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*Happy
Thanksgiving!*



Five new cases reported at Groton Area School

The COVID-19 positive numbers in the Groton Area School swelled by five on Wednesday with five new cases. Two new cases were reported in the fifth grade, one new case in the freshman class, one new case in the junior class and one staff member was contracted the virus. That makes 11 students and three staff members. The detailed report can be found on page 4.



OPEN: Recycling Trailer in Groton

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

#276 in a series

Covid-19 Updates: by Marie Miller

Fewer new cases, more deaths. All in all, not a great day. Here we go:

We're at 12,840,400 cases and almost certain to hit 13 million on the holiday tomorrow. There were 176,400 new cases reported today, a 1.4% increase from yesterday's total, and our seven-day new-case average went past 175,000 for the first time, setting a record for the 33rd consecutive day. There's never a great time to set a record like this one, but this seems to me to be a particularly inauspicious time with winter, the holidays, and flu season hard on us. There is still 27% of Americans who plan to dine with people outside their households. Travel has been forecast 10% below last year with train travel down the most and air travel radically decreased, but automobile travel not so much affected. While we're seeing numbers below the usual for Thanksgiving, they're still well above "Don't do it," so there may be rocky territory ahead. As for the short term—the rest of this week, I'm not sure how the holiday will play into new case reporting, but the usual effect for holidays—and isn't it sad that we've built up enough experience with holidays to make a call?—has been a decrease over a long weekend like the upcoming one. We'll see what tomorrow brings.

California and Texas both set single-day new-case records and not by a little, by a lot. We hit another record—15 days running now—for hospitalizations. There are 88,080 people hospitalized with Covid-19 in the US today. This just keeps going up. I suppose it will until there's nowhere to put people anymore. Not sure how soon that happens, but it feels imminent.

The number of new deaths is the highest we've seen since May 6—and I've been saying that a whole lot over the past week or so. We're looking at a death from Covid-19 in the US roughly every 38 seconds. There were 2253 reported today, a 0.9% increase in the total, which is up to 262,020. Worse, death rates seem to be rising slightly. They've been falling ever since spring as we've learned more about how to treat sick people—what works and what doesn't—and as some therapeutics have been identified; but now they're ticking upward again as hospitals, and importantly their staffs, are under increasing strain which affects the quality of care. I should also note that over 100,000—around 40%—of the deaths so far have been residents and workers in nursing homes; we have not done any kind of good job protecting these folks. None of this looks good. Every time someone suggests to you that we should just let this happen—protect high-risk people and get the rest of us back to work—feel free to point out that the protect-the-high-risk part of that equation just is not happening; then ask the person whether it's OK to just sacrifice the vulnerable in the interest of commerce. Because so far, that's how it's working.

Key to containing a pandemic is contact tracing, following up with a newly identified infected person to discover who he or she may have exposed so those people can be quarantined to reduce the risk of spread from the initial case. Despite the value of contact tracing, many states and localities are significantly scaling back or just abandoning tracing efforts in the face of burgeoning case loads and staffing that was inadequate from the start. The agencies are saying they simply cannot keep up.

What's supposed to happen is that, within 48 hours of the positive test, the patient receives a phone call from a trained tracer who conducts an interview and then gets in touch with each of the patient's contacts to warn them to quarantine and get tested. That simply is not happening. Part of the problem is that test results are coming back so slowly that it's often long after the test before results are even known. By that time, there may not be much point in finding contacts. Then there is the issue of noncooperation; people are refusing to name contacts, sometimes because communities are treating those who identify contacts sort of the way movie gangsters treat "stoolies." I heard from a woman in a small town near me whose son named a classmate who was then held out of the big game that weekend, and the kid's life pretty much wasn't worth living at school after that. But as big as those problems are, the larger problem now is simply that it is not possible to deal with the influx of cases.

New guidance from the CDC tells health departments to focus on people who've tested positive within the past six days, especially those at greatest risk of infecting others. It says people infected more than 14 days ago should not be traced—no point. In Maine, the decision has been made to contact each patient

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just once and not check back to see whether they're well and quarantining. New Hampshire is only tracing cases connected to larger outbreaks or in at-risk groups. One county in Minnesota is giving the effort up entirely; their advice to the public is, "if you are in a group setting, just assume that someone has Covid." And in North Dakota, they gave up tracing altogether a few weeks ago, telling those diagnosed to get in touch with their contacts themselves. The current situation is aptly described by New Hampshire's former chief of communicable disease and epidemiology, Rich DePentima, who explained that we started out in the hole with an inadequate response to the pandemic. "We have a situation where we missed the boat in the beginning. Then you throw up your hands, saying you can't do this any more." Perfect.

The CDC is getting ready to shorten the recommended quarantine period for those exposed to Covid-19. The current guidance is to quarantine for 14 days; the contemplated revision would shorten this to something between a week and 10 days, to be followed with a test. This change is reportedly not based on a change in the scientific understanding of the disease and its incubation period, but simply in response to resistance and noncompliance; the thinking appears to be that, if people would follow the recommendations at a higher rate, the additional compliance would make up for the increased chance you're going to see transmission from those coming out of quarantine before the end of their infectious period. The risk in this strategy is not as great as it might appear on first glance. We know half of infected people stop being infectious after five days with decreasing numbers of people being infectious after six, seven, eight, etc. The vast majority are done shedding by 12 days. So yes, there's risk; but there's also risk created by those who won't stay home according to recommendations. And that risk is mitigated to some degree by the test at the end of the quarantine—supposing that happens; a week is likely long enough for virus to replicate in the host to push tests to positive. Importantly, it is thought that perhaps a shorter period would help people decide to hang in there, so this may be a good strategy.

There is a 501(c)(3) organization administered by the Rockefeller Philanthropy Advisors called the COVID-19 Early Treatment Fund (CETF). It's stated goal is "to ensure the rapid and successful completion of outpatient clinical trials that lead to effective early treatments for COVID-19, using existing drugs." What they're funding is extensive work to weed through drugs currently on the market to discover those which have some promise for treating Covid19, then funding and assisting with small clinical trials to identify those warranting further study. They then work with larger trials of those drugs to help negotiate with manufacturers, work out the logistics of trials in nonhospitalized patients, and securing funding. They have a Scientific Advisory Board (SAB) of independent physician-scientists to review every grant proposal and assure only the most well-designed trials for the most promising drugs receive their funding. It's an interesting concept, and it appears to be bearing fruit.

The Journal of the American Medical Association published the results of a Washington School of Medicine study of fluvoxamine, an anti-depressant drug funded by CETF. This was a randomized, controlled, double-blind clinical trial involving around 150 participants which found that when taken within seven days of the first symptoms, the drug reduces the risk of respiratory deterioration. The drug is a powerful anti-inflammatory, and it is believed to be preventing the development of the cytokine storms, those massive inflammatory overreactions which appear to be causing much of the respiratory damage seen in these patients. In the trial, none of the 80 patients treated with fluvoxamine progressed to the trial endpoint (oxygen saturation of 92% or lower along with difficulty breathing or hospitalization for pneumonia) while six of 72 who received placebo did deteriorate.

A prior observational study done in France showed that selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRI), the class of antidepressants to which fluvoxamine belongs, reduced the risk of requiring a ventilator or death, so this study affirms those findings. This is a readily available, inexpensive drug which is already known to be safe, so it could be a real find.

This evidence is apparently considered fairly strong because David Seftel, MD, internist, CEO of Stanford partner lab Enable Biosciences, and principal investigator for several NIH projects who was not affiliated with this study, said, "Fluvoxamine might be considered by doctors for off-label use to treat COVID-19 patients early in their disease [F]luvoxamine may dramatically decrease the odds that someone will need to

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be hospitalized.” A new larger trial with 880 participants is in planning stages with funding from CETF.

This will be a difficult Thanksgiving for many who are accustomed to big family or friend gatherings, but this year will settle for something much different. For example, the Gillis family—dad, mom, three grown sisters who all live minutes apart in the northern suburbs of Denver—is not getting together as is their usual habit. They thought about it despite all the warnings because the pull of family is strong, but in the end decided they couldn’t take the risk. The oldest sister is pregnant with the first grandchild, another sister works in a grocery store, and mom works in a bookstore—plenty of exposure to go around there. So these sisters decided they just couldn’t indulge in their usual routine of gathering in their childhood home with their folks; but they still wanted the holiday, the family, the food.

And so a plan was born.

One sister is making Mom’s cucumber salad, basically cucumber slices suspended in lime Jell-O. She isn’t thrilled about that—doesn’t like the stuff, but wants to make things “normal.” Various family members are also making Mom’s mashed potatoes and her sausage-chestnut dressing. There will be a roast turkey, mashed potatoes, and a green bean casserole; a cranberry orange salad, pies, and some things from a category named “Miscellaneous,” which leaves plenty of room for the non-cooks in the crowd to have some fun. One sister is driving from house to house, collecting and dropping off until everyone has a complete meal; then they’ll do a Google Hangout dinner “together.” No one thinks this is as good as a real, family, in-person Thanksgiving, but given one in 41 people in Colorado is contagious at this time, it’s a safe way to celebrate the holiday.

I hope you all have a happy and safe Thanksgiving. Be well. We’ll talk tomorrow.

Groton Area School District

Active COVID-19 Cases

Updated November 23, 2020; 12:03 PM

JK	KG	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	Staff	Total
1	2	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	8

Updated November 24, 2020; 12:59 PM

JK	KG	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	Staff	Total
1	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	2	9

Updated November 25, 2020; 4:21 PM

JK	KG	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	Staff	Total
1	1	1	1	1	0	2	0	0	1	2	0	1	0	3	14

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Area COVID-19 Cases

	Nov. 18	Nov. 19	Nov. 20	Nov. 21	Nov. 22	Nov. 23	Nov. 24
Minnesota	236,949	242,043	249,906	256,700	262,952	270,157	276,500
Nebraska	103,805	106,617	109,280	111,661	113,029	114,061	115,921
Montana	49,398	50,582	51,818	53,293	54,542	55,580	56,381
Colorado	172,044	176,694	182,801	188,566	194,679	198,600	202,289
Wyoming	21,047	21,750	22,489	23,347	23,567	24,309	25,560
North Dakota	65,967	67,230	68,612	70,016	71,540	72,683	73,397
South Dakota	67,284	68,671	69,742	71,070	72,214	73,065	73,848
United States	11,360,125	11,530,345	11,718,867	11,913,945	12,090,469	12,247,487	12,421,216
US Deaths	248,707	250,548	252,564	254,424	255,905	256,783	257,707

Minnesota	+5,931	+5,094	+7,863	+6,794	+6,252	+7,205	+6,343
Nebraska	+2,204	+2,812	+2,663	+2,381	+1,368	+1,032	+1,860
Montana	+1,371	+1,184	+1,236	+1,475	+1,249	+1,038	+801
Colorado	+4,331	+4,650	+6,107	+5,765	+6,113	+3,921	+3,689
Wyoming	+1,162	+703	+739	+858	+220	+742	+1,251
North Dakota	+1,082	1,263	+1,382	+1,404	+1,524	+1,143	+714
South Dakota	+1,006	+1,387	+1,071	+1,328	+1,144	+851	+783
United States	+154,640	+170,220	+188,522	+195,078	+176,524	+157,018	+173,729
US Deaths	+1,487	+1,841	+2,016	+1,860	+1,481	+878	+924

	Nov. 25	Nov. 26
Minnesota	282,916	289,303
Nebraska	117,682	120,076
Montana	57,504	58,565
Colorado	206,439	210,630
Wyoming	25,975	26,677
North Dakota	74,401	75,478
South Dakota	74,859	76,142
United States	12,597,333	12,780,410
US Deaths	259,962	262,282

Minnesota	+6,416	+6,387
Nebraska	+1,761	+2,294
Montana	+1,123	+1,061
Colorado	+4,150	+4,191
Wyoming	+415	+702
North Dakota	+1,004	+1,077
South Dakota	+1,011	1,283
United States	+176,117	+183,077
US Deaths	+2,255	+2,320

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November 25th COVID-19 UPDATE

Groton Daily Independent from State Health Lab Reports

There were 1,345 fewer active cases today and the percent recovered in the state is at 78.8 percent. In Brown County, 80.6 percent are recovered.

There were 28 deaths in South Dakota today and 6 in North Dakota.

Deaths by county: Brown-1, Codington-3, Davison-2, Grant-5, Gregory-1, Hamlin-1, Hutchinson-1, Lawrence-1, Lincoln-1, Miner-1, Minnehaha-7, Pennington-3, Yankton-1. There were 15 females and 13 males. Age groups: 80+ had 22, 70s had 3, 60s had 1 and 50s had 2.

Glacial Lakes hospital beds being occupied by COVID-19 patients as well as Minnehaha and Pennington counties: Walworth: 1 (-0) Occupied Beds.; Potter: 2 (+1) Occupied Beds; Hughes: 17 (-1) Occupied Beds, 5 (-0) ICU Beds, 3 (+0) Ventilation; Hand: 3 (-2) Occupied Beds; Faulk: 1 (-0) Occupied Beds; Edmunds: 1 (+1) Occupied Bed; Brown: 33 (+1) Occupied Beds, 1 (-1) ICU, 1 (-1) Ventilation; Spink: 4 (+1) Occupied Beds; Day: 1 (+1) Occupied Beds; Marshall: 1 (+0) Occupied Beds; Grant: 3 (-1) Occupied Beds; Codington: 8 (-2) Occupied Beds, 1 (-1) ICU, 1 (-0) Ventilation; None (some counties have no hospitals): Clark, Hyde, Stanley, Sully, Campbell, McPherson, Roberts; Minnehaha: 278 (-7) Occupied Beds, 65 (+0) ICU, 37 (+0) Ventilation; Pennington: 79 (+2) Occupied Beds, 13 (+0) ICU, 7 (+0) Ventilation.

Brown County:

Total Positive: +44 (3424) Positivity Rate: 15.9%

Total Tests: +276 (26,492)

Total Individuals Tested: +59 (13,445)

Recovered: +104 (2,760)

Active Cases: -61 (646)

Ever Hospitalized: +5 (197)

Deaths: +1 (18)

Percent Recovered: 80.6%

Hospital Reports:

Avera St. Luke's: Covid-19 Occupied 26 (+2); ICU 0 (-0), Ventilation 0 (0).

Sanford Aberdeen: Covid-19 Occupied 7 (-1); ICU 1 (-1), Ventilation 1 (-1)

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

Marshall County Healthcare: Covid-19 Occupied: 1 (+0).

South Dakota:

Positive: +1283 (76,142 total) Positivity Rate: 16.6%

Total Tests: 7709 (582,944 total)

Total Individuals Tested: 2560 (318,354)

Hospitalized: +50 (4243 total). 570 currently hospitalized -4)

Deaths: +28 (849 total)

Recovered: +2600 (59,981 total)

Active Cases: -1345 (15,312)

Percent Recovered: 78.8%

Total COVID-19 Occupied Beds: 570 (-4), Black Hills Region 126 (+4), Glacial Lakes Region 77 (+1) Sioux

Empire Region 296 (-7), South Central Plains 71 (-2).

ICU Units: Total 101 (-3), BH 15 (+0), GL 7 (-2), SE 65 (+0), SCP 14 (-1).

Ventilation: Total 49 (-1), BH 7 (+0), GL 5 (-1), SE 37 (+0), SCP 0 (-0).

Staffed Hospital Bed Capacity: 21% Covid, 44% Non-Covid, 35% Available

ICU Bed Capacity: 48% Covid, 34% non-covid, 19% available.

Staffed Adult + Pediatric ICU Bed Capacity: 67% Occupied, 33% Available

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

Beadle (25) +27 positive, +95 recovered (473 active cases)

Brookings (16) +19 positive, +73 recovered (381 active cases)

Brown (18): +44 positive, +104 recovered (646 active cases)

Clark (1): +6 positive, +11 recovered (62 active cases)

Clay (9): +26 positive, +33 recovered (244 active cases)

Codington (42): +48 positive, +78 recovered (445 active cases)

Davison (30): +18 positive, +123 recovered (622 active cases)

Day (5): +5 positive, +9 recovered (100 active cases)

Edmunds (2): +3 positive, +5 recovered (36 ac-

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tive cases)

Faulk (8): +1 positive, +8 recovered (25 active cases)

Grant (10): +11 positive, +22 recovered (136 active cases)

Hanson (1): +4 positive, +16 recovered (64 active cases)

Hughes (17): +28 positive, +73 recovered (326 active cases)

Lawrence (22): +38 positive, +55 recovered (357 active cases)

Lincoln (47): +83 positive, +184 recovered (1014 active cases)

Marshall (3): +6 positive, +6 recovered (53 active cases)

McCook (11): +9 positive, +23 recovered (134 active cases)

McPherson (1): +3 positive, +4 recovery (42 active case)

Minnehaha (169): +307 positive, +643 recovered (3577 active cases)

Pennington (71): +162 positive, +255 recovered (1701 active cases)

Potter (1): +7 positive, +6 recovered (63 active cases)

Roberts (17): +8 positive, +27 recovered (149 active cases)

Spink (12): +7 positive, +22 recovered (110 active cases)

Walworth (11): +6 positive, +11 recovered (112 active cases)

NORTH DAKOTA

COVID-19 Daily Report, Nov. 25:

- 14.0% rolling 14-day positivity
- 1,096 new positives
- 8,904 susceptible test encounters
- 297 currently hospitalized (+8)
- 8,615 active cases (-292)
- 887 total deaths (+6)

Yesterday

Today

Global Cases	Global Cases
59,827,512	60,559,702
12,597,333 US	12,780,410 US
9,222,216 India	9,266,705 India
6,118,708 Brazil	6,166,606 Brazil
2,206,126 France	2,221,874 France
2,144,229 Russia	2,169,424 Russia
1,594,844 Spain	1,605,066 Spain
1,542,623 United Kingdom	1,560,872 United Kingdom
1,455,022 Italy	1,480,874 Italy
1,381,795 Argentina	1,390,388 Argentina
1,262,494 Colombia	1,270,991 Colombia
1,060,152 Mexico	1,070,487 Mexico
965,355 Germany	995,879 Germany

Global Deaths	Global Deaths
1,410,458	1,424,470
259,962 deaths US	262,282 deaths US
170,115 deaths Brazil	170,769 deaths Brazil
134,699 deaths India	135,223 deaths India
102,739 deaths Mexico	103,597 deaths Mexico
55,935 deaths United Kingdom	56,630 deaths United Kingdom
51,306 deaths Italy	52,028 deaths Italy
50,324 deaths France	50,700 deaths France
45,738 deaths Iran	46,689 deaths Iran

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County	Positive Cases	Recovered Cases	Negative Persons	Deceased	Community Spread	% RT-PCR Test Positivity Rate (Weekly)
Aurora	345	258	729	3	Substantial	29.41%
Beadle	2205	1707	4570	25	Substantial	31.43%
Bennett	311	258	1028	5	Substantial	20.33%
Bon Homme	1335	1188	1715	14	Substantial	38.50%
Brookings	2311	1914	8111	16	Substantial	15.98%
Brown	3424	2760	10021	18	Substantial	20.21%
Brule	542	437	1571	5	Substantial	20.99%
Buffalo	369	319	799	6	Substantial	32.61%
Butte	689	578	2473	13	Substantial	10.58%
Campbell	103	90	183	1	Moderate	28.57%
Charles Mix	804	561	3287	4	Substantial	28.29%
Clark	241	178	763	1	Substantial	21.02%
Clay	1296	1043	3992	9	Substantial	24.87%
Codington	2548	2061	7432	42	Substantial	22.71%
Corson	361	301	831	4	Substantial	49.23%
Custer	507	404	1983	7	Substantial	14.55%
Davison	2292	1640	5181	30	Substantial	35.89%
Day	336	231	1364	5	Substantial	20.65%
Deuel	292	232	894	2	Substantial	25.00%
Dewey	807	495	3384	3	Substantial	33.82%
Douglas	283	228	740	5	Substantial	18.58%
Edmunds	232	194	833	2	Substantial	9.14%
Fall River	353	283	2047	8	Substantial	7.02%
Faulk	275	242	550	8	Substantial	10.53%
Grant	576	430	1727	10	Substantial	31.12%
Gregory	428	325	937	18	Substantial	24.58%
Haakon	139	114	455	3	Substantial	8.51%
Hamlin	446	301	1345	3	Substantial	20.69%
Hand	277	207	640	1	Substantial	31.96%
Hanson	235	170	526	1	Substantial	46.15%
Harding	68	62	129	0	Minimal	14.29%
Hughes	1585	1242	4823	17	Substantial	14.50%
Hutchinson	541	373	1822	6	Substantial	23.81%

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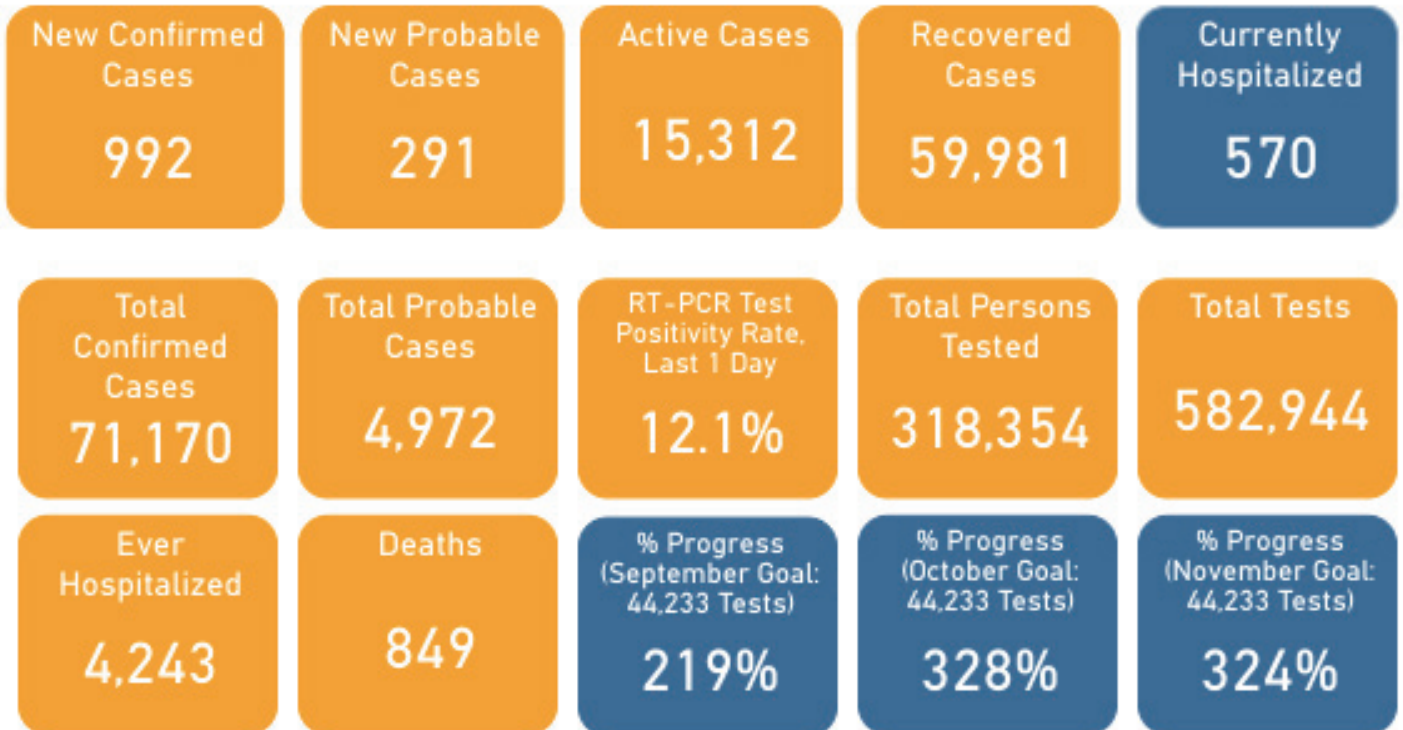
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Hyde	116	82	341	0	Substantial	25.53%
Jackson	188	155	812	6	Substantial	11.90%
Jerauld	233	184	435	13	Substantial	20.69%
Jones	59	44	151	0	Moderate	30.30%
Kingsbury	417	305	1223	8	Substantial	18.72%
Lake	805	617	2407	10	Substantial	18.91%
Lawrence	1907	1528	6552	22	Substantial	11.76%
Lincoln	5182	4121	15251	47	Substantial	27.09%
Lyman	440	345	1542	8	Substantial	24.17%
Marshall	164	108	889	3	Substantial	25.78%
McCook	574	429	1250	11	Substantial	33.12%
McPherson	140	97	455	1	Substantial	12.64%
Meade	1650	1324	5936	13	Substantial	13.69%
Mellette	161	131	607	1	Substantial	54.55%
Miner	185	151	453	5	Moderate	8.82%
Minnehaha	19493	15747	60074	169	Substantial	24.52%
Moody	396	297	1459	10	Substantial	32.50%
Oglala Lakota	1585	1269	5898	20	Substantial	25.95%
Pennington	8122	6350	29075	71	Substantial	16.13%
Perkins	179	109	536	2	Substantial	49.07%
Potter	256	192	647	1	Substantial	12.98%
Roberts	675	509	3537	17	Substantial	22.38%
Sanborn	257	170	531	1	Substantial	37.25%
Spink	531	409	1731	12	Substantial	16.82%
Stanley	220	154	673	0	Substantial	19.68%
Sully	89	66	200	3	Substantial	23.40%
Todd	876	674	3547	12	Substantial	61.54%
Tripp	485	366	1222	2	Substantial	33.91%
Turner	766	609	2096	36	Substantial	17.80%
Union	1194	954	4718	23	Substantial	25.64%
Walworth	455	332	1439	11	Substantial	27.57%
Yankton	1615	1208	7452	9	Substantial	16.65%
Ziebach	171	119	599	7	Substantial	27.27%
Unassigned	0	0	1589	0		

