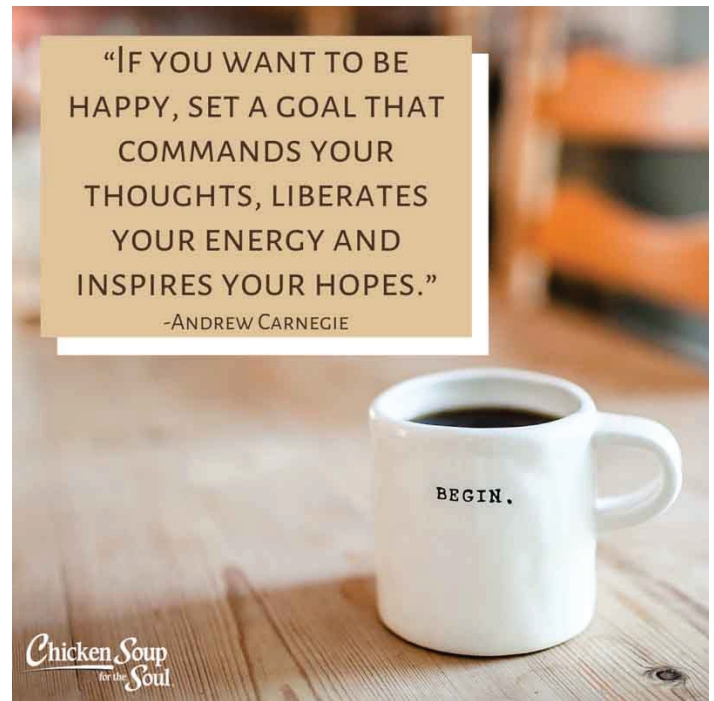


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## Service Notice: Mary Walter

Services for Mary Walter, 65, of Groton and formerly of Pierre will be 2:00 p.m., Friday, December 4, 2020 at St. John's Lutheran Church, Groton. Rev. Andrew Wolfgram will officiate. Burial will follow in Union Cemetery under the direction of Paetznick-Garness Funeral Chapel, Groton. Services will be broadcast live on GDILIVE.COM and will also be broadcast on GDIRADIO at 89.3 FM, available within 1 mile of Groton.

Visitation will be held for one hour prior to services at the church.

Mary passed away November 30, 2020 at the home of Bill and Eileen Schuelke.

## Saturday, December 5, 2020

10:00am: Basketball: Girls 7th/8th Jamboree at Groton



**CLOSED:** Recycling Trailer in Groton  
The recycling trailer is located west of the city shop. It takes cardboard, papers and aluminum cans.

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## MidCo looking to expand into Groton

Four representatives from MidCo came before the Groton Council Meeting Tuesday night to talk about bringing their services to Groton. They offer internet, phone and cable service and already serve over 400 communities in the Dakotas and Minnesota. They currently are in five communities that are already served by James Valley Telecommunications/Northern Valley Communications, which serves the Groton. Under the proposal, they would utilize existing utility poles throughout town and would also bore underground where there are no poles.

The council has to negotiate with MidCo for the franchise requirements, which would include a fee to the city for the use of the utility poles.

The council will continue dialog with MidCo at its next meeting.

The first reading of the liquor laws was approved. Basically, references are made to South Dakota Codified Laws that have been repealed. City Finance Officer Hope Block said there are no changes being made in the implementation, it is just making sure everyone is following the most current laws.

Second reading to the 2020 supplemental appropriation ordinance was approved, basically, balancing all funds for year-end.

The Holiday Lighting Contest was approved for judging on Dec. 17th with credits on the utility credits to be \$100 for first place, \$75 for second place and \$50 for third place.

## GFP Completes Annual Salmon Spawn

PIERRE, S.D. – South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks (GFP) recently completed their annual salmon spawning operations on Lake Oahe. Crews collected 900,000 eggs at the Whitlock Spawning Station.

Bob Hanten, GFP fisheries biologist, said 477 Chinook Salmon returned to Whitlock Spawning Station.

"This year, we yielded more eggs per female than we would have on a normal year and we saw larger fish, however, the number of fish that returned was lower," said Hanten. "To make up for the collection of eggs for next year, we are working with the North Dakota Game and Fish to obtain approximately 400,000 salmon eggs."

State agencies frequently partner together to help obtain egg take goals and meet other spawning objectives. These partnerships are crucial to meeting management objectives and continuing to provide high quality fisheries for anglers to enjoy.

South Dakota currently has 1.3 million Chinook eggs in the hatcheries across the state. The eggs available should be enough to stock approximately 400,000 juvenile salmon in Lake Oahe in 2021.

Each year, juvenile Chinook salmon are stocked into Lake Oahe. They then disperse throughout the reservoir until they become sexually mature. The water flowing down the fish ladder attracts mature salmon to the station where GFP staff collect, sort and spawn the fish. The salmon hatch and grow, spending about seven months in the hatchery before they are stocked back into the lake.

Chinook salmon do not naturally reproduce in Lake Oahe and would not exist there without the efforts of GFP staff collecting eggs, rearing and stocking them back into the lake for anglers to enjoy.

"The opportunity to catch salmon out on the prairie is pretty exciting for anglers," says Geno Adams, Fisheries Program Administrator, "We saw some excellent salmon fishing this past year and many anglers were out taking advantage of the hot bite. The salmon fishing is just another aspect that makes Lake Oahe such a special fishery."

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## Badger Clark: Cowboy Poet and Jailbird

Badger Clark probably hoped to find adventure, money and romance in Cuba. What awaited him instead was a prison cell.

South Dakota's first poet laureate (a title not yet bestowed upon him at the time) was among a group of people who left the country in December 1903 to colonize Cuba.

Colonizing plans fell through, and the 21-year-old Clark was the only would-be colonizer who remained in Cuba after April 1904. He went to work for plantation owner Augustin Rodriguez.

Clark's sense of humor was evident when, in 1906, he wrote about his experiences in Cuba. They were published in the Summer 1977 volume of "South Dakota History," the quarterly journal of the South Dakota State Historical Society.

Rodriguez often quarreled with two of his neighbors, father and son Emilio and Enrique Barretto. The feud escalated one morning when Enrique threatened Rodriguez with a machete. Rodriguez fired his gun at Enrique and wounded him. Rodriguez and Clark soon found themselves in a six-by-10 foot jail cell.

Brought before the court, Clark was informed that he had deliberately, feloniously, and with malice aforethought fired at Enrique at a distance of 10 feet and missed. "I immediately put in an indignant plea of not guilty," Clark wrote.

Clark and Rodriguez were told that they could get "libertad provisional" if they would put up the sum of \$300 apiece for bail.

After three days in jail, the two men were transferred to the provincial penitentiary, where they were separated and forbidden to communicate.

"I reached the low water mark of despondency that afternoon when the steel doors of the big prison closed behind us," Clark wrote.

"I was thrust into a large cell with seventeen convicts. When I sized up these fellow sufferers of mine, I was if possible sicker than before ... Not one of them spoke English and most of them spoke a very poor dialect of Spanish ...."

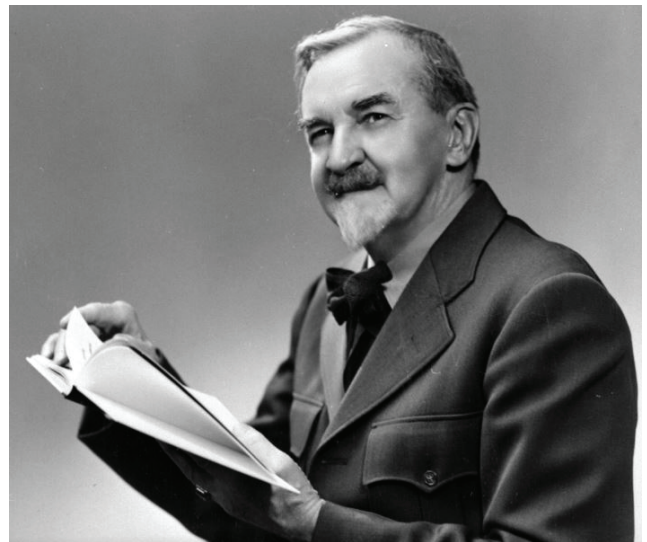
His cell had an informal government with a prisoner called the "Presidente" in charge.

"The daily program at the prison was so simple and easy to learn that after a few days it became almost monotonous. We arose at six in the morning. At six thirty a man came to the door of the cell carrying a five-gallon kerosene can full of coffee. Under the supervision of the Presidente we filed out and one at a time filled our tin cups with the thick brown mixture. This coffee was all we were given for our breakfast, but we generally eked it out with a piece of bread saved from dinner the day before. This bread kept us busy because it had to be eaten slowly on account of the number of ants it contained.

"After breakfast we were left to our own devices for awhile ... As for me I lay in my bed and smoked innumerable cigarettes while I read stories from some old American magazines. Had it not been for these magazines, I might have gone crazy for want of something to take my mind off my troubles.

"At ten o'clock in the morning we ate our 'almuerzo' the first real meal of the day. Almuerzo consisted principally of soup. It was a thick soup and was probably highly nourishing, if grease and nourishment are synonymous.

## SOUTH DAKOTA HISTORY & HERITAGE



**Badger Clark was South Dakota's first poet laureate.** (South Dakota State Historical Society – State Archives photo)

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"At four o'clock in the afternoon the comida or heavy meal of the day was served. The principal dish at this meal was the soup of the morning, only the strictly soup part had been drained off leaving the solids in the form of a kind of 'boiled dinner.' This was rather (more) palatable than the soup and the fact that they gave us a small allowance of bread, fruit, and coffee made it quite a feast."

The interval between comida and bedtime was generally the noisiest of the day, as this was the time the prisoners did most of their singing.

"At nine o'clock the guards would extinguish the lamps and the Presidente would command silence ... This was the hardest time of day for me. I could not sleep before midnight, and so I would lie and think unpleasant thoughts and listen to the prison bell as it struck the halves and quarters.

"Two weeks dragged on before I procured my release. Despite my troubles I thrived rather than pined, and the only possible damage my health suffered during my confinement was from smoking too much."

Rodriguez put up bail for Clark. Clark felt he had to stay in Cuba to keep Rodriguez from losing the \$300. Clark was acquitted at his trial on Jan. 31, 1905.

Clark returned to the United States, where he became known as a cowboy poet. He was named South Dakota's poet laureate on Dec. 24, 1937, a title he held until his death in 1957.

This moment in South Dakota history is provided by the South Dakota Historical Society Foundation, the nonprofit fundraising partner of the South Dakota State Historical Society at the Cultural Heritage Center in Pierre. Find us on the web at [www.sdhsf.org](http://www.sdhsf.org). Contact us at [info@sdhsf.org](mailto:info@sdhsf.org) to submit a story idea.

-30-

Groton Area School District																
Active COVID-19 Cases																
Updated November 30, 2020; 11:47 AM																
JK	KG	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	Staff	Total	
0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	1	2	0	1	0	2	8	

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

Updated December 1, 2020; 3:03 PM																
JK	KG	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	Staff	Total	
0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	2	0	1	0	3	8	

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## Conde National League

**Nov. 30 Team Standings:** Pirates 28, Cubs 26, Tigers 25 ½, Braves 23 ½, Giants 23, Mets 18.

**Men's High Games:** Russ Bethke 193, Ryan Bethke 191, Collin Cady 188.

**Men's High Series:** Russ Bethke 537, Ryan Bethke 508, Collin Cady 476

**Women's High Games:** Sam Bahr 197, Tanah Messevou 191, Michelle Johnson 179

**Women's High Series:** Sam Bahr 520, Tanah Messevou 504, Michelle Johnson 443

## Groton Prairie Mixed

**Nov. 27 Team Standings:** Shih Tzus 12, Cheetahs 10, Jackelopes 6, Chipmunks 4

**Men's High Games:** Tony Waage 200, Brad Waage 194, Tony Madsen 179

**Women's High Games:** Michelle Johnson 207, Nicole Kassube 175, 162, Sue Stanley 158

**Men's High Series:** Brad Waage 525, Ron Belden 506, Tony Waage 474

**Women's High Series:** Michelle Johnson 477, Nicole Kassube 458, Sue Stanley 417

## Erdmann Recognized for Sustained Efforts to Improve Cow Productivity

Michael Erdmann, Groton, South Dakota, recently re-enrolled in the American Angus Association® whole-herd reporting system MaternalPlus® as a commitment to making genetic improvements in lifetime cow herd productivity. Breeders participating in MaternalPlus are keenly focused to better evaluate herd reproductive performance, the number one profit driver in the cow-calf industry.

MaternalPlus is a voluntary, inventory-based reporting system that collects additional reproductive trait data to provide Angus breeders and their customers the information they need to make effective selection decisions. To date, more than 10 breeders have completed MaternalPlus enrollment.

The program allows producers to capture cow herd and reproductive performance data, gain faster access to preweaning EPDs as a selection tool, characterize females through heifer pregnancy EPDs tied directly to herd genetics, expand new trait development for Angus reproductive and longevity measures, and streamline their ability to track heifer and cow reproductive records through AAA Login.

In addition, MaternalPlus lays the groundwork for selection tools related to cow longevity in the herd. Gathering these records will allow the Association to cultivate research related to cow herd productivity and make improvements similar to what the Angus breed has witnessed in other economically relevant traits.

For more information on MaternalPlus, visit the Association website or access AAA Login.

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**#282 in a series**

## **Covid-19 Update: by Marie Miller**

Looks like we came roaring back. It will be difficult to say what number of these are delayed reports from the weekend piling up and inflating today's reports; we can hope a lot of them are. Today, we had 189,500 new case reports, a 1.4% increase in the total from yesterday and our third-worst day yet. The total number of cases in the US is now up to 13,791,400. We may hit 14 million as soon as Thursday; tomorrow's not inconceivable, but I think Thursday's more likely.

Our current seven-day new-case average is 167,759 cases; on November 1 that number was 82,057. It's gone up by 95.5% in a month. There are zero indications this is going to get appreciably better—and quite a few it will get appreciably worse—in the upcoming month. After all, the backdrop for these numbers is that more people traveled Sunday than at any time since March. Because why not, right?

