, and urges people to share the video with "anybody else that doesn't want aborted fetal tissue fragments put into them." She then shows a preprint of a University of Bristol study that tested the vaccine on MRC-5 cell lines. She explains that the cell line was originally developed from an aborted male fetus. "Is everybody OK with having that

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injected into themselves or their children?" the woman asks. A spokesperson for AstraZeneca confirmed to the AP that the company does not use MRC-5 cells in the development of its vaccine. Researchers at the University of Bristol, who were independent from the vaccine's development, injected the COVID-19 vaccine into MRC-5 cell lines as part of their own study. MRC-5 cells are what is known as an immortalized cell line, which can reproduce indefinitely. Such cell lines are used in vaccine production to grow viruses in order to keep them from replicating. The AstraZeneca and Oxford vaccine relies on a harmless chimpanzee cold virus to carry the coronavirus spike protein into the body in order to create an immune response. AstraZeneca did not use MRC-5 cells, but it did use a different producer cell line to develop it: Human Embryonic Kidney 293 TREX cells. According to the University of Oxford development team, the original Human Embryonic Kidney 293 cells were taken from the kidney of an aborted fetus in 1973, but the cells used now are clones of the original cells. Dr. Deepak Srivastava, president of Gladstone Institutes and former president of the International Society for Stem Cell Research, said fetal cell lines were critical in developing hepatitis, measles and chickenpox vaccines. "What's important for the public to know even if they are opposed to the use of fetal cells for therapies, these medicines that are being made and vaccines do not contain any aspect of the cells in them," Srivastava said. "The cells are used as factories for production." Misinformation around COVID-19 vaccines have public health experts concerned about the implications it could have on the adoption of the vaccine in the United States.

— Associated Press writer Beatrice Dupuy in New York contributed this item.

Thousands attended DC rally supporting Trump, not '1 million'

CLAIM: More than 1 million people took part in the "Million MAGA March" in Washington.

THE FACTS: On Nov. 14, fervent supporters of President Donald Trump gathered at Freedom Plaza along Pennsylvania Avenue in Washington to rally behind Trump's false claims that the election was stolen from him. Some social media users shared aerial images from the Washington march claiming that 1 million people had attended. That number is far off, a generous estimate would be between 11,000 and 15,000 participants, according to G. Keith Still, a professor who teaches crowd science at the University of Suffolk in England and trains police departments on techniques to calculate crowd sizes. "73 million angry Trump voters. One million of them marched in DC today..." said one Twitter user who overstated the crowd size. The false post had over 6,000 retweets. White House press secretary Kayleigh McEnany also tweeted the exaggerated numbers: "More than one MILLION marchers for President @realDonaldTrump descend on the swamp in support," she tweeted on Nov. 14. The post had over 70,000 retweets. The National Park Service in Washington issued a permit to Women for America First, a pro-Trump group that demonstrated on Saturday, for 10,000 people to attend the event at Freedom Plaza. The park service and Washington's Metropolitan Police Department do not provide estimates on crowd size.

— Arijeta Lajka

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In multiple countries, alarm over hunger crisis rings louder

By EISSA AHMED, TAMEEM AKHGAR AND SAMY MAGDY Associated Press

ABS, Yemen (AP) — The twin baby boys lay on a bed of woven palm leaves in a remote camp for displaced people in Yemen's north, their collar bones and ribs visible. They cried loudly, twisting as if in pain, not from disease but from the hunger gnawing away at them.

Here, U.N. officials' increasingly dire warnings that a hunger crisis is growing around the world are becoming reality.

U.N. agencies have warned that some 250 million people in 20 countries are threatened with sharply spiking malnutrition or even famine in coming months.

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The United Nations humanitarian office this week released \$100 million in emergency funding to seven countries most at risk of famine — Yemen, Afghanistan, South Sudan, Ethiopia, Nigeria, Congo, and Burkina Faso.

But David Beasley, head of the World Food Program, says billions in new aid are needed. Without it, “we are going to have famines of biblical proportions in 2021,” he said in an Associated Press interview last week.

In multiple countries, the coronavirus pandemic has added a new burden on top of the impact of ongoing wars, pushing more people into poverty, unable to afford food. At the same time, international aid funding has fallen short, weakening a safety net that keeps people alive.