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South Dakota



AGE GROUP OF SOUTH DAKOTA COVID-19 CASES

Age Range	# of Cases	# of Deaths
0-9 years	2602	0
10-19 years	8284	0
20-29 years	14527	2
30-39 years	12760	9
40-49 years	10903	16
50-59 years	10783	53
60-69 years	8475	107
70-79 years	4393	177
80+ years	3415	485

SEX OF SOUTH DAKOTA COVID-19 CASES

Sex	# of Cases	# of Deaths
Female	39776	420
Male	36366	429

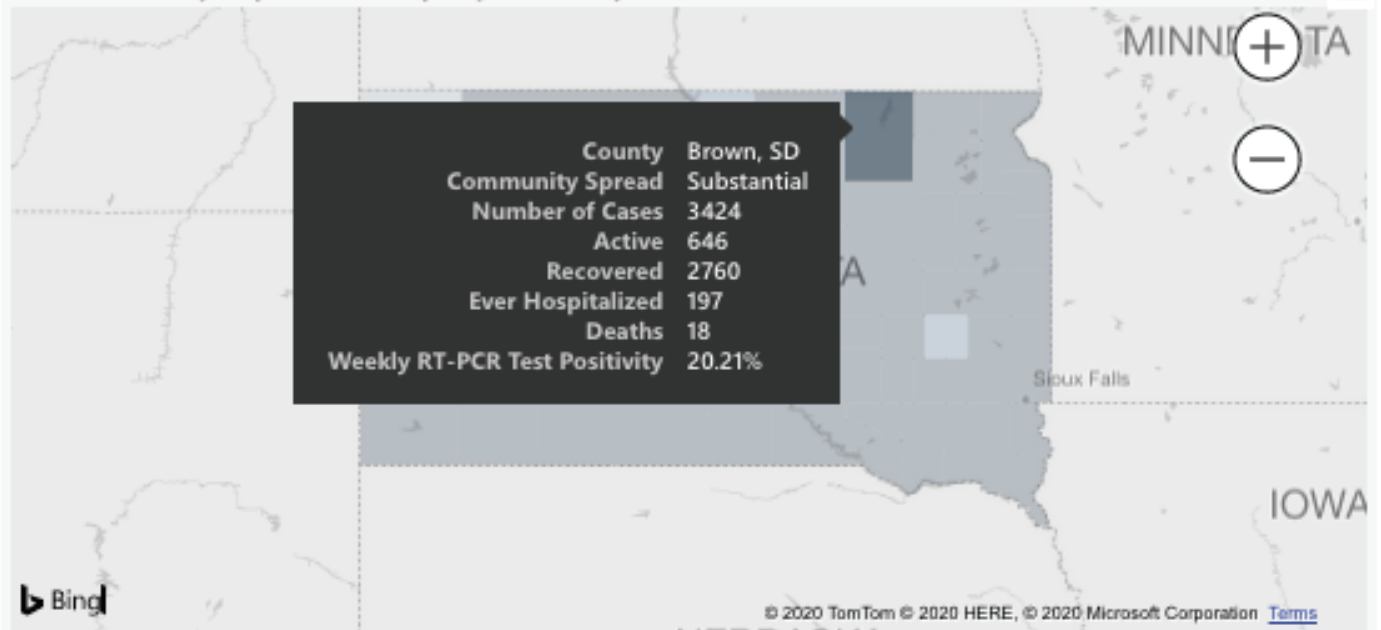
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Brown County

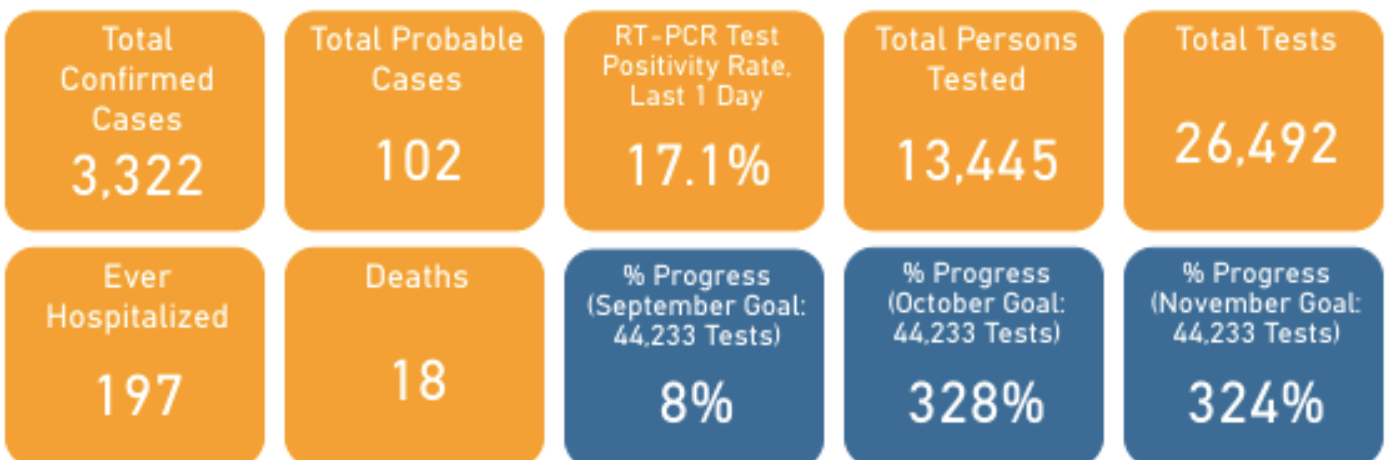


Community Spread Map by County of Residence



Community Spread ● Minimal ● Moderate ● Substantial

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



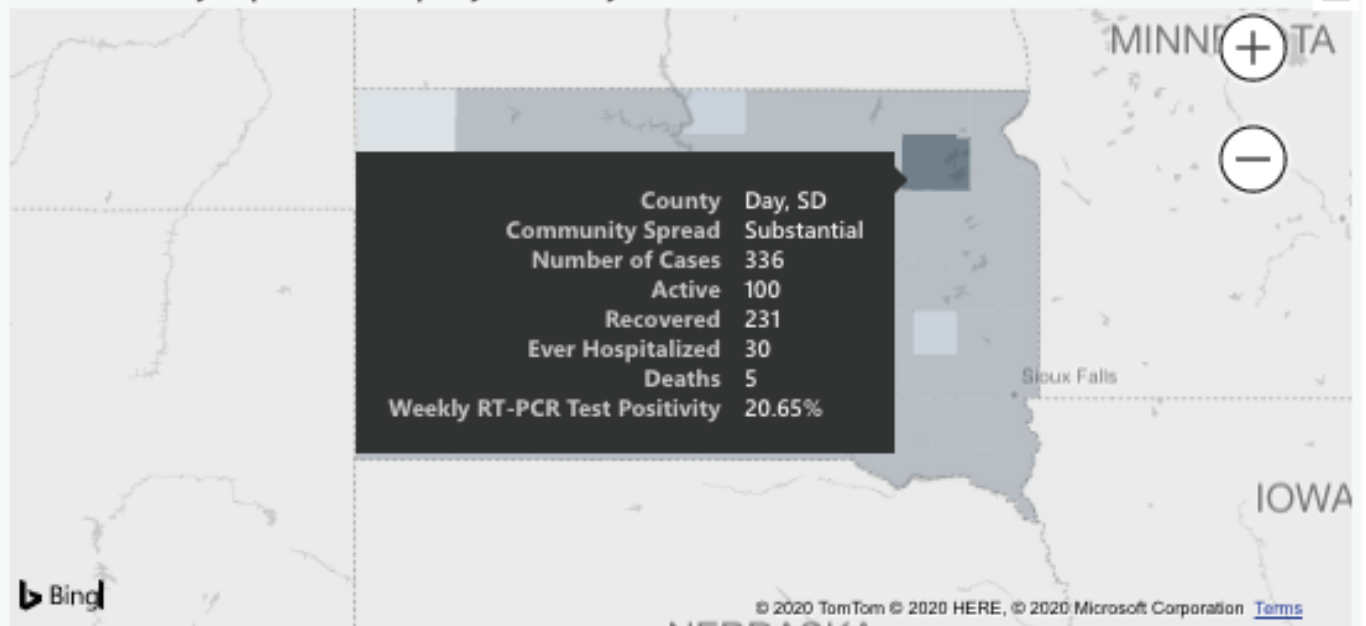
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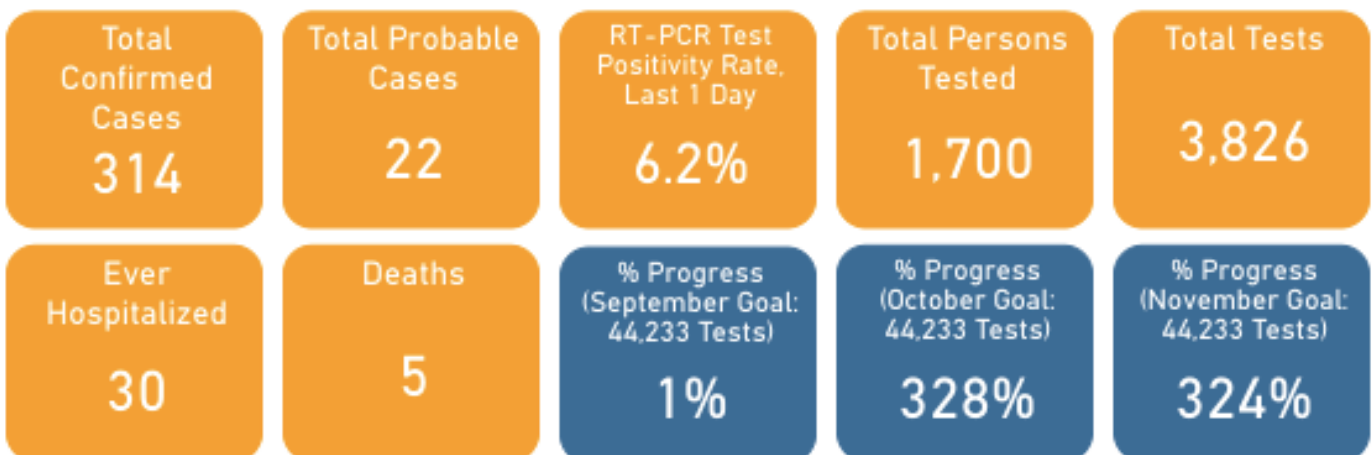
Day County



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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Groton Area School District First Quarter Honor Roll

Seniors

4.0 GPA: Samantha Pappas, Sage Mortenson, Isaac Smith, Trey Gengerke, Brooklyn Gilbert, Alexis Hanten, Alexa Herr, Erin Unzen, Tanae Lipp, Hailey Monson, Tessa Erdmann, Jasmine Gengerke, Regan Leicht, Grace Wambach

3.99-3.50: Alex Morris, Kale Pharis, Dragr Monson, Eh Tha You Say, Grace Wiedrick, Alyssa Fordham, Chloe Daly, Chandler Larson, Kaden Carda, Braden Freeman, Steven Paulson, Lee Iverson, Connor Lehman, Austin Anderson

3.49-3.00: Paxton Bonn, Kannon Coats, Jaimen Farrell, Dylan Krueger, Trevor Harry, Tristan Traphagen, Adrian Knutson-Kvistad, Tiara DeHoet, Tucker Carda

Juniors

4.0 GPA: Madeline Flihs, Trista Keith, Allyssa Locke, Travis Townsend, Stella Meier, Seth Johnson, Pierce Kettering, Kansas Kroll,

3.99-3.50: Jordan Bjerke, Madisen Bjerke, Hannah Gustafson, Alyssa Thaler, Kennedy Anderson, Jackson Cogley, Julianna Kosel, Jace Kroll, Lane Krueger, Brayden Hansen, Favian Sanchez-Gonzalez

3.49-3.00: Megan Flihs, Torrence Wiesman, Trey Johnson, Kaden Kurtz, Landon Kokales

Sophomores

4.0 GPA: Cole Bisbee, Jackson Dinger, Jacob Lewandowski, Andrew Marzahn, Elliana Weismantel

3.99-3.50: Kaleb Antonsen, Ethan Clark, Shaylee Peterson, Cadance Tullis, Carter Barse, Brooke Gengerke, Caleb Hanten, Cole Simon, Sierra Ehresmann, Aspen Johnson, Cade Larson, Tate Larson, Porter Johnson, Jacelynne Gleason, Gracie Traphagen, Jackson Bahr, Brenna Carda

3.49-3.00: Shallyn Foertsch, KayLynn Overacker, Kaleb Hoover, Ava Kramer, Lener Perez Torres, Nathalia Garcia

Freshmen

4.0 GPA: Hannah Monson

3.99-3.50: Emily Clark, Claire Heinrich, Jaycie Lier, Lexi Osterman, Ashlyn Sperry, Holden Sippel, Camryn Kurtz, Kyleigh Englund, Anna Fjeldheim, Bradin Althoff, Anna Bisbee, Sara Menzia, Lydia Meier, Shea Jandel, Colby Dunker, Lane Tietz, Cadence Feist, Sydney Leicht, Emma Schinkel, Abigail Jensen, Logan Ringgenberg

3.49-3.00: Faith Flihs, Ava Wienk, Dillon Abeln, Jackson Garstecki, Karsyn Jangula, Carly Guthmiller, Jacob Zak, Bryson Wambach

Eighth Graders

4.0 GPA: Gretchen Dinger

3.99-3.50: Axel Warrington, Elizabeth Flihs, Payton Mitchell, Blake Pauli, Faith Traphagen, Jeslyn Kosel, Ashlyn Feser, Karrah-Jo Johnson,

3.49-3.00: Emma Kutter, Corbin Weismantel, Easten Ekern, Blake Dennert, Turner Thompson, Aiden Heathcote, Korbin Kucker, Brevin Flihs, Kaden Kampa, Kayla Lehr, Laila Roberts, Kellen Antonsen, Carter Simon, Ashley Johnson

Seventh Graders

4.0 GPA: Carly Gilbert, Jaedyn Penning, Nathan Unzen

3.99-3.50: Talli Wright, Jerica Locke, Natalia Warrington, Mia Crank, Lucas Carda, De Eh Tha Say

3.49-3.00: Benjamin Hoeft, Gage Sippel, Keegan Tracy, Ryder Johnson, Olivia Stiegelmeier, Cali Tollifson, Karter Moddy, Logan Warrington, Rylee Dunker, London Bahr, Lincoln Krause, Raelee Lilly, Jayden Schwan, Karsten Flihs

Sixth Graders

4.0 GPA: Teagan Hanten

3.99-3.50: Carlee Johnson, Ashlynn Warrington, Kira Clocksene, Gavin Kroll, Emerlee Jones, Brody Lord, Liby Althoff, Colt Williamson, Halee Harder,

3.49-3.00: Addison Hoffman Wipf, Blake Lord, Hailey Pauli, Aiden Strom, Walker Zoellner, Zander Harry, Claire Schuelke, Estella Sanchez-Gonzalez, McKenna Tietz, Maggie Cleveland, Jackson Hopfinger, Sklyer Kramer, Kella Tracy, Leah Jones

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**Thanksgiving
Day**



Gradual
Clearing

High: 46 °F

Tonight



Mostly Clear

Low: 19 °F

Friday



Sunny

High: 43 °F

**Friday
Night**



Mostly Clear

Low: 25 °F

Saturday



Sunny

High: 51 °F

Happy Thanksgiving!

- Above average temperatures today with highs in the upper 30s to mid 40s
 - Mostly Sunny
 - Breezy westerly winds of 20-25 mph for most of the area
- *Far northern South Dakota west of the Missouri may see much stronger gusts up to 40 mph

 **NATIONAL WEATHER SERVICE**
OCEANIC AND ATMOSPHERIC ADMINISTRATION

Updated: 11/26/2020 3:13 AM Central

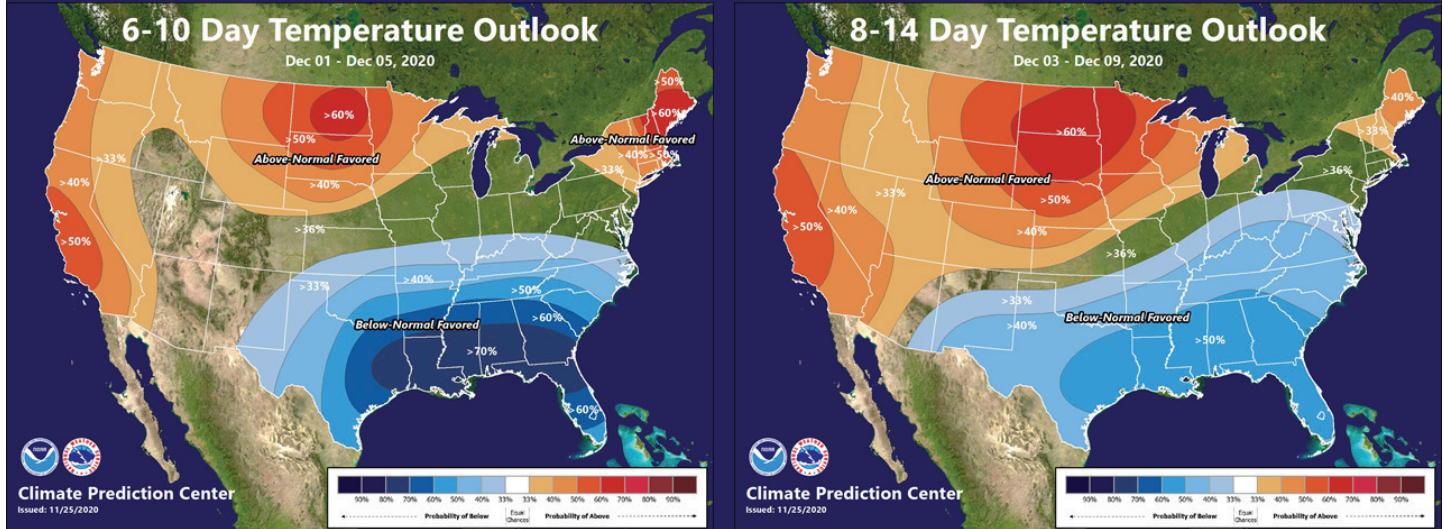
Well above average temperatures remain the norm through Saturday before a cold front drops temperatures to around average for Sunday. Dry conditions remain on tap through the weekend and into early next week. For today, breezy to windy conditions are expected for most of the area.

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11/26/2020 Update
National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD

Warm and Dry Conditions favored for the start of December



Average Temperatures for early December are...
Highs of 25 to 35°
Lows of 15 to 25°

Warm and dry conditions are favored for the start of December. Average temperatures during this period are highs in the 25 to 35 degree range, and lows in the 15 to 25 degree range (warmest over south central SD, and cooler over northeastern SD and west central MN).

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Today in Weather History

November 26, 1989: Snow began falling in western South Dakota during the early evening of the 26th and swept across the state and into west central Minnesota that night and through much of the 27th. Almost two feet of snow fell in parts of the Black Hills, while one to two inches fell in the southeast part of South Dakota. Icy roads caused by rain that preceded the snow in central and eastern parts of the state combined with strong northerly winds on the 27th to make for dangerous traveling conditions. Numerous accidents were reported, and many cars went into ditches. Some of the heavier snow amount in central, north central, and northeast South Dakota were reported at Leola with 6 inches; Mellette and Onida with 5 inches; and Eureka, Faulkton, and Aberdeen with 4 inches.

November 26, 2001: Heavy snow of 6 to 12 inches, along with strong north winds of 20 to 40 mph, caused near-blizzard conditions and challenging travel conditions across most of central and northeast South Dakota and west central Minnesota. Snowfall amounts were 6 to 12 inches in South Dakota and 10 to 14 inches in west central Minnesota. Most schools were closed or started late on both the 26th and 27th and some businesses were also closed. Many flights were also delayed or canceled. Some snowfall amounts included 6 inches at Eagle Butte, Fort Thompson and Webster; 7 inches at Eureka, Onida, Doland, and Watertown; 8 inches at Highmore, Miller, Onaka, Castlewood, and Selby; 9 inches at Sisseton and Peever; 10 inches at Ortonville, Faulkton, Blunt, Murdo, Kennebec, and Stephan; 11 inches at Victor and Gettysburg; 12 inches at Milbank, White Rock, and Clear Lake; 13 inches at Wheaton; and 14 inches at Browns Valley.

November 26, 2007: Lightning and heavy rain delay the start of the Monday Night Football game at Pittsburgh's Heinz Field between the Miami Dolphins and the Pittsburgh Steelers by 25 minutes. The muddy field conditions contribute to one of the lowest scoring NFL games won by the Steelers, 3-0. The teams combined 375 yards, and the winning field goal occurred with 17 seconds left in the game.

1888 - A late season hurricane brushed the East Coast with heavy rain and gale force winds. The hurricane passed inside Nantucket and over Cape Cod, then crossed Nova Scotia. (David Ludlum)

1896 - Snow and high winds hit the Northern Plains and the Upper Mississippi Valley, with a Thanksgiving Day blizzard across North Dakota. The storm was followed by a severe cold wave in the Upper Midwest. The temperature at Pokegama Dam MI plunged to 45 degrees below zero. (David Ludlum)

1987 - A Thanksgiving Day storm in the northeastern U.S. produced heavy snow in northern New England and upstate New York. Snowfall totals in Maine ranged up to twenty inches at Flagstaff Lake. Totals in New Hampshire ranged up to 18 inches at Errol. Gales lashed the coast of Maine and New Hampshire. A second storm, over the Southern and Central Rockies, produced nine inches of snow at Kanosh UT, and 13 inches at Divide CO, with five inches reported at Denver CO. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - Thunderstorms produced severe weather over the Central Gulf Coast States during the late morning and afternoon hours. Five tornadoes were reported in Mississippi, with the tornadoes causing a million dollars damage at Ruleville, and in Warren County. In Utah, the town of Alta was blanketed with 15 inches of snow overnight, and during the day was buried under another 16.5 inches of snow. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 - A massive storm over the western U.S. produced heavy snow in Utah, Colorado, Wyoming and Montana. The storm produced more than two feet of snow in the higher elevations of northern and central Utah, bringing more than sixty inches of snow to the Alta Ski Resort in the Wasatch Mountains. Winds in Utah gusted to 60 mph at Bullfrog. The storm brought much needed snow to the ski resorts of Colorado, with 19 inches reported at Beaver Creek. (Storm Data) (The National Weather Summary)

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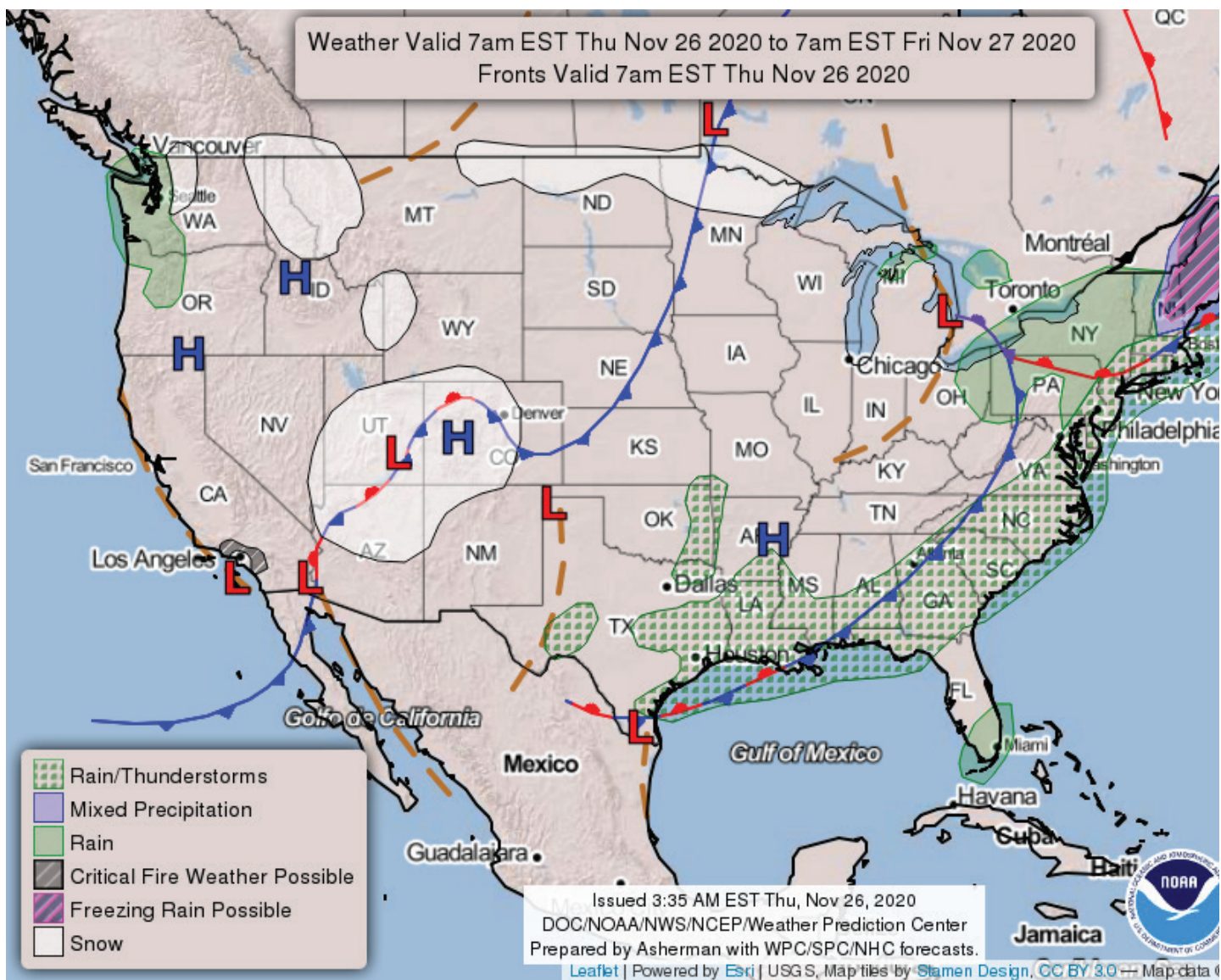
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Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 37 °F at 3:41 PM
Low Temp: 20 °F at 11:43 PM
Wind: 20 mph
Precip: .00

Today's Info

Record High: 63° in 1914
Record Low: -24° in 1996
Average High: 33°F
Average Low: 14°F
Average Precip in Nov.: 0.64
Precip to date in Nov.: 0.18
Average Precip to date: 21.11
Precip Year to Date: 16.52
Sunset Tonight: 4:54 p.m.
Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:49 a.m.