The grand total for new cases in November turned out to be a staggering 4.4 million; that's almost the combined population of Alaska, Wyoming, North Dakota, South Dakota, Vermont, and Delaware. We've reported over 100,000 new cases every day for four solid weeks; the best we could do during the summer surge was just over 75,000 cases per day. By contrast, the first four million cases in this country took 184 days—six months, more than six times as long. Florida joined the million-case club today; it is the third member after Texas and California. For reference, Germany (population 83 million) just hit one million cases late last week. Texas had a record day for new-case reports, over 15,000 new cases. California did too with over 14,000 new cases today. The number of child cases is soaring; nearly 1.2 million children—close to 12% of cases—have been diagnosed since this pandemic started. Dr. Jonathan Reiner, professor of medicine at George Washington University, said that this past weekend had the potential to be the "mother of all superspreader events." Where we go from here is not a good place.

Hospitalizations have tripled since October 1 and more than doubled since November 1. We set new hospitalization records on 17 consecutive days, have been at record levels 20 days in the last three weeks, and now stand at 96,039. We'll hit 100,000 hospitalized this week. We are averaging 91,326 over the last week, and this, too, is a record. Eighteen states are reporting record hospitalizations. Hospitals are filling up; health care workers are overworked, exhausted, and traumatized; and many workers have become ill themselves, causing suffering and leaving their colleagues to shoulder ever-greater burdens of patient care. Rural hospitals, including critical access hospitals, are teetering on the brink of closure. Hospitals in Wisconsin are reporting "current and imminent critical staffing shortages," according to Andrea Palm, Department of Health Secretary-designee.

There were 2629 deaths reported today, the most since May 6 and coming perilously close to our all-time record from April 15 of 2752. There have been 270,515 deaths so far in the US, a number 1.0% higher than yesterday.

Wisconsin had a record number of deaths today; today is only the second time they've recorded more than 100 deaths in a single day. Projections are that the daily deaths are set to double in coming days and will approach 4000 per day before this month is through. On average, 51 people died from Covid-19 every hour—just under one per minute—throughout the entire month of November. More people died from Covid-19 in November than died from influenza during the entire 2019-2020 flu season. More people died from Covid-19 in the US in November than the total lost in the entire pandemic so far in Australia, Canada, China, Japan, and Germany—combined. Let that sink in. We are failing miserably.

An antibody study led by scientists at the CDC was published yesterday in the journal *Clinical Infectious Diseases*. Their study of blood bank samples from donations collected by the American Red Cross between December 13 and January 17 showed evidence of coronavirus antibodies in 106 out of 7389 blood donations. Thirty-nine of those positive samples were collected in Washington, Oregon, and California between December 13 and December 16, and antibodies were detected in 67 samples collected in early January in Iowa, Wisconsin, Michigan, Massachusetts, Connecticut, and Rhode Island. This is not evidence of spread in those weeks, but these findings may indicate the virus was in the United States before it was previously thought to be present. The researchers noted they do not know whether most of these are cases of

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infections or just a manifestation of cross-reactivity in people who had antibodies to other coronaviruses, which is a thing we know happens. Only one of these cases has yielded a pretty definitive identification of antibodies to a specific part of the SARS-CoV-2 virus so that it could be determined to be “likely from an individual with a past or active SARS-CoV-2 infection.” For any of these cases which were actual infections with SARS-CoV-2, it is not clear whether these people were returning travelers who brought the virus back with them from a part of the world where it was already circulating. The first case confirmed in the US was in a traveler from China, identified in Washington on January 19 or 20. This is a phenomenon worth study: The more we understand about the introduction and spread of this virus in our country, the more likely we are to design appropriate response measures to the next incipient pandemic—and that is not a matter of if, but of when.

There is a growing body of evidence that rapid antigen tests, already known to be less accurate at picking up on infections, are even less accurate when used in children. One test which did very well in newly symptomatic adults, detecting 96.5% of cases in that group, and less well at 70.2% in asymptomatic adults, detected only 77.8% of symptomatic and a paltry 63.6% asymptomatic cases in children. Another test identified 62.5% of cases in children. We’re not sure whether this is simply a function of lower viral loads in children, and we also are not clear whether children are significant sources of infection; but these tests are not looking ready for prime time in those under 18.

All this vaccine news is pretty exciting, right? So when do you get your vaccination? That depends. You should know that the CDC Advisory Committee for Immunization Practices is working now on a plan for prioritizing vaccine recipients. You should also know this committee is composed of experts who do not work for the companies producing the vaccines and who also do not work for the federal government in any capacity; that means they have no ax to grind here other than the science. The likelihood these recommendations are anything other than fact-based is vanishingly small. The group met again today and likely finalized most of their recommendations; but vaccines will be allotted to states, presumably by population, not by the size of the outbreak in the state. It is states who will ultimately decide whether to follow those recommendations. Most folks anticipate states will follow them, but there is no assurance they will. Supposing your state does, if you’re a health care worker (21 million people) or a resident in a long-term care facility (3 million people), you’re going to be in the first group of those immunized. We’re pretty sure that’s going to more than use up whatever vaccine supplies may be available this year. After that, the next group is likely to be essential workers (87 million). That will take up most of the available supply through March or later. After that comes people with high-risk medical conditions (100 million) and those 65 and over (53 million). Now, recognizing there is some overlap among these groups and some number of folks are going to refuse vaccine, you’re probably still going to be waiting a while. It also helps to realize there are a few other vaccines nearing the approval phase, and as those come on the market, that will ease the crunch on supplies. No one thinks this will happen fast, but the steps up until now have happened faster than anyone could have predicted, and so we’re in better shape with respect to vaccination than we had any reason to expect back when this thing started.

Something that worries vaccinologists a bit is the side effects of the vaccine—not because they’re expected to be dangerous or even particularly awful, but because people might misinterpret what they’re experiencing. Not everyone experiences side effects, but when they do, it’s generally a signal their body is reacting as expected to the vaccine—that is, it’s working. The problems is these side effects are frequently much like a mild case of Covid-19—aches and feeling ill; there is concern people will think they’ve gotten the infection and no longer need the vaccine so that they don’t bother to come back for that second dose of vaccine. This would be a big issue, so there’s been a fair amount of conversation about educating people as the vaccine rolls out. In addition to the logistics we’ve already discussed, there’s a whole lot of planning needed to pull off a vaccination effort as massive as this one’s likely to be.

Ayleen and Ryan Apathy are both nurses at Mercy General Hospital in South Florida and have been working through this pandemic—she in labor and delivery and he in a Covid-19 unit. Then, on July 29, while they were spending time with their two children at Ryan’s mother’s home, they received a call: Their house was on fire. By the time the fire was out, their home was gutted, the interior destroyed. Their dog

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and the children's hamster died in the fire. The family ended up staying with a family member while they sorted their lives out, and a coworker set up a GoFundMe page.

This is where 16-year-old Steven Ferreiro came in. He said he felt called to action. "I had to do something. The Apathys, they're saving lives in the community. I couldn't imagine what they've been dealing with." So Ferreiro did what any 16-year-old would do: He put his nonprofit organization to work on the problem. At least, I assume that's what the average 16-year-old with a nonprofit would do; I don't actually know any kids this age with their own nonprofit—I guess I don't run in the right crowd. Ferreiro started his organization, Helping Others and Giving Hope, just over a year ago to "support and assist many going through difficult times throughout the communities," according to its website; and he decided this was the sort of family they should be helping. He went to work talking to his corporate partners (yep, this kid has corporate partners too), and a real estate company stepped up in a pretty big way.

So, when the Apathy family went to be shown an apartment in a brand new building with a view to renting it while they came up with a more permanent housing solution, they were surprised to be met there by this kid who explained to them that the first three months' rent on the new two-bedroom apartment they were standing in is covered—and that he has secured financial commitments for a further three months if needed until they can get on their feet. Just like that.

Ryan Apathy explained he's been caring for Covid-19 patients for months and it's been a struggle to deal with, even before his family found themselves without a home, with all of their possessions destroyed, and having lost their pets. He choked up a bit describing the situation; then he explained, "That apartment was the first place we planned on looking at. We thought they were just showing us the apartment and then we saw the cameras and all these people coming in. It was very exciting."

Ayleen Apathy adds, "This is such a huge weight off our shoulders and we can just relax and try to get back to normal for these guys." I'm going to guess, when you feel like you're falling, it must be wonderful to realize an entire community is there to catch you.

Ferreiro said, "It meant the world to me to be able to give them a new place to stay. We are so grateful we were able to do this today and we are glad they can now call that place a home."

The world is full of good people. Let's try to be them.

And keep yourself healthy. We'll talk again.



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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	Nov. 28	Nov.29	Nov. 30	Dec. 01	Dec. 2
Minnesota	282,916	289,303	295,001	304,023	306,603	318,763	322,312
Nebraska	117,682	120,076	124,066	125,323	126,466	128,407	130,194
Montana	57,504	58,565	59,796	60,845	61,801	62,198	63,205
Colorado	206,439	210,630	220,953	225,283	228,772	232,905	237,310
Wyoming	25,975	26,677	27,597	27,737	28,252	29,053	29,389
North Dakota	74,401	75,478	77,232	77,935	78,658	79,252	79,655
South Dakota	74,859	76,142	78,280	79,099	79,900	80,464	80,912
United States	12,597,333	12,780,410	13,092,661	13,247,386	13,385,494	13,545,793	13,726,306
US Deaths	259,962	262,282	264,866	266,074	266,887	268,103	270,691
Minnesota	+6,416	+6,387	+5,698	+9,022	+2,580	+12,160	+3,549
Nebraska	+1,761	+2,294	+2,990	+1,257	+1,143	+1,941	+1,787
Montana	+1,123	+1,061	+1,231	+1,049	+956	+397	+1,007
Colorado	+4,150	+4,191	+10,323	+4,330	3,489	+4,133	+4,405
Wyoming	+415	+702	+920	+140	+515	+801	+336
North Dakota	+1,004	+1,077	+1,754	+703	+723	+594	+403
South Dakota	+1,011	+1,283	+2,138	+819	+801	+564	+448
United States	+176,117	+183,077	+312,251	+154,725	+138,108	+160,299	+180,513
US Deaths	+2,255	+2,320	+2,584	+1,208	+813	+1,216	+2,588

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## December 1st COVID-19 UPDATE

### Groton Daily Independent from State Health Lab Reports

There were two deaths in South Dakota. They were 70 and older with one in Minnehaha County and one in Pennington County.

Very low positive cases in South Dakota with just 448 cases while those that recovered numbered 3,542. The active cases in South Dakota lowered to 3096. Today's positivity rate in South Dakota was 8 percent while in Brown County it was 4.2 percent.

Glacial Lakes hospital beds being occupied by COVID-19 patients as well as Minnehaha and Pennington counties: Walworth: 4 (-1) Occupied Beds.; Potter: 2 (-1) Occupied Beds; Hughes: 13 (+1) Occupied Beds, 3 (-0) ICU Beds, 2 (-0) Ventilation; Hand: 0 (-0) Occupied Beds; Faulk: 1 (-0) Occupied Beds; Edmunds: 3 (-1) Occupied Bed; McPherson: 0 (-0) Occupied Bed; Brown: 31 (-1) Occupied Beds, 4 (-2) ICU, 0 (-0) Ventilation; Spink: 2 (+1) Occupied Beds; Day: 3 (+0) Occupied Beds; Marshall: 0 (-2) Occupied Beds; Grant: 2 (+0) Occupied Beds; Codington: 11 (+1) Occupied Beds, 5 (+3) ICU, 2 (+2) Ventilation; None (some counties have no hospitals): Clark, Hyde, Stanley, Sully, Campbell, Roberts; Minnehaha: 274 (-3) Occupied Beds, 65 (-1) ICU, 44 (+0) Ventilation; Pennington: 79 (+1) Occupied Beds, 14 (+0) ICU, 10 (+0) Ventilation.

Brown County:  
Total Positive: +16 (3657) Positivity Rate: 4.2%  
Total Tests: +376 (28,335)  
Total Individuals Tested: +147 (13,956)  
Recovered: +167 (3,050)  
Active Cases: -151 (586)  
Ever Hospitalized: +5 (219)  
Deaths: +0 (21)  
Percent Recovered: 83.4%  
Hospital Reports:  
Avera St. Luke's: Covid-19 Occupied 26 (+2); ICU 3 (+0), Ventilation 0 (0).  
Sanford Aberdeen: Covid-19 Occupied 5 (-3); ICU 1 (-2), Ventilation 0 (-0)  
Sanford Webster: Covid-19 Occupied 3 (+0).  
Marshall County Healthcare: Covid-19 Occupied: 0 (-2).

South Dakota:  
Positive: +448 (80,912 total) Positivity Rate: 8.0%  
Total Tests: 5,635 (615,534 total)  
Total Individuals Tested: 1681 (330,533)  
Hospitalized: +70 (4572 total). 547 currently hospitalized +1)  
Deaths: +3 (948 total)  
Recovered: +3542 (65,876 total)  
Active Cases: -3096 (14,088)  
Percent Recovered: 81.4%  
Total COVID-19 Occupied Beds: 547 (+1), Black Hills Region 116 (+7), Glacial Lakes Region 72 (-3) Sioux Empire Region 285 (-6), South Central Plains 74 (+3).