In Afghanistan’s capital, Kabul, Zemaray Hakimi said he can only give his children one meal a day, usually hard, black bread dunked in tea. He lost his work as a taxi driver after contracting COVID-19 and now waits daily on the street for day laborer work that rarely comes.

When his children complain of hunger, he said, “I tell them to bear it. One day maybe we can get something better.”

South Sudan may be closer than any other country to famine, as crisis after crisis wears on a population depleted by five years of civil war. The U.N. projected earlier this year that a quarter of the population of Jonglei State, home to more than 1.2 million, would reach the brink of famine.

Now cut off from much of the world by flooding that has affected some 1 million people, many South Sudanese have seen farming and other food-gathering activities ripped apart. The challenges are so numerous that even “plastic sheets are not available, as they had largely been used for the previous flood response,” the U.N. humanitarian agency said this week.

COVID-19 has restricted trade and travel. Food prices rose. Post-war unrest remains deadly; gunmen recently fired on WFP boats carrying supplies.

“The convergence of conflict, macroeconomic crisis, recurrent flooding as well as the indirect impacts of COVID create a ‘perfect storm,’” the country director for the CARE aid group, Rosalind Crowther, said in an email. “Flooding and violence have led to massive displacement, low crop production and loss of livelihoods and livestock.”

In the Arabian Peninsula, Yemen is on a “countdown to catastrophe,” Beasley, of the WFP, warned the U.N. Security Council last week.

“Famine is truly a real and dangerous possibility and the warning lights are ... flashing red — as red can be,” he said.

For years, Yemen has been the center of the world’s worst food crisis, driven by the destructive civil war between Iranian-backed Houthi rebels who in 2014 took over the north and the capital, Sanaa, and a Saudi-led coalition backing the government in the south.

International aid pulled it from the edge of famine two years ago. But the threat has surged back this year, fueled by increasing violence and a currency collapse that put food out of reach for growing numbers of people.

Donors have been wary of new funding because of corruption and restrictions that Houthis have put on humanitarian workers. The U.N. had to cut in half the rations it gives to 9 million people — and faces possible cuts to another 6 million in January.

The 18-month-old twins, Mohammed and Ali, weigh only about 3 kilograms, or 6.6 pounds, less than a third of the weight they should be, according to their doctor.

Their father, Hassan al-Jamai, was a farmer in northern Hajjah province near the border with Saudi Arabia. Soon after their birth, the family had to flee fighting to a displaced camp in the district of Abs.

“We are struggling to treat them,” said Mariam Hassam, the twins’ grandmother. “Their father took them everywhere.”

Two-thirds of Yemen’s population of about 28 million people are hungry. In the south, U.N. data from recent surveys show cases of severe acute malnutrition rose 15.5% this year, and at least 98,000 children under five could die of it.

By the end of the year, 41% of the south’s 8 million people are expected to have significant gaps in food consumption, up from 25%.

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The situation could be worse in Sanaa and the north, home to more than 20 million people. The U.N. is currently conducting a similar survey there.

Sanaa's main hospital, al-Sabeen, received over 180 cases of malnutrition and acute malnutrition in the past three months, well over its capacities, according Amin al-Eizari, a nurse.

At least five children died at the hospital during that period, with more dying outside, he said.

U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres on Friday urged parties with influence in Yemen to take action to "stave off catastrophe" or risk a tragedy with "consequences that will reverberate indefinitely into the future."

Yemen is "now in imminent danger of the worst famine the world has seen for decades," he said.

In Afghanistan — like Yemen, crippled by war — the pandemic has meant further losses of jobs and mounting food prices. The poverty rate is expected to leap this year from 54% of the population of some 36 million to as high as 72%, according to World Bank projections.

Some 700,000 Afghan workers returned from Iran and Pakistan this year, fleeing coronavirus outbreaks. That halted millions of dollars in remittances, a key income for families in Afghanistan, and returnees flooded the ranks of those needing work.

Markets in Kabul seem full of food items. But shop owners say fewer customers can afford anything. More people are experiencing major gaps in their food — expected to rise to 42% of the population by the end of the year, from 25%, according to U.N. figures.

In the Bagrami displaced camp in the mountains surrounding Kabul, Gul Makai sat beside her mud-brick hut. She had spent the night shoveling out water and mud after the roof leaked in a recent snow. With early snows this year, temperatures have dropped below freezing.