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WHY WORSHIP AND SING PRAISES?

Each church has its own "temperament." There are churches where you find happiness and hope, a warm fellowship and a welcoming spirit. Others are cold and closed, old and tired. In between are some that are looking for an identity, trying one thing and then another.

Psalm 33 is filled with enthusiasm for God. And, it has some great advice on how to worship God. "Sing joyfully," said the Psalmist. "Praise the Lord with the harp and the ten-stringed lyre," he continues. But why?

One reason is that "The Word of the Lord is right and true." No one has ever rejected the Bible because it contradicts itself but because it contradicts the reader. "The only objection against the Bible," said Wilmot the infidel when he was dying, "is a bad life."

"The plans of the Lord stand true," is another reason to sing. A father said to his son, "Go to the third step and jump. I'll catch you!" But he didn't, and his son fell to the floor. "Now get up and remember," he said, "not to trust anyone - not even your father." What terrible, tragic advice. However, our Heavenly Father never tricks us nor tempts us. He is faithful in all places, in all things, and at all times.

Finally, "The eyes of the Lord are upon those who fear Him." No army has ever saved a king, David once said. Warriors work together and combine their strength but are often defeated. But "God delivers His own from death and keeps them alive in famine."

Humanists depend on human beings. But Christians depend on Jesus Christ to nourish, deliver, sustain, and save them, while providing strength for the journey.

Prayer: Thank you Father for delivering us! May our hearts and lives be centered on worshiping You in songs of joy and shouts of praise. May we accept all we have in You. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: Let the godly sing for joy to the Lord; it is fitting for the pure to praise him. Psalm 33:1

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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

SD Lottery

By The Associated Press undefined

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

Dakota Cash

04-09-16-34-35

(four, nine, sixteen, thirty-four, thirty-five)

Estimated jackpot: \$20,000

Lotto America

01-07-12-38-40, Star Ball: 6, ASB: 3

(one, seven, twelve, thirty-eight, forty; Star Ball: six; ASB: three)

Estimated jackpot: \$3.35 million

Mega Millions

Estimated jackpot: \$214 million

Powerball

02-57-58-60-65, Powerball: 26, Power Play: 2

(two, fifty-seven, fifty-eight, sixty, sixty-five; Powerball: twenty-six; Power Play: two)

Estimated jackpot: \$202 million

No. 15 West Virginia holds off South Dakota State 79-71

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — West Virginia faced South Dakota State in its own backyard at the Bad Boys Mowers Crossover Classic just 50 miles from campus, but with no fans in the building due to COVID-19 restrictions, it felt like a neutral site for both teams.

Miles McBride scored a career-high 23 points and No. 15 West Virginia held off South Dakota State 79-71 on Wednesday night.

McBride, selected to the Big 12 All-Freshman team last season, was 9 for 19 from the field and 4 for 4 from the free throw line for the Mountaineers in the opener. He added three assists and two steals.

"The main part of my game is pull-up jumpers and trying to get to the foul line," McBride said. "I just relied on that and the shots went in today."

Sean McNeil added a career-high 16 points on 6-of-16 shooting. Summit League Player of the Year Douglas Wilson led South Dakota State with 17 points. South Dakota native Noah Freidel had 16.

West Virginia built the lead to 12 points in the second half when McNeil hit a 3-pointer. The Jackrabbits cut it to four with just under two minutes to play on Wilson's 3-point play, but could get no closer. Freidel missed a three-pointer with just over a minute to play.

West Virginia led the nation last year in offensive rebounds at 15.5 per game. They had 17 against South Dakota State, but were outrebounded 41-39.

"The way they play, it leads to a lot of long rebounds because everything is so much penetration and kick and shooting threes," West Virginia coach Bob Huggins said. "It's a different kind of rebounding than what we're used to."

South Dakota State led 19-14 on Wilson's 3-point play with 10 minutes to play in the first half. West Virginia battled back and took the lead for good on a McNeil 3-pointer with just over six minutes to play in the half.

South Dakota State will face the loser of the Utah State vs. VCU game on Thursday night.

BIG PICTURE

West Virginia's long front line seemed to be too much for South Dakota State to overcome.

HE SAID IT

"We actually had to do a lot of scouting, and obviously we didn't do a very good job on the last one," Huggins said about scouting Texas A&M, who dropped out of the tournament due to COVID-19 complica-

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tions, Northern Iowa, whose game was moved against West Virginia in the tournament, and then finally South Dakota State. "They're a lot better than I think our guys thought they were."

STAR WATCH

West Virginia's Oscar Tshiebwe was named to the Preseason All-Big 12 Team. He picked up two fouls in the first four minutes and another early in the second half and was a non-factor all night, finishing with seven points and three rebounds. At halftime, Tshiebwe was just 1-for-1 from the field with two points and one rebound.

NEW FACES

This was the first meeting ever between West Virginia and South Dakota State. It's the first time West Virginia has played a game in the state of South Dakota.

UP NEXT

West Virginia advanced to the semifinals Thursday against VCU, an 85-69 winner over Utah State in the late game.

South Dakota State will face Utah State on Thursday night.

Wright leads Colorado over South Dakota 84-61

MANHATTAN, Kan. (AP) — McKinley Wright IV scored 16 points in the first half and finished with 20 on 8-of-12 shooting to help Colorado open the season with an 84-61 win over South Dakota on Wednesday night in the Little Apple Classic.

Colorado had three players finish with double-digit scoring off the bench. Keeshawn Barthelemy and Jeriah Horne added 11 points each and Jabari Walker scored 10. Wright handed out six assists.

Colorado missed its first five 3-point attempts but finished the game 10 of 25 from the arc. Barthelemy and Eli Parquet hit back-to-back 3s late in the first half to make it 45-25, Colorado's largest lead before the break.

The Buffaloes led by at least 13 throughout the second half and Horne's 3-pointer with 8:51 left in the game gave them their largest lead at 73-48.

Stanley Umude scored 24 points to lead the Coyotes and Ty Chisom added 12 points and nine rebounds.

Colorado plays Friday against host Kansas State, which lost to Drake 80-70 on Wednesday. South Dakota will face Drake on Friday.

For more AP college basketball coverage: <https://apnews.com/Collegebasketball> and http://twitter.com/AP_Top25

Hollingsworth leads W. Kentucky over N. Iowa 93-87

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — Taveion Hollingsworth scored 26 points as Western Kentucky beat Northern Iowa 93-87 on Wednesday in the first round of the Bad Boy Mowers Crossover Classic.

Dayvion McKnight added 21 points for the Hilltoppers while Luke Frampton scored 14 points and Charles Bassey 11.

AJ Green led the Panthers with 28 points and seven rebounds. Noah Carter scored a career-high 28 points — coming on nine 3-pointers, a Northern Iowa single-game record — and had seven rebounds. Bowen Born had 16 points.

Northern Iowa lofted a barrage of 3-pointers, making 20 of 39 from distance, 12 after halftime, but Western Kentucky dominated the paint 44-12 and got 42 points off the bench.

For more AP college basketball coverage: <https://apnews.com/Collegebasketball> and http://twitter.com/AP_Top25

Elements of this story were generated by Automated Insights, <http://www.automatedinsights.com/ap>, using data from STATS LLC, <https://www.stats.com>

Ellis scores 24 to help Memphis beat Saint Mary's 73-56

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — Boogie Ellis had a career-high 24 points as Memphis beat Saint Mary's 73-56 on Wednesday at the Bad Boy Mowers Crossover Classic.

Ellis hit 6 of 7 from 3-point range.

Landers Nolley II had 11 points for Memphis (1-0). Damion Baugh added 10 points. Moussa Cisse had 10 points.

Matthias Tass had 15 points for the Gaels (0-1). Alex Ducas added 10 points. Kyle Bowen had eight rebounds.

For more AP college basketball coverage: <https://apnews.com/Collegebasketball> and http://twitter.com/AP_Top25

This was generated by Automated Insights, <http://www.automatedinsights.com/ap>, using data from STATS LLC, <https://www.stats.com>

Sanford settles with state over improper Medicaid billing

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — Sanford Health must pay more than \$329,000 to settle allegations of improper billing to the South Dakota Medicaid plan, the state attorney general's office announced Wednesday.

The penalty resulted from billing that was done on behalf of former Sanford neurosurgeon Dr. Wilson Asfora, the Argus Leader reported. A federal lawsuit accuses Asfora of using medical devices he had invested in during his surgeries involving Medicaid patients.

Federal anti-kickback laws prohibit health providers from using goods or services in which they have a financial interest for patients participating in federal medical programs. Asfora allegedly ran a physician owned distributorship that gives doctors a cut from the sales of devices.

Asfora has denied the allegations and has filed a counter suit against Sanford.

Investigators say man killed himself after police shootout

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — The South Dakota Attorney General's office on Wednesday confirmed a Sioux Falls police report that a man who engaged in a shootout with officers in October killed himself.

Police responded to a 911 call for someone refusing to leave an apartment complex when they encountered a 29-year-old man. The man drew a pistol and fired at an officer, hitting him in the foot and shoulder. A second officer returned fire.

Police said they later entered the building and found that the man had committed suicide.

David Natvig, the director of the state's Division of Criminal Investigation, said an autopsy confirmed the report from the Sioux Falls police officers.

The Division of Criminal Investigation performed the investigation with assistance from the Sioux Falls Police Department and the Minnehaha County Sheriff's Office.

Cannabis group files to defend constitutional amendment

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — The group that campaigned to legalize recreational marijuana in South Dakota through a voter-backed constitutional amendment has filed in court to defend the amendment in a legal challenge brought by two law enforcement officers.

The Rapid City Journal reports South Dakotans for Better Marijuana Laws organized the effort to pass a constitutional amendment legalizing cannabis for adults, as well as providing for its commercial regulation and medical use by minors. The amendment was approved by 54% of voters on Election Day.

But two law enforcement officers, Pennington County Sheriff Kevin Thom and Highway Patrol Superin-

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tendent Col. Rick Miller, have brought a lawsuit arguing the amendment is not legal because it covers more than one subject and should have been handled as a constitutional revision rather than an amendment.

South Dakota taxpayers have found themselves paying for both sides of the legal tussle, with Attorney General Jason Ravnsborg defending the constitutional amendment and Gov. Kristi Noem paying legal fees for Miller.

The pro-cannabis group has asked a judge to allow it to defend the constitutional amendment, arguing that the lawsuit tries to "overturn the will of the voters" using incorrect legal theories. They say the amendment applies to the lone subject of cannabis.

Governor names two new administration appointments

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — South Dakota Gov. Kristi Noem announced two appointments to positions within her administration on Wednesday, naming new heads for the Department of Education and state housing program.

Noem said that in December she will move her senior policy advisor Tiffany Sanderson to the Department of Education, where she will replace Ben Jones as Secretary of Education. Sanderson was focused on education policy in Noem's office and previously worked in the Department of Education directing the state's technical colleges.

The Republican governor also named Lorraine Polak to direct the South Dakota Housing Development Authority. She will replace the retiring director, Mark Lauseng, in January. Polak has worked in the housing program for over two decades and currently oversees rental housing development.

South Dakota officials: Holiday could undo virus progress

By STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — South Dakota health officials warned Wednesday that the state's recent progress in slowing the COVID-19 infection rate could be undone by holiday gatherings.

The state added 28 more deaths from the illness caused by the coronavirus, pushing the November total to 424, which is one fewer than the 425 the state had in every other month of the pandemic combined.

Despite the sharp increase in deaths, the average number of new daily cases has declined over the past two weeks. But health officials warned that Thanksgiving gatherings could lead to a resurgence.

Although cases have recently had a modest drop, South Dakota still has the nation's second-highest number of new cases per capita over the last two weeks, according to Johns Hopkins researchers. Roughly one out of every 50 people has tested positive in the last two weeks, according to Johns Hopkins researchers.

"We are still seeing a high level of cases within the state, as are many states," said Josh Clayton, the state epidemiologist.

Health officials asked people to take steps to prevent infections from spreading as they gather for Thanksgiving, but stopped short of asking them to cancel holiday plans.

"We ask that individuals do take precautions, whether it's at the bar, whether you are traveling to visit family, or whether you are spending time with family," Clayton said.

That message is in line with the stance of Gov. Kristi Noem, who said she wouldn't stop or discourage people from gathering for Thanksgiving but asked that people wash their hands frequently, keep festivities small and protect those most vulnerable to serious complications from the disease.

The Republican governor kicked off the holiday season on Tuesday night with a Christmas tree lighting ceremony at the Capitol. In photos she shared on social media, she was not wearing a face mask despite being in close proximity to other people. Noem has said she wears masks when "appropriate," but the former rancher has publicly expressed doubt about whether the widespread wearing of masks in public helps slow the spread of infections.

They're baaack: Trump and allies still refuse election loss

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By COLLEEN LONG, ALANNA DURKIN RICHER and ZEKE MILLER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Monday seemed like the end of President Donald Trump's relentless challenges to the election, after the federal government acknowledged President-elect Joe Biden was the "apparent winner" and Trump cleared the way for cooperation on a transition of power.

But his baseless claims have a way of coming back. And back. And back.

By Wednesday, Trump was phoning into a local Pennsylvania Republican lawmakers' meeting that had been orchestrated by his campaign to assert falsely, again, that the election was tainted.

"This election was rigged and we can't let that happen," Trump said by phone, offering no specific evidence.

The 2020 presidential race is turning into the zombie election that Trump just won't let die. Despite dozens of legal and procedural setbacks, his campaign keeps filing new challenges that have no hope of succeeding and making fresh, unfounded claims of fraud.

But that's the point. Trump's strategy wasn't to change the outcome, but to create a host of phantom claims about the 2020 presidential race that would infect the nation with doubt, even though the winner was clear and there has been no evidence of mass voter fraud.

"Zombies are dead people walking among the living — this litigation is the same thing," said Franita Tolson, a professor at the University of Southern California Gould School of Law. "In terms of litigation that could change the election, all these cases are basically dead men walking."

It's a strategy tolerated by many Republicans, most notably Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell of Kentucky, who are clinging to Trump as they face a test of retaining their own power in the form of two runoff elections in Georgia in January.

"This really is our version of a polite coup d'état," said Thomas Mann, senior resident scholar at the Institute of Governmental Studies at the University of California at Berkeley. "It could end quickly if the Republican Party acknowledged what was going on. But they cower in the face of Trump's connection with the base."

A day after Trump said his administration should begin working with Biden's team, three more lawsuits were filed by allies attempting to stop the certification in two more battleground states. In Minnesota, a judge did not rule on the suit and the state certified the results for Biden. Another was filed in Wisconsin, which doesn't certify until Tuesday. Arizona Republicans filed a complaint over ballot inspection; the state certification is due Monday.

And the campaign legal team said state lawmakers in Arizona and Michigan would hold meetings on the election "to provide confidence that all of the legal votes have been counted and the illegal votes have not been counted in the November 3rd election."

In Pennsylvania, where state Republican lawmakers met at Gettysburg on Wednesday to air grievances about the election, Trump lawyer Rudy Giuliani attended in person and Trump dialed in from the Oval Office.

"We have all the evidence," Trump asserted. "All we need is to have some judge listen to it properly without having a political opinion."

But the strongest legal rebuke yet came from a conservative Republican judge in federal court in Pennsylvania, who on Saturday dismissed the Trump team's lawsuit seeking to throw out the results of the election. The judge admonished the Trump campaign in a scathing ruling about its lack of evidence. The campaign has appealed.

Trump's allies have privately acknowledged their plan would never actually overturn the results, but rather might provide Trump an off-ramp for a loss he wasn't owning up to and an avenue to keep his base loyal for whatever he does next.

"And then our governing and politics will be hellish, because he will continue doing what he's doing from his private own perch," Mann predicted.

Emily Murphy, the top official at the General Services Administration, declared Biden the "apparent winner" Monday, a procedural yet critical step that allowed for the transition to begin in earnest. She made the determination after Trump's efforts to subvert the vote failed across battleground states. She cited "recent developments involving legal challenges and certifications of election results."

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Michigan certified Biden's 154,000-count victory Monday, despite calls by Trump to the GOP members to block the vote to allow for an audit of ballots in Wayne County, where Trump claimed he was the victim of fraud. Biden crushed the president by more than 330,000 votes there.

"The board's duty today is very clear," said Aaron Van Langevelde, the Republican vice chair. "We have a duty to certify this election based on these returns."

Still, the Trump legal team dismissed the certification as "simply a procedural step" and insisted it would fight on.

Trump and his allies have brought at least four cases in Michigan that sought — unsuccessfully — to block certification of election results in part or all of the state.

In Pennsylvania, after Gov. Tom Wolf certified Biden as the winner, an appeals court judge ordered state officials to halt any further steps toward certifying election results. The state has appealed to Pennsylvania's Supreme Court.

In Arizona, just as lawyers for a woman in the Phoenix area dropped a case alleging that equipment was unable to record her ballot because she completed it with a county-issued Sharpie pen, Trump's campaign filed its own lawsuit echoing some of the same complaints. As that suit was about to be dismissed, lawyers for the woman filed a new case reviving the claims and demanding that she be allowed to recast her ballot. All three of the cases have now been dismissed.

"The legal process seems to be unfolding the way it's supposed to, but the Trump campaign has made clear its desire to throw wrenches in the system wherever it can," said Lisa Marshall Manheim, a professor at the University of Washington School of Law.

Richer reported from Boston. Associated Press writers Maryclaire Dale in Philadelphia, Scott Bauer in Madison, Wisconsin; Jacques Billeaud in Phoenix and Steve Karnowski in St. Paul, Minnesota, contributed to this report.

Americans risk traveling over Thanksgiving despite warnings

By LISA MARIE PANE, SOPHIA TULP and DANIELLA PETERS Associated Press

Millions of Americans took to the skies and the highways ahead of Thanksgiving at the risk of pouring gasoline on the coronavirus fire, disregarding increasingly dire warnings that they stay home and limit their holiday gatherings to members of their own household.

Those who are flying witnessed a distinctly 2020 landscape at the nation's airports: plexiglass barriers in front of the ID stations, rapid virus testing sites inside terminals, masks in check-in areas and on board planes, and paperwork asking passengers to quarantine on arrival at their destination.

While the number of Americans traveling by air over the past several days was down dramatically from the same time last year, many pressed ahead with their holiday plans amid skyrocketing deaths, hospitalizations and confirmed infections across the U.S.

Some were tired of more than eight months of social distancing and determined to spend time with loved ones.

"I think with the holidays and everything, it's so important right now, especially because people are so bummed out because of the whole pandemic," said 25-year-old Cassidy Zerkle of Phoenix, who flew to Kansas City, Missouri, to visit family during what is traditionally one of the busiest travel periods of the year.

She brought snacks and her own hand sanitizer and said the flight was half full. She had a row of seats to herself.

"As long as you're maintaining your distance, you're not touching stuff and you're sanitizing your hands, people should see their families right now," she said.

The U.S. has recorded more than 12.7 million coronavirus infections and over 262,000 deaths. The country is still missing about eight infections for every one counted, according to a new government report Wednesday. Many people don't get tests, especially if they don't have symptoms.

More than 88,000 people in the U.S. — an all-time high — were in the hospital with COVID-19 as of

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Tuesday, pushing the health care system in many places to the breaking point, and new cases of the virus have been setting records, soaring to an average of over 174,000 per day.

Deaths have surged to more than 1,600 per day, a mark last seen in May, when the crisis in the New York area was easing.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and state and local authorities have begged people not to travel and urged them to keep their Thanksgiving celebrations small.

"That'll make sure that your extended family are around to celebrate Christmas and to celebrate the holidays next year," Kentucky Gov. Andy Beshear said.

But even Denver Mayor Michael Hancock flew to Mississippi to spend Thanksgiving with his wife and youngest daughter despite sending messages on social media and to city staff asking them to avoid traveling for the holiday. He apologized, acknowledging that he went against his own public guidance.

"I made my decision as a husband and father, and for those who are angry and disappointed, I humbly ask you to forgive decisions that are borne of my heart and not my head," Hancock said.

About 900,000 to 1 million people per day passed through U.S. airport checkpoints from Friday through Wednesday, a drop-off of around 60% from the same time a year ago. Still, those were some of the biggest crowds since the COVID-19 crisis took hold in the U.S. in March. On Wednesday, the more than 1 million people screened at airports was the largest since the start of the pandemic.

Last year, a record 26 million passengers and crew passed through U.S. airport screening in the 11-day period around Thanksgiving.

More Americans drive than fly during the holiday, and AAA has projected those numbers are also likely to be lower this year. How much lower the auto club has not said.

Many states and cities have adopted precautions. Travelers to Los Angeles, either by plane or train, were required to fill out an online form acknowledging California's request that people quarantine for two weeks after arrival in the state.

Thea Zunick, 40, boarded a flight from Newark, New Jersey, to Florida to see her 90-year-old grandmother and her parents.

"We've all kind of decided like it's worth the risk," Zunick said. "But I wanted to make sure that all the efforts that I've made to stay healthy isn't undone by other people's carelessness. And absolutely, I know that I'm taking a risk by flying. I know that, but sometimes it's necessary."

She isolated at home for days before the trip, got a COVID-19 test that came back negative and made sure to choose an early and direct flight. She also masked up and layered a face shield on top.

"I felt like an astronaut, to be honest," Zunick said.

Once at the airport, Zunick said, she saw poor adherence to mask-wearing, loose enforcement of rules, long lines to check baggage and a disregard for social distancing in security lines.

Once she boarded her completely full flight, with middle seats occupied, she watched passengers eat and drink with their masks pulled down and sat next to a passenger wearing a loose bandanna, prompting her to call over a flight attendant, she said.

"I said to the stewardess, 'Hey, the person next to me, is that permitted? Because it's making me uncomfortable.' They're like, 'Oh, yeah, that's fine.' But it's not," Zunick said. "The bottom of it was open. And it was tied so loosely that it kept falling down throughout the flight and he kept messing with it and trying to make it tighter and pull it up."

Anne Moore, a 60-year-old woman from Chicago, flew to Albany, New York, to be with her daughter for the holiday and then drive back to Illinois with her. Her daughter is a senior at Dartmouth College, and Moore and her husband were worried about her driving back by herself.

Before the spike, the family had planned to hold a Thanksgiving gathering of fewer than 10 people. But instead it will be just Moore, her husband and her daughter.

"I have friends who are alone. And I'm not inviting them. And I feel badly about that," she said. "We'll take a walk or something instead. But yeah, the three of us are isolating."

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If you were there, you will never forget Maradona in Mexico

By BARRY WILNER AP Sports Writer

From the press tribune above the Estadio Azteca field it was impossible to discern the trickery Diego Maradona had performed.

From the same location, it was impossible not to marvel at the brilliant maneuverability that Maradona also performed.

That was the paradox presented by Maradona, the great Argentine player who died Wednesday at age 60. He could be magical in positive and negative ways.

His most famous — and infamous — game came against England at the then-majestic stadium in Mexico City, a World Cup quarterfinal in 1986. The lure of being there was as strong for media members as it was for the 100,000 or so fans on hand. Not since Pele in his prime had there been such a must-see footballer on such a superlative stage.

Adding to the electric atmosphere were the legions of Argentina fans in their blue-and-white striped jerseys, waving their flags and chanting tributes to "El Gran Diego." There even were some shouts of "El Dios Diego."