ICU Units: Total 106 (+6), BH 15 (-0), GL 12 (+1), SE 65 (-1), SCP 14 (+6).  
Ventilation: Total 59 (+2), BH 10 (+0), GL 4 (+2), SE 44 (+0), SCP 1 (-0).  
Staffed Hospital Bed Capacity: 20% Covid, 41% Non-Covid, 39% Available  
ICU Bed Capacity: 53% Covid, 30% non-covid, 17% available.  
Staffed Adult + Pediatric ICU Bed Capacity: 63% Occupied, 37% Available  
Ventilator Capacity: 14% Covid, 16% Non-Covid, 70% Available

Beadle (29) +14 positive, +91 recovered (389 active cases)  
Brookings (16) +13 positive, +103 recovered (381 active cases)  
Brown (21): +16 positive, +167 recovered (586 active cases)  
Clark (1): +1 positive, +8 recovered (55 active cases)  
Clay (10): +4 positive, +66 recovered (218 active cases)  
Codington (50): +14 positive, +108 recovered (413 active cases)  
Davison (36): +4 positive, +151 recovered (495 active cases)  
Day (10): +1 positive, +22 recovered (106 active cases)  
Edmunds (2): +6 positive, +8 recovered (47 active cases)

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Faulk (10): +0 positive, +4 recovered (22 active cases)  
 Grant (12): +3 positive, +25 recovered (135 active cases)  
 Hanson (2): +2 positive, +13 recovered (75 active cases)  
 Hughes (18): +2 positive, +53 recovered (295 active cases)  
 Lawrence (22): +16 positive, +89 recovered (350 active cases)  
 Lincoln (51): +29 positive, +261 recovered (850 active cases)  
 Marshall (3): +8 positive, +7 recovered (62 active cases)  
 McCook (15): +0 positive, +29 recovered (113 active cases)  
 McPherson (1): +1 positive, +3 recovery (45 active case)  
 Minnehaha (184): +132 positive, +917 recovered (3273 active cases)  
 Pennington (78): +63 positive, +356 recovered (1625 active cases)  
 Potter (1): +0 positive, +11 recovered (64 active cases)  
 Roberts (19): +6 positive, +33 recovered (143 active cases)  
 Spink (14): +2 positive, +18 recovered (108 active cases)  
 Walworth (12): +4 positive, +22 recovered (111 active cases)

## NORTH DAKOTA

COVID-19 Daily Report, Dec. 1:

- 12.4% rolling 14-day positivity
- 409 new positives
- 3,059 susceptible test encounters
- 319 currently hospitalized (-12)
- 5,686 active cases (-791)
- 954 total deaths (+27)

## Yesterday

## Today

Global Cases  
**63,347,492**

Global Cases  
**63,957,998**

13,545,793 US  
 9,462,809 India  
 6,335,878 Brazil  
 2,302,062 Russia  
 2,275,016 France  
 1,648,187 Spain  
 1,633,733 United Kingdom  
 1,601,554 Italy  
 1,424,533 Argentina  
 1,316,806 Colombia  
 1,113,543 Mexico  
 1,072,412 Germany  
 999,924 Poland  
 975,951 Iran

13,726,306 US  
 9,499,413 India  
 6,386,787 Brazil  
 2,327,105 Russia  
 2,275,429 France  
 1,656,444 Spain  
 1,647,230 United Kingdom  
 1,620,901 Italy  
 1,432,570 Argentina  
 1,324,792 Colombia  
 1,122,362 Mexico  
 1,094,678 Germany  
 1,013,747 Poland  
 975,951 Iran

Global Deaths  
**1,470,456**

Global Deaths  
**1,482,451**

268,103 deaths US  
 173,120 deaths Brazil  
 137,621 deaths India  
 105,940 deaths Mexico  
 58,545 deaths United Kingdom  
 55,576 deaths Italy  
 52,819 deaths France  
 48,628 deaths Iran

270,691 deaths US  
 173,817 deaths Brazil  
 138,122 deaths India  
 106,765 deaths Mexico  
 59,148 deaths United Kingdom  
 56,361 deaths Italy  
 52,821 deaths France  
 48,628 deaths Iran

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County	Positive Cases	Recovered Cases	Negative Persons	Deceased	Community Spread	% RT-PCR Test Positivity Rate (Weekly)
Aurora	360	282	735	5	Substantial	36.54%
Beadle	2292	1874	4680	29	Substantial	21.19%
Bennett	314	266	1038	5	Substantial	7.14%
Bon Homme	1366	1233	1747	14	Substantial	23.85%
Brookings	2461	2064	8761	16	Substantial	9.32%
Brown	3657	3050	10299	21	Substantial	25.91%
Brule	570	490	1599	5	Substantial	27.07%
Buffalo	378	333	822	8	Substantial	21.62%
Butte	730	617	2595	13	Substantial	16.44%
Campbell	103	93	189	1	Moderate	16.67%
Charles Mix	892	626	3361	5	Substantial	19.08%
Clark	254	198	775	1	Substantial	20.00%
Clay	1377	1149	4156	10	Substantial	16.12%
Codington	2700	2237	7555	50	Substantial	25.30%
Corson	389	323	852	5	Substantial	41.18%
Custer	544	441	2180	7	Substantial	13.17%
Davison	2409	1878	5286	36	Substantial	26.75%
Day	382	266	1407	10	Substantial	35.19%
Deuel	311	248	910	2	Substantial	36.36%
Dewey	885	598	3363	3	Substantial	29.55%
Douglas	295	241	754	5	Substantial	17.46%
Edmunds	258	209	850	2	Substantial	11.88%
Fall River	365	302	2109	10	Substantial	9.04%
Faulk	280	248	557	10	Moderate	18.18%
Grant	623	476	1771	12	Substantial	30.32%
Gregory	440	356	977	20	Substantial	23.76%
Haakon	150	129	460	3	Substantial	10.99%
Hamlin	484	345	1378	4	Substantial	22.67%
Hand	283	237	660	1	Substantial	30.00%
Hanson	266	189	533	2	Substantial	54.32%
Harding	75	63	133	0	Moderate	38.89%
Hughes	1657	1346	4932	18	Substantial	20.40%
Hutchinson	576	421	1845	9	Substantial	39.17%

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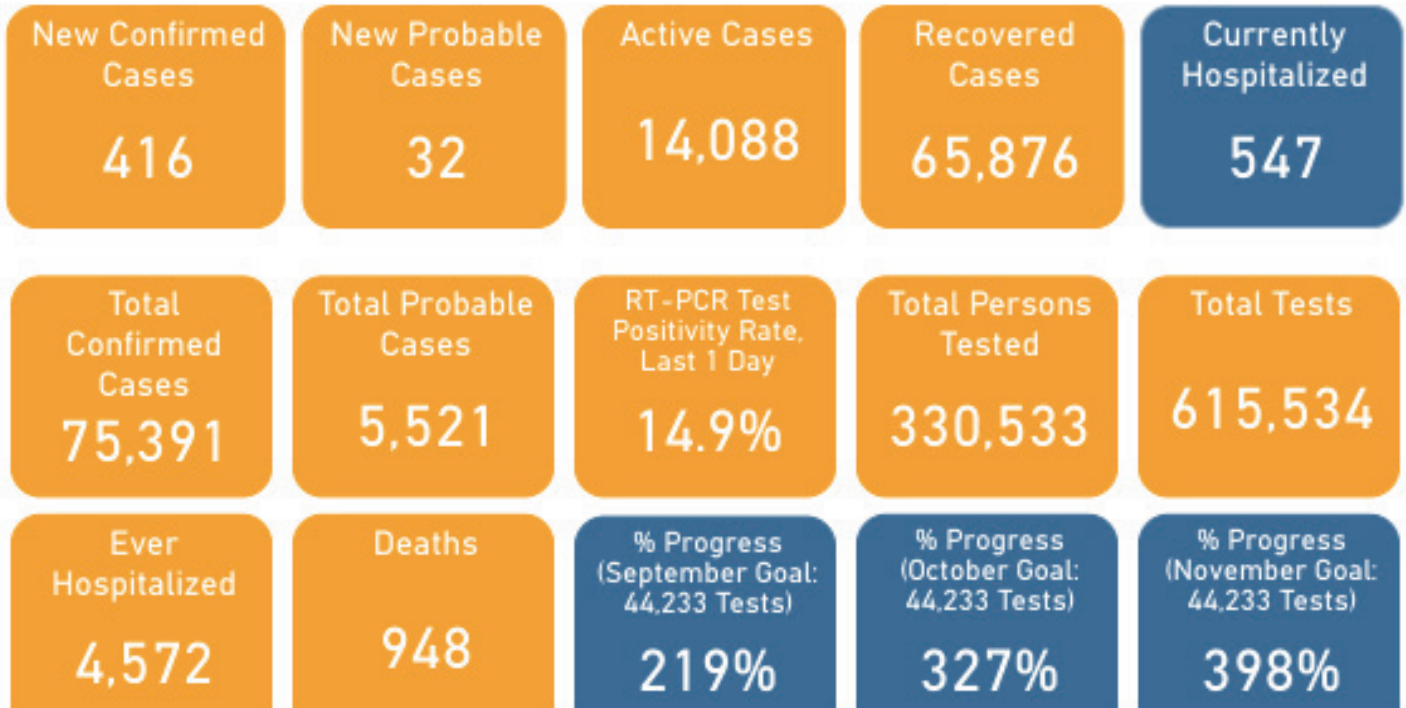
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Hyde	125	99	338	0	Substantial	50.00%
Jackson	205	166	827	8	Substantial	23.19%
Jerauld	237	198	446	13	Substantial	17.86%
Jones	62	52	153	0	Moderate	10.00%
Kingsbury	442	352	1266	10	Substantial	15.22%
Lake	867	700	2547	10	Substantial	16.60%
Lawrence	2051	1679	7036	22	Substantial	14.10%
Lincoln	5453	4552	15656	51	Substantial	23.82%
Lyman	458	382	1569	8	Substantial	24.76%
Marshall	191	126	908	3	Substantial	31.58%
McCook	597	469	1280	15	Substantial	28.18%
McPherson	151	105	469	1	Substantial	11.27%
Meade	1763	1431	6131	13	Substantial	15.08%
Mellette	180	148	611	1	Substantial	15.79%
Miner	189	160	466	5	Moderate	8.33%
Minnehaha	20652	17195	61326	184	Substantial	23.48%
Moody	420	330	1495	10	Substantial	25.22%
Oglala Lakota	1649	1340	5964	23	Substantial	22.18%
Pennington	8733	7030	30728	78	Substantial	15.67%
Perkins	205	125	566	2	Substantial	38.67%
Potter	271	206	658	1	Substantial	17.89%
Roberts	720	558	3595	19	Substantial	20.68%
Sanborn	271	193	557	1	Substantial	22.39%
Spink	562	438	1750	14	Substantial	25.32%
Stanley	229	191	680	0	Substantial	21.74%
Sully	91	78	204	3	Moderate	15.00%
Todd	963	811	3590	12	Substantial	24.64%
Tripp	514	406	1241	4	Substantial	34.78%
Turner	788	656	2130	42	Substantial	15.09%
Union	1259	1029	4847	25	Substantial	19.27%
Walworth	489	366	1510	12	Substantial	28.26%
Yankton	1792	1348	7555	9	Substantial	18.19%
Ziebach	207	129	584	7	Substantial	42.31%
Unassigned	0	0	1669	0		

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## South Dakota



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

Age Range	# of Cases	# of Deaths
0-9 years	2796	0
10-19 years	8800	0
20-29 years	15245	2
30-39 years	13519	9
40-49 years	11584	17
50-59 years	11526	57
60-69 years	9083	126
70-79 years	4690	205
80+ years	3669	532

### SEX OF SOUTH DAKOTA COVID-19 CASES

Sex	# of Cases	# of Deaths
Female	42250	466
Male	38662	482

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## Brown County

New Confirmed Cases

16

New Probable Cases

0

Active Cases

586

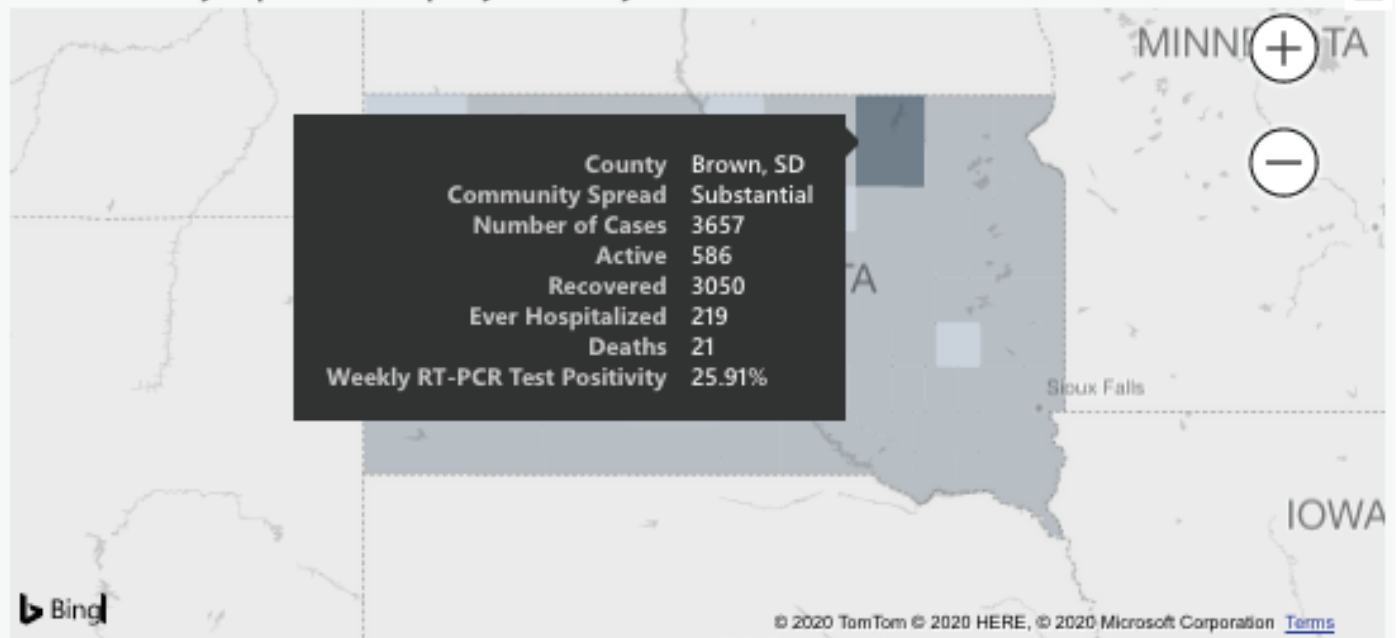
Recovered Cases

3,050

Currently Hospitalized

547

### Community Spread Map by County of Residence



Community Spread ● Moderate ● Substantial

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

Total Confirmed Cases

3,538

Total Probable Cases

119

RT-PCR Test Positivity Rate, Last 1 Day

16.0%

Total Persons Tested

13,956

Total Tests

28,335

Ever Hospitalized

219

Deaths

21

% Progress (September Goal: 44,233 Tests)