Her 12 children, all 10 or younger, sat with her, hungry and shivering in the cold breeze. They were all thin. One daughter, Neamat, around 4, had the withered look that suggests malnutrition.

Makai fled seven months ago from her home in southern Helmand province after her husband was killed in a crossfire between government forces and the Taliban. By begging, she scrounges up enough rice or hard bread to give her kids one meal a day. She eats every other day.

"The weather in winter will get colder," she said. "If I don't get help, my children may get sick, or God forbid, I may lose any of them. We are in a bad condition."

AP correspondent Cara Anna in Nairobi, Kenya contributed to this report. Akhgar reported from Kabul. Magdy reported from Cairo.

Justices put off case over access to Russia probe grand jury

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Supreme Court is putting off upcoming arguments about whether Congress should have access to secret grand jury testimony from special counsel Robert Mueller's Russia investigation.

The Democratic-controlled House of Representatives had asked the court to put off arguments scheduled for Dec. 2, and the court on Friday agreed, removing the case from its calendar.

Douglas Letter, the top lawyer for the House had told the court in a written filing that the House Judiciary Committee that takes office in January "will have to determine whether it wishes to continue pursuing the application for the grand-jury materials that gave rise to this case." Letter noted that President Donald Trump's defeat in his bid for reelection could affect the committee's decision.

The material initially was sought in the summer of 2019 as part of the committee's investigation of possible misconduct by Trump, including whether he obstructed Mueller's investigation. Mueller's 448-page report, issued in April 2019, "stopped short" of reaching conclusions about Trump's conduct to avoid stepping on the House's impeachment power, the federal appeals court in Washington said in March when it ruled that the materials should be turned over.

By the time of the appellate ruling, Trump had been impeached by the House for his efforts to get Ukraine to announce an investigation of Democrat Joe Biden, and acquitted by the Senate.

Iran's allies on high alert in Trump's final weeks in office

By QASSIM ABDUL-ZAHRA and SAMYA KULLAB Associated Press

BAGHDAD (AP) — Iran has instructed allies across the Middle East to be on high alert and avoid provoking tensions with the U.S. that could give an outgoing Trump administration cause to launch attacks in the U.S. president's final weeks in office, Iraqi officials have said.

The request — delivered by a senior Iranian general to allies in Baghdad this week — reflects the growing regional anxiety over President Donald Trump's unpredictable behavior and the uncertainty in the chaotic transition period until President-elect Joe Biden takes over in two months.

Iran's allies have collectively welcomed Trump's election defeat. Under his presidency, tensions with Iran escalated, reaching fever pitch at the beginning of the year with the U.S. airstrike that killed Iran's top general, Qassim Soleimani, at the Baghdad airport. Iran launched a ballistic missile attack in response to the fatal drone strike, targeting U.S. soldiers in Iraq and wounding dozens.

Trump also unilaterally withdrew America in 2018 from Iran's nuclear deal with world powers, meant to prevent it from developing nuclear weapons, and re-imposed punishing sanctions on Iran, crippling its economy.

Iran has since abandoned all limits on its uranium enrichment program, even as the deal's other international partners have tried unsuccessfully to salvage it. The incoming Biden administration has stated plans to rejoin or renegotiate the 2015 nuclear accord.

But there is growing concern over what Trump, who is refusing to concede the election, might do in the last days of his presidency — including a potential strike on America's enemies abroad. On Thursday, an adviser to Iran's supreme leader warned in an interview with The Associated Press that any American attack on Iran could set off a "full-fledged war" in the region.

"We don't welcome war. We are not after starting a war," said Hossein Dehghan, who served in Iran's paramilitary Revolutionary Guard before becoming a defense minister under President Hassan Rouhani.

The concern does not appear to be rooted in anything concrete — Trump has, in fact, ordered a draw-down in U.S. troops in Iraq and Afghanistan to be completed by mid-January — but rather in general nervousness about the unpredictability of Trump's actions. His firing of Defense Secretary Mark Esper two days after the election triggered a flurry of speculation about whether it was related to a broader plan to strike abroad.