If only they truly knew.

Soccer at its highest level is a game of intrigue, 11 players on each side weaving a tapestry. The wise fan does not concentrate on the ball the way hockey followers will watch the puck. Rather, you focus on the movement of the players as a group, the patterns and the probing, and eventually the penetrating attacks.

But not when Maradona was in his prime. You watched No. 10 for Argentina. Always.

Taking your eyes off Maradona was tantamount to going to the concession stand in the middle of the match.

And on that June day, in what would become the foundation of his legacy, Maradona delivered.

Following a goalless first half, Maradona struck in the 51st minute with a powerful header. Or did he?

A misplay by an England defender sent the ball high and toward the net, from which keeper Peter Shilton — one of the best ever — sprinted to clear it. The diminutive Maradona beat him with a leap and a swivel of the noggin. Or, more accurately, as video replays indicate today, a punch with his left hand from the side of his head.

GOAL!!!!!!!!!!!! (the only way to describe such scores, of course).

From the press area, all seemed fair. To the English players and manager, it was a farce — a blatant breaking of the rules. To the Argentines, it was Diego doing his thing.

No matter, because the goal stood for a 1-0 lead. In fact, to most of us covering the game, the furor seemed misplaced.

Had the match ended with that score, Maradona's reputation everywhere but among his countrymen might have been scarred forever. But then came something so spectacular yet refined, so wild yet controlled, that even the hardened folks in the press box felt like cheering.

And some did.

Maradona basically weaved around and through half of the England team, starting from just his side of midfield, and finishing his slalom run with a short poke into the net as he fell.

As the English telly announcer exclaimed, "There was no doubt about that one."

And no doubt it would be recalled globally on the same level as Americans remember Bobby Thomson's home run or the Immaculate Reception.

Watching from on high — no, not "Hand of God" on high — every reporter knew there was no way of truly describing this goal. No way of giving it justice with words.

Certainly we all would try, fruitless as it might be. None of us, naturally, could match the skill and creativity — the sheer magnificence — conjured up by Maradona that afternoon.

Pele famously and appropriately dubbed soccer "O Jogo Bonito" (The Beautiful Game). That phrase fit the grace and graciousness of the Brazilian, and the way he played. Pele was a cheetah and a gazelle. If Pele's football was a musical genre, try jazz.

Maradona was a bull, a charge-ahead locomotive. His music would have been heavy metal.

Yet on that summer day under a brilliant sky in Mexico City, Maradona showed us he had some of the virtuoso in him. And some impish sorcery, too.

Thailand approved transfer of 3 Iranians as Australian freed

By TASSANEE VEJPONGSA and NICK PERRY Associated Press

BANGKOK (AP) — Thailand said Thursday it transferred three Iranians involved in a botched 2012 bomb plot back to Tehran, as Iran released an Australian academic who was imprisoned for more than two years on spying charges.

While Thai officials declined to call it a swap and Iran referred to the men as “economic activists,” the arrangement freed academic Kylie Moore-Gilbert and saw the three men linked to a wider bomb plot targeting Israeli diplomats return home to a hero’s welcome.

The bombers wore Iranian flags draped over their shoulders, their faces largely obscured by black baseball caps and surgical masks. It was a sharp contrast to other prisoner exchanges Iran has trumpeted in the past, in which television anchors repeatedly said their names and broadcasters aired images of them reuniting with their families.

The reason for Iran’s refusal to name those freed remains unclear. However, Tehran has long denied being behind the bomb plot and likely hopes to leverage the incoming administration of U.S. President-elect Joe Biden to ease American sanctions imposed by President Donald Trump. Israeli officials declined to immediately comment on the release.

In Australia, Prime Minister Scott Morrison said he was “thrilled and relieved” that Moore-Gilbert, 33, had been released but added that it would take time for her to process her “horrible” ordeal.

“The tone of her voice was very uplifting, particularly given what she has been through,” Morrison told Australia’s Network Nine.

Chatchom Akapin, Thailand’s deputy attorney general, told The Associated Press that Thai authorities had approved the transfer of the prisoners under an agreement with Iran.

“These types of transfers aren’t unusual,” he said. “We transfer prisoners to other countries and at the same time receive Thais back under this type of agreement all the time.”

A Thai Corrections Department official, who spoke on condition of anonymity as no approval had been granted to speak publicly on the issue with journalists, said only two of the Iranians were sent home Wednesday under the prison transfer agreement, while one received a pardon in September.

Under transfer agreements, returnees are supposed to serve the remainder of their sentences in their home country. Thailand has such agreements with about three dozen countries. However, Iranian state television video of the men’s arrival suggested that a return to prison seemed unlikely as officials showered them with flowers and offered shouted praise to God and the Prophet Muhammad.

The plane that carried the men from Bangkok to Iran had a tail number linking it to an Australian private air carrier called Skytraders, which describes itself as a “principal provider of air services to government.” An employee at the company declined to comment when reached by the AP.

The plane had flown twice this week from Bangkok to Tehran, and then on to Doha, Qatar, flight data obtained by the AP showed. Authorities declined to say where Moore-Gilbert was Thursday, though she thanked Australia’s government and diplomats in a statement for securing her release, as well as supporters who campaigned for her freedom.

Despite her ordeal, Moore-Gilbert said she had “nothing but respect, love and admiration for the great nation of Iran and its warm-hearted, generous and brave people.”

Asked about the swap, Australia’s prime minister said he “wouldn’t go into those details, confirm them one way or the other.” However, Morrison said he could assure Australians there had been nothing done to prejudice their safety and no prisoners were released in Australia.

Thai police discovered the three Iranians’ plot in 2012 when an accidental explosion blew apart their rented Bangkok villa. At the time, Iran was suspected in two bombing attempts in India and the former

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Soviet republic of Georgia targeting Israeli diplomats amid heightened tensions over its nuclear program. Its own nuclear scientists, meanwhile, had been killed in attacks long suspected to have been carried out by Israel.

Police say one of the Iranians, Saeid Moradi, threw a grenade at officers that bounced backed and exploded, shearing away his legs. Moradi was sentenced to life for attempting to murder a police officer. Another man, Mohammad Kharzei, received a 15-year sentence for possessing explosives. The sentence of the third man, Masoud Sedaghatzadeh, wasn't immediately known.

Kharzei was the Iranian who was said to have been pardoned this past September, the Thai corrections official said.

Their release along with Moore-Gilbert's represents another case in which Iran held a Westerner on widely criticized espionage charges. Activists and U.N. investigators believe Iran systematically leverages their imprisonment for money or influence in negotiations with the West. Tehran denies it, though there have been similar exchanges in the past.

Moore-Gilbert was a Melbourne University lecturer on Middle Eastern studies when she was picked up at the Tehran airport as she tried to leave the country after attending an academic conference in 2018. She was sent to Tehran's notorious Evin prison, convicted of spying and sentenced to 10 years. She vehemently denied the charges and maintained her innocence.

Moore-Gilbert wrote in letters to Morrison that she had been imprisoned "to extort" the Australian government.

Her detention had strained relations between Iran and the West at a time of already escalating tensions, which reached a fever pitch earlier this year following the American killing of a top Iranian general in Baghdad and retaliatory Iranian strikes on a U.S. military base.

International pressure had been building on Iran to release Moore-Gilbert. She had gone on repeated hunger strikes and her health had deteriorated during long stretches in solitary confinement. She also alleged Iran subjected her to "grievous violations" of her rights, including psychological torture.

Perry reported from Wellington, New Zealand. Associated Press writers Isabel DeBre and Jon Gambrell in Dubai, United Arab Emirates, and Amir Vahdat in Tehran, Iran, contributed to this report.

Ethiopian PM says troops ordered to move on Tigray capital

By CARA ANNA Associated Press

NAIROBI, Kenya (AP) — Ethiopia's prime minister said Thursday the army has been ordered to move on the embattled Tigray regional capital after his 72-hour ultimatum ended for Tigray leaders to surrender, and he warned the city's half-million residents to stay indoors and disarm.

The military offensive "has reached its final stage" after three weeks of fighting, Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed's office said. That means tanks and other weaponry can close in on Mekele, whose residents were warned of "no mercy" if they didn't move away from Tigray leaders in time.

That caused international alarm as rights groups said such wording could violate international law and put civilians in further danger. "We will take utmost care to protect civilians," Abiy's statement said.

It also asserted that thousands of Tigray militia and special forces surrendered during the 72-hour period.

The United Nations has reported people fleeing Mekele, but communications and transport links remain severed to Tigray, and it's not clear how many people received the warnings in time. Tigray regional leaders couldn't immediately be reached.

"What is happening is beyond words, and it is heartbreaking to see a great country is collapsing," said a message sent from a Mekele resident on Wednesday and seen by The Associated Press. The message expressed hopelessness at not being able to reach loved ones elsewhere in the region, adding, "Ohhhh-hhhh GOD!"

The international community is pleading for immediate de-escalation, dialogue and humanitarian access as Ethiopian forces have fought their way through Tigray to Mekele. "The hostilities in Ethiopia are of ma-

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for concern for the EU. Next to the casualties, the danger of a major humanitarian crisis is imminent. An immediate de-escalation is needed by all parties," European Union commissioner for crisis management Janez Lenarcic tweeted Thursday.

But Abiy, last year's Nobel Peace Prize winner, has rejected international "interference." His government has said three high-level African Union envoys for the conflict can meet with Abiy, but not with the Tigray leaders.

Abiy's office on Thursday for the first time did say a "humanitarian access route" would open under the management of the country's Ministry of Peace, with no details. It also said distribution of supplies has begun in areas of Tigray now under government control.

That came hours after the U.N. said shortages have become "very critical" in the Tigray region as its population of 6 million remains sealed off.

It remains difficult to verify claims in the fighting that erupted Nov. 4 between Ethiopian forces and the heavily armed forces of the Tigray People's Liberation Front, which once dominated Ethiopia's government but has been sidelined under Abiy's rule. The two governments now regard each other as illegal.

Fuel and cash are running out in Tigray, more than 1 million people are now estimated to be displaced and food for nearly 100,000 refugees from Eritrea will be gone in a week, according to the U.N. update released overnight. And more than 600,000 people who rely on monthly food rations haven't received them this month.

Travel blockages are so dire that even within Mekele the U.N. World Food Program cannot obtain access to transport food from its warehouses there.

A statement this week from a civil society representative in the region, seen by the AP, described heavy bombardment of communities elsewhere that has kept many residents from fleeing.

Other people are frantically moving within the Tigray region from one district to another and "living within church compounds, streets, schools, health centers," the statement warned, and it pleaded for a safe corridor to ship in aid as food runs out.

Human Rights Watch is warning that "actions that deliberately impede relief supplies" violate international humanitarian law, and that the complete shutdown of communications "could amount to a form of collective punishment by imposing penalties on people without a clear lawful basis."

Another crisis is unfolding as more than 40,000 Ethiopian refugees have fled into a remote area of Sudan, where humanitarian groups and local communities struggle to feed, treat and shelter them. Nearly half the refugees are children under 18. Many fled with nothing.

"When it is cold, it hurts so much," said one wounded refugee, Alam Kafa. "At night, I have to wrap tightly with a blanket so I can sleep. But I don't sleep at night."

"Just to imagine for everything, literally for everything, starting from your food, ending with your water drinking, ending just to go for the toilet facilities and washing your hands, for everything you depend on somebody else," said Javanshir Hajiyev with aid group Mercy Corps. This is really a very dire situation. I can't stress how difficult it is."

Fay Abuelgasim in Umm Rakouba contributed to this report.

Move over St. Paul: Napoli stadium to be named for Maradona

By ANDREW DAMPF AP Sports Writer

Move over St. Paul and make way for Maradona.

The mayor of Naples started a formal process to rename the San Paolo stadium for Diego Maradona on Thursday.

The move comes with the city in mourning for the soccer great, who died Wednesday of a heart attack at age 60, two weeks after being released from a hospital in Buenos Aires following brain surgery.

"We are already putting it together this morning, taking the first steps to dedicate Naples' stadium to Maradona," Luigi De Magistris said. "It's a process but it will be a quick process, because when there is

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such a strong desire there's nothing that will hold us up.

"We're hoping to make it coincide with the resumption of games with fans," the mayor added.

The city operates the San Paolo stadium, where Maradona led Napoli to its only two Serie A titles in 1987 and 1990.

Built after World War II, the stadium was named for St. Paul according to the legend that the apostle docked in the surrounding Fuorigrotta area when he reached current-day Italy.

"I think it's fair to name San Paolo after you, to have you still with us as a witness to the sublime path that this squad has undertaken," Napoli president Aurelio De Laurentiis said in an open letter to Maradona. "Yours were unforgettable years in Neapolitans' memories. A symbol of a renewal and a desired resurrection."

Napoli plays Croatian side Rijeka on Thursday in the Europa League in a match that will be empty of fans due to the coronavirus pandemic.

However, fans were already outside the stadium late Wednesday and into Thursday morning waving banners, singing songs and lighting flares in Maradona's honor -- even though gatherings are technically banned in the city, which is located in a coronavirus "red zone."

"Maradona is like a father, like a brother, a family member for us," said one fan outside the stadium, Raffaele Cuomo. "Unfortunately it's like someone from the family died, and it's like a part of Naples has died."

Added Anna Carpi, another Naples resident: "It broke my heart. ... But Diego will always be with us, in our heart."

When Maradona joined Napoli in 1984, the southern club had won virtually nothing and was far removed both geographically and socio-economically from the country's soccer capitals of Milan and Turin.

"It sparked the revival of a people," De Magistris said. "He loved Naples and so he wanted to — via soccer — make the world aware of a city full of humanity, affection, energy and fantasy.

"Even today I see young kids who didn't (see him play), like my kids, who still have Maradona in their minds and in their hearts."

Il Mattino, Naples' leading newspaper, had a front-page headline Thursday that said simply, "Grazie" — "Thank You."

The Gazzetta dello Sport, the country's leading sports newspaper, dedicated its first 23 pages to Maradona.

Ottavio Bianchi, who coached Maradona and Napoli to their first Italian league title in 1987, lamented that he didn't do enough to stop Maradona's cocaine addiction.

"Diego was great at doing simple things," Bianchi told RAI state radio. "He made himself very available to kids and his teammates. But I regret that I in no way prevented the path that his life took.

"When we were alone I tried to scold him and he listened to me with his eyes facing downward. I remember that I told him that he was putting his life at risk. He looked at me and told me that he wanted to live his life with the gas pedal pushed completely down -- to the maximum.

"It upsets me that he has gone like this," Bianchi added. "I always hoped that he would be able to dribble by one final obstacle."

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

Andrew Dampf is at <https://twitter.com/AndrewDampf>

'Why now?' Dismay as US considers troop pullout from Somalia

By CARA ANNA Associated Press

NAIROBI, Kenya (AP) — No country has been involved in Somalia's future as much as the United States. Now the Trump administration is thinking of withdrawing the several hundred U.S. military troops from the Horn of Africa nation at what some experts call the worst possible time.

Three decades of chaos, from warlords to al-Qaida affiliate al-Shabab to the emergence of an Islamic

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State-linked group, have ripped apart the country that only in the past few years has begun to find its footing. The U.S. Embassy returned to Somalia just last year, 28 years after diplomats and staffers fled.

Somalia faces a tense election season that begins in the next few weeks to decide the presidency and parliament. United Nations experts say al-Shabab, supporting its 5,000 to 10,000 fighters on a rich diet of extorting businesses and civilians, is improving its bomb-making skills. And an ever bigger military force, the African Union's 19,000-strong AMISOM, has begun its own withdrawal from a country whose forces are widely considered unready to assume full responsibility for security.

It is not clear whether President Donald Trump will order the withdrawal of the some 700 U.S. military forces from Somalia, following his orders for Afghanistan and Iraq, or whether the reported urge will pass before he leaves office in January. But the idea is taken seriously, even as U.S. drone strikes are expected to continue in Somalia against al-Shabab and IS fighters from neighboring Djibouti and Kenya — where al-Shabab carried out a deadly attack against U.S. forces early this year.

The U.S. Africa Command has seen a "definitive shift" this year in al-Shabab's focus to attack U.S. interests in the region, a new report by the Department of Defense inspector general said Wednesday — and the command says al-Shabab is Africa's most "dangerous" and "imminent" threat.

Here's what's at stake:

COUNTERTERRORISM

"The first thing ... it's disastrous for Somalia's security sector, it just causes that first panic reaction: You know, why now?" said Samira Gaid, a Somali national security specialist who served as senior security adviser to the prime minister and special adviser to the head of AMISOM. "Especially since over the past three and half years in particular the security sector really improved, and we tried to work closely with" the U.S., she told The Associated Press.

Recent progress includes a "war council" between the U.S. and Somali governments, she said, where the U.S. helps to draw up military plans. "We call them Somali-led operations, but really the U.S. is hand-holding us through it."

The U.S. military also trains Somalia's elite Danab special forces that now number around 1,000, and is providing Danab with air cover and intelligence, Gaid said.

"Danab was expanding, that's why this is so shocking," she said. "Is it possible to move forward with that plan now?"

Danab units are now operational in four of Somalia's five member states, the U.S. military says, and they conducted about 80% of the Somali national army's offensive forces in the quarter ending Sept. 30 and "nearly all" operations against al-Shabab.

The Danab forces also serve as a model for how the rest of Somali military forces can develop to be "more meritocracy and less clan-focused," said Omar Mahmood, an analyst with the International Crisis Group.

The loss of U.S. forces is widely seen as a gain for al-Shabab, and for the far smaller presence of hundreds of IS-affiliated fighters in Somalia's north. "From the al-Shabab perspective, they just need to hold out," Mahmood said, and they might even ask themselves what need there is for any potential Taliban-style negotiations.

Al-Shabab's messaging has always stressed the extremist group's staying power, national security specialist Gaid said: "These external forces will always leave." A U.S. withdrawal will play into that narrative.

Gaid said she doesn't see any other country stepping into the U.S. military's role, though a withdrawal would open space for powers like Russia and China. Somalia also has some 1,500 special forces that have been trained by Turkish troops, she said, but "they don't benefit from Turkish advisers on the ground."

SECURITY

Without U.S. forces, al-Shabab "will find it easier to overrun AMISOM, let alone the Somali national army," Vanda Felbab-Brown, co-director of the African Security Initiative at the Brookings Institution, told an online event this week. And with neighboring Ethiopia's conflict increasing pressure to withdraw more Ethiopian forces from Somalia, a U.S. troop withdrawal "is really just the worst time."

The support that U.S. forces give AMISOM is "huge," Gaid said, including as a key interlocutor with Somali

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forces. And with AMISOM also drawing down by the end of next year, "it's a tricky time."

The U.S. has said implementation of the plan for Somali forces to take over the country's security next year is "badly off track," said the new report by the Department of Defense inspector general.

Somali forces cannot contain the al-Shabab threat on its own, the report said. They still rely on the international community for financial support, and yet they "sometimes go unpaid for months."

Maybe a U.S. withdrawal would lead the AMISOM force to adjust its own withdrawal timeline "more realistically," Mahmood said.

The U.S. has been the most engaged security partner in Somalia "willing to get down and dirty," he added. But no other country appears to have the willingness to replace what U.S. forces are doing on the ground.

And a withdrawal of both the U.S. and AMISOM would risk leaving the impression that "Somalia increasingly can rely less and less on external security partners," Mahmood said.

POLITICAL STABILITY

Somalia is on the brink of elections, with the parliamentary vote scheduled in December and the presidential one in February. What had meant to be the country's first one-person-one-vote election in decades instead remains limited by disputes between the federal government and regional ones — which the U.S. has said also weakens command and control of Somali forces.

At least keep U.S. forces in Somalia until after the elections, Felbab-Brown wrote this week, warning of possible post-election violence or al-Shabab taking advantage of any chaos.

Even though U.S. forces don't provide election security, "our problem is, with the U.S. focused on a drawdown of troops, it would not be focused on how the elections are going politically," Gaid said.

The U.S. has been one of the most vocal actors on Somalia's election process, she said. "We were all expecting after November that the U.S. would be clear on a lot of stuff. Now it seems we have to wait."

China's top diplomat stresses S.Korea ties amid row with US

By KIM TONG-HYUNG Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — China's top diplomat on Thursday stressed the importance of bilateral relations while meeting senior officials in South Korea, where there is growing concern the country is becoming squeezed between China, its biggest trading partner, and military ally the United States.

After meeting South Korean Foreign Minister Kang Kyung-wha, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi told reporters that his visit during the coronavirus pandemic shows how much Beijing values its relations with Seoul. He called for stronger cooperation over anti-virus efforts, trade and finding a peaceful solution to a nuclear standoff with North Korea.

When asked whether Beijing was pressing Seoul to choose a side amid rising U.S.-China tensions over trade, security and other issues, Wang said "America is not the only nation in the world."

"There are 190 countries and each of them are sovereign nations," he said. "They include China and South Korea, which are close neighbors and should visit each other more often, like relatives."

Wang later met with President Moon Jae-in, who acknowledged bilateral accomplishments in fighting the virus and maintaining essential business exchanges despite tightened border controls, according to a pool report.

Moon also urged Beijing to continue serving a "constructive role" in international efforts to denuclearize the Korean Peninsula and helping improve relations between the rival Koreas.

Wang replied that Seoul and Beijing have set a "role model" for international cooperation amid the pandemic and conveyed a message by Chinese President Xi Jinping that he considers his "friendship and trust" with Moon as "very important."

Moon's ambitions for inter-Korean engagement have faltered amid stalled nuclear negotiations between the U.S. and North Korea, which have disagreed over the release of crippling U.S.-led sanctions against North Korea in exchange for disarmament steps by the North.

China, as North Korea's only major ally and economic lifeline, is seen as having unique leverage over the government in Pyongyang.

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Wang arrived in Seoul following a visit to Japan, where he met Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga.

In Tokyo on Wednesday, Wang told Suga that he wants the two Asian powers to have good relations and cooperate in fighting the coronavirus and reviving their pandemic-hit economies. But the two sides remain at odds over an island dispute.

South Korea has been eager to repair its relations with China, its biggest trading partner, which reacted furiously to Seoul's decision to deploy an advanced U.S. anti-missile system on its soil in 2016 to better cope with North Korean threats. There is also concern in South Korea over a deepening row between Washington and Beijing over trade, security, human rights and other issues, which could force Seoul into a difficult balancing act.

China, which says the U.S. anti-missile system in South Korea could be reconfigured to peer into its territory, had been accused by Seoul of retaliating by limiting visits by Chinese tour groups to South Korea. Beijing also destroyed South Korean supermarket giant Lotte's business in China after the company sold a plot of land to the South Korean government where the anti-missile system was later installed.

South Korea had hoped to secure a visit by Chinese leader Xi Jinping this year in what Seoul officials describe as a key step in repairing relations, but the pandemic has complicated such plans.

When asked about a possible Xi visit, Wang pointed to the face masks worn by reporters, saying that the coronavirus must first be contained.

South Korea on Thursday reported 583 new cases of the coronavirus, its biggest daily increase in about eight months, as a resurgence in the capital region threatens to erase hard-won gains.

High court blocks NY coronavirus limits on houses of worship

By JESSICA GRESKO Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — As coronavirus cases surge again nationwide the Supreme Court late Wednesday barred New York from enforcing certain limits on attendance at churches and synagogues in areas designated as hard hit by the virus.

The justices split 5-4 with new Justice Amy Coney Barrett in the majority. It was the conservative's first publicly discernible vote as a justice. The court's three liberal justices and Chief Justice John Roberts dissented.

The move was a shift for the court. Earlier this year, when Barrett's liberal predecessor, Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg, was still on the court, the justices divided 5-4 to leave in place pandemic-related capacity restrictions affecting churches in California and Nevada.

The court's action Wednesday could push New York to reevaluate its restrictions on houses of worship in areas designated virus hot spots. But the impact of the court's action is also muted because the Catholic and Orthodox Jewish groups that sued to challenge the restrictions are no longer subject to them.

The Diocese of Brooklyn and Agudath Israel of America have churches and synagogues in areas of Brooklyn and Queens previously designated red and orange zones. In those red and orange zones, the state had capped attendance at houses of worship at 10 and 25 people, respectively. But the those particular areas are now designated as yellow zones with less restrictive rules neither group challenged.

The justices acted on an emergency basis, temporarily barring New York from enforcing the restrictions against the groups while their lawsuits continue. In an unsigned opinion the court said the restrictions "single out houses of worship for especially harsh treatment."

"Members of this Court are not public health experts, and we should respect the judgment of those with special expertise and responsibility in this area. But even in a pandemic, the Constitution cannot be put away and forgotten. The restrictions at issue here, by effectively barring many from attending religious services, strike at the very heart of the First Amendment's guarantee of religious liberty," the opinion said.

The opinion noted that in red zones, while a synagogue or church cannot admit more than 10 people, businesses deemed "essential," from grocery stores to pet shops, can remain open without capacity limits. And in orange zones, while synagogues and churches are capped at 25 people, "even non-essential businesses may decide for themselves how many persons to admit."

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Roberts, in dissent, wrote that there was “simply no need” for the court’s action. “None of the houses of worship identified in the applications is now subject to any fixed numerical restrictions,” he said, adding that New York’s 10 and 25 person caps “do seem unduly restrictive.”