8%

% Progress (October Goal: 44,233 Tests)

327%

% Progress (November Goal: 44,233 Tests)

398%

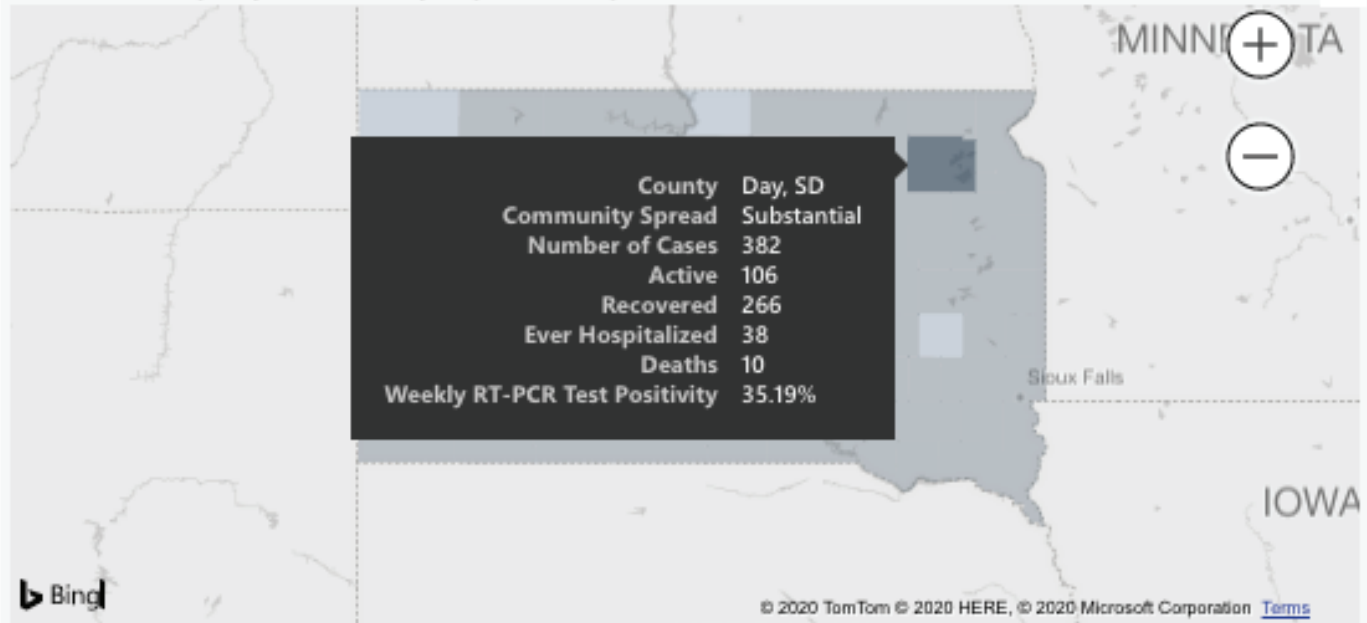
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## Day County

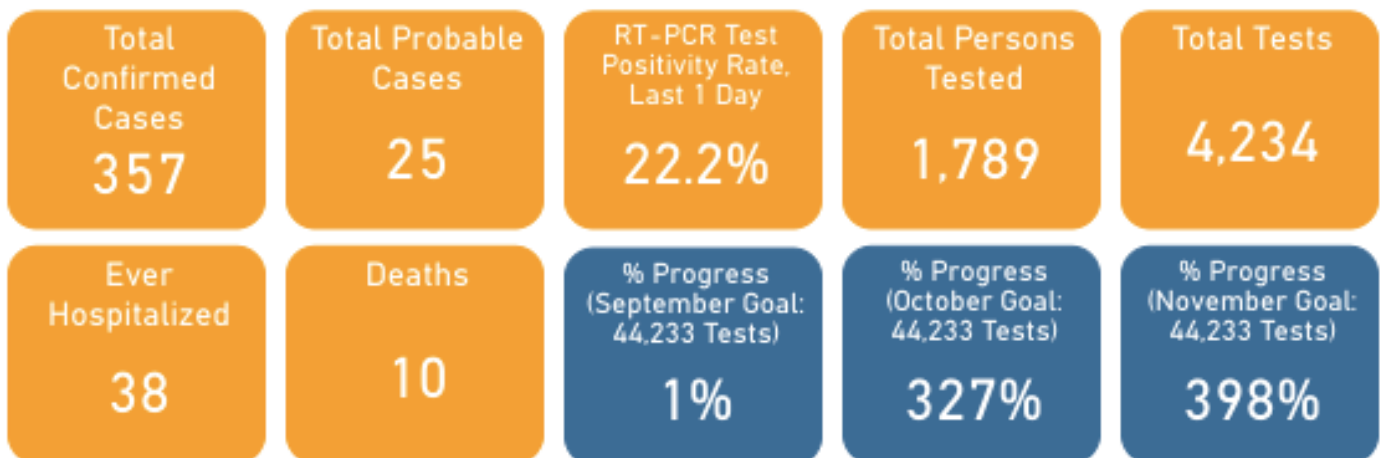


Community Spread Map by County of Residence



Community Spread ● Moderate ● Substantial

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

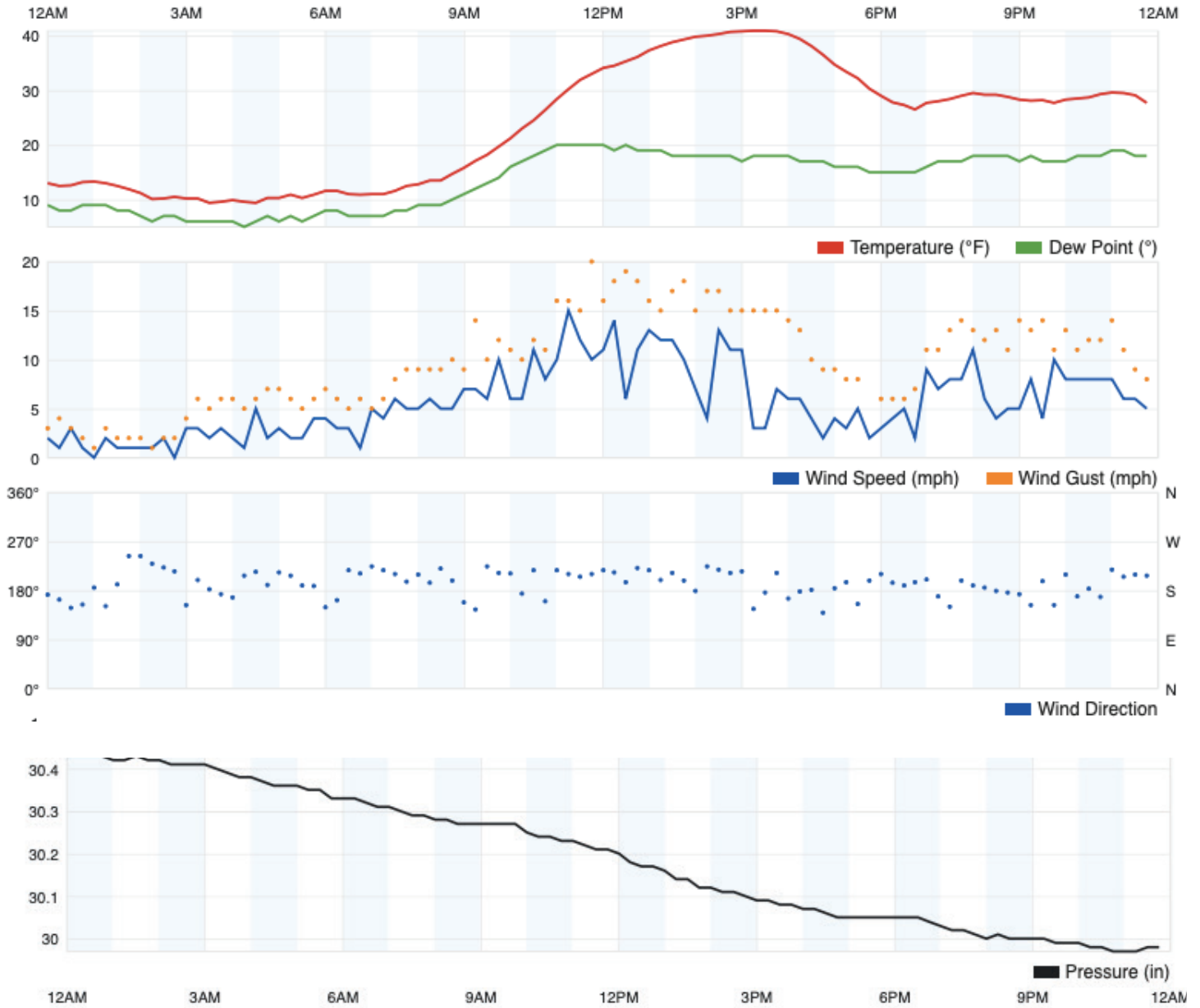




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## Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Today



Decreasing  
Clouds

High: 38 °F

Tonight



Mostly Clear

Low: 17 °F

Thursday



Sunny

High: 47 °F

Thursday  
Night



Mostly Clear

Low: 22 °F

Friday



Sunny


High: 46 °F

**Today**  
*Mostly cloudy, patchy drizzle/freezing drizzle Missouri valley this morning.*  
*Highs 34-42°*

**Thursday**  
*Mostly sunny and milder.*  
*Highs 38-52°*

**Friday**  
*Mostly sunny and continued mild.*  
*Highs 38-56°*

Graphic Created 12/2/2020 3:00 AM  
National Weather Service Aberdeen, SD



Patchy drizzle and freezing drizzle are expected over the Missouri valley this morning. Otherwise, it should be dry for the rest of the work week. Beware of slick roads and walkways over the central part of the state this morning. #sdwx #mnwx

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## Today in Weather History

December 2, 1978: A low-pressure system moved northeast from Kansas, causing snow to fall over southern Minnesota south of a line from Alexandria to Duluth on the 2nd and 3rd, with the heaviest snow falling from west-central and southwest Minnesota to west-central Wisconsin. Snow depths of six inches or more fell in southwestern Minnesota, with 10 inches or more at Marshall, MN. Winds averaged near 20 mph, and temperatures ranged from 5 to 15 degrees above zero while the snow fell, but the snow did not cause extensive problems for the area. Wheaton had 2 inches, Artichoke Lake and Browns Valley had 3 inches.

December 2, 1984: Snow fell in the central and northeast parts of South Dakota from the late afternoon of the 1st to the morning of the 2nd, with amounts ranging from 3 to 10 inches. The most substantial amounts were in the northeast part of the state, with Day County reporting 8 to 10 inches. Five inches of snow fell at Clear Lake; six inches fell at Waubay, Clark, Miller, and 12 miles southwest of Harrold with 7 inches at Redfield.

1896: Early season snow and ice storm struck the southeastern U.S. Eleven inches of snow fell at Charlotte, NC, and 6 inches at Atlanta, GA.

1950: A rare tornado event occurred when a storm system produces three tornadoes in Illinois and one in Arkansas. The three tornadoes in Illinois are relatively rare in December, with only three days with tornadoes from 1835 to 1950. The other years are 1876 and 1949.

1959: Between November 19 and December 2, an estimated 20 inches of rain fell near Frejus on the French Riviera. The rain caused the Malpasset Dam to collapse, which sent a 130-foot high wall of water into the towns of Malpasset and Bozon. The wall of water 10 feet tall reached Frejus, flooding the western half of the city. The dam breach killed 423 people and caused \$68 million in damages.

1968: The "Sacramento," a 250-foot fishing barge and former ferry between San Francisco and Oakland, succumb to a winter storm off Redondo Beach.