Iraq, where the U.S.-Iran rivalry has chiefly played out, is seen as a potential arena. Frequent attacks against the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad in recent months led a frustrated Trump administration to threaten to close the mission, a move that sparked a diplomatic crisis and diplomatic back channel messaging that led to an informal truce a few weeks ahead of the U.S. election.

With two months to go until a Biden administration takes over, Iranian Gen. Esmail Ghaani, head of the Guard's expeditionary Quds Force, delivered Tehran's request during a meeting with Iranian-backed Iraqi militia factions and Shiite politicians in Baghdad this week, according to two senior Iraqi Shiite politicians who attended the meetings in Baghdad.

The message: Stand down to avoid giving Trump the opportunity to initiate a fresh tit-for-tat round of violence.

And to the Iraqi Shiite paramilitaries: Be calm and cease attacks for now against American presence in Iraq.

However, if there was a U.S. aggression by the Trump administration, Iran's response would "be in line with the type of strike," one of the Iraqi politicians cited Ghaani as saying.

An Iraqi government official also confirmed Ghaani's meetings with Iranian-backed factions in Iraq this week. All Iraqi officials spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss the private meetings.

Meanwhile, in Lebanon, the leader of the Iran-backed militant Hezbollah group, Hasan Nasrallah, warned followers and allies to be vigilant during Trump's remaining weeks in office.

"All of us ... should be on high alert in these next two months so that it passes peacefully," Nasrallah said in televised remarks earlier this month even as he urged followers to "be prepared to face any danger,

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aggression or harm” and to respond in kind “if the US or Israel’s follies go that far.”

But only hours after Ghaani delivered Iran’s message in Baghdad — and while he was still in Iraq — a barrage of Katyusha rockets were fired at the Iraqi capital’s heavily fortified Green Zone, landing a few hundred meters (yards) from the U.S. Embassy. A few of the rockets that landed just outside the Green Zone killed a child and wounded five civilians.

The attack — contrary to instructions to avoid escalation — could indicate potential disagreement within militia ranks, or a deliberate plan by the factions to offer mixed messages and keep their intentions ambiguous.

A little-known militia group, Ashab al-Kahf, believed to have links with the powerful Kataib Hezbollah, claimed responsibility for the rocket attack. For its part, Kataib Hezbollah denied it had carried out the barrage, and claimed the truce initiated in October was still in place.

That claim was countered by Qais al-Khazali, the head of the powerful Iran-aligned Asaib Ahl al-Haq militia group, who said in a televised interview on Thursday that the truce had ended.

France postpones ‘Black Friday’ to help locked-down shops

PARIS (AP) — France’s government on Friday got supermarket chains and e-commerce platforms like Amazon to agree to postpone “Black Friday” promotions, responding to concerns that shops shuttered by the nation’s coronavirus lockdown are hemorrhaging business and could be hurt further if they miss out on the consumer splurge.

Under the deal brokered by the economy minister, Bruno Le Maire, “Black Friday” in France will now be pushed back by a week to Dec. 4, with the understanding that lockdown-shuttered businesses will have been allowed to reopen by then.

The ministry said support for the delay ended up being unanimous among commerce, e-commerce and supermarket representatives who took part in two days of talks. It said a “spirit of responsibility and solidarity” prevailed.

With the lockdown starting to bring France’s latest virus surge back under control, the government is facing pressure to allow businesses closed as “non-essential” to reopen. But it is also mindful of the risk of infections speeding up again if restrictions are lifted too soon, too quickly. The approach of “Black Friday,” originally scheduled for Nov. 27 in France, had brought the dilemma to a head.

Postponing “Black Friday” until real-world stores have reopened would allow them to also profit from consumer spending on cut-price goods ahead of Christmas.

The director of Amazon France, Frederic Duval, told France Info radio on Friday before the meeting that the e-commerce distributor was ready to sign up to a delay. Its “Black Friday” promotions will be pushed back to Dec. 4, he said. The delay applies only to Amazon France, he added. In several other countries Amazon was launching a week of deals already on Friday.

The focus on “Black Friday” is part of what has become a wider debate in France about the lopsided effects of lockdowns, with businesses deemed “non-essential” forced to close while some big distributors and e-commerce sites have thrived as consumers have shopped online instead.

In a boost to florists, among businesses that found themselves on the “non-essential” list, the government allowed sales of Christmas trees from Friday, granting a lockdown exception to the traditional decoration that, arguably, could be regarded as perhaps not strictly essential.