“The Governor might reinstate the restrictions. But he also might not. And it is a significant matter to override determinations made by public health officials concerning what is necessary for public safety in the midst of a deadly pandemic,” he wrote.

Roberts and four other justices wrote separately to explain their views. Barrett did not.

The court’s action was a victory for the Roman Catholic Church and Orthodox Jewish synagogues that had sued to challenge state restrictions announced by Gov. Andrew Cuomo on Oct. 6.

The Diocese of Brooklyn, which covers Brooklyn and Queens, argued houses of worship were being unfairly singled out by the governor’s executive order. The diocese argued it had previously operated safely by capping attendance at 25% of a building’s capacity and taking other measures. Parts of Brooklyn and Queens are now in yellow zones where attendance at houses of worship is capped at 50% of a building’s capacity, but the church is keeping attendance lower.

“We are extremely grateful that the Supreme Court has acted so swiftly and decisively to protect one of our most fundamental constitutional rights — the free exercise of religion,” said Randy Mastro, an attorney for the diocese, in a statement.

Avi Schick, an attorney for Agudath Israel of America, wrote in an email: “This is an historic victory. This landmark decision will ensure that religious practices and religious institutions will be protected from government edicts that do not treat religion with the respect demanded by the Constitution.”

Two lower courts had sided with New York in allowing the restrictions to remain in place. New York had argued that religious gatherings were being treated less restrictively than secular gatherings that carried the same infection risk, like concerts and theatrical performances. An email sent early Thursday by The Associated Press to the governor’s office seeking comment was not immediately returned.

There are currently several areas in New York designated orange zones but no red zones, according to a state website that tracks areas designated as hot spots.

Biden seeks unity as Trump stokes fading embers of campaign

By ALEXANDRA JAFFE and JILL COLVIN Associated Press

WILMINGTON, Del. (AP) — On a day of grace and grievance, President-elect Joe Biden summoned Americans to join in common purpose against the coronavirus pandemic and their political divisions while the man he will replace stoked the fading embers of his campaign to “turn the election over.”

Biden, in a Thanksgiving-eve address to the nation, put the surging pandemic front and center, pledging to tap the “vast powers” of the federal government and to “change the course of the disease” once in office. But for that to work, he said, Americans must step up for their own safety and that of their fellow citizens.

“I know the country has grown weary of the fight,” Biden said Wednesday. “We need to remember we’re at war with the virus, not with one another. Not with each other.”

President Donald Trump, who has scarcely mentioned the pandemic in recent days even as it has achieved record heights, remained fixated on his election defeat.

He sent his lawyer Rudy Giuliani and other members of his legal team to meet Pennsylvania Republican state senators in Gettysburg. Inside a hotel near the hallowed battlefields of civil war, they again aired complaints about the election and repeated allegations of Democratic malfeasance that have already disintegrated under examination by courts.

“We have to turn the election over,” Trump said from the Oval Office, where he joined the meeting by speakerphone.

“This was an election that we won easily,” he said. “We won it by a lot.” In fact, the election gave Biden a clear mandate, and no systemic fraud has been uncovered. Judge after judge has dismissed the Trump campaign’s accusations as baseless, and the transition to Biden’s presidency is fully underway.

Nevertheless, Trump repeated: “This election has to be turned around.”

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Trump had been expected to appear in person in Gettysburg, but did not after another member of his legal team tested positive for the coronavirus. Few at the meeting wore masks.

Altogether, the forum heard — and cheered — yet another declaration from a U.S. president seeking to reverse a democratic election and the voters' will because he wants to stay in power. The setting was about a mile from the scene of Pickett's Charge, where Union troops repelled a desperate Confederate attack in July 1863 and helped turn the tide of the Civil War.

The president followed up by pardoning former national security adviser Michael Flynn, the second Trump associate convicted in the Russia probe to be granted clemency by Trump.

The pardon was part of a broader effort to undo the results of an investigation that for years has shadowed Trump's administration and yielded criminal charges against a half dozen associates. The pardon voids the criminal case against Flynn just as a federal judge was deciding whether to grant a Justice Department request to dismiss the prosecution despite Flynn's own guilty plea to lying to the FBI about his Russia contacts.

For his part, Biden has largely projected serenity as the necessary elements of a presidential transition — money, access to office space and more — were held at bay for nearly three weeks by Trump's machinations and a delayed ascertainment by the General Services Administration that he had won the election. On Wednesday, he addressed Trump's raw tactics only in passing.

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"In America, we have full and fair and free elections, and then we honor the results," he said. "The people of this nation and the laws of the land won't stand for anything else."

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He has formed a coronavirus advisory board of scientists, doctors and public health experts, and plans to establish a COVID-19 coordinator in the White House to lead his administration's response.

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In urging Americans to be vigilant in their Thanksgiving plans, Biden said Wednesday he was taking precautions of his own, eschewing his traditional large family gathering and spending the holiday instead with just his wife, daughter and son-in-law.

He's traveling with his wife, Jill, to Rehoboth Beach, the small Delaware beach town where the two have a vacation home. That's where they'll host their family for Thanksgiving dinner. Biden is expected to stay through the weekend in Rehoboth before returning to Wilmington for further work on the transition.

Trump will forgo his usual plans to celebrate Thanksgiving at his private club in Florida and will instead remain at the White House.

Colvin reported from Washington. Associated Press writer Mark Scoloro in Harrisburg, Pa., contributed to this report.

US will appeal order barring expulsions of migrant children

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By NOMAAN MERCHANT Associated Press

HOUSTON (AP) — The U.S. government on Wednesday appealed a judge's order barring the expulsions of immigrant children who crossed the border alone, a policy enacted during the coronavirus pandemic to deny the children asylum protections.

Judge Emmet Sullivan issued a preliminary injunction on Nov. 18 sought by advocates for immigrants that barred expulsions of unaccompanied children under public health laws.

The Justice Department filed a notice of appeal Wednesday night to the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit. It also asked Sullivan to issue a stay of the injunction pending appeal, a request he previously denied.

Since March, border agents have expelled 200,000 immigrant adults and children citing the pandemic and a need to prevent the spread of the virus, even though COVID-19 is spreading broadly through border communities and the country at large.

Sullivan's order only covered children who cross the border without a parent and not adults or parents and children. At least 8,800 unaccompanied children have been expelled without having a chance to seek asylum protections or speak to a lawyer. Most people have been expelled within hours or days, though the Trump administration detained hundreds of children for weeks in hotels near the U.S.-Mexico border for days or weeks at a time until another judge barred that practice.

President-elect Joe Biden has said he will reverse several of President Donald Trump's immigration programs when he takes office in January. Biden has not stated whether he will stop expulsions of immigrants.

In its filing Wednesday night, the Justice Department cited the spread of the virus in border communities in Arizona and Texas. It warned that Sullivan's order "likely will have an irreversible impact on public health" by straining hospital capacity and forcing the government to move "potentially infected" children and teenagers through airports.

The Associated Press reported on Oct. 3 that top officials at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention resisted issuing an emergency declaration allowing immigrant expulsions because it lacked a public health basis, but that Vice President Mike Pence ordered the agency to move forward anyway.

Immigration advocates who sought the injunction say the government has the ability to protect children and border agents simultaneously. They argue the Trump administration is using the pandemic as a pretext to crack down on immigrants.

"There is no basis for allowing this cruel, unprecedented policy to take effect, given the harm that these young children would face if sent back and the readily available ways of safely housing the children," said Lee Gelernt, a lawyer for the American Civil Liberties Union, in an email.

Trump pardons Flynn despite guilty plea in Russia probe

By ERIC TUCKER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump pardoned his former national security adviser Michael Flynn on Wednesday, ending a yearslong prosecution in the Russia investigation that saw Flynn twice plead guilty to lying to the FBI and then reverse himself before the Justice Department stepped in to dismiss his case.

"It is my Great Honor to announce that General Michael T. Flynn has been granted a Full Pardon," Trump tweeted. "Congratulations to @GenFlynn and his wonderful family, I know you will now have a truly fantastic Thanksgiving!"

The pardon, in the waning weeks of Trump's single term, is part of a broader effort by Trump to undo the results of a Russia investigation that shadowed his administration and yielded criminal charges against a half-dozen associates. It comes just months after the president commuted the sentence of another associate, Roger Stone, days before he was to report to prison.

A Justice Department official said the department was not consulted on the pardon and learned Wednesday of the plan. But the official, who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss internal deliberations, noted that the president has the legal power to pardon Flynn.

The move is likely to energize supporters who have taken up Flynn as a cause celebre and rallied around

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the retired Army lieutenant general as the victim of what they assert is an unfair prosecution, even though Flynn twice admitted guilt. Trump has repeatedly spoken warmly about Flynn and, in an indication of his personal interest in his fate, asked then-FBI Director James Comey in February 2017 to end a criminal investigation into the national security adviser.

In a statement, Flynn's family thanked Trump "for answering our prayers and the prayers of a nation" by issuing the pardon.

Democrats lambasted the pardon as undeserved and unprincipled. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi called it "an act of grave corruption and a brazen abuse of power," while Rep. Adam Schiff, the Democratic chair of the House Intelligence Committee, said a "pardon by Trump does not erase" the truth of Flynn's guilty plea, "no matter how Trump and his allies try to suggest otherwise."

"The President's enablers have constructed an elaborate narrative in which Trump and Flynn are victims and the Constitution is subject to the whims of the president," House Judiciary Committee Chair Jerry Nadler said in a statement. "Americans soundly rejected this nonsense when they voted out President Trump."

The pardon is the final step in a case defined by twists and turns. The most dramatic came in May when the Justice Department abruptly moved to dismiss the case, insisting that Flynn should not have been interviewed by the FBI in the first place, only to have U.S. District Justice Emmet Sullivan resist the request and appoint a former judge to argue against the federal government's position and to evaluate whether Flynn should be held in criminal contempt for perjury.

That former judge, John Gleeson, called the Justice Department's dismissal request an abuse of power and said its grounds for dropping the case were ever-evolving and "patently pretextual."

As Sullivan declined to immediately dismiss the prosecution, Flynn lawyer Sidney Powell sought to bypass the judge by asking a federal appeals court to direct him to drop the matter. A three-judge panel did exactly that, but the full court overturned that decision and sent case back to Sullivan.

At a hearing in September, Powell told Sullivan that she had discussed Flynn's case with Trump but also said she did not want a pardon — presumably because she wanted him to be vindicated in the courts.

Powell emerged separately in recent weeks as a public face of Trump's efforts to overturn the results of his election loss to President-elect Joe Biden, but the Trump legal team distanced itself from her after she advanced a series of uncorroborated conspiracy claims.

The pardon spares Flynn the possibility of any prison sentence, which Sullivan could potentially have imposed had he ultimately rejected the Justice Department's dismissal request. That request was made after a review of the case by a federal prosecutor from St. Louis who had been specially appointed by Attorney General William Barr.

At issue in the prosecution was an FBI interview of Flynn, days after Trump's inauguration, about a conversation he had during the presidential transition period with the then-Russian ambassador.

Flynn acknowledged lying during that interview by saying he had not discussed with the diplomat, Sergey Kislyak, sanctions that the outgoing Obama administration had just been imposed on Russia for election interference. During that conversation, Flynn advised that Russia be "even-keeled" in response to the punitive measures, and assured him "we can have a better conversation" about relations between the countries after Trump became president.

The conversation alarmed the FBI, which at the time was investigating whether the Trump campaign and Russia had coordinated to sway the election. In addition, White House officials were stating publicly that Flynn and Kislyak had not discussed sanctions, which the FBI knew was untrue.

Flynn was ousted from his position in February 2017 after news broke that Obama administration officials had warned the White House that Flynn had indeed discussed sanctions with Kislyak and was vulnerable to blackmail. He pleaded guilty months later to a false statement charge.

But last May, after years of defending the prosecution, the Justice Department abruptly reversed its position.

It asserted the FBI had no basis to interview Flynn about Kislyak and that any statements he made during the interview were not material to the FBI's broader counterintelligence probe. The department also

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pointed to internal FBI notes showing agents had planned to close out the investigation weeks before interviewing Flynn about Kislyak.

Flynn, of Middletown, Rhode Island, was among the first people charged in Mueller's investigation and provided such extensive cooperation that prosecutors did not recommend any prison time, leaving open the possibility of probation.

But the morning he was to have been sentenced, after a stern rebuke about his behavior from Sullivan, Flynn asked for the hearing to be cut short so that he could continue cooperating and earn credit toward a more lenient sentence.

After that, he hired new attorneys — including Powell, a conservative commentator and outspoken critic of Mueller's investigation — who took a far more confrontational stance to the government and tried to withdraw his guilty plea.

Biden seeks unity as Trump stokes fading embers of campaign

By ALEXANDRA JAFFE and JILL COLVIN Associated Press

WILMINGTON, Del. (AP) — On a day of grace and grievance, President-elect Joe Biden summoned Americans on Wednesday to join in common purpose against the coronavirus pandemic and their political divisions while the man he will replace stoked the fading embers of his campaign to "turn the election over."

Biden, in a Thanksgiving-eve address to the nation, put the surging pandemic front and center, pledging to tap the "vast powers" of the federal government and to "change the course of the disease" once in office. But for that to work, he said, Americans must step up for their own safety and that of their fellow citizens.

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Colvin reported from Washington. Associated Press writer Mark Scoloro contributed to this report from Harrisburg, Pa.

Argentine soccer great Diego Maradona dies at 60

By DEBORA REY Associated Press

BUENOS AIRES, Argentina (AP) — Diego Maradona, the Argentine soccer great who scored the "Hand of God" goal in 1986 and led his country to that year's World Cup title before later struggling with cocaine use and obesity, has died. He was 60.

Maradona's spokesman, Sebastián Sanchi, said he died Wednesday of a heart attack, two weeks after being released from a hospital in Buenos Aires following brain surgery.

The office of Argentina's president said it will decree three days of national mourning, and the Argentine soccer association expressed its sorrow on Twitter.

One of the most famous moments in the history of the sport, the "Hand of God" goal, came when the diminutive Maradona punched the ball into England's net during the 1986 World Cup quarterfinals. England said the ball went in off of Maradona's hand, not his head. Maradona himself gave conflicting accounts of what had happened over the years, at one point attributing the goal to divine intervention, to "the hand of God."

Ahead of his 60th birthday in October, Maradona told France Football magazine that it was his dream

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to "score another goal against the English, this time with the right hand."

Maradona also captivated fans around the world over a two-decade career with a bewitching style of play that was all his own.

Although his reputation was tarnished by his addictions and an ill-fated spell in charge of the national team, he remained idolized in soccer-mad Argentina as the "Pibe de Oro" or "Golden Boy."

"You took us to the top of the world," Argentine President Alfredo Fernández said on social media. "You made us incredibly happy. You were the greatest of all."

The No. 10 he wore on his jersey became synonymous with him, as it also had with Pelé, the Brazilian great with whom Maradona was regularly paired as the best of all time.

The Brazilian said in a statement he had lost "a dear friend."

"There is much more to say, but for now may God give his family strength," Pelé said. "One day, I hope, we will play soccer together in the sky."

Bold, fast and utterly unpredictable, Maradona was a master of attack, juggling the ball easily from one foot to the other as he raced upfield. Dodging and weaving with his low center of gravity, he shrugged off countless rivals and often scored with a devastating left foot, his most powerful weapon.

"Everything he was thinking in his head, he made it happen with his feet," said Salvatore Bagni, who played with Maradona at Italian club Napoli.

A ballooning waistline slowed Maradona's explosive speed later in his career and by 1991 he was snared in his first doping scandal when he admitted to a cocaine habit that haunted him until he retired in 1997, at 37.

Hospitalized near death in 2000 and again in '04 for heart problems blamed on cocaine, he later said he overcame the drug problem. Cocaine, he once said famously, had proven to be his "toughest rival."

But more health problems followed, despite a 2005 gastric bypass that greatly trimmed his weight. Maradona was hospitalized in early 2007 for acute hepatitis that his doctor blamed on excessive drinking and eating.

He made an unlikely return to the national team in 2008 when he was appointed Argentina coach, but after a quarterfinal exit at the 2010 World Cup in South Africa, he was ousted — ultimately picking up another coaching job with the United Arab Emirates club Al Wasl.

Maradona was the fifth of eight children who grew up in a poor, gritty barrio on the Buenos Aires outskirts where he played a kind of dirt-patch soccer that launched many Argentines to international stardom.

None of them approached Maradona's fame. In 2001, FIFA named Maradona one of the two greatest in the sport's history, alongside Pelé.

"Maradona inspires us," said then-Argentina striker Carlos Tevez, explaining his country's everyman fascination with Maradona at the 2006 World Cup in Germany. "He's our idol, and an idol for the people."

Maradona reaped titles at home and abroad, playing in the early 1980s for Argentinos Juniors and Boca Juniors before moving on to Spanish and Italian clubs. His crowning achievement came at the 1986 World Cup, captaining Argentina in its 3-2 win over West Germany in the final and decisive in a 2-1 victory against England in a feisty quarterfinal match.

Over the protests of England goalkeeper Peter Shilton, the referee let stand a goal by Maradona in which, as he admitted years later, he intentionally hit the ball with his hand in "a bit of mischief."

But Maradona's impact wouldn't be confined to cheating. Four minutes later, he spectacularly weaved past four opponents from midfield to beat Shilton for what FIFA later declared the greatest goal in World Cup history.

Many Argentines saw the match as revenge for their country's loss to Britain in the 1982 war over the Falkland Islands, which Argentines still claim as "Las Malvinas."

"It was our way of recovering 'Las Malvinas,'" Maradona wrote in his 2000 autobiography "I am Diego."

"It was more than trying to win a game. We said the game had nothing to do with the war. But we knew that Argentines had died there, that they had killed them like birds. And this was our revenge. It was something bigger than us: We were defending our flag."

It also was vindication for Maradona, who in what he later called "the greatest tragedy" of his career was

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cut from the squad of the 1978 World Cup — which Argentina won at home — because he was only 17.

Maradona said he was given a soccer ball soon after he could run.

"I was 3 years old and I slept hugging that ball all night," he said.

At 10, Maradona gained fame by performing at halftime of professional matches, wowing crowds by keeping the ball airborne for minutes with his feet, chest and head. He also made his playing debut with the Argentinos Juniors youth team, leading a squad of mostly 14-year-olds through 136 unbeaten matches.

"To see him play was pure bliss, true stardom," teammate Carlos Beltran said.

Maradona played from 1976-81 for first division club Argentinos Juniors, then went to Boca Juniors for a year before heading to Barcelona for a world-record \$8 million.

In 1984, Barcelona sold him to Napoli, in Italy. He remade its fortunes almost single-handedly, taking it to the 1987 Italian league championship for its first title in 60 years.

A year after losing the 1990 World Cup final to West Germany, Maradona moved to Spanish club Sevilla, but his career was on the decline. He played five matches at Argentine club Newell's Old Boys in 1994 before returning to Boca from 1995-97 — his final club and closest to his heart.

Drug problems overshadowed his final playing years.

Maradona failed a doping test in 1991 and was banned for 15 months, acknowledging his longtime cocaine addiction. He failed another doping test for stimulants and was thrown out of the 1994 World Cup in the United States.

In retirement, Maradona frequented Boca matches as a raucous one-man cheering section and took part in worldwide charity, sporting and exhibition events. But the already stocky forward quickly gained weight and was clearly short of breath as he huffed through friendly matches.

In 2000, in what doctors said was a brush with death, he was hospitalized in the Uruguayan resort of Punta del Este with a heart that doctors said was pumping at less than half its capacity. Blood and urine samples turned up traces of cocaine.

After another emergency hospitalization in 2004, Maradona was counseled for drug abuse and in September of that year traveled to Cuba for treatment at Havana's Center for Mental Health. There he was visited by his friend, Cuban President Fidel Castro.

In Cuba, Maradona took to playing golf and smoking cigars. He frequently praised Castro and Argentine-born revolutionary "Che" Guevara, who fought with Castro in the Cuban revolution — even sporting a tattoo of Guevara on his right arm.

Maradona said he got clean from drugs there and started a new chapter.

In 2005, he underwent gastric bypass in Colombia, shedding nearly 50 kilograms (more than 100 pounds) before appearing as host of a wildly popular Argentine television talk show. On "10's Night," Maradona headed around a ball with Pelé, interviewed boxer Mike Tyson and Hollywood celebrities, and taped a lengthy conversation with Castro in Cuba.

In retirement, Maradona also became more outspoken. He sniped frequently at former coaches, players — including Pelé — and the pope. He joined a left-wing protest train outside the Summit of the Americas in 2005, standing alongside Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez to denounce the presence of then-President George W. Bush.

His outsider status made it all the more surprising when he was chosen as Argentina coach following Alfio Basile's resignation.

He won his first three matches but his tactics, selection and attention to detail were all questioned after a 6-1 loss to Bolivia in World Cup qualifying equaled Argentina's worst-ever margin of defeat.

Victor Hugo Morales, Argentina's most popular soccer broadcaster, said Maradona will ultimately be remembered for a thrilling style of play that has never been duplicated.

"He has been one of the great artists of my time. Like great masters of music and painting, he has defied our intellect and enriched the human spirit," Morales said. "Nobody has thrilled me more and left me in such awe as Diego."

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

Trump administration denies planned mine near Alaska fishery

By MARK THIESSEN Associated Press

ANCHORAGE, Alaska (AP) — The Trump administration on Wednesday effectively killed a contentious proposed mine in Alaska, a gold and copper prospect once envisioned to be nearly as deep as the Grand Canyon and could produce enough waste to fill an NFL stadium nearly 3,900 times — all near the headwaters of the world's largest sockeye salmon fishery.

The Army Corps of Engineers "concluded that the proposed project is contrary to the public interest" and denied a permit to build the Pebble Mine under both the Clean Water Act and the Rivers and Harbors Act, the agency said in a statement.

The rejection was a surprise. It's at odds with President Donald Trump's efforts to encourage energy development in Alaska, including opening up part of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge to drilling, and other moves nationwide to roll back environmental protections that would benefit oil and gas and other industries.

The Corps of Engineers also seemed to signal just a few months ago that after almost two decades of political wrangling, Pebble Mine was on a fast track to approval, a reversal from what many had expected under the Obama administration.

But unlike drilling elsewhere in Alaska, the mine proposed for the southwestern Bristol Bay region could have negatively affected the state's billion-dollar fishing industry. Conservationists and even Trump's eldest son, Donald Trump Jr., sounded the alarm on the project before the administration changed course again.

The CEO of the Pebble Limited Partnership, the mine's developers, said he was dismayed by the decision, especially after the corps had indicated in an environmental impact statement in July that the mine and fishery could coexist.

"One of the real tragedies of this decision is the loss of economic opportunities for people living in the area," CEO John Shively said in a statement. The environmental review "clearly describes those benefits, and now a politically driven decision has taken away the hope that many had for a better life. This is also a lost opportunity for the state's future economy."

He said they are considering their next steps, which could include an appeal of the corps' decision.

"Today Bristol Bay's residents and fishermen celebrate the news that Pebble's permit has been denied; tomorrow we get back to work," said Katherine Carscallen, executive director of the group Commercial Fishermen for Bristol Bay.

The group wants Congress to pass laws protecting the region. "We've learned the hard way over the last decade that Pebble is not truly dead until protections are finalized," Carscallen said.

In July, the Corps of Engineers released an environmental review that the mine developer saw as laying the groundwork for key federal approvals. The review said that under normal operations, Pebble Mine "would not be expected to have a measurable effect on fish numbers and result in long-term changes to the health of the commercial fisheries in Bristol Bay."

However, in August, the corps said it had determined that discharges at the mine site would cause "unavoidable adverse impacts to aquatic resources" and laid out required steps to reduce those effects.

Canada-based Northern Dynasty Minerals Ltd., which owns Pebble Limited Partnership, said it had submitted a mitigation plan on Nov. 16.

Even if the corps had approved the project, there was still no guarantee it would have been built. It would have needed state approval, and President-elect Joe Biden has expressed opposition to the project.

Critics saw Pebble Mine as getting a lifeline under the Trump administration. Last year, the Environmental Protection Agency withdrew restrictions on development that were proposed — but never finalized — under the Obama administration and said it planned to work with the corps to address concerns.

However, Trump's eldest son was among those who voiced opposition earlier this year. After senior Trump campaign adviser Nick Ayers tweeted in August that he hoped the president would direct the EPA to block Pebble Mine, Trump Jr. responded: "As a sportsman who has spent plenty of time in the area

I agree 100%. The headwaters of Bristol Bay and the surrounding fishery are too unique and fragile to take any chances with."

The president later said he would "listen to both sides."

"The credit for this victory belongs not to any politician but to Alaskans and Bristol Bay's Indigenous peoples, as well as to hunters, anglers and wildlife enthusiasts from all across the country who spoke out in opposition to this dangerous and ill-conceived project," said Adam Kolton, executive director of the Alaska Wilderness League.

Alaska's two Republican U.S. senators, who support oil and gas development and mining, hailed the rejection of the Pebble Mine permit. Sen. Lisa Murkowski said the decision affirmed her position that it's the wrong mine in the wrong place.

"It will help ensure the continued protection of an irreplaceable resource — Bristol Bay's world-class salmon fishery," she said.