1925 - A late season hurricane caused extensive damage across the Florida peninsula, then moved off the Georgia coast crossing Cape Hatteras as a tropical storm. The storm produced whole gales along the Middle Atlantic and Southern New England coast. Winds gusted to 60 mph at Block Island RI, and reached 64 mph at Atlantic City NJ. (David Ludlum)

1970 - A tornado, 400 yards in width, touched down about one mile below the summit of Timpanogos Divide. Trees up to 18 inches in diameter were snapped, and some of the 38 inch snow cover was carried 1000 feet above the ground as the tornado traveled one mile. (The Weather Channel)

1982 - A tornado destroyed a home four miles south of Eastwood MO. The owners were not injured in that tornado, but ironically one was killed Christmas Eve when another tornado hit the replacement mobile home on the same site. (The Weather Channel)

1987 - A powerful storm over the Gulf of Alaska continued to produced high winds and heavy rain along the northern and central Pacific coast. Winds gusted to 80 mph south of Port Orford OR, Stevens Pass WA was blanketed with sixteen inches of snow, and Blue Canyon CA was soaked with 1.63 inches of rain. (Storm Data) (The National Weather Summary)

1988 - Squalls in the Great Lakes Region produced ten inches of snow at Union City, PA. Gale force winds gusted to 55 mph at Buffalo NY. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 - Squalls produced heavy snow in the Great Lakes Region. Totals in Upper Michigan ranged up to 20 inches at Ironwood. Heavy snow and high winds caused 150 auto accidents in Michigan, resulting in sixteen deaths and 22 injuries. Strong northwesterly winds gusted to 73 mph at Johnstown PA, and Lowville PA received 20 inches of snow in 36 hours. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

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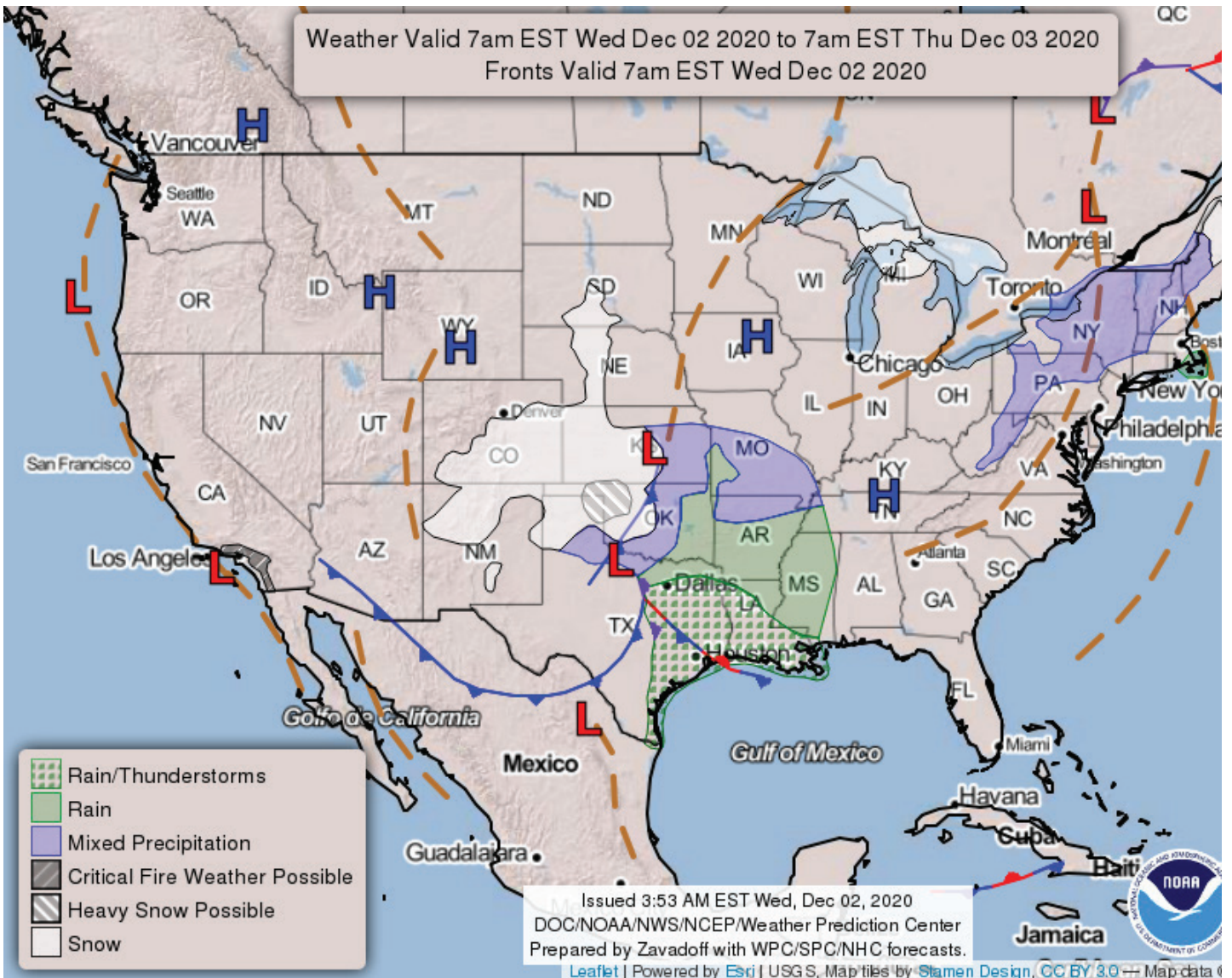
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## Yesterday's Groton Weather

**High Temp: 40 °F at 3:14 PM**  
**Low Temp: 18 °F at 7:42 AM**  
**Wind: 12 mph at 10:26 AM**  
**Precip: .00**

## Today's Info

**Record High: 56° in 2012**  
**Record Low: -20° in 1895, 1896**  
**Average High: 30°F**  
**Average Low: 11°F**  
**Average Precip in Dec.: 0.02**  
**Precip to date in Dec.: 0.00**  
**Average Precip to date: 21.22**  
**Precip Year to Date: 16.52**  
**Sunset Tonight: 4:52 p.m.**  
**Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:56 a.m.**



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## WHAT'S IN A NAME?

Initially, He was named Jesus. Now we also call Him Christ.

Jesus was the name given to Him when He was born. It means the same as the Jewish name, Joshua, which literally means God is salvation! So, the message that God sent to Joseph through His angels was, "You shall call Him 'God is salvation' for He shall save His people from their sins." That name, Jesus, tells us all that we need to know because it reveals God's plan and purpose: God will save humanity through His only begotten Son.

Christ is more than a name. It is a title. It comes from the Greek word Christos, meaning "anointed" or "anointed one." Its meaning is the same as the Hebrew word Messiah. John quoted Andrew in a conversation that he had with his brother Peter. Said Andrew, "We have found the Messiah (which translated means Christ)." So the terms Messiah and Christ are titles given to Jesus that assure us that He is the anointed one. Jesus is the One whom God anointed to fulfill the promises and prophecies of the Old Testament.

The name Jesus proves that He was human, lived life on our level and faced the same issues and problems that we face. But the title Christ assures us that this One, once called Jesus, can lift us up to God's level because He is the One whom God anointed to be our Savior.

Prayer: We thank You, Lord, for what You did for us through Your Son, our Savior. We rejoice in Your love, mercy and grace that brought our salvation through Him. In Jesus' Name, Amen. Scripture For Today: John 1:41 He first found his own brother Simon, and said to him, "We have found the Messiah" (which is translated, the Christ).

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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 Tuesday:

Mega Millions

07-33-53-61-65, Mega Ball: 14, Megaplier: 2

(seven, thirty-three, fifty-three, sixty-one, sixty-five; Mega Ball: fourteen; Megaplier: two)

Estimated jackpot: \$229 million

Powerball

Estimated jackpot: \$231 million

### Allen leads Nebraska past South Dakota 76-69

LINCOLN, Neb. (AP) — Teddy Allen scored 23 points and Nebraska turned back South Dakota 76-69 on Tuesday night.

Allen made two free throws to start a 9-0 burst that put Nebraska's lead at 57-43 midway through the second half. A few minutes later, he had a three-point play and a jumper that pushed the difference to 18 with six minutes to go.

Trey McGowens added 13 points for the Cornhuskers (3-1).

The teams were tied with 6:24 to go in the first half when Lat Mayen, who finished with 12 rebounds, hit a 3-pointer to put Nebraska on top for good. The lead was 36-29 at the break.

Stanley Umude scored nine-straight points early in the second half to keep the Coyotes close.

A.J. Plitzuweit scored 24 points for South Dakota (0-3) and Umde had 23 points 11 rebounds and five assists.

More AP college basketball: <https://apnews.com/hub/college-basketball> and [https://twitter.com/AP\\_Top25](https://twitter.com/AP_Top25)

### South Dakota readies for 7,800 vaccine doses in 2 weeks

By STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — South Dakota expects to receive nearly 8,000 COVID-19 vaccinations as soon as Dec. 15, health officials said during a Tuesday conference call with the state's health care providers.

The prospect of vaccines being just weeks away offered a blip of good news in the state's coronavirus crisis, but officials from the Department of Health said they don't yet know when more doses will arrive. While the roll-out of COVID-19 vaccines has been accomplished in record time, they likely will not come soon enough to prevent a winter of virus cases.

Health officials hope to see medical providers begin administering the 7,800 doses of the vaccine, manufactured by Pfizer Inc., the day after the shipment is received. Medical workers are expected to be at the top of the list to receive vaccines, with the elderly and other vulnerable populations soon to follow.

"We'll have vaccine on the ground before you know it," said Tim Heath, the immunization program coordinator.

The initial shipment will be enough to begin vaccinations, which require two doses spread over three weeks, for about 1% of the state's roughly 885,000 people. But health officials have been preparing health care providers to administer vaccines en masse once they are in plentiful supply.

Pfizer Inc. is applying for emergency use authorization with the Food and Drug Administration. The pharmaceutical company, along with its German partner BioNTech, have said a large, ongoing study shows the vaccine to be 95% effective at preventing mild to severe COVID-19 disease.

South Dakota's largest hospital systems have said they expect it to take several months before vaccines

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are available to the general public. In the meantime, they are doing everything they can to be ready for their arrival, even performing a dry-run of receiving a vaccine shipment.

Heath said that Sanford Health is expected to receive an empty cooler this week like the ones that will carry the vaccine. The vaccine must be stored at ultra-cool temperatures, which has added another logistical challenge.

Meanwhile, the Department of Health reported that active coronavirus cases in the state have declined to 14,088. It also reported one of the lowest numbers of new cases, with 448 people testing positive. But health officials reported two more COVID-19 deaths, bringing the tally to 948 deaths during the pandemic.

The average number of cases reported daily over the last week has decreased to 945, but the state still ranked third in the country in new cases per capita in the last two weeks, according to Johns Hopkins researchers. One in every 133 people in South Dakota tested positive in the past week.

Meanwhile, the Department of Health reported it has hired a former press secretary from President Donald Trump's reelection campaign to serve as its communications director.

The health department's former spokesman, Derrick Haskins, has handled media relations throughout the pandemic, but resigned on Nov. 6. He will be replaced by Daniel Bucheli, who is slated to begin the role on Dec. 9.

The health department said Bucheli was hired after two rounds of interviews. KELO-TV first reported his hiring.

## Bond set at \$100,000 for man charged in fatal shooting

RAPID CITY, S.D. (AP) — A judge has set bond at \$100,000 cash for a man charged with fatally shooting his girlfriend's teenage son at a home near Rapid City.

Prosecutors say 43-year-old Jason Sharp is charged with second-degree murder in the Nov. 24 shooting of 19-year-old Ocean Sun Eberlein at a mobile home park where Sharp lives.

Magistrate Judge Marya Tellinghuisen set Sharp's bond during an initial appearance on Monday.

A probable cause affidavit signed by an investigator with the Pennington County Sheriff's Office says dispatchers received a call that night from a woman who could be heard screaming "you shot my son!"

A second caller told a dispatcher that she saw Eberlein and Sharp fighting in a driveway and heard a gunshot after they were out of her view.

Deputies arrived to find Eberlein unresponsive with a gunshot wound. He was pronounced dead at a hospital, the Rapid City Journal reported.

The victim's mother told deputies that that Eberlein and Sharp did not have a good relationship and had been squabbling with each other that day.

Sharp was taken to the Public Safety Building where he agreed to be interviewed and said he was regretful of his actions, according to the affidavit.

He said he remembered a physical fight and getting up from the ground before telling Eberlein the fight was over. Sharp said Eberlein was heading toward him so he retrieved his rifle and fired two rounds towards Eberlein.

## Midwest Economy: November state-by-state glance

OMAHA, Neb. (AP) — The Institute for Supply Management, formerly the Purchasing Management Association, began formally surveying its membership in 1931 to gauge business conditions.

The Creighton Economic Forecasting Group uses the same methodology as the national survey to consult supply managers and business leaders. Creighton University economics professor Ernie Goss oversees the report.

The overall index ranges between 0 and 100. Growth neutral is 50, and a figure greater than 50 indicates growth in that factor over the next three to six months. A figure below 50 indicates decline.

Here are the state-by-state results for November:

Arkansas: The overall index for Arkansas fell to 62.2 from October's 64.4. Components from the November



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survey were: new orders at 73.7, production or sales at 73.9, delivery lead time at 52.3, inventories at 48.9, and employment at 62.3. "Recent surveys indicate that durable goods producers are expanding at a solid pace while nondurable goods manufacturers continue to experience flat business conditions," Goss said.

Iowa: Iowa's overall index remained above growth-neutral but declined to 74.6 from 78.7 in October. Components of the overall index were: new orders at 77.8, production or sales at 79.2, delivery lead time at 78.7, employment at 62.5, and inventories at 87.2. "Recent surveys indicate that both durable and nondurable goods manufacturers are expanding at a solid pace," Goss said.

Kansas: The Kansas overall index decreased to 60.1 from 68.7 in October. Components were: new orders at 73.3, production or sales at 81.3, delivery lead time at 50.9, employment at 50.7, and inventories at 45.2. "Recent surveys indicate that both durable and nondurable goods producers are experiencing slow growth," Goss said.

Minnesota: The overall index for Minnesota declined to 73.2 from 82.7 in October. Components were: new orders at 79.5, production or sales at 80.9, delivery lead time at 72.5, inventories at 66.2, and employment at 66.9. "Recent surveys indicate that both durable and nondurable goods manufacturers are expanding at a solid pace," Goss said.

Missouri: The overall index for Missouri dropped to 75.6 from October's 78.0. Components were: new orders at 82.6, production or sales at 78.2, delivery lead time at 78.8, inventories at 82.6, and employment at 61.2. "Recent surveys indicate that durable goods manufacturers continue to expand at a solid pace, and nondurable goods producers are experiencing slow to no growth," Goss said.

Nebraska: Nebraska's overall index fell to 66.8 from 71.4 in October. Components of the index were: new orders at 75.6, production or sales at 76.2, delivery lead time at 58.9, inventories at 66.7, and employment at 56.7. "Recent surveys indicate that both durable and nondurable goods manufacturers are expanding at a solid pace," Goss said.

North Dakota: The overall index for North Dakota slumped to 57.2 from 59.0 in October. Components were: new orders at 73.2, production or sales at 73.3, delivery lead time at 50.5, employment at 50.4, and inventories at 38.9. "Recent surveys indicate that durable goods manufacturers and nondurable goods producers continue to experience slow to no growth," Goss said.

Oklahoma: Oklahoma's overall index sank below growth-neutral in November, to 49.4 from October's strong 61.1. Components were: new orders at 70.7, production or sales at 70.2, delivery lead time at 41.7, inventories at 20.6, and employment at 43.8. "Recent surveys indicate that durable goods manufacturers are experiencing slow to no growth, while nondurable goods producers continue to experience solid growth," Goss said.