Paris florist Ieda Fusco was thrilled.

“If we can’t open our shops for Christmas it will be very difficult for the sector,” she said. “There are already a lot of flower shops that suffer greatly so, today, we need help and coherence.”

Florida’s Sen. Scott has coronavirus, ‘very mild symptoms’

By MARY CLARE JALONICK Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Sen. Rick Scott of Florida said Friday he had tested positive for the coronavirus

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and was isolating at home with "very mild symptoms."

He's the second senator, along with Iowa's Chuck Grassley, and at least the eighth member of Congress to announce a positive test this week.

Scott, 67, has been quarantining at home all week after coming into contact in Florida on Nov. 13 with someone who subsequently tested positive. His office said he had "multiple negative rapid tests earlier in the week" but a separate test he took Tuesday came back positive Friday morning.

Scott, a Republican, said he was "feeling good" despite the mild symptoms and would be working at his home in Naples.

"I want to remind everyone to be careful and do the right things to protect yourselves and others," Scott said in a statement. "Wear a mask. Social distance. Quarantine if you come in contact with someone positive like I did. As we approach Thanksgiving, we know this holiday will be different this year. But, listen to public health officials and follow their guidance."

The former Florida governor was recently elected as the chairman of Senate Republicans' campaign arm, leading GOP fundraising and recruiting efforts for the next two years.

While Scott's office said he was quarantining after being exposed in Florida on Nov. 13, Scott was also in Georgia earlier that day campaigning for Republican Sens. Kelly Loeffler and David Perdue, who are facing January Senate runoffs. The crowded campaign event was held indoors with little distancing, and Scott wore a mask only part of the time. Several people in the room also were not wearing masks.

Scott's announcement came three days after Grassley, the longest-serving Republican senator and third in the line of presidential succession, also said he has tested positive. Grassley, 87, was in the Senate on Monday — and spoke on the Senate floor without a mask — but is now quarantining in his Virginia home.

The increasing number of cases among members of Congress has raised questions about the safety of the Capitol complex as cases have spiked in most every state and lawmakers are flying back and forth weekly. House members could be regularly tested in the Capitol starting this week, but there is still no testing protocol for senators.

The senators' absences this week also threatened the progress of legislation and other work as Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell is trying to wrap up business in the remaining weeks of President Donald Trump's term. The absence Scott and Grassley on Tuesday helped Democrats block the nomination of Judy Shelton, Trump's controversial pick for the Federal Reserve.

Besides Sens. Scott and Grassley, at least six members of the House have announced that they tested positive for the virus in the last week: Republican Reps. Don Young of Alaska, Dan Newhouse of Washington, Doug Lamborn of Colorado and Tim Walberg of Michigan and Democratic Reps. Ed Perlmutter of Colorado and Cheri Bustos of Illinois.

Young, 87, is the longest-serving member of the House. In a statement Monday, he said he had been discharged from the hospital and "I had not felt this sick in a very long time."

Besides the current members, a Republican congresswoman-elect who flipped an Iowa seat in this month's election also said she tested positive. Ashley Hinson, 37, said she would participate in this week's House orientation virtually as she quarantined with her family in Iowa.

Associated Press videojournalist Angie Wang contributed to this report from Atlanta, Georgia.

Today in History

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Saturday, Nov. 21, the 326th day of 2020. There are 40 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On Nov. 21, 1980, 87 people died in a fire at the MGM Grand Hotel in Las Vegas, Nevada.

On this date:

In 1920, the Irish Republican Army killed 12 British intelligence officers and two auxiliary policemen in

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the Dublin area; British forces responded by raiding a soccer match, killing 14 civilians.

In 1922, Rebecca L. Felton, a Georgia Democrat, was sworn in as the first woman to serve in the U.S. Senate; her term, the result of an interim appointment, ended the following day as Walter F. George, the winner of a special election, took office.

In 1931, the Universal horror film "Frankenstein," starring Boris Karloff as the monster and Colin Clive as his creator, was first released.

In 1967, President Lyndon B. Johnson signed the Air Quality Act.

In 1969, the Senate voted down the Supreme Court nomination of Clement F. Haynsworth, 55-45, the first such rejection since 1930.