Sen. Dan Sullivan said he would remain an advocate for good-paying jobs derived from resource development.

"However, given the special nature of the Bristol Bay watershed and the fisheries and subsistence resources downstream, Pebble had to meet a high bar so that we do not trade one resource for another," he said. "Pebble did not meet that bar."

Associated Press journalist Becky Bohrer in Juneau contributed to this report.

AstraZeneca manufacturing error clouds vaccine study results

By DANICA KIRKA Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — AstraZeneca and Oxford University on Wednesday acknowledged a manufacturing error that is raising questions about preliminary results of their experimental COVID-19 vaccine.

A statement describing the error came days after the company and the university described the shots as "highly effective" and made no mention of why some study participants didn't receive as much vaccine in the first of two shots as expected.

In a surprise, the group of volunteers that got a lower dose seemed to be much better protected than the volunteers who got two full doses. In the low-dose group, AstraZeneca said, the vaccine appeared to be 90% effective. In the group that got two full doses, the vaccine appeared to be 62% effective. Combined, the drugmakers said the vaccine appeared to be 70% effective. But the way in which the results were arrived at and reported by the companies has led to pointed questions from experts.

The partial results announced Monday are from large ongoing studies in the U.K. and Brazil designed to determine the optimal dose of vaccine, as well as examine safety and effectiveness. Multiple combinations and doses were tried in the volunteers. They were compared to others who were given a meningitis vaccine or a saline shot.

DID RESEARCHERS MEAN TO GIVE A HALF DOSE?

Before they begin their research, scientists spell out all the steps they are taking, and how they will analyze the results. Any deviation from that protocol can put the results in question.

In a statement Wednesday, Oxford University said some of the vials used in the trial didn't have the right concentration of vaccine so some volunteers got a half dose. The university said that it discussed the problem with regulators, and agreed to complete the late stage trial with two groups. The manufacturing problem has been corrected, according to the statement.

WHAT ABOUT THE RESULTS THEMSELVES?

Experts say the relatively small number of people in the low dose group makes it difficult to know if the effectiveness seen in the group is real or a statistical quirk. Some 2,741 people received a half dose of the vaccine followed by a full dose, AstraZeneca said. A total of 8,895 people received two full doses.

Another factor: none of the people in the low-dose group were over 55 years old. Younger people tend to mount a stronger immune response than older people, so it could be that the youth of the participants in the low-dose group is why it looked more effective, not the size of the dose.

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Another point of confusion comes from a decision to pool results from two groups of participants who received different dosing levels to reach an average 70% effectiveness, said David Salisbury, and associate fellow of the global health program at the Chatham House think tank.

"You've taken two studies for which different doses were used and come up with a composite that doesn't represent either of the doses," he said of the figure. "I think many people are having trouble with that."

WHY WOULD A SMALLER FIRST DOSE BE MORE EFFECTIVE?

Oxford researchers say they aren't certain and they are working to uncover the reason.

Sarah Gilbert, one of the Oxford scientists leading the research, said the answer is probably related to providing exactly the right amount of vaccine to trigger the best immune response.

"It's the Goldilocks amount that you want, I think, not too little and not too much. Too much could give you a poor quality response as well," she said. "So you want just the right amount and it's a bit hit and miss when you're trying to go quickly to get that perfect first time."

WHAT ARE THE NEXT STEPS?

Details of the trial results will be published in medical journals and provided to U.K. regulators so they can decide whether to authorize distribution of the vaccine. Those reports will include a detailed breakdown that includes demographic and other information about who got sick in each group, and give a more complete picture of how effective the vaccine is.

Moncef Slaoui, who leads the U.S. coronavirus vaccine program Operation Warp Speed, said Tuesday in a call with reporters that U.S. officials are trying to determine what immune response the vaccine produced, and may decide to modify the AstraZeneca study in the U.S. to include a half dose.

"But we want it to be based on data and science," he said.

VIRUS TODAY: Americans travel as Biden addresses nation

By The Associated Press undefined

Here's what's happening Wednesday with the coronavirus pandemic in the U.S.:

— Millions of Americans are traveling for the Thanksgiving holiday despite warnings from health officials that family gatherings could make a bad situation worse.

— More people are applying for unemployment benefits as the economy remains burdened by the coronavirus. About 778,000 people applied for unemployment last week, the second straight week the number has risen.

— Authorities are desperately pleading with people to stay home for the holidays and dramatically increasing fines for businesses that break the rules. In Connecticut, Gov. Ned Lamont says he will fine businesses \$10,000 for violating virus restrictions.

THE NUMBERS: COVID-19 deaths have been shooting up all week. The average number per day is now over 1,600. The country is averaging 174,000 new cases of the virus per day.

QUOTABLE: "I don't want to be South Dakota." — West Virginia Gov. Jim Justice in saying he would not follow the lead of other Republican governors who resist mask mandates. He cited the grim statistics in South Dakota and the governor's refusal to require masks.

ICYMI: The virus has scuttled a long-standing holiday tradition in the tiny Kansas town of Norcatur. In a decades-old tradition that evokes Norman Rockwell nostalgia, the whole town gathers for a potluck dinner at Christmastime and conducts a prize drawing for a plethora of donated meats, crafts and goodies. This year, it's off.

ON THE HORIZON: President-elect Joe Biden is ramping up his response to the pandemic. He is delivering a national Thanksgiving address in an attempt to unify the country in the face of the resurgent virus, and congressional leaders are waiting for his strategy for fighting the pandemic.

Find AP's full coverage of the coronavirus pandemic at <https://apnews.com/hub/coronavirus-pandemic>

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The Latest: Biden urges Americans to forgo big Thanksgiving

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Latest on President-elect Joe Biden (all times local):

3:30 p.m.

A big Biden family Thanksgiving is off the table for President-elect Joe Biden because of the pandemic. In remarks billed as a Thanksgiving address to the nation, the Democrat urged Americans to “hang on” and not “surrender to the fatigue” after months of coping with the virus.

He noted that public health officials have asked Americans to give up many of the traditions that make Thanksgiving special, like big indoor family get-togethers.

Biden said he knows how hard it is to give up family traditions but that it’s very important this year given the spike in virus cases, averaging about 160,000 a day.

He urged everyone to wear masks, practice social distancing and limit the size of groups, calling it a “patriotic duty” until a vaccine is approved.

3:10 p.m.

President Donald Trump uttered one falsehood after another as he baselessly claimed that he won the 2020 election instead of President-elect Joe Biden as he called into an event organized by Pennsylvania Republicans in Gettysburg.

Trump’s election lawyer, Rudy Giuliani, attended the event to continue his quixotic and dangerous quest to try to overturn the results of the democratic election.

Trump had been expected to appear in person, but did not after another member of his legal team tested positive for the coronavirus. He was placed on speakerphone to address the group.

Trump is refusing to concede, even though Pennsylvania on Tuesday certified Biden as the winner in the state and as the formal transition process has begun.

State election officials and international observers have insisted that there is no evidence of widespread voter fraud. Trump’s legal team repeatedly has lost its cases in court.

12:25 p.m.

President Donald Trump will not be appearing at an event in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, with his lawyer Rudy Giuliani aimed at trying to discredit the results of the 2020 election, which Joe Biden won.

The decision comes after a member of Trump’s campaign legal team, Boris Epshteyn, announced Wednesday he had tested positive for the coronavirus.

Epshteyn attended a press conference with Giuliani in Washington last week during which Giuliani continued to lob meritless accusations of mass voter fraud despite no evidence to support his claims.

Also in attendance was Giuliani’s son, who works at the White House and announced a day later that he had tested positive.

Trump’s appearance was never confirmed or announced by the White House. But the Federal Aviation Administration had placed a flight restriction over the area, and Giuliani had teased it was a possibility in a radio interview en route to the event.

A broad coalition of top government and industry officials says the Nov. 3 election was “the most secure in American history.” Biden was declared the winner on Nov. 7.

HERE’S WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT PRESIDENT-ELECT JOE BIDEN’S TRANSITION TO THE WHITE HOUSE:

President-elect Joe Biden plans a Thanksgiving address to the nation, and he’s expected to focus on shared sacrifices during the holiday season and express confidence that Americans will get through the coronavirus pandemic together.

Read more:

- Analysis: Biden prioritizes experience with his Cabinet picks
- Congress braces for Biden’s national coronavirus strategy

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- US jobless claims rise to 778,000 as the coronavirus pandemic worsens
- Q&A: Will Twitter and Facebook crack down on Trump?

HERE'S WHAT ELSE IS GOING ON:

11:30 a.m.

Joe Biden will receive his first classified briefing as president-elect and announce his economic team next week.

Biden transition adviser Jen Psaki says Biden on Monday will receive his first presidential daily briefing, the regular briefing on the most sensitive intelligence offered to top U.S. officials.

Biden had been blocked from receiving intelligence briefings and his team members had been blocked from contact with their counterparts in the Trump administration due to the General Services Administration's refusal to ascertain that Biden won the election while Trump campaign legal challenges against the vote continued. That ascertainment came Monday, lifting those roadblocks to cooperation.

Transition adviser Kate Bedingfield says the Biden team will begin briefings with the Trump administration on vaccine distribution, testing and the personal protective equipment supply chain on Wednesday.

Bedingfield says the team has been in touch with FBI and Department of Justice officials about coordinating expedited background checks for Biden's senior White House staffers and the Cabinet nominees he announced Tuesday.

10:50 a.m.

President Donald Trump's personal lawyer Rudy Giuliani is headed to Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, to continue his fight to overturn the results of the election and secure Trump a second term.

Pennsylvania has already certified its results and awarded its 20 electors to Democrat Joe Biden, who was declared the winner of the Nov. 3 election.

Giuliani is leading legal challenges to the balloting in Pennsylvania and other states as the Republican president seeks to maintain his base of supporters and keep his options open for opportunities post-presidency.

Giuliani claimed in a Wednesday interview with New York radio station AM 970 that illegal votes were cast, especially in Philadelphia, that he wants to see disqualified. But a broad coalition of top government and industry officials says the Nov. 3 election was "the most secure in American history."

In Pennsylvania on Saturday, a conservative Republican judge shot down the Trump campaign's biggest legal effort in the state with a scathing ruling that questioned why he was supposed to disenfranchise 7 million voters with no evidence to back its claims and an inept legal argument at best.

9:35 a.m.

Chinese President Xi Jinping has congratulated U.S. President-elect Joe Biden and expressed hope for "win-win cooperation" amid conflicts over trade, technology and security.

China on Wednesday became one of the last major governments to congratulate Biden. There was no explanation for the delay, but some commentators suggest Beijing might want to avoid straining relations with President Donald Trump, who hasn't conceded.

A statement carried by the official Xinhua News Agency says Xi told Biden "healthy and stable" relations are "the common expectation of the international community."

The statement says: "We hope the two sides will uphold the spirit of non-conflict and non-confrontation, mutual respect and win-win cooperation, will focus on cooperation, control differences and promote healthy and stable development of Chinese-U.S. relations."

Global push to end domestic violence, worse amid COVID-19

By RAF CASERT and ANGELA CHARLTON Associated Press

BRUSSELS (AP) — In a global push to end violence against women, activists held rallies Wednesday

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and world leaders called for action to stop the abuse, which has worsened because of the coronavirus pandemic this year.

Protests from France to Ukraine were held on the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women to draw attention to domestic violence in what is an uphill struggle to protect millions of women killed or abused every year by their partners and close relatives.

In Rome, the office of the prime minister was being lit in red and red banners tumbled from trade union offices in Florence to demand an end to violence against women. Italy was a hotbed for COVID-19 infections this year, forcing the government to impose lockdowns to keep the virus out. In an unintended consequence, domestic violence cases began to grow.

"Because of the restrictions, we involuntarily created profound distress," that led to increased episodes of domestic violence and femicide, Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte told a parliamentary discussion on Italy's long-standing problem with violence against women.

The Italian Health Ministry, citing data from national statistics agency ISTAT, said calls to domestic violence hotlines shot up during the lockdown, registering a 75% increase compared to the same period in 2019. Between March and June, calls and text messages to the anti-violence number more than doubled during the same period, to 119.6%

Together with Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez, Conte signed a joint declaration vowing to accelerate measures to stamp out violence against women, which they called "an invisible pandemic."

Even if detailed statistics were hard to come by, organizations and countries, from the United Nations to the European Union, France and Britain, all said that the pandemic had so far been an additional source for men to mistreat women.

In Ukraine, the Femen feminist activist group staged a protest outside the president's office with a brief topless protest.

"We want to illustrate the situation with women's rights in Ukrainian society — unprotected from any violence. We think the violence against women is a human rights violation, Femen activist Anya Alian said.

U.N. agency UNAIDS said that "evidence shows that the COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in significant increases in gender-based violence in nearly all countries," especially for women trapped at home with their abuser.

"Men's violence against women is also a pandemic — one that pre-dates the virus and will outlive it," said Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, executive director of the U.N. Women agency. "Last year alone, 243 million women and girls experienced sexual or physical violence from their partner. This year, reports of increased domestic violence, cyberbullying, child marriages, sexual harassment and sexual violence have flooded in," she said.

In Turkey, where at least 234 women were killed since the start of the year, according to government figures, riot police in Istanbul blocked a small group of demonstrators from marching to the city's iconic Taksim Square to denounce violence against women. The government has declared the square off-bounds for demonstrations.

Elsewhere in Istanbul, some 2,000 other women staged a peaceful demonstration calling on President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's government to remain committed to a European treaty on combatting violence against women. Earlier this year, some officials from Erdogan's Islam-oriented party had spoken in favor of reviewing the agreement to adapt it to Turkey's more conservative family values.

Pope Francis marked the day by tweeting: "Too often women are offended, mistreated, raped and forced to prostitute themselves ... If we want a better world, a home of peace and not a courtyard of war, we all must do much more for the dignity of each woman."

France's government sealed a deal with TikTok to encourage young people to report abuse through the social network. World soccer governing body FIFA announced an awareness campaign.

France's deal with TikTok is among multiple measures it has taken since a national reckoning over domestic violence last year prompted by an unusually high number of women killed by their husbands, boyfriends or former partners. Activists say more needs to be done.

France's minister for equal rights, Elisabeth Moreno, said that reports of domestic violence registered with the government rose 42% during France's first virus lockdown in the spring, and have risen 15% since a new lockdown was imposed nearly a month ago. Given that most people don't report such abuse, the real rise is believed to be higher.

In Britain, The Office for National Statistics said police recorded 259,324 domestic abuse offenses between March and June, an increase of 18% compared to the same period in 2018. The charity Refuge said the number of people calling its domestic abuse hotline were 65% higher between April and June than in the first three months of the year, before lockdown.

"These appalling statistics show endemic levels of domestic abuse," Labour Party crime spokesman Nick Thomas-Symonds said. "The COVID crisis didn't create this scar on our society, but it has made the situation even worse."

Europe largest human rights organization, the 47-nation Council of Europe, called on legislators throughout Europe to better protect women and girls.

"The COVID-19 pandemic has shown how fragile the protective safety-net for victims of violence really is, especially when it comes to domestic violence," said Petra Bayr (SOC, Austria), Chair of the Committee on Equality and Non-Discrimination of the Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly (PACE). "The increase in violence during lockdown has been a shocking revelation in almost all our societies; it has put a magnifying glass on the harmful mindsets that still prevail."

Angela Charlton reported from Paris. Nicole Winfield in Rome, Jill Lawless and Sylvia Hui in London, Barry Hatton in Lisbon and Suzan Fraser in Ankara, Turkey, contributed to this report.

Ethiopian leader rejects international 'interference' in war

By CARA ANNA Associated Press

NAIROBI, Kenya (AP) — Ethiopia's prime minister is rejecting growing international consensus for dialogue and a halt to deadly fighting in the Tigray region as "unwelcome," saying his country will handle the conflict on its own as a 72-hour surrender ultimatum runs out on Wednesday.

Some people were "fleeing Mekele in search of safety," the United Nations said of the Tigray regional capital. Meanwhile, a statement this week from a civil society representative in the region, seen by The Associated Press, described heavy bombardment of communities elsewhere that has kept many residents from fleeing. It pleaded for a safe corridor to ship in aid as food runs out.

However, the international community should "stand by" until Ethiopia's government asks for assistance, Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed's office said in a statement as government forces were reportedly positioned well outside Mekele with tanks. "We respectfully urge the international community to refrain from any unwelcome and unlawful acts of interference," it added.

The government led by Abiy, last year's Nobel Peace Prize winner, has warned Mekele's half-million residents to move away from the Tigray People's Liberation Front leaders or there will be "no mercy" — language that the United Nations human rights chief and others have warned could lead to "further violations of international humanitarian law."

But communications remain almost completely severed to the Tigray region of some 6 million people, and is not clear how many people in Mekele are aware of the warnings and the threat of artillery fire.

"Warnings alone do not absolve the government of its duty to take constant care to protect civilians when carrying out military operations in urban areas that are home to thousands of people who may not be able to reach more secure areas," Human Rights Watch's Horn of Africa director Laetitia Bader said in a statement.

Diplomats said U.N. Security Council members in a closed-door meeting Tuesday expressed support for an African Union-led effort to deploy three high-level envoys to Ethiopia. But Ethiopia has said the envoys cannot meet with the TPLF leaders.

"This conflict is already seriously destabilizing the region," European Union foreign policy chief Josep

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Borrell said Tuesday after meeting with Ethiopia's foreign minister.

"Both sides should immediately begin dialogue facilitated by the AU," the national security adviser for U.S. president-elect Joe Biden, Jake Sullivan, tweeted.

The Tigray regional leader, Debretsion Gebremichael, could not immediately be reached.

The TPLF dominated Ethiopia's government for more than a quarter-century, but was sidelined after Abiy took office in 2018 and sought to centralize power. The TPLF opted out when Abiy dissolved the ruling coalition, then infuriated the federal government by holding an election in September after national elections were postponed by COVID-19. Each side now regards the other as illegal.

One Ethiopian military official claimed that more than 10,000 "junta forces" have been "destroyed" since the fighting began on Nov. 4, when Abiy accused the TPLF of attacking a military base. Col. Abate Nigatu told the Amhara Mass Media Agency that more than 15,000 heavy weapons and small arms had been seized.

The international community has urgently called for communications to be restored to the Tigray region so such claims can be investigated, and for immediate humanitarian access. The U.N. says it has been unable to send supplies into Tigray and that people there are "terrified."

Hundreds, perhaps thousands, of people have been killed in three weeks of fighting. More than 40,000 refugees have fled into Sudan. And nearly 100,000 Eritrean refugees at camps in northern Tigray have come close to the line of fire.

Misery continues for the refugees in Sudan, with little food, little medicine, little shelter, little funding and little or no contact with loved ones left behind in Tigray. "We are absolutely not ready," said Suleiman Ali Mousa, the governor of Qadarif province.

"Help us so that we don't die," said one refugee, Terhas Adiso. "We came from war. We were scared we were going to die from the war and we came here, we don't want to die of hunger, disease. If they are going to help us they need to help us quickly. That's all I am going to say."

Meanwhile, reports continued of alleged targeting of ethnic Tigrayans, even outside Ethiopia. Three soldiers serving with the U.N. peacekeeping force in South Sudan were ordered home over the weekend, the force said in a statement. The AP has confirmed the repatriated soldiers are Tigrayan.

"If personnel are discriminated against because of their ethnicity or any other reason, this could involve a human rights violation under international law," the statement said.

Abiy's government has said it aims to protect civilians, including Tigrayans, but reports continue of arrests, discrimination, house-to-house searches and frozen bank accounts.

Fay Abuelgasim in Umm Rakouba contributed.

Christmas traditions axed as pandemic sweeps rural Kansas

By ROXANA HEGEMAN Associated Press

BELLE PLAINE, Kan. (AP) — It's barely a town anymore, battered by time on the windswept prairie of northwest Kansas. COVID-19 still managed to find Norcatatur.

Not much remains of the rural hamlet, save for a service station, a grain elevator, a little museum, and a weekend hangout where the locals play pool, eat pizza and drink beer. The roof has collapsed on the crumbling building that once housed its bank and general store. Schools closed decades ago and the former high school building is used for city offices.

But for the 150 or so remaining residents, the cancellation of the beloved Norcatatur Christmas Drawing has driven home how the coronavirus pandemic has reached deep into rural America.

"Due to individuals who have COVID and refuse to stay home and quarantine it has been determined it is not safe for the citizens of Norcatatur and the area to proceed," read the notice tucked in the town's newsletter and posted on its Facebook page. It blamed "negligent attitudes of lack of concern for others" for the cancellation.

In a decades-old tradition that evokes Norman Rockwell nostalgia, the whole town typically gathers for a potluck dinner at Christmastime. Its namesake drawing features a plethora of donated meats, crafts and

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other goodies so every family can go home with prizes. The local 4-H Club puts on its bake sale. Santa Claus comes riding the firetruck.

Decatur County has fewer than 3,000 people scattered across farms and small towns like Norcatgur. As of Wednesday, the county had reported 196 coronavirus cases and one death, although medical providers say there have been at least four more local deaths that have yet to be added to the official toll.

Carolyn Plotts, a 73-year-old Norcatgur resident who never had symptoms and only found out she was positive for COVID-19 when tested for a medical procedure in October, said two of her former high school classmates who live in the county died because of the virus. Her husband also tested positive.

"It's been very real to me," she said.

Plotts wondered whether the cancellation notice was maybe "talking about me." During her quarantine she would only leave her house — with her doctor's permission and wearing a mask, she said pointedly — to care for a housebound friend who still believes the pandemic is a hoax.

Carl Lyon, the Norcatgur mayor who takes on the annual Santa role, said while most residents are "pretty good" about social distancing and wearing a mask, some have caught the virus.

"I know a couple of people had it and they were still kind of running around and whatnot," Lyon said. "Didn't seem to bother them that they infected everybody else."

Decatur County Sheriff Ken Badsy estimated that 5% of county residents who should quarantine violate the restrictions and go out. His office has called some and "insisted they do what they are supposed to do," but has taken no legal action.

"I have so much other stuff to do. I don't have time to follow people around," Badsy said. "We have 900 square miles, we have three full-time officers and a part-time to take care of that and we are busy with everything else."

Medical providers have been growing increasingly concerned, as coronavirus cases are surging and it's getting more difficult to find beds for their sickest patients at hospitals across the state.

"We need some backing to stop this virus and we are looking to people that need to do their job to do it, and so otherwise this thing is going to run rampant and it is going to put more pressure on our hospital," Kris Mathews, the administrator of Decatur Health, a small critical access hospital in Oberlin, just 19 miles (30 kilometers) west of Norcatgur.

Stan Miller, the announcer for the Christmas Drawing for more than 25 years, has mixed emotions about the decision to forgo it this year. The 63-year-old Norcatgur resident said he understands there are elderly people who you don't want to get the virus. But it's also disappointing.

"I like to see all the joy, especially the little kids," Miller said. "We have Santa Claus after the drawing is over and to see them sit on Santa's lap and tell them what they want for Christmas, you know, always puts a smile on my face."

Picture of US economy is worrisome as virus inflicts damage

By MARTIN CRUTSINGER and PAUL WISEMAN AP Economics Writers

WASHINGTON (AP) — Gripped by the accelerating viral outbreak, the U.S. economy is under pressure from persistent layoffs, diminished income and nervous consumers, whose spending is needed to drive a recovery from the pandemic.

A flurry of data released Wednesday suggested that the spread of the virus is intensifying the threats to an economy still struggling to recover from the deep recession that struck in early spring.

The number of Americans seeking unemployment aid rose last week for a second straight week to 778,000, evidence that many employers are still slashing jobs more than eight months after the virus hit. Before the pandemic, weekly jobless claims typically amounted to only about 225,000. Layoffs are still historically high, with many businesses unable to fully reopen and some, especially restaurants and bars, facing tightened restrictions.

Consumers increased their spending last month by just 0.5%, the weakest rise since the pandemic erupted. The tepid figure suggested that on the eve of the crucial holiday shopping season, Americans

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remain anxious with the virus spreading and Congress failing to enact any further aid for struggling individuals, businesses, cities and states. At the same time, the government said Wednesday that income, which provides the fuel for consumer spending, fell 0.7% in October.

The spike in virus cases is heightening pressure on companies and individuals, with fear growing that the economy could suffer a "double-dip" recession as states and cities reimpose curbs on businesses. The economy, as measured by the gross domestic product, is expected to eke out a modest gain this quarter before weakening — and perhaps shrinking — early next year. Mark Zandi, chief economist at Moody's Analytics, predicts annual GDP growth of around 2% in the October-December quarter, with the possibility of GDP turning negative in the first quarter of 2021.

Economists at JPMorgan Chase have slashed their forecast for the first quarter to a negative 1% annual GDP rate.

"This winter will be grim," they wrote in a research note.

Zandi warned that until Congress agrees on a new stimulus plan to replace a now-expired multi-trillion-dollar aid package enacted in the spring, the threat to the economy will grow.

"The economy is going to be very uncomfortable between now and when we get the next fiscal rescue package," Zandi said. "If lawmakers can't get it together, it will be very difficult for the economy to avoid going back into a recession."