South Dakota: The overall index for South Dakota climbed to 71.7 from 71.2 in October. Components were: new orders at 77.0, production or sales at 77.9, delivery lead time at 63.7, inventories at 79.5, and employment at 60.3. "Recent surveys indicate that durable goods manufacturers are experiencing slow to no growth, while nondurable goods producers continue to experience solid growth," Goss said.

## Confidence in Midwest economic future plummets in survey

OMAHA, Neb. (AP) — A new monthly survey of business leaders in nine Midwest and Plains states suggests faltering confidence in the region's economy as a new surge of the coronavirus outbreak sweeps the country.

After climbing every month since bottoming out in April, the overall index of the Creighton University Mid-America Business Conditions survey fell to 69.0 in November from October's 70.2.

Any score above 50 on the survey's indexes suggests growth, while a score below 50 suggests recession.

The monthly survey results have mirrored national manufacturing survey results, which indicate the sector has been expanding at a steady pace since sinking to a post-2008 recession low in April, according to Creighton University economist Ernie Goss, who oversees the survey.

"Even so, current output in the regional and U.S. manufacturing sectors remains below pre-COVID-19 levels," Goss said.

Meanwhile, the survey's confidence index looking ahead six months plummeted 20 points to 50.0 this month from October's 70.4.

"A sharp upturn in COVID-19 infections, along with more economic lockdowns, weighted on November's economic outlook," Goss said.

The survey's employment index fell to 63.1 from 66.7 in October. More than half of manufacturers surveyed this month indicated they had hired back all COVID-19 furloughed workers, while nearly 30% reported rehiring a portion of furloughed workers. Nearly 18% reported no furloughs. About 6% expect to furlough additional workers, Goss said.

The monthly survey covers Arkansas, Iowa, Kansas, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, Oklahoma and South Dakota.

## UK authorizes Pfizer coronavirus vaccine for emergency use

By LAURAN NEERGAARD and DANICA KIRKA Associated Press

British officials authorized a COVID-19 vaccine for emergency use on Wednesday, greenlighting the world's first shot against the virus that's backed by rigorous science and taking a major step toward eventually ending the pandemic.

The go-ahead for the vaccine developed by American drugmaker Pfizer and Germany's BioNTech comes as the virus surges again in the United States and Europe, putting pressure on hospitals and morgues in some places and forcing new rounds of restrictions that have devastated economies.

The Medicines and Healthcare Products Regulatory Agency, which licenses drugs in the U.K., recommended the vaccine could be used after it reviewed the results of clinical trials that showed the vaccine was 95% effective overall — and that it also offered significant protection for older people, among those most at risk of dying from the disease. But the vaccine remains experimental while final testing is done.

"Help is on its way," British Health Secretary Matt Hancock told the BBC, adding that the situation would start to improve in the spring.

"We now have a vaccine. We're the first country in the world to have one formally clinically authorized but, between now and then, we've got to hold on, we've got to hold our resolve," he said.

Other countries aren't far behind: Regulators in the United States and the European Union also are vetting the Pfizer shot along with a similar vaccine made by competitor Moderna Inc. British regulators also are considering another shot made by AstraZeneca and Oxford University.

Hancock said Britain expects to begin receiving the first shipment of 800,000 doses "within days," and people will begin receiving shots as soon as the National Health Service gets the vaccine.

Doses everywhere are scarce, and initial supplies will be rationed until more is manufactured in the first several months of next year.

A government committee will release details of vaccination priorities later Wednesday, but Hancock said nursing home residents, people over 80, and healthcare workers and other care workers will be the first to receive the shot.

Pfizer said it would immediately begin shipping limited supplies to the U.K. — and has been gearing up for even wider distribution if given a similar nod by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration, a decision expected as early as next week.

Pfizer CEO Albert Bourla called the U.K. decision "a historic moment."

"We are focusing on moving with the same level of urgency to safely supply a high-quality vaccine around the world," Bourla said in a statement.

While the U.K. has ordered 40 million doses of the Pfizer vaccine, enough for 20 million people, it's not clear how many will arrive by year's end. Hancock said the U.K. expects to receive "millions of doses" by the end of this year, adding that the actual number will depend on how fast Pfizer can produce the vaccine.

One concern about the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine is that it must be stored and shipped at ultra-cold temperatures of around minus 70 degrees Celsius (minus 94 degrees Fahrenheit), adding to the challenge of distributing the vaccine around the world.

Pfizer says it has developed shipping containers that use dry ice to keep the vaccine cool. GPS-enabled sensors will allow the company to track each shipment and ensure they stay cold, the company says.

"Pfizer has vast experience and expertise in cold-chain shipping and has an established infrastructure to supply the vaccine worldwide, including distribution hubs that can store vaccine doses for up to six months," the company said in a statement.

The company also says it has agreed to work with other vaccine makers to ensure there is sufficient supply and a range of vaccines, "including those suitable for global access."

Every country has different rules for determining when an experimental vaccine is safe and effective enough to use. Intense political pressure to be the first to roll out a rigorously scientifically tested shot colored the race in the U.S. and Britain, even as researchers pledged to cut no corners. In contrast, China and Russia have offered different vaccinations to their citizens ahead of late-stage testing.

The shots made by U.S.-based Pfizer and its German partner BioNTech were tested in tens of thousands of people. And while that study isn't complete, early results suggest the vaccine is 95% effective at preventing mild to severe COVID-19 disease. The companies told regulators that of the first 170 infections detected in study volunteers, only eight were among people who'd received the actual vaccine and the rest had gotten a dummy shot.

"This is an extraordinarily strong protection," Dr. Ugur Sahin, BioNTech's CEO, recently told The Associated Press.

The companies also reported no serious side effects, although vaccine recipients may experience temporary pain and flu-like reactions immediately after injections.

Final testing must still be completed. Still to be determined is whether the Pfizer-BioNTech shots protect against people spreading the coronavirus without showing symptoms. Another question is how long protection lasts.

The vaccine also has been tested in only a small number of children, none younger than 12, and there's no information on its effects in pregnant women.

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

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

## Rage and hope fuel women's revolt over abortion in Poland

By VANESSA GERA Associated Press

WARSAW, Poland (AP) — Karolina Micula had used her bare chest in political protest once before.

When Poland's right-wing government first tried to restrict abortion rights, the actress and singer delivered an intense performance onstage in Wroclaw in 2017 that included her spreading paint in the national colors — white and red — onto her breasts and face, ending with a fist raised high.

When the authorities tried again to impose a near-total ban on abortion in October this year, Micula, along with a friend, again stripped to her waist and stood on top of a car at a busy Warsaw intersection during a protest, holding a flare high and giving the middle finger.

"A woman's body is a place of political battle," the 32-year-old said from her Warsaw apartment in an interview. "My gesture meant that I will do with my body whatever I want to do with it. If I want to stand naked in front of people, I will do it, because it's my choice."

Micula's friend had just come from physiotherapy following a double mastectomy and wanted to encourage other protesters by showing her tattooed chest. Theirs is among many taboo-breaking acts by furious women in Poland in the past weeks.

The upheaval began when Poland's constitutional court, packed with loyalists of the conservative ruling party, ruled Oct. 22 to ban abortions in cases of congenital fetal defects, even if the fetus has no chance

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of survival.

Poland already had one of Europe's most restrictive abortion laws, and the ruling would mean that the only legal reasons for abortion would be rape, incest or if the woman's life is in danger.

Jaroslav Kaczynski, the ruling party leader and Poland's most powerful politician, had said he wanted even nonviable fetuses to be carried to birth, so they can be given a baptism, a name and a burial.

The rage of Polish women, and many men as well, erupted onto the streets across the country, growing into the largest protest movement in the three decades since communism fell.

Protesters at first disrupted Masses, shouted obscenities at priests and spray-painted the number of an abortion hotline on church facades. Those early provocative tactics were largely dropped after they triggered a backlash in a society where many cherish Catholic traditions.

They continued their protests on the streets, however, refusing to be cowed by the authorities or by the pandemic.

"My water has broken. I am delivering a revolution," said one sign at a protest in Warsaw on Nov. 18, expressing a view held by an increasing number of protesters.

The interior minister recently warned that the government would not tolerate "a revolution made by force against the constitutional organs of the Polish state." Police have been increasingly detaining and charging protesters, and in some cases using tear gas and other force.

Still, amid the massive social upheaval, the government has not formally implemented the court ruling and has spoken of coming up with a new law. But reproductive rights activists say that hospitals are already refusing to carry out abortions of congenitally damaged fetuses.

The governing party's attempt to ban abortion, with the use of a court packed with loyalists and during a pandemic, seemed excessively cruel to 21-year-old Nina Michnik, a student of Arabic studies and philosophy.

"They did it in this critical moment when everyone was scared of the pandemic," said Michnik. She described feeling extremely lonely and fragile when the court ruling came down.

"They caught us in this very sensitive moment," Michnik said. "That's why we were so angry."

While she was stuck at home by the country's coronavirus lockdown, Michnik had stopped the boxing workouts she loves. After the protests erupted, she began working out again and joined a group that scans protests for far-right troublemakers.

The recent protests have certainly become a political awakening for Polish youth, but older Poles also have taken part. They are led by the Women's Strike, a group of female activists, but many men have also joined in. What began as a revolt against an abortion ruling has become a larger struggle for democracy and human rights.

Before the court ruling, the people on the front lines of Poland's culture war had been LGBT rights activists who were frequently denounced by government and church leaders as a threat to Poland's culture and families.

Those grievances have now been woven together into one larger struggle against a government that the protesters hope to eventually bring down. Rainbow flags are held high at all the abortion protests.

Gabe Wilczynska, 19, has so far this year joined rallies for LGBT rights, racial justice in the U.S., and against sexual violence. With political convictions shaped by having been raped by a boy in high school, Wilczynska, who identifies as a lesbian and as non-binary, has gotten five court citations for involvement in the recent protests.

Wilczynska's forms of protests have included dressing in a red handmaid costume to protest the government's "attempts to control our bodies," and joining a group that has pasted slogans at night on city walls with messages including: "My uterus is not a coffin," and "Abortion is a right not a favor."

In interviews, protesters often say they feel a connection with the women of neighboring Belarus, who have emerged as a driving force in an uprising against the regime of longtime authoritarian President Alexander Lukashenko.

The decision to have weekly, rather than daily, protests, for example, was inspired by what is happening in Belarus, the goal being to keep people from getting worn down by daily protests, Micula said.

Conscious of the global battles between authoritarian and democratic forces, some Poles are also put-

ting faith in U.S. President-elect Joe Biden, who is expected to encourage democracy and human rights. Micula said she is hopeful that a new, better society is being born now, her hope bolstered by the sight of young people dancing on the streets during the protests and their solidarity with each other. No matter what happens politically in the short term, in the longer term, "we are winning," she said. "The social revolution is already happening," she continued. "Society is changing."

## The Latest: Italy plans 202 million COVID-19 vaccine doses

By The Associated Press undefined

ROME — Italy's health minister told lawmakers on Wednesday that Italy will distribute 202.6 million doses of COVID-19 vaccines during 2021 in "an unprecedented effort that will require a huge collective commitment."

Robert Speranza said the vaccines will not be mandatory, but that the doses allotted Italy through an EU collective purchasing agreement would be "enough to potentially vaccinate the entire population."

Speranza emphasized that the distribution of the vaccines would depend on regulatory approval which was still pending from the European Medicines Agency.

The first vaccines are expected to arrive in January with Pfizer's vaccine expected to get first EMA approval by Dec. 29 and Moderna by Jan. 12. Priority will be given first to Italy's front-line health care workers, then residents of nursing homes, then to elderly over 80 before moving to other groups like people with medical risks, law enforcement, teachers and prison workers.

Speranza said the vaccines provide "a message of hope" in the pandemic, which has killed more than 55,000 Italians, but that "prudence and caution are still needed."

### HERE'S WHAT ELSE IS HAPPENING:

— U.K. approves Pfizer coronavirus vaccine for emergency use, puts Britain on track to start vaccinations soon

— US panel: 1st vaccines to health care workers, nursing homes

— 'Very dark couple of weeks': Morgues and hospitals overflow

— British lawmakers approve new coronavirus restrictions in England that will take effect within hours. But Prime Minister Boris Johnson faced substantial opposition from within his Conservative Party over the measures.

— Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau says the ban on nonessential travel with the United States will not be lifted until COVID-19 is significantly more under control around the world.

— French President Emmanuel Macron says France will apply restrictions to prevent vacationers from going to Swiss ski resorts and French slopes will remain closed during the Christmas season.

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

### HERE'S WHAT ELSE IS HAPPENING:

LONDON — Drugmakers Pfizer and BioNTech said Wednesday they've won permission for emergency use of their COVID-19 vaccine in Britain, the world's first coronavirus shot that's backed by rigorous science — and a major step toward eventually ending the pandemic.

The move allows Britain to become one of the first countries to begin vaccinating its population as it tries to curb Europe's deadliest outbreak.

"The vaccine will be made available across the U.K. from next week," the Department of Health and Social Care said in a statement. The National Health Service "has decades of experience in delivering large scale vaccination programs and will begin putting their extensive preparations into action to provide care and support to all those eligible for vaccination."

Other countries aren't far behind: Regulators in the United States and the European Union also are vet-

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ting the Pfizer shot along with a similar vaccine made by competitor Moderna Inc.

British regulators also are considering another shot made by AstraZeneca and Oxford University.

**PARIS** — French Prime Minister Jean Castex has announced that “random border checks” will be put in place over the holiday season targeting French skiers trying to get to foreign resorts, particularly in Switzerland.

“The goal is to avoid French citizens getting contaminated. That will be done by putting in random border checks,” Castex said on BFM TV Wednesday.

He said the controls will include virus tests and a seven-day quarantine will be imposed on returning French skiers.

On Tuesday, President Emmanuel Macron had indicated that the government was considering taking “restrictive and dissuasive measures” to prevent the French from going abroad to ski, especially in Switzerland, at Christmas.