In 1973, President Richard Nixon's attorney, J. Fred Buzhardt (buh-ZAHRDT'), revealed the existence of an 18-1/2-minute gap in one of the White House tape recordings related to Watergate.

In 1979, a mob attacked the U-S Embassy in Islamabad, Pakistan, killing two Americans.

In 1985, U.S. Navy intelligence analyst Jonathan Jay Pollard was arrested accused of spying for Israel. (Pollard later pleaded guilty to espionage and was sentenced to life in prison; he was released on parole on Nov. 20, 2015.)

In 1992, a three-day tornado outbreak that struck 13 states began in the Houston area before spreading to the Midwest and eastern U.S.; 26 people were killed. Sen. Bob Packwood, R-Ore., issued an apology but refused to discuss allegations that he'd made unwelcome sexual advances toward ten women over the years. (Faced with a threat of expulsion, Packwood ended up resigning from the Senate in 1995.)

In 1995, Balkan leaders meeting in Dayton, Ohio, initialed a peace plan to end three and a-half years of ethnic fighting in Bosnia-Herzegovina (BAHZ'-nee-ah HEHR'-tsuh-goh-vee-nah).

In 2001, Ottilie (AH'-tih-lee) Lundgren, a 94-year-old resident of Oxford, Conn., died of inhalation anthrax; she was the apparent last victim of a series of anthrax attacks carried out through the mail system.

In 2018, President Donald Trump and Chief Justice John Roberts publicly clashed over the independence of America's judiciary, with Roberts rebuking the president for denouncing a judge hearing a migrant asylum challenge as an "Obama judge."

Ten years ago: Debt-struck Ireland formally applied for a massive EU-IMF loan to stem the flight of capital from its banks, joining Greece in a step unthinkable only a few years earlier when Ireland was a booming Celtic Tiger and the economic envy of Europe. Justin Bieber received four American Music Awards, becoming at age 16 the youngest performer to win artist of the year.

Five years ago: Belgian authorities closed down Brussels' subway system and flooded the streets with armed police and soldiers in response to what they said was a threat of Paris-style attacks. Louisiana Democrats reclaimed the governor's mansion for the first time in eight years as John Bel Edwards defeated Republican David Vitter in a runoff election.

One year ago: Fiona Hill, a former White House official, testified to House investigators that President Donald Trump's top European envoy had been sent on a "domestic political errand" seeking investigations of Democrats; the testimony challenged a main line of the president's defense in the impeachment probe. Trump declared that the Navy would not be taking away the SEAL designation of Chief Petty Officer Edward Gallagher; he'd been acquitted of a murder charge in the stabbing death of an Islamic State captive but a military jury convicted him of posing with the corpse. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu was indicted in a series of corruption cases; the charges were the first ever against a sitting Israeli prime minister. (Netanyahu is currently on trial.)

Today's Birthdays: Actor Laurence Luckinbill is 86. Actor Marlo Thomas is 83. Actor Rick Lenz is 81. Actor Juliet Mills is 79. Basketball Hall of Famer Earl Monroe is 76. Television producer Marcy Carsey is 76. Actor Goldie Hawn is 75. Movie director Andrew Davis is 74. Rock musician Lonnie Jordan (War) is 72. Singer Livingston Taylor is 70. Actor-singer Lorna Luft is 68. Actor Cherry Jones is 64. Rock musician Brian Ritchie (The Violent Femmes) is 60. Gospel singer Steven Curtis Chapman is 58. Actor Nicollette Sheridan is 57. Singer-actor Bjork (byork) is 55. Pro and College Football Hall of Famer Troy Aikman is 54. Rhythm-and-blues singer Chauncey Hannibal (BLACKstreet) is 52. Rock musician Alex James (Blur) is 52. Baseball Hall

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of Famer Ken Griffey Jr. is 51. TV personality Rib Hillis is 50. Rapper Pretty Lou (Lost Boyz) is 49. Football player-turned-TV personality Michael Strahan (STRAY'-han) is 49. Actor Rain Phoenix is 48. Actor Marina de Tavira is 47. Country singer Kelsi Osborn (SHeDAISY) is 46. Actor Jimmi Simpson is 45. Singer-actor Lindsey Haun is 36. Actor Jena Malone is 36. Pop singer Carly Rae Jepsen is 35. Actor-singer Sam Palladio is 34.