Some corners of the economy still show strength, or at least resilience. Manufacturing is one. The government said Wednesday that orders for durable goods rose 1.3% in October, a sign that purchases of goods remain solid even while the economy's much larger service sector — everything from restaurants, hotels and airlines to gyms, hair salons and entertainment venues — is still struggling. But economists caution that factories, too, remain at risk from the surge in coronavirus cases, which could throttle demand in coming months.

And sales of new homes remained steady in October, the latest sign that ultra-low mortgage rates and a paucity of properties for sale have spurred demand and made the housing market a rare economic bright spot.

But at the heart of the economy are the job market and consumer spending, which remain especially vulnerable to the spike in virus cases. Most economists say the distribution of an effective vaccine would likely reinvigorate growth next year. Yet they warn that any sustained recovery will also hinge on whether Congress can agree soon on a sizable aid package to carry the economy through what could be a bleak winter.

"With infections continuing to rise at an elevated pace and curbs on business operations widening, layoffs are likely to pick up over coming weeks," said Rubeela Farooqi, chief U.S. economist at High Frequency Economics.

The government said the total number of people who are continuing to receive traditional state unemployment benefits dropped to 6.1 million from 6.4 million the previous week. That figure has been declining for months. It shows that more Americans are finding jobs and no longer receiving unemployment aid. But it also indicates that many jobless people have used up their state unemployment aid — which typically expires after six months.

More Americans are collecting benefits under programs that were set up to cushion the economic pain from the pandemic. For the week of Nov. 7, the number of people collecting benefits under the Pandemic Unemployment Assistance program — which offers coverage to gig workers and others who don't qualify for traditional aid — rose by 466,000 to 9.1 million.

And the number of people receiving aid under the Pandemic Emergency Unemployment Compensation program — which offers 13 weeks of federal benefits to those who have exhausted state jobless aid — rose by 132,000 to 4.5 million.

The data firm Womply says that 21% of small businesses were shuttered at the start of this month, reflecting a steady increase from June's 16% rate. Consumer spending at local businesses is down 27% this month from a year ago, marking a deterioration from a 20% year-over-year drop in October, Womply found.

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The heart of the problem is an untamed virus: The number of confirmed infections in the United States has shot up to more than 170,000 a day, from fewer than 35,000 in early September. The arrival of cold weather in much of the country could further worsen the health crisis.

Meanwhile, another economic threat looms: The impending expiration of the two supplemental federal unemployment programs the day after Christmas could end benefits completely for 9.1 million jobless people. Congress has failed for months to agree on any new stimulus aid for jobless individuals and struggling businesses after the expiration of a multi-trillion dollar rescue package it enacted in March.

The expiration of benefits will make it harder for the unemployed to make rent payments, afford food or keep up with utility bills. Most economists agree that because unemployed people tend to quickly spend their benefits, such aid is effective in boosting the economy.

When the viral outbreak struck in early spring, employers slashed 22 million jobs in March and April, sending the unemployment rate rocketing to 14.7%, the highest rate since the Great Depression. Since then, the economy has regained more than 12 million jobs. Yet the nation still has about 10 million fewer jobs than it did before the pandemic erupted.

All of which has left many Americans anxious and uncertain. The Conference Board, a business research group, reported Tuesday that consumer confidence weakened in November, pulled down by lowered expectations for the next six months.

And the University of Michigan's Surveys of Consumers reported Wednesday that sentiment declined slightly this month, and remained far below where it was before the pandemic struck. With the resurgence of the virus depressing the outlook of consumers, the sentiment index fell to its lowest point since August.

"Gloomier consumer expectations will weigh on spending as the holidays approach," cautioned Kathy Bostjancic, chief U.S. financial economist at Oxford Economics.

AP Business Writer Ken Sweet contributed to this report from Charlotte, North Carolina.

Tweet on spare change generates big money for virus aid

By LINDSAY WHITEHURST Associated Press

SALT LAKE CITY (AP) — Andy Larsen is a sports writer, but with so many games scratched during the pandemic he has spent a lot of time digging into coronavirus data and its sobering implications.

Then on Monday, while he was sorting his spare change — some from a childhood piggy bank shaped like SpongeBob SquarePants — it struck him: Other people in Utah could use the money more than he could.

His composed a tweet to his nearly 27,000 followers, hoping to quickly find someone who could use the \$165.84.

Within a minute, someone offered to essentially double his donation with a deposit into his Venmo account. Then someone else pitched in, and another. It kept snowballing as Utah Lt. Gov. Spencer Cox retweeted it, calling the effort "very cool."

"I figured I would help a couple families with Thanksgiving, or a family with three kids buy Christmas presents," said the 29-year-old Larsen, who covers the NBA's Utah Jazz for the Salt Lake Tribune. "I was shocked ... within five, 10 minutes we got \$1,000."

By Wednesday, he had collected more than \$52,000.

Among the first to get on board was Jeff Jones, a 54-year-old partner at a CPA firm in South Jordan.

"I was thinking, 'We're not having a big Thanksgiving dinner this year, I can use some of the money we would have spent to hopefully help some other people,'" he said.

With the pandemic keeping people from getting together in a big way for the holiday, the online effort became a chance to conjure a sense of community, a feeling of being part of something larger.

"It felt like it took on a life of its own," Jones said. "Man, it's sure been fun to be a part of it."

Larsen also heard from people in need. There was someone who got COVID-19 and couldn't work for a month, possibly putting Christmas gifts out of reach. Another who couldn't pay a water bill. Someone else whose neighbor didn't have money for Thanksgiving. Most were local, several were names he recognized

from Twitter.

Larsen is a numbers guy, so he built spreadsheets for donations and people in need. The effort has gotten big enough that he'll need some legal help to make sure he's got everything in order, but he's planning to start giving away money in the coming days.

He's hoping to help with bigger things too, like a down payment on a car for a parent he heard from who can't get the kids to daycare after being in an accident.

The outpouring has been restorative for Larsen, who owes his career in part to social media but has also seen its ugly side.

"I thought I was permanently just bitter, the classic embittered journalist," he said. "And now I'm not for a little bit. And that's nice."

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

The pandemic is changing Hollywood, maybe forever

By JAKE COYLE AP Film Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — "No New 'Movies' Till Influenza Ends" blared a New York Times headline on Oct. 10, 1918, while the deadly second wave of the Spanish Flu was unfolding.

A century later, during another pandemic, movies — quotes no longer necessary — are again facing a critical juncture. But it's not because new films haven't been coming out. By streaming service, video-on-demand, virtual theater or actual theater, a steady diet of films have been released under COVID-19 every week. The Times has reviewed more than 460 new movies since mid-March.

Yet until recently — with only a few exceptions — those haven't been the big-budget spectacles Hollywood runs on. Eight months into the pandemic, that's changing. Last month, the Walt Disney Co. experimented with the \$200 million "Mulan" as a premium buy on its fast-growing streaming service, Disney+ — where the Pixar film "Soul" will also go on Dec. 25. WarnerMedia last week announced that "Wonder Woman 1984" — a movie that might have made \$1 billion at the box office in a normal summer — will land in theaters and on HBO Max simultaneously next month.

Much remains uncertain about how the movie business will survive the pandemic. But it's increasingly clear that Hollywood won't be the same afterward. Just as the Spanish Flu, which weeded out smaller companies and contributed to the formation of the studio system, COVID-19 is remaking Hollywood, accelerating a digital makeover and potentially reordering an industry that was already in flux.

"I don't think the genie will ever be back in the bottle," says veteran producer Peter Guber, president of Mandalay Entertainment and former chief of Sony Pictures. "It will be a new studio system. Instead of MGM and Fox, they're going to be Disney and Disney+, Amazon, Apple, Netflix, HBO Max and Peacock."

Many of the pivots in 2020 can be chalked up to the unusual circumstances. But several studios are making more long-term realignments around streaming. WarnerMedia, the AT&T conglomerate that owns Warner Bros. (founded in 1923), is now run by Jason Kilar, best known as the former chief executive of Hulu. Last month, Disney chief executive Bob Chapek, the Robert Iger heir, announced a reorganization to emphasize streaming and "accelerate our direct-to-consumer business."

Universal Pictures, owned by Comcast, has pushed aggressively into video-on-demand. Its first major foray, "Trolls," kicked up a feud with theater owners. But as the pandemic wore on, Universal hatched unprecedented deals with AMC and Cinemark, the largest and third-largest chains, respectively, to dramatically shorten the traditional theatrical window (usually about three months) to just 17 days. After that time, Universal can move releases that don't reach certain box-office thresholds to digital rental.

While the nation's second largest theater chain, Regal Cinemas, has resisted such deals, there's widespread acknowledgement that the days of 90-day theatrical runs are over. It's something the studios have long sought for the potential benefit of covering both platforms with one marketing campaign. Many see

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the pandemic as accelerating a decades-long trend.

"Windows are clearly changing," says Chris Aronson, distribution chief for Paramount Pictures. "All this stuff that's going on now in the business was going to happen, the evolution is just happening faster than it would have. What would have taken three to five years is going to be done in a year, maybe a year and a half."

That condensed period of rapid change is happening at the same time as a land rush for streaming market share, as Disney+, HBO Max, Apple and Peacock wrestle for a piece of the home viewing audience dominated by Netflix and Amazon. With theme parks struggling and worldwide box office down tens of billions, streaming is a bright spot for media companies, and the pandemic may offer a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to lure subscribers. "Wonder Woman 1984" and "Soul" are essentially very expensive advertisements for those streaming services.

Each studio, depending on their corporate ownership and streaming positioning, is taking a different approach. Paramount, like Sony Pictures, doesn't have a streaming service to offload films to. Both have held back their tentpole releases while selling more mid-sized films to streamers. For Paramount, "A Quiet Place: Part II," "Top Gun: Maverick" and "Mission: Impossible 7" are waiting for 2021 while "The Trial of the Chicago 7" fetched a reported \$56 million from Netflix and Eddie Murphy's "Coming to America 2" went to Amazon Prime Video for a reported \$125 million.

HBO Max has had a bumpier rollout than Disney+, so "Wonder Woman 1984" is an especially critical gambit for WarnerMedia following the audacious release of "Tenet." As the first tentpole to test theaters reopened with safety protocols and reduced capacities, it has made about \$350 million worldwide -- a lot considering everything but far less than originally hoped for. Credit Suisse analyst Douglas Mitchelson called the "Wonder Woman" plans — which include rolling theatrical runs in China, Europe and elsewhere — "a grand experiment that could have lasting implications if successful."

Director Patty Jenkins acknowledged the simultaneous release was a kind of sacrifice, not just to HBO Max but to families stuck at home. "At some point you have to choose to share any love and joy you have to give, over everything else," Jenkins wrote on Twitter.

It can be easy to cheer such moves, even if their financial performance remain cloudy (no studio has been transparent about its viewership numbers or digital grosses) and their long-term viability uncertain. Can you replicate \$1 billion in box office in new subscriptions? And for how long will the one-time bounce of a new movie (unlike a series staggered over weeks or months) drive subscribers once streaming services are closer to tapping as many homes as they can?

"The whole thing is more complicated than people want it to be," says Ira Deutchman, the veteran independent film producer and Columbia University professor. "The way movies are made and distributed, certainly at the studio level, has been really in need of change and hopefully this will bring it on. But when people hear that, it's like: The pandemic is the straw that broke the camel's back and now theatrical is dead. I personally feel that's garbage."

Deutchman considers the idea that people, after a year of quarantines and lockdowns, won't want to leave their living room "ludicrous." But he does imagine continued mergers and acquisitions, and "a new equilibrium" for distributors and theater owners.

So what could that mean on the other side of COVID, if moviegoers are once again comfortable sitting in packed theaters on opening weekend? It will almost certainly mean the months-long runs of films like "Titanic" or "Get Out" are a thing of the past. It could mean variable pricing on different nights. It could mean an even greater division between the franchise films of the multiplex and the boutique art house, with everything in between going straight to streaming.

But after decades of slow but steady decline in attendance, most think movie theaters will have to innovate in a way other than raising ticket prices.

"The outlook is pretty dire in terms of being a major theatrical exhibitor," says Jeff Bock, senior box-office analyst for Exhibitor Relations. He imagines shortened windows will mean few films — even the Marvel releases — ascending to \$1 billion in worldwide box office. He can see some studios, like Disney, operating their own theaters as "mini-theme parks" with merchandising stuffing the lobbies.

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In the meantime, theaters are hoping for much-needed relief from Congress. With the virus surging, about 40% of U.S. theaters are open; in New York and Los Angeles, they've stayed shut since March. Chains have taken on loans to stay afloat and avert bankruptcy. Cineworld, owner of Regal Cinemas (currently entirely closed) on Monday announced a deal for a \$450 million rescue loan.

It will be a very different holiday season — usually the most lucrative corridor in theaters — for the movie business. How different 2021 and beyond will be remains to be seen. Some things, though, may never change.

"If you're going to be in this business, no matter what you do or where it plays, whether it's streaming or in cinemas, you're going to make hits and you're going to make flops," says Guber. "The idea is to make more hits than flops."

Follow AP Film Writer Jake Coyle on Twitter at: <http://twitter.com/jakecoyleAP>

Duchess of Sussex reveals she had miscarriage in the summer

By JILL LAWLESS Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — The Duchess of Sussex has revealed that she had a miscarriage in July, giving a personal account of the traumatic experience in hope of helping others.

Meghan described the miscarriage in an opinion piece in The New York Times on Wednesday, writing that "I knew, as I clutched my firstborn child, that I was losing my second."

The former Meghan Markle and husband Prince Harry have an 18-month-old son, Archie.

The duchess, 39, said she was sharing her story to help break the silence around an all-too-common tragedy. Britain's National Health Service says about one in eight pregnancies in which a woman is aware she is pregnant ends in miscarriage.

"Losing a child means carrying an almost unbearable grief, experienced by many but talked about by few," Meghan wrote. "In being invited to share our pain, together we take the first steps toward healing."

In a startlingly intimate account of her experience, the duchess described how tragedy struck on a "morning that began as ordinarily as any other day: Make breakfast. Feed the dogs. Take vitamins. Find that missing sock. Pick up the rogue crayon that rolled under the table. Throw my hair in a ponytail before getting my son from his crib."

"After changing his diaper, I felt a sharp cramp. I dropped to the floor with him in my arms, humming a lullaby to keep us both calm, the cheerful tune a stark contrast to my sense that something was not right."

Later, she said, she "lay in a hospital bed, holding my husband's hand. I felt the clamminess of his palm and kissed his knuckles, wet from both our tears. Staring at the cold white walls, my eyes glazed over. I tried to imagine how we'd heal."

Buckingham Palace said it was "a deeply personal matter we would not comment on."

Sophie King, a midwife at U.K. child-loss charity Tommy's, said miscarriage and stillbirth remained "a real taboo in society, so mothers like Meghan sharing their stories is a vital step in breaking down that stigma and shame."

"Her honesty and openness today send a powerful message to anyone who loses a baby: this may feel incredibly lonely, but you are not alone," King said.

Meghan, an American actress and star of TV legal drama "Suits," married Harry, a grandson of Queen Elizabeth II, in a lavish ceremony at Windsor Castle in May 2018. Their son was born the following year.

Early this year, the couple announced they were quitting royal duties and moving to North America, citing what they said was the unbearable intrusions and racist attitudes of the British media. They recently bought a house in Santa Barbara, California.

The duchess is currently suing the publisher of Britain's Mail on Sunday newspaper for invasion of privacy over articles that published parts of a letter she wrote to her estranged father after her wedding.

Last month, a judge in London agreed to Meghan's request to postpone the trial from January until fall 2021. The decision followed a hearing held in private, and the judge said the reason for the delay request should be kept confidential.

Pandemic gave locals fleeting taste of a tourist-free Hawaii

By JENNIFER SINCO KELLEHER Associated Press

HONOLULU (AP) — Line-Now Memea Kruse lives on Oahu's famed North Shore, where marveling at sea turtles, epic waves and sunsets that paint the sky orange and purple are a must for many tourists in Hawaii.

After the islands required a two-week quarantine for travelers amid the coronavirus pandemic, Kruse rejoiced in the little things as the number of tourists dramatically dropped. It took her 35 minutes to drive to Walmart, instead of spending hours stuck in traffic as tourists gawked at turtles on the beach.

But tourist-reliant Hawaii has now eased the restrictions imposed in March, allowing visitors to produce a negative COVID-19 test to avoid the quarantine.

"I can literally tell you the day that they opened up," Kruse said. She was driving to Walmart on Oct. 15, when the travel restrictions eased, and "I waited for hours again."

For seven months, locals had taken back spots normally crowded with visitors. They could enjoy Waikiki's famous beaches without the sunburned tourists and walk on sidewalks without hordes of visitors awestruck by clear blue water, white sand and the other trappings of a tropical getaway.

Locals, many of whom depend on tourism jobs, have long felt ambivalence about living in an island paradise that relies heavily on visitor spending, but many saw an upshot to a health crisis that threatened their livelihoods — reclaiming favorite areas long overrun by crowds.

Before the pandemic, as many as 30,000 visitors arrived a day. That dropped to several thousand after the quarantine mandate.

"What the pandemic did was give us all a moment to pause, a number of months, to rethink everything," said state Sen. J. Kalani English. "What it proves for us is that old model of tourism, which is, you know, mass bring 11 million visitors a year, didn't work and people were tired of it."

Some residents are worried as cases surge in other parts of the U.S., but Hawaii officials say an "extremely small number" who get tested before traveling are diagnosed after they arrive. On Monday, 10,515 passengers arrived, with nearly 5,300 indicating they were coming for vacation, the Hawaii Tourism Authority said.

For English, who represents rural parts of Maui, fewer tourists allowed him to reconnect to Hamoa Beach, his "playground" as a child near where his family has lived for generations.

"I haven't been down there for a number of years because, frankly, it was just too crowded," he said. During the pandemic, "I started going there again like I did when I was very young, to go swim in the morning."

Bryant de Venecia of Honolulu took up standup paddle-boarding when beaches were less crowded.

"How I see it is there was some silver lining in this pandemic that over the last few months, locals and especially kanaka were able to reclaim some of the spaces ... we are not able to occupy or even use because of tourism," he said, using a word for Native Hawaiians.

But as a communications organizer for a union of hotel workers, de Venecia has "messy" feelings: Many members lost paychecks and medical benefits because of a lack of tourists.

Only 300 out of some 9,000 out-of-work members returned to their jobs when Hawaii welcomed back travelers, de Venecia said, making him wonder if tourism will be the lifeblood it once was.

One union member recently went back to work with hesitation. Aina Iglesias, a guest service agent at a Waikiki hotel, said she's grateful for an income again.

"But it felt really nice for a while to be tourist-free," she said of the days spent on less-crowded Waikiki beaches with her family. "When tourists are here, it's packed, there's traffic."

Iglesias said she's nervous about staying safe at work, pointing to guests who have ignored health orders.

"Those who are in quarantine, they go out and they don't care," Iglesias said. "And they get mad at us."

Even with the option to produce a negative test, some travelers choose to quarantine for two weeks, whether at hotels, rentals or at home. Hawaii authorities have arrested some people for violating quarantine.

John Fielding, an Oahu resident of 35 years, said returning tourists will bring normalcy and economic stability. But he wants them to wear masks, keep their distance and follow other health orders.

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"I think it's time that we start bringing them back," he said. "But they need to be educated. They need to be aware. And they need to ... have the respect when they come here."

John Alderete, a virologist who lives on Kauai, said it's not safe to allow tourists during a pandemic.

"So it is, in my opinion, a fait accompli that we're basically just bringing the virus here and knowingly, willfully doing so," he said.

A second test after arrival is required for the Big Island, voluntary for Maui and Kauai, and not required for Oahu, the most populated island.

Many attractions popular with tourists are open, including Pearl Harbor and Iolani Palace. But others are closed, including the Polynesian Cultural Center, Hanauma Bay and the Diamond Head State Monument.

For residents along Oahu's western Waianae Coast, there's less concern about the possibility of visitors making them sick and more of a longstanding feeling that tourists are valued over locals, said state Rep. Cedric Asuega Gates.

Seeing tourism come back while many schoolchildren are still learning remotely feels like a "slap in the face," Gates said.

Jamaica Osorio, assistant professor of Native Hawaiian and indigenous politics at the University of Hawaii, has been vocal about her disdain for tourists.

"We aren't your hosts," she said in widely shared tweet on Oct. 15. "Hawaii is still closed. Go home haole," she wrote, using a Hawaiian word for "foreigner."

No one should be vacationing during a pandemic, she said in an interview: "This is not a time for travel and exploration."

Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade to march on despite pandemic

By MARK KENNEDY AP Entertainment Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Jawan M. Jackson recently got to do something he's been yearning to do for months — sing and dance again with his Broadway cast.

Jackson is one of the stars of "Ain't Too Proud — The Life and Times of The Temptations" and he reunited with castmates for the first time since theaters shuttered to prepare for the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade on Thursday.

"I was most happy with just seeing all my old friends I haven't seen in months, some who flew in specifically for the show to do this," he said. "It was different, but it was still great to do."

The pandemic, which shut down theaters in March, may have upended most traditions this holiday season, but the annual New York City parade will march on with balloons, dancers, floats, Broadway shows and Santa — albeit heavily edited for safety.

"Traditions like this are comforting and they're uplifting," said Susan Tercero, executive producer of the parade. "New York has always been a tough city. It bounces back. It takes its blows and then it continues on. And I think it's extremely important for us to be that display this holiday season. Regardless of what's happened, New York needs to be that beacon of light in the darkness and this parade, I think, is symbolic of that."

The Macy's parade has been a traditional holiday season kickoff for more than 90 years, and spectators often line up a half-dozen deep along the route to cheer about 8,000 marchers, two dozen floats, entertainers and marching bands. At last year's parade, the big fear was high wind. This time, it's a pandemic that has made crowds untenable.

The biggest change this year is that the usual 2 1/2-mile route through crowded Manhattan has been scrapped in favor of concentrating events to a one-block stretch of 34th Street in front of the retailer's flagship Manhattan store. Many performances have been pre-taped and most of the parade's performers will be locally based to cut down on travel.

In addition to "Ain't Too Proud," the parade will feature performances from the Broadway casts of "Hamilton," "Mean Girls" and "Jagged Little Pill," a musical built around the music of Alanis Morissette. The Broadway performances were taped days before the parade.

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Things felt a lot different for actor Derek Klena, who was in the 2017 parade as part of the cast of "Anastasia." This year, he's Tony Award-nominated for his role in "Jagged Little Pill" and helped perform "You Learn" from the Tony-nominated show.

The cast was quarantined for two weeks before taping and tested regularly for the virus. Cast members rehearsed in masks until the moment cameras started rolling and kept socially distant. They sang live this time instead of years past when casts lip-synched.

"Although the circumstances were much different, it was still so magical and fulfilling to get to share that experience with your fellow castmates after being distant for so long," said Klena.

"I think it was important to everybody to find a way to still celebrate this event and celebrate the shows and the companies that all get to share in this amazing event."

Both Jackson and Klena said everyone adhered to the show's strict safety protocols — enforcing the 6-foot rule, frequent testing and requiring face masks plus face shields, as well as a fresh mask after their performance. "I'm appreciative of it because it is built to keep you safe," said Jackson, though he noted "dancing in a mask is a tough feat."

This year's lineup of balloons includes Snoopy, "Diary of a Wimpy Kid," "The Elf on the Shelf," Chase from "Paw Patrol," Pikachu, the Pillsbury Doughboy, Ronald McDonald, SpongeBob SquarePants and "Trolls." New this time are "The Boss Baby" and Red Titan from "Ryan's World."

The giant cartoon-character balloons will be flown without the traditional 80 to 100 rope-pulling handlers assigned to each inflatable and will instead be tethered to specialized vehicles.

Pentatonix, Ally Brooke, Keke Palmer, Sofia Carson, Leslie Odom Jr. and Jordin Sparks will perform, and there will be floats from "Blue's Clues," "Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles" and Lego. There will be a New York City Ballet ballerina with a performance from "The Nutcracker," an all-female samba drumline and acrobats from "The Big Apple Circus," and the Rockettes will be out in force. The parade ends with an appearance from Santa Claus.

Another change this year was the decision to spotlight many of the New York City parades that were canceled in the spring and fall due to the pandemic — the St. Patrick's Day Parade, the Mermaid Parade, the Puerto Rican Day Parade and NYC Pride March.

"We're going to be highlighting them, and we're going to be really giving them a chance to shine," said Tercero. "You're going to be able to see creativity in this entertainment come to life that has sort of been dormant for the past seven months."

For the Broadway performers, there's a silver lining to the changes this year. Usually on Thanksgiving Day, they'd be freezing in Midtown, having woken at dawn and been dancing and singing for hours. This year, they get to watch themselves from the warmth of their apartments, a job already well done.

"It's the first Thanksgiving in a few years where I either don't have a show or I'm not taping something," said Klena. "So in that way it'll be kind of fun to just celebrate with some of my friends here in the city and my wife."

Mark Kennedy is at <http://twitter.com/KennedyTwits>

Consumer spending up a slight 0.5% as virus maintains grip

By MARTIN CRUTSINGER AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — U.S. consumers increased their spending by a sluggish 0.5% last month, the weakest rise since April, when the pandemic first erupted, and a sign that Americans remain wary with the virus resurging across the country and threatening the economy.