France will apply restrictions to prevent vacationers from going to ski resorts abroad and French slopes will remain closed during the Christmas period amid the coronavirus pandemic Macron said.

France has reported over 52,800 dead in the pandemic, the third-worst death toll in Europe after Britain and Italy.

**PARIS** — French Prime Minister Jean Castex said his country is putting in place a “progressive” virus vaccination plan, with more than enough doses to cover the entire population of 67 million.

Speaking on BFM TV Wednesday, he said that the government had “pre-ordered enough to vaccinate 100 million people, via the European system.”

It was the European Commission that negotiated with pharmaceutical companies on behalf of European Union member states. Authorizations to use the vaccines will come “rather toward the end of December,” he said.

He will outline the specifics on Thursday alongside Health Minister Olivier Veran.

**LISBON, Portugal** — Health Director-General Graça Freitas, has tested positive for COVID-19 and is in confinement, the Portuguese health ministry said Wednesday.

In a statement, the ministry said Freitas has some light symptoms. It said health services were tracing people with whom Freitas may have direct contact. The ministry said Freitas’ Wednesday’s press briefing would be canceled.

Freitas, 63, has been the government’s chief official for the virus pandemic.

Portugal’s virus infection numbers have eased in recent days. The country has registered some 300,000 cases and 2,300 deaths.

**TOKYO** — Japan’s parliament on Wednesday approved revised vaccination legislation to accommodate smooth distribution and administration of coronavirus vaccines for all citizens to fight the pandemic.

The government aims to secure vaccines enough for all 126 million Japanese by the first half of next year.

Under the law, the people are required to make efforts to receive the coronavirus vaccine as part of their cooperation in fighting the pandemic. Local municipalities will carry out inoculations for free, with priority given to the elderly and those with underlying health issues.

The government hopes to start vaccination during the first half of next year, ahead of the Summer Olympics that has been postponed until July due to the pandemic.

The enactment comes as Japan struggles with a resurgence of the infections, with rapid increase of serious cases burdening medical systems. Tokyo, Osaka and several other cities have seen rapid spikes of cases.

Nationwide, Japan has had 2,172 deaths as of Wednesday.

**ISLAMABAD** — Pakistan reported 75 new COVID-19 deaths Wednesday, one of the highest fatalities from coronavirus in recent months, prompting government to launch a week-long campaign beginning Saturday

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to urge people to wear masks.

The government, however, has ruled out re-imposing a nationwide lockdown to contain the spread of the virus, which has killed 8,166 people and infected 403,311 in Pakistan.

Pakistan flattened the curve in August but currently it is facing a lethal new surge of infections, mainly due to those violating social distancing rules.

SEOUL, South Korea — South Korean officials are urging people to remain at home if possible and cancel gatherings large and small as around half a million students prepared for a crucial national college exam.

Vice Education Minister Park Baeg-beom says the 490,000 applicants so far include 35 virus carriers who will take exams Thursday at hospitals or treatment shelters. Education authorities have also prepared separate venues for some 400 applicants currently under self-quarantine.

Applicants will be required to wear masks and maintain distance from each other. They will be screened for fever and take exams separately if they have symptoms.

Park Yu-mi, an anti-virus official in Seoul, pleaded with people to cancel all gatherings of more than 10, and for companies to half at least one-third of their employees work from home to ensure a safe environment for Thursday's examination.

The country on Wednesday reported 511 new infections, continuing a weeklong resurgence centered around the greater capital area that brought the national caseload to 35,163, including 526 deaths.

NEW DELHI — India has maintained a declining trend in coronavirus infections with 36,604 new cases reported in the past 24 hours.

The cases declined by 32% in November as compared to October, according to the Health Ministry. For more than three weeks, India's single-day cases have remained below 50,000.

Health Secretary Rajesh Bhushan said new cases were declining consistently after peaking in mid-September at nearly 100,000 per day.

The capital of New Delhi has also seen a dip in daily infections. It reported 4,006 new cases in the past 24 hours.

India reported 501 additional deaths, raising total fatalities to 138,122.

DENVER -- The ACLU of Colorado and the Weld County Sheriff's office have reached an agreement to implement measures at the county's jail to better protect inmates from the coronavirus pandemic.

Weld County Sheriff Steve Reams and the ACLU asked a federal judge Tuesday to enter a consent decree between the two sides to carry out the changes and provide federal oversight.

The ACLU had filed a lawsuit in April alleging that the sheriff's office had failed to meet public health orders related to the pandemic and did not sufficiently protect inmates, jail staff and the public.

Joe Moylan, a spokesperson for the Weld County Sheriff's Office, declined further comment.

ANNAPOLIS, Md. — Maryland Gov. Larry Hogan announced measures on Tuesday to boost the number of available health care workers and plan for more hospital beds.

In a partnership with the Maryland Hospital Association, the governor announced the launch of an initiative called MarylandMedNow to recruit people with clinical backgrounds to work at state hospitals, nursing homes, testing sites and vaccination clinics.

The state has asked colleges and universities to develop emergency policies and procedures to award academic credit to students who are willing to get hands-on work experience during the pandemic.

The governor also announced steps to increase hospital beds. Hospitals across the state will be required to submit a patient surge plan, including strategies to expand bed and staffing capacity adjustments. They will be due at the health department Dec. 8.

Also, if hospitalizations reach a total of 8,000 hospitalizations or more, hospitals will be required to expand their staffed bed capacity by 10% of each hospital's physical bed capacity within seven calendar days.

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**SAN FRANCISCO** — San Francisco Mayor London Breed dined at a posh Napa Valley restaurant the day after California's governor was there. San Jose Mayor Sam Liccardo went to his parents' house for Thanksgiving. And a Los Angeles County supervisor dined outdoors just hours after voting to ban outdoor dining there.

All three local officials were on the hot seat Tuesday after various reports that they violated rules aimed at controlling the spread of the coronavirus — or at a minimum, violating the spirit of the rules as they repeatedly urged others to stay home.

Breed joined seven others at the three Michelin-starred French Laundry on Nov. 7 to celebrate the 60th birthday of socialite Gorretti Lo Lui, the mayor's spokesman confirmed to the San Francisco Chronicle. She dined in the same kind of partially enclosed indoor/outdoor room Gov. Gavin Newsom celebrated in a day earlier.

Newsom, who has appealed to Californians to "do your part" and stay home, apologized when the 12-person dinner was reported, then again when photos emerged showing him, his wife and others sitting close together at the same table without masks.

Breed's spokesman, Jeff Cretan, called the mayor's French Laundry dinner a "small family birthday dinner." He did not immediately respond to a telephone message Tuesday inquiring whether the dinner involved more than three different households, which are prohibited under the state's rules.

**DENVER** — Colorado Gov. Jared Polis joined the nation's top infectious disease expert Tuesday and urged people to wear masks and socially distance to help prevent stay-at-home orders and overwhelmed hospitals as cases of the coronavirus surge during the holidays.

Dr. Anthony Fauci, director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases and a member of the White House's coronavirus task force, warned during a virtual news conference that Colorado is not alone in seeing a spike in cases and pleaded with people not to travel or gather in large groups.

"If you look across the United States, we are really in a public health crisis right now because we are having a surge the likes of which is worse than the surges that we all saw in the late winter, early spring," Fauci said.

He added that "we are likely going to see a surge upon a surge" of cases, based on the number of people who traveled and gathered for Thanksgiving and on those who are expected to shop and attend holiday parties before celebrating Christmas and New Year's in large groups.

Colorado has been hit with a substantial spike in COVID-19 cases, with one in 41 residents believed to be contagious.

**UNITED NATIONS** -- The U.N. General Assembly is trying to address the problem of 400,000 seafarers stranded at sea as a result of COVID-19 by adopting a resolution urging all nations to designate those working on ships as "key workers."

The resolution adopted by consensus Tuesday by the 193-member world body stresses the very difficult conditions seafarers face at sea which have been exacerbated by the response to the pandemic that has impeded crew changes and repatriation of sailors to their home countries.

Indonesia's U.N. Ambassador Dian Triansyah Djani, who sponsored the resolution, said the work of two million seafarers "who have shown their dedication and professionalism during this crisis, ensuring that world trade and logistics continue to move properly" largely goes unnoticed.

The resolution acknowledged that "shipping has continued to transport more than 80 percent of world trade essential to the normal functioning of society, including vital medical supplies, food and other basic goods that are critical for the COVID-19 response and recover

## **Klain to lead Biden White House in return of professionals**

By ASHRAF KHALIL and LAURIE KELLMAN Associated Press



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WASHINGTON (AP) — Ron Klain has checked all the boxes of a classic Washington striver: Georgetown, Harvard Law, Supreme Court clerk and Capitol Hill staffer, White House adviser and, along the way, of course, lobbyist and lawyer.

Now Klain is preparing to serve as President-elect Joe Biden's chief of staff, a job often referred to as the nation's chief operating officer.

His gilded resume, deep knowledge of the gears and levers of power in the capital and decadeslong association with Biden have also done something unusual in today's Washington: drawn praise from both sides of the ideological divide.

The 59-year-old father of three has a reputation among Democrats and, strikingly, even some Republicans for competence — a notable attribute after an administration that rewarded and dismissed people based on their loyalty to President Donald Trump.

In his new job, Klain will be asked to enforce the president's wishes, catch the spears thrown at him and oversee dozens of other top staffers whose outside ambition may match his own.

"This is not a time for inexperienced novices," said Valerie Jarrett, who worked as senior adviser to President Barack Obama while Klain was then-Vice President Biden's chief of staff.

Klain, she noted, knows the function of every agency in the federal government, has deep relationships on Capitol Hill and has the obvious respect of Biden and his inner circle.

"We've seen over the past four years how much can go wrong when people who actually don't understand how the government works are in charge," she added.

Klain is a throwback, representing the return of the experienced Washington hand — equal parts wonky master of obscure policy and power-shaping consigliere.

"He has a quiet profile among the wider public and an enormous profile among those who understand real power," said Evan Osnos, author of a new Biden biography, "Joe Biden: The Life, The Run and What Matters Now."

Osnos points to the fact that Klain's appointment as chief of staff was "applauded by an almost impossibly wide spectrum" of politicians and pundits — from left-wing standard-bearer Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez of New York to conservative commentator Hugh Hewitt.

The Indianapolis native has been a top aide in all three branches of government, plus an unofficial permanent fourth, the K Street influence industry.

And he has been a quiet presence with a seat at the table for some epochal political moments spanning three decades.

He helped lead Vice President Al Gore's legal team during the 2000 election's Florida vote recount; he was chief counsel to the Senate Judiciary Committee (chaired by then-Sen. Biden) during the acrimonious confirmation hearings of Justice Clarence Thomas; and he helped shepherd President Bill Clinton's nomination of Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsberg.

Jarrett recalls an old Klain mantra that comes into play again as Biden starts to assume the presidency while Trump continues to openly question the result of the election and declare, without proof, widespread voter fraud.

"Ignore the noise," Klain, then Obama's Ebola czar, told the White House team as anxiety swirled that the virus was coming to American shores. "Ignore the noise. Focus on the facts."

"Because there's always going to be noise," Jarrett said. "And it can be distracting."

Sen. Ed Markey, D-Mass., hired a young Klain, who had clerked for Supreme Court Justice Byron White, for what was then Markey's House staff. What stood out, Markey says now, was Klain's ability to digest and articulate the driest policy points in ways that human beings could understand.

"It defied his age," Markey says. He recalled in a recent phone interview a time early on when he handed Klain a book by an economics professor and asked him to get familiar with it before the author visited the office the next day.

When the meeting arrived, Klain made Markey look good by being able to converse with the author on the dense economic argument outlined in the book. The skill carried through to other policy areas.

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"If you were on 'Who Wants to be a Millionaire,' and you could dial a friend and the million dollars depended on it, Ron Klain is the one I would call," Markey said.

His attention to detail can even be seen in his family life. Longtime co-workers describe him as work and family oriented, fond of planning every minute detail of large family vacations. He's also known for throwing home parties with quirky touches, like hiring an ice cream truck to come to his front door or renting a blow-up movie screen for his backyard. A passionate fan of his hometown Indianapolis 500, Klain attends the race.

Klain hasn't always been considered the right man for the job. His 2014 appointment to head up Obama's Ebola response team drew a round of public criticism because of his lack of medical experience. Republican Sen. Ted Cruz of Texas dismissed him as a "White House political operative" and GOP Sen. John McCain of Arizona called him a "democratic apparatchik." "Saturday Night Live" lampooned him as hopelessly out of his depth.

But now Klain's experiences with pandemic policy confer an air of authority on his critiques of the Trump administration's strategies. He's made multiple media appearances and a series of deliberately zippy Biden campaign video explainers that show Klain breaking things down in front of an illustrated whiteboard.

More than a year before the coronavirus was even identified, Klain was warning that Trump's presidential style was singularly unequipped to deal with a pandemic. His comments at a summer 2018 forum sponsored by the Aspen Institute now seem prescient.

"The president is anti-science. He trades in attacking experts. He trades in conspiracy theories. All those things would lead to the loss of many lives in the event of an epidemic in the United States," Klain said. "We would need the public not to trade in conspiracy theories, not to believe the news was fake but to respect scientific expertise."

Klain has served as chief of staff to two vice presidents (Gore and Biden) and one attorney general (Janet Reno). He has worked with Biden in one form or another for more than 30 years.

Along the way, Klain also carved out a particular niche: go-to guy for presidential debate prep. He's had a hand in debate preparations for Democratic presidential candidates going back to John Kerry in 2004. And Klain and his frequent partner, Karen Dunn, are credited with helping Obama successfully bounce back from a shaky performance in his first debate against Mitt Romney in 2012.

Gene Sperling, another of Obama's debate coaches, was in the room when Klain took a post-debate call from Obama after the first faceoff. He said Klain didn't try to sugarcoat the situation; he acknowledged the setback and agreed with Obama's own harsh assessment of his performance, but kept things focused on the upcoming debates.