The October gain reported Wednesday by the Commerce Department followed a seasonally adjusted 1.2% increase in September. It suggested that consumer spending, the primary driver of the U.S. economy, is being restrained by a weakened economy and by the failure of Congress to provide another stimulus package to struggling individuals and businesses.

The government's report also showed that income, which provides the fuel for spending, fell 0.7% in

October.

With new viral cases accelerating across the country, many states are adopting or considering new restrictions on businesses. Sales at restaurants and bars fell in October for the first time in six months. Restaurant traffic declined further this month, according to the reservations provider OpenTable. Hotel occupancy is down from a month ago. Consumer spending on credit cards dropped in the first week of November from a month earlier, according to data compiled by Opportunity Insights.

Economists warn that consumer spending could falter further in the current October-December quarter given that many of the major government support programs have expired and Congress has yet to renew the assistance.

"With coronavirus infection rates soaring, states re-imposing restrictions and the ... data on in-person dining and jobless claims beginning to show signs of weakness, we are increasingly worried that the monthly gains in consumption will be weaker," Paul Ashworth, chief U.S. economist at Capital Economics, wrote in a research note.

The report showed that while the wages-and-salaries component of consumer income rose 0.7% in October, government transfers — the category that includes unemployment aid and other benefits — fell 6.2%.

Inflation, as measured by a gauge tied to consumer spending, was unchanged in October. Measured year over year, it's up just 1.2%. That is far below the 2% annual target set by the Federal Reserve, and it gives the Fed further leeway to supply support to the economy beyond the ultra-low interest rates it is already providing.

Wiping down groceries? Experts say keep risk in perspective

By CANDICE CHOI Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Cleaning wipes are harder to find on store shelves, and businesses are reassuring customers with stepped up sanitation measures. In New York, the subway system is shut down nightly for disinfecting.

To avoid any traces of the coronavirus that might be lurking on surfaces, Americans have been wiping down groceries, wearing surgical gloves when they go out and leaving mail packages out for an extra day or two. But experts say the national fixation on scrubbing sparked by the pandemic can sometimes be overkill.

"It's important to clean surfaces, but not to obsess about it too much in a way that can be unhealthy," said Dr. John Brooks, chief medical officer for the COVID-19 response at the U.S. Centers for Disease and Control.

Health officials knew less about the virus in the early days of the pandemic, but say it's become clearer the main way it spreads is between people — through the respiratory droplets they spray when talking, coughing, sneezing or singing. It's why officials emphasize the importance of wearing masks and social distancing.

That doesn't mean surfaces don't pose any risk — cleaning is still recommended — especially frequently touched spots like door knobs or elevator buttons that infected people might have recently touched. Other germs that sicken people, like gastrointestinal bugs, haven't gone away either.

But with COVID-19, experts say to keep the risk in perspective: The virus is fragile and doesn't survive easily outside the body for long. Early studies finding it could linger on surfaces for days used large viral loads and were in laboratory conditions, not the real world. Other tests might just detect remnants of the virus, rather than live virus capable of infecting people.

Viruses also don't leap off surfaces to infect people, and infection would require a sequence of events: There would have to be enough surviving virus on whatever the person is touching, the person would have to get it on their hands, then touch their mouth, nose or eyes.

All that means there could be diminishing returns to all the disinfecting, especially if people have good hand washing practices.

For public health experts, the challenge is telling people exactly where they should draw the line, espe-

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cially if cleaning isn't doing any harm.

What counts as overkill could also vary depending on the situation, said Justin Lessler, an expert in infectious diseases at Johns Hopkins University.

While Lessler wouldn't wipe down his own groceries, for example, he said it might not be a bad idea for people caring for someone at high-risk for becoming severely ill if infected.

"These are things that maybe are on the lower end of how much they actually reduce risk. But they're relatively easy and cheap," he said.

And in nursing homes, Lessler said vigilance about disinfecting surfaces makes sense.

Even if it doesn't meaningfully reduce risk, regularly disinfecting surfaces can be a way for people to exert control when they feel they don't have any, said Stephen Morse, an infectious disease researcher at Columbia University.

In public places, he said stepped up cleaning — what some refer to as "hygiene theater" — can be a way to reassure people.

"People want to make it evident that they really care," Morse said.

But Emanuel Goldman, a professor of microbiology at Rutgers-New Jersey Medical School, said that reassurance could also create a false sense of safety — and detract from measures that matter more.

"They worry less about what they breathe. And breathing is your primary source of infection," said Goldman, who wrote a commentary in a medical journal in July saying the fear of transmission through surfaces was being overblown.

"I'm not saying don't do routine maintenance. I'm not saying don't do cleaning. But you don't have to go to extraordinary measures," he said.

In some cases, Goldman noted there are significant financial costs.

In New York, the Metropolitan Transportation Authority is spending \$8.1 million a week on COVID-19 related expenses, including subway cleanings throughout the day and overnight.

The agency says it's approaching safety in multiple ways. And Mark Dowd, the agency's chief innovation officer, said surfaces could still pose a risk, and that understanding of the virus has continued to evolve.

"We don't think taking our foot off the pedal with regard to disinfecting our surfaces is the right approach," he said.

The MTA is also looking at ways to improve ventilation, Dowd said, but that is far more complicated.

Americans are wiping store shelves clean of disinfecting products, too. Since the pandemic hit, sales have been up about 30% in the The Clorox Co.'s business unit that includes cleaning products.

Whether those habits will last remains to be seen.

At the start of the pandemic in March and April, Paige Zuber said she would come home from her corporate food service job in New York and leave her mask in a bag by the door, immediately change out of her clothes and shower.

"It was like disinfecting chaos to make sure I was not bringing anything into our apartment," said Zuber, who has since been laid off and moved to Rhode Island.

Zuber is still cleaning a lot more than she did before the pandemic, but not going to the same extremes.

At the CDC, Brooks said he tells people to do what makes them comfortable, but to keep in mind the relative risk of different routes of transmission.

"As long as you don't touch your face when you're unpacking those groceries, and wash your hands afterwards and are careful, I think that may be sufficient," he said.

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Money promised to combat US overdose crisis sits unused

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By GEOFF MULVIHILL Associated Press

When it filed for bankruptcy last year, Purdue Pharma agreed to an innovative plan: It would make \$200 million available immediately to help those harmed by its signature painkiller, OxyContin, and ease the effects of the opioid crisis.

More than a year later, with the crisis worsening, not a penny has been spent.

"The money is just sitting in Purdue's bank account collecting dust," said Ed Neiger, a lawyer representing opioid victims. "It's a travesty of epic proportions."

It's not Purdue that is holding up the money. Instead, it's lawyers representing the wide range of entities suing the company who cannot agree how best to use it. The main disagreement is between nearly 3,000 local governments and advocates for those hurt by opioids.

Advocates want the money funneled mostly to local nonprofits that provide emergency services to people with addictions. State attorneys general say doing so would dilute the money so much it would not be effective. Because Purdue is undergoing the long process of distributing its assets, the states also see the prospect of distributing billions of dollars over time as more important than the \$200 million.

"You see the state AGs come in and block the money, and you're not understanding why," said Jill Cichowicz, who lost her twin brother to an overdose and sits on a committee advocating for victims in Purdue's bankruptcy case. "We're all baffled."

Purdue filed for bankruptcy last year as part of an effort to settle thousands of lawsuits seeking to hold the company accountable for the crisis that has been linked to 470,000 deaths in the U.S. since 2000. In a separate case, it pleaded guilty Tuesday as part of a broader settlement with the Department of Justice.

The proposal being considered in bankruptcy court calls for members of the Sackler family, which owns Purdue, to pay at least \$3 billion and give up ownership of the company. Purdue would then become a public benefit corporation, with its profits going to ease the overdose crisis, including by increasing treatment capacity and providing other addiction services.

The company says the total value of the deal over time could be more than \$10 billion.

State attorneys general, all of whom have sued Purdue, disagree over whether that's the right approach.

They are not the only ones who will need to be persuaded. A committee of creditors that includes people in recovery or who have lost loved ones to overdoses must also agree. It was that group that proposed the \$200 million relief fund after Purdue filed for bankruptcy in September 2019.

The fund was inspired by one adopted last year in the case of Pacific Gas and Electric Co., the giant California utility that landed in bankruptcy because of lawsuits blaming it for California wildfires.

Neiger, who represents a committee of victims in the complicated legal battle, says the relief fund idea is so novel that it's not even recognized by bankruptcy law but was accepted by federal bankruptcy Judge Robert Drain.

The plan called for distributing money to groups trying to help people with addictions by providing shelter, connecting them to services and supplying overdose antidote drugs. It was left to parties in the case to work out the details.

With disagreements on where the money should go and who should control it, that has not happened.

In a statement read during a hearing in April, a group of lawyers said they were pausing talks on how to use the relief money while they focus on broader mediation about how Purdue's assets will be used.

The statement asserted that "despite the best intentions on all sides," the players in the case had a "deeply held, fundamental difference in view" about the best use of the money. They said talking about it was straining efforts to figure out what to do with the billions that could ultimately flow from Purdue. They planned to revisit the issue later.

Since then, the broader question of where settlement money would go was resolved through mediation. State and local governments agreed to put their full shares toward programs to alleviate the crisis. That's a significant development, but it does not bring the quick help called for with the \$200 million fund. And there are no indications when the relief fund discussions will resume.

Advocates for people with substance abuse disorders say local nonprofits could have used the money

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to assist more people immediately.

"If you gave them a million dollars, they would be able to do so much more than if you just gave it to a state agency," said Cichowicz, whose twin brother, Scott Zebrowski, fatally overdosed in 2017 on a counterfeit OxyContin pill containing fentanyl. The former gym manager was 38.

Cichowicz, who lives in Richmond, Virginia, said her brother became addicted after being prescribed OxyContin for back pain in 2014.

While the case plays out, the addiction problem only deepens. The U.S. had a record 71,000 overdose deaths last year, most of them from opioids. Preliminary data shows an even higher death toll is likely this year. Experts say that could be in part because of the loss of in-person counseling during the coronavirus pandemic.

Brandon George, director of the Indiana Addictions Issues Coalition, said the pandemic has taken almost all the energy of county health departments and left local recovery organizations to distribute naloxone, an overdose antidote. He expects mental health services to be cut as state and local tax revenue decreases.

George said he never expected the Purdue relief fund to get money to groups quickly, but it might have made a difference.

"That money certainly could have been put to good use," he said. "Right now, our health care systems are very strained."

Mulvihill reported from Davenport, Iowa. Follow him at <http://www.twitter.com/geoffmulvihill>.

Congress braces for Biden's national coronavirus strategy

By LISA MASCARO AP Congressional Correspondent

WASHINGTON (AP) — Congress is bracing for President-elect Joe Biden to move beyond the Trump administration's state-by-state approach to the COVID-19 crisis and build out a national strategy to fight the pandemic and distribute the eventual vaccine.

The incoming administration's approach reflects Democrats' belief that a more comprehensive plan, some of it outlined in the House's \$2 trillion coronavirus aid bill, is needed to get the pandemic under control. Republicans have resisted big spending but agree additional funding is needed. With the nation on edge but a vaccine in sight, the complicated logistics of vaccinating hundreds of millions of Americans raise the stakes on the major undertaking.

"We have an incredible challenge on our hands," said Sen. Patty Murray of Washington state, which is approaching the anniversary of its first reported case of the virus last January.

A vaccine can only go so far, Murray warned, without a distribution plan. "A vaccine can sit on a shelf. A vaccination is what we're talking about," she said.

As Congress weighs a new round of COVID-19 relief, federal officials say doses of the vaccine could begin shipping within a day of Food and Drug Administration approval. Three pharmaceutical manufacturers — Pfizer, Moderna and AstraZeneca — have announced early results. But the rollout faces a patchwork of state plans, a transitioning White House and potential backlash from vaccine skeptics, despite the rising U.S. death toll of nearly 260,000 people.

Biden said Tuesday on NBC's "Nightly News with Lester Holt" that his team has started meeting with COVID-19 officials at the White House on how to "get from a vaccine being distributed to a person being able to get vaccinated."

Democrats have been sounding the alarm that the Trump administration's delay in granting Biden's team access to transition materials was wasting precious time.

States submitted draft vaccination planning documents last month, but not all of them have made full plans public. Private Capitol Hill briefings by officials from Operation Warp Speed, the federal vaccine effort, left some lawmakers fuming last week over what they called a lack of coordination with Biden's camp.

Health and Human Services Secretary Alex Azar said Tuesday that his department "immediately" started working with Biden's staff after the General Services Administration formally acknowledged the election

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results.

Azar said he wanted to ensure Biden's transition would be "in the spirit of looking out for the health and well-being of the American people and, in particular, saving lives through this COVID-19 pandemic."

From the start, the pandemic has challenged and reflected the two parties' approaches to the public health crisis, with the Trump administration largely outsourcing many decisions to the states and Democrats pressing for a more nationalized approach.

In Congress, Republicans largely rejected the \$2 trillion-plus House bill from Democrats as excessive. They prefer their own \$500 billion Senate effort, saying states and cities can tap funding from previous relief legislation. Senate Democrats blocked that bill twice as insufficient.

Biden's campaign called for \$25 billion for vaccines to "guarantee it gets to every American, cost-free." That's similar to the amount included in both the House and the Senate bills, through different strategies, and Congress previously mandated that vaccines be free. With fresh legislation stalled, it's uncertain if states will have the resources needed once the FDA approves the vaccines.

During a conference call this week with governors, Azar and other health officials fielded a range of questions. Governors were seeking guidance on which populations they should prioritize for the vaccine and whether there was a list of pharmacies available to administer the two-dose regimens, according to a readout of the call provided by the office of Democratic Gov. Jay Inslee of Washington.

Blaire Bryant, who oversees health care policy at the National Association of Counties, said a national strategy for communicating vaccine information to the public and the funding to make vaccinations equitable are vital.

"We're in uncharted territory," she said. "The more information, the more guidance we can get from the federal level, the better."

She said states do have access to previously approved funding, but cash-strapped local governments have been reluctant to draw down the remaining dollars for vaccines. It's robbing Peter to pay Paul, she said.

As Congress debates funding, at least two Republican senators are participating in vaccine trials as a way to build confidence among Americans skeptical of the federal effort.

Sen. Rob Portman, R-Ohio, said in a statement that he hoped his participation "will reassure people about the safety and effectiveness of vaccines."

Sen. Steve Daines of Montana, who is participating in the Pfizer trials, asked the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention on Tuesday to consider the "unique challenges" of distributing the vaccine to remote and rural communities like those in his state.

Daines said in a letter to the CDC that it will also be "critical" to ensure access for frontline health care and essential workers, as well as older adults and people with medical conditions.

Other lawmakers, though, have brushed off concerns. GOP Sen. John Cornyn of Texas said he expects vaccine distribution will be "well underway" by the time Biden takes office Jan. 20.

Murray, as the top Democrat on the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee, grew concerned this summer as she said the Trump administration outsourced much of the vaccine distribution planning to the states.

She drafted a 19-page paper calling for \$25 billion to stand up a vaccination program with supply chains, hired personnel, drive-in clinics and other ways to provide no-cost vaccines. She warned of the Trump administration's "lack of centralized leadership" and "chaotic communication" with the states.

Biden and Murray have since talked about her approach, which draws on input from health professionals on Biden's team. Former Surgeon General Vivek Murthy, a member of Biden's COVID-19 task force, briefed Senate Democrats the week after the election.

Murray compared the vaccine effort to sending a man to the moon or fighting a world war. She said it will take all Americans joining to say, "This is a pandemic, and I'm going to do my part to get the country out of it."

Associated Press writers Candice Choi in New York and Rachel La Corte in Olympia, Wash., contributed to this report.

Analysis: Biden prioritizes experience with Cabinet picks

By JONATHAN LEMIRE Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Competence is making a comeback.

President-elect Joe Biden has prized staying power over star power when making his first wave of Cabinet picks and choices for White House staff, with a premium placed on government experience and proficiency as he looks to rebuild a depleted and demoralized federal bureaucracy.

With an eye in part toward making selections who may have to seek approval from a Republican-controlled Senate, Biden has prioritized choosing qualified professionals while eschewing flashy names. Even the most recognizable pick — John Kerry — lacks the showmanship that has defined the Trump era.

In sharp contrast to President Donald Trump, who openly distrusted the very government he led, Biden has showcased a faith in bureaucracy that was born out of his nearly five decades in Washington. He's made hires with the deliberate aim of projecting a sense of dutiful and, even boring, competency.

Surrounding himself with longtime aides and veterans of the Obama administration, many of whom have already worked together for years, Biden has rolled out a team of careerists with bursting resumes and little need of a learning curve.

"Collectively, this team has secured some of the most defining national security and diplomatic achievements in recent memory — made possible through decades of experience working with our partners," Biden said Tuesday as he unveiled his national security team.

"Experience" is indeed the coin of the realm on Biden's burgeoning team.

His pick for secretary of state, Antony Blinken, worked for Biden in the Senate for years, and held the posts of deputy secretary of state and deputy national security adviser. His choice for national security adviser, Jake Sullivan, was the deputy to that post under President Barack Obama. His nominee for treasury secretary, Janet Yellen, was chair of the Federal Reserve and chair of the White House Council of Economic Advisers. His incoming White House chief of staff, Ron Klain, was chief of staff to two vice presidents — Al Gore and Biden himself — and was the Obama administration's Ebola czar.

And Kerry, Biden's choice to fill the newly created post of presidential climate envoy, was a longtime U.S. senator and his party's 2004 presidential nominee before serving as secretary of state.

"The team is bringing competency and experience, which are two separate things but deeply interwoven," said retired Navy Adm. James Stavridis, former NATO supreme allied commander Europe, who has worked with much of Biden's new team. "There are deputies stepping up into full roles, seasoned hands returning to the job. They tend to be calm and centered and they won't all fight over the ball."

"They know their counterparts overseas and they know whom to pick up the phone and call," said Stavridis. "It's a completely different approach than what we saw with the Trump team — and I hesitate to call it a team because they didn't work all that well together."

Four years ago, contenders for Cabinet posts were marched through the gilded lobby of Trump Tower, the president-elect's Manhattan skyscraper, in full view of reporters and TV cameras. The candidates publicly jockeyed for posts, Trump aides took turn knifing each other in the media, and the incoming president even took one secretary of state contender, Mitt Romney, out to dinner for a public and ultimately unsuccessful audition.

Conversely, Biden's transition hiring process has been carried out behind closed doors or, out of concern for the surging pandemic, on Zoom and over the phone. Leaks to reporters have been few. And the public only got its first glimpse of Biden's choices when they took their spots, spaced apart and wearing masks, on a Delaware stage.

Another change was the distinct lack of tributes from the staffers about their boss, a marked difference from the lengthy, glowing veneration of the president that came to define any Trump Cabinet meeting. Also different: No one who stood with Biden was a family member or an in-law.

"The contrast between Biden's selections and Trump's selections are like night and day: Biden's picks are capable, sensible and play well in the sandbox together," said Steve Rattner, a former Obama economic

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adviser. "Biden prefers people he has known for decades. Trump picked Rex Tillerson because he thought he looked like a secretary of state."

There are risks. Many progressive Democrats aren't looking for simply a return to the Obama years, which ended with many on the left frustrated at the slow pace of change.

Republicans are also unimpressed with Biden's hires.

"Biden's cabinet picks went to Ivy League schools, have strong resumes, attend all the right conferences & will be polite & orderly caretakers of America's decline," tweeted Florida Sen. Marco Rubio, who may seek the White House again in 2024.

Trump's own hiring process was besieged with chaos of his own making. He jettisoned the man in charge of his transition — former Gov. Chris Christie, R-N.J. — and more than 30 binders that Christie had prepared in favor of a staffing plan based on his gut, family recommendations and, yes, by his own admission, choices who looked straight out of central casting.

The tumult didn't end once he took office.

While a few of his picks were establishment choices, like Marine Gen. Jim Mattis to run the Pentagon, most were plucked from the corporate world — like Tillerson at the State Department and Steven Mnuchin at the Treasury Department. His senior adviser, Steve Bannon, said he wanted to oversee "the destruction of the administrative state."

Trump had more senior staff and Cabinet turnover than any modern predecessor — his first national security adviser, Michael Flynn, didn't last a month — and he declared an informal war on the federal bureaucracy once the investigation began into whether his campaign had any ties to Russia.

Deeply suspicious of what he deemed the "deep state," Trump allowed scores of vacancies to remain unfilled across federal agencies, fired officials he deemed insufficiently loyal, encouraged in-fighting on his staff and, with relentless public attacks, attempted to undermine Americans' faith in the institutions of their own government.

EDITOR'S NOTE — Jonathan Lemire has covered the White House and national politics for The Associated Press since 2013.

Follow Lemire on Twitter at <http://twitter.com/@JonLemire>.

Today in History

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Thursday, Nov. 26, the 331st day of 2020. There are 35 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On Nov. 26, 2000, Florida Secretary of State Katherine Harris certified George W. Bush the winner over Al Gore in the state's presidential balloting by a 537-vote margin.

On this date:

In 1789, Americans observed a day of thanksgiving set aside by President George Washington to mark the adoption of the Constitution of the United States.

In 1883, former slave and abolitionist Sojourner Truth died in Battle Creek, Mich.

In 1917, the National Hockey League was founded in Montreal, succeeding the National Hockey Association.

In 1933, a judge in New York ruled the James Joyce book "Ulysses" was not obscene and could be published in the United States.

In 1941, U.S. Secretary of State Cordell Hull delivered a note to Japan's ambassador to the United States, Kichisaburo Nomura (kee-chee-sah-boor-oh noh-moo-rah), setting forth U.S. demands for "lasting and extensive peace throughout the Pacific area." The same day, a Japanese naval task force consisting of six aircraft carriers left the Kuril Islands, headed toward Hawaii.

In 1943, during World War II, the HMT Rohna, a British transport ship carrying American soldiers, was hit by a German missile off Algeria; 1,138 men were killed.

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In 1950, China entered the Korean War, launching a counteroffensive against soldiers from the United Nations, the U.S. and South Korea.

In 1973, President Richard Nixon's personal secretary, Rose Mary Woods, told a federal court that she'd accidentally caused part of the 18-1/2-minute gap in a key Watergate tape.

In 1986, President Ronald Reagan appointed a commission headed by former Senator John Tower to investigate his National Security Council staff in the wake of the Iran-Contra affair.

In 1992, the British government announced that Queen Elizabeth II had volunteered to start paying taxes on her personal income, and would take her children off the public payroll.

In 2007, Sen. Trent Lott announced his retirement after a 35-year career in Congress. Washington Redskins star safety Sean Taylor, 24, was mortally wounded during a botched armed robbery at his home in Palmetto Bay, Florida. (Taylor died the next day.)

In 2008, teams of heavily armed Pakistani gunmen stormed luxury hotels, a popular tourist attraction and a crowded train station in Mumbai, India, leaving at least 166 people dead in a rampage lasting some 60 hours.

Ten years ago: Nineteen-year-old Somali-born Mohamed Osman Mohamud was arrested by federal agents in Portland, Oregon, after an elaborate sting operation in which Mohamud was led to believe he would be detonating a van of explosives during the city's Christmas tree lighting ceremony. (Mohamud was later sentenced to 30 years in prison.) President Barack Obama received 12 stitches in his upper lip after taking an errant elbow during a pickup basketball game with family and friends visiting for the Thanksgiving holiday.

Five years ago: French President Francois Hollande and Russian President Vladimir Putin agreed to tighten cooperation in the fight against the Islamic State group. Pope Francis celebrated his first Mass in Africa; later that day in Nairobi, Kenya, the pope met with several hundred priests and nuns, urging them to serve others and not be served. The White House underwent a Thanksgiving Day lockdown after a man draped in an American flag jumped the fence.

One year ago: Heavy snow and wind shut down highways in Colorado and Wyoming and forced more than 1,000 travelers to sleep overnight in Denver's airport after hundreds of flights were canceled as the Thanksgiving travel period went into high gear. Top-ranked Duke lost to Stephen F. Austin, 85-83, for the Blue Devils' first home loss to a nonconference foe since 2000.

Today's Birthdays: Impressionist Rich Little is 82. Singer Tina Turner is 81. Singer Jean Terrell is 76. Pop musician John McVie is 75. Actor Marianne Muellerleile is 72. Actor Scott Jacoby is 64. Actor Jamie Rose is 61. Country singer Linda Davis is 58. Actor Scott Adsit is 55. Blues singer-musician Bernard Allison is 55. Country singer-musician Steve Grisaffe is 55. Actor Kristin Bauer is 54. Actor Peter Facinelli is 47. Actor Tammy Lynn Michaels Etheridge is 46. DJ/record label executive DJ Khaled (KAL'-ehd) is 45. Actor Maia (MY'-ah) Campbell is 44. Country singer Joe Nichols is 44. Contemporary Christian musicians Anthony and Randy Armstrong (Red) are 42. Actor Jessica Bowman is 40. Pop singer Natasha Bedingfield is 39. Actor Jessica Camacho is 38. Country singer-musician Mike Gossin (Gloriana Rock) is 36. Rock musician Ben Wysocki (The Fray) is 36. Singer Lil Fizz is 35. MLB All-Star Matt Carpenter is 35. Actor-singer-TV personality Rita Ora is 30. Actor/singer Aubrey Peeples is 27.