"He was like, 'OK, two more, we're going to do this, we're going to do that,'" Sperling said in a recent telephone interview. "I think that's just really important: That you can cheerlead and lose credibility, you can just be just a prince of darkness or you can be the straight voice who's acknowledging some difficulties but realizing the only thing that helps is being the cool head. Ron was the cool head."

Klain can occasionally be prickly or short tempered and has been described as one who does not suffer fools gladly. But co-workers recall his management style as disciplined and inclusive — a departure from both the turmoil of the Trump White House and from Obama's first chief of staff, Rahm Emanuel, who was notorious for his aggressive, often vulgar, style.

There have been some missteps along the way. As Biden's top deputy on the rollout of the nearly \$800 billion Recovery Act stimulus package, Klain became publicly enmeshed in controversy surrounding Solyndra, a solar panel manufacturer that went bankrupt after receiving more than \$500 million in stimulus funds. Klain, despite known doubts about the company's viability, was later revealed to have signed off on an Obama visit to the Solyndra factory that became an embarrassment and opened the stimulus program to charges of mismanagement.

Klain's professional bond with Biden has been through some ups and downs as well.

In the 2016 presidential race, Klain signed on as an adviser to presumptive Democratic front-runner Hillary Clinton without waiting to see if Biden — who was mourning the recent death of his son Beau —

would declare his candidacy.

The perceived defection produced hard feelings that were revealed by the WikiLeaks dump of hacked emails from Clinton campaign chief John Podesta. In an October 2015 email to Podesta, about a week before Biden announced he would not run, Klain acknowledged that his choice had damaged both Biden's campaign prospects and his relationship with his longtime boss.

"It's been a little hard for me to play such a role in the Biden demise," Klain wrote then. "I am definitely dead to them — but I'm glad to be on Team HRC."

But as Biden's 2020 campaign heated up, Klain once again found himself deeply ensconced in the operation, serving as one of the public faces of the campaign and preparing his candidate for the most chaotic presidential debate in American history.

"Klain was able to get his way back into Bidenland by sheer competence," Osnos said.

Kellman reported from Tel Aviv. Associated Press researcher Rhonda Shafner in New York contributed to this report.

Follow Khalil at <https://twitter.com/Ashrafkhalil> and Kellman at <https://twitter.com/APLaurieKellman>.

## **Thai prime minister acquitted of ethics breach, retains post**

By GRANT PECK and CHALIDA EKVITTHAYAVECHNUKUL Associated Press

BANGKOK (AP) — Thailand's highest court on Wednesday acquitted Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-ocha of breaching ethics clauses in the country's constitution, allowing him to stay in his job.

The Constitutional Court ruled on a complaint brought by the Pheu Thai party, the largest opposition grouping in Parliament, that Prayuth had broken the law by continuing to live in his military residence after he retired as army commander in September 2014.

The complaint alleged that he broke constitutional articles barring government ministers from receiving special benefits from state agencies or enterprises because that would amount to a conflict of interest. If a minister is found guilty of violating ethical standards, the official is to be disqualified and forced to step down.

The nine-judge panel agreed with an army explanation that retired senior officers such as Prayuth are allowed to stay in army housing in recognition of their service.

The ruling comes as Prayuth has been dealing with a persistent student-led pro-democracy movement that has been holding frequent well-attended rallies demanding that he and his government step down, charging that they came to power illegitimately.

Even before the court convened Wednesday, the protesters had called a rally to respond to the verdict. "Thailand's justice system has completely lost its integrity. The court's verdict today shows they look down on the people. This will fuel people's anger and be the condition that drives our rallies to a higher level," a protest leader, Parit "Penguin" Chiwarak, told The Associated Press.

As army commander, Prayuth led a coup in May 2014 that ousted an elected government led by the Pheu Thai party. He then headed the junta that ruled for five years and was also prime minister in the military-guided government.

A general election last year brought to power a proxy party established by the military, which with its allies selected Prayuth to serve again as prime minister. The ongoing protests charge that the 2017 constitution established under military rule gave the proxy Palang Pracharath Party an unfair advantage in the election.

When Prayuth and several of his Cabinet ministers faced a censure debate in Parliament in February, opposition leader Sompong Amornwiwat of the Pheu Thai party raised the issue of whether Prayuth had acted illegally by continuing to live at his army residence at a base in Bangkok.

Prayuth's defense has been that the official residence of the prime minister is undergoing renovation, and also that he faces security concerns.

The army argued on his behalf that his military housing is actually a VIP guest house, though critics

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suggest that if he did not pay at least for water and electricity, he may be breaking the law.

The court said that senior officers such as Prayuth were entitled to live in military housing as special guests in honor of their military careers. Deputy Prime Minister Prawit Wongsuwan and Interior Minister Anupong Paochinda were given the same privilege, former army chief Gen. Apirat Kongsompong declared before his retirement this past September. The court also said the current chief, Gen. Narongpan Jittkeawtae, had explained that the army's regulations allow it to pay for utilities and other necessary costs in such instances.

In the past 12 years, court rulings have ousted three Thai prime ministers.

The court, like the military, is considered a pillar of the country's royalist establishment, and the ultimate bulwark against threats to it. The three ousted politicians were associated with a former prime minister, populist billionaire Thaksin Shinawatra, who was ousted by a 2006 military coup after being accused of abuse of power, corruption and disrespect to the monarchy.

The court's rulings have generally been favorable to Thaksin's opponents and hostile to his supporters, leading to criticism that it is guided as much by politics as by law.

## China spacecraft collects moon samples to take back to Earth

By JOE McDONALD Associated Press

BEIJING (AP) — A Chinese spacecraft took samples of the moon's surface Wednesday as part of a mission to bring lunar rocks back to Earth for the first time since the 1970s, the government said, adding to a string of successes for Beijing's increasingly ambitious space program.

The Chang'e 5 probe touched down Tuesday on the Sea of Storms on the moon's near side after descending from an orbiter, the China National Space Administration said. It released images of the barren landing site showing the lander's shadow.

"Chang'e has collected moon samples," the agency said in a statement.

The probe, launched Nov. 24 from the tropical island of Hainan, is the latest venture by a space program that sent China's first astronaut into orbit in 2003. Beijing also has a spacecraft en route to Mars and aims eventually to land a human on the moon.

This week's landing is "a historic step in China's cooperation with the international community in the peaceful use of outer space," said a foreign ministry spokeswoman, Hua Chunying.

"China will continue to promote international cooperation and the exploration and use of outer space in the spirit of working for the benefit of all mankind," Hua said.

Plans call for the lander to spend two days drilling into the lunar surface and collecting 2 kilograms (4.4 pounds) of rocks and debris. The top stage of the probe will be launched back into lunar orbit to transfer the samples to a capsule to take back to Earth, where it is to land in China's northern grasslands in mid-December.

If it succeeds, it will be the first time scientists have obtained fresh samples of lunar rocks since the Soviet Union's Luna 24 probe in 1976.

The samples are expected to be made available to scientists from other nations, although it is unclear how much access NASA will have due to U.S. government restrictions on cooperation with China's military-linked program.

From the rocks and debris, scientists hope to learn more about the moon, including its precise age, as well as increased knowledge about other bodies in our solar system. Collecting samples, including from asteroids, is an increasing focus of many space programs.

American and Russian space officials congratulated the Chinese program.

"Congratulations to China on the successful landing of Chang'e 5. This is no easy task," NASA's science mission chief, Thomas Zurbuchen, wrote on Twitter.

"When the samples collected on the Moon are returned to Earth, we hope everyone will benefit from being able to study this precious cargo that could advance the international science community."

U.S. astronauts brought back 842 pounds (382 kilograms) of lunar samples from 1969 to 1972, some of

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which is still being analyzed and experimented on.

The Chang'e 5 flight is China's third successful lunar landing. Its predecessor, Chang'e 4, was the first probe to land on the moon's little-explored far side.

Chinese space program officials have said they envision future crewed missions along with robotic ones, including possibly a permanent research base. No timeline or other details have been announced.

The latest flight includes collaboration with the European Space Agency, which is helping to monitor the mission from Earth.

China's space program has proceeded more cautiously than the U.S.-Soviet space race of the 1960s, which was marked by fatalities and launch failures.

In 2003, China became the third country to send an astronaut into orbit on its own after the Soviet Union and the United States. It launched a temporary crewed space station in 2011 and a second in 2016.

China, along with neighbors Japan and India, also has joined the growing race to explore Mars. The Tianwen 1 probe launched in July is on its way to the red planet carrying a lander and a rover to search for water.

## China's space ambitions: robot on Mars, a human on the moon

By JOE McDONALD and VICTORIA MILKO Associated Press

BEIJING (AP) — China's landing of its third probe on the moon is part of an increasingly ambitious space program that has a robot rover en route to Mars, is developing a reusable space plane and is planning to put humans back on the lunar surface.

The Chang'e 5, the first effort to bring lunar rocks to Earth since the 1970s, collected samples on Wednesday, the Chinese space agency announced. The probe landed Tuesday on the Sea of Storms on the moon's near side.

Space exploration is a political trophy for the ruling Communist Party, which wants global influence to match China's economic success.

China is a generation behind the United States and Russia, but its secretive, military-linked program is developing rapidly. It is creating distinctive missions that, if successful, could put Beijing on the leading edge of space flight.

The coming decade will be "quite critical" in space exploration, said Kathleen Campbell, an astrobiologist and geologist at The University of Auckland.

"This is where we're going to transform out of near Earth orbit and back into what people will call 'deep space,'" Campbell said.

In 2003, China became the third nation to launch an astronaut into orbit on its own, four decades after the former Soviet Union and the United States. Its first temporary orbiting laboratory was launched in 2011 and a second in 2016. Plans call for a permanent space station to be launched after 2022.

This week's landing is "a historic step in China's cooperation with the international community in the peaceful use of outer space," said a foreign ministry spokeswoman, Hua Chunying.

"China will continue to promote international cooperation and the exploration and use of outer space in the spirit of working for the benefit of all mankind," Hua said.

After astronaut Yang Liwei's 2003 flight, space officials expressed hope for a crewed lunar mission as early as this year. But they said that depended on budget and technology. They have pushed back that target to 2024 or later.

The space agency gave no reason for landing its latest probe on the Sea of Storms, far from where American and Soviet craft touched down. But the choice might help to shed light on possible sites being studied for a crewed mission.

Beijing's space plane would be China's version of the American Space Shuttle and the former Soviet Union's short-lived Buran.

China also has launched its own Beidou network of navigation satellites so the Communist Party's military wing, the People's Liberation Army, doesn't need to rely on the U.S.-run GPS or a rival Russian system.

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Last year, China graduated from “me too” missions copying Soviet and American ventures to scoring its own firsts when it became the first nation to land a probe on the moon’s little-explored far side.

That probe, the Chang’e 4, and its robot rover still are functioning, transmitting to Earth via an orbiter that passes over the moon’s far side. China’s first moon lander, the Chang’e 3, still is transmitting.

China’s earliest crewed spacecraft, the Shenzhou capsules, were based on Russian technology. Its powerful Long March rockets are, like their Soviet and American predecessors, based on ballistic missiles developed using technology seized from Nazi Germany after World War II.

China has proceeded more cautiously than the breakneck U.S.-Soviet space race of the 1960s, which was marked by fatalities. China’s crewed missions have gone ahead without incident. Some launches of robot vehicles have been delayed by technical problems but those appear to have been resolved.

China is in a growing space rivalry with Asian neighbors Japan and India, which it sees as strategic competitors. Both have sent their own probes to Mars.

While Chang’e 5 gathers moon rocks, Japan’s space agency just pulled off the even more challenging feat of obtaining samples from an asteroid, Ryugu. The Hayabusa2 mission is due to deliver those to Earth on Saturday.

As its confidence grows, Beijing’s space goals have multiplied.

It has joined the race to explore Mars, and its Tianwen-1 probe, launched in July carrying a robot rover to search for signs of water, is due to complete its 470-million kilometer (292-million mile) journey in February.

Plans call for a permanent crewed space station as early as 2022.

China is excluded from the International Space Station due to U.S. opposition to including Chinese military officers in a venture that otherwise is operated by civilian space agencies.

Plans also call for an international lunar research base at some point, the deputy director of the Chinese agency’s lunar exploration center, Pei Zhaoyu, told reporters last week.

Despite its successes, the military-run Chinese program is more secretive than those of other governments.

Yang and other Chinese astronauts made only a handful of brief public appearances following their flights, in contrast to Soviet and American astronauts who were sent on global publicity tours before cheering foreign crowds.

The agency announced in September its space plane had completed a successful test flight but has yet to release details or even a photo of the craft.

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Milko reported from Jakarta, Indonesia.

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## Iran’s president rejects bill that would boost enrichment

TEHRAN, Iran (AP) — Iran’s President Hassan Rouhani on Wednesday rejected a bill approved by parliament that would have suspended U.N. inspections and boosted uranium enrichment, saying it was “harmful” to diplomatic efforts aimed at restoring the 2015 nuclear deal and easing U.S. sanctions.

The tug-of-war over the bill, which gained momentum after the killing of a prominent Iranian nuclear scientist last month, reflects the rivalry between Rouhani, a relative moderate, and hard-line lawmakers who dominate parliament and favor a more confrontational approach to the West.

The bill would have suspended U.N. inspections and required the government to resume enriching uranium to 20% if European nations fail to provide relief from crippling U.S. sanctions on the country’s oil and banking sectors. That level falls short of the threshold needed for nuclear weapons but is higher than that required for civilian purposes.

Speaking at a Cabinet meeting, Rouhani said his administration, “does not agree with that and considers it harmful for the trend of diplomatic activities.” He implied the lawmakers were positioning themselves ahead of elections planned for June.

He added that "today, we are more powerful in the nuclear field than at any other time."

The bill is expected to have little if any impact, as Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei has the final say on all major policies, including those related to the nuclear program. Rather, it appeared to be a show of defiance after Mohsen Fakhrizadeh, a key figure in Iran's nuclear program, was killed in an attack Iranian officials have blamed on Israel.

Fakhrizadeh headed a program that Israel and the West have alleged was a military operation looking at the feasibility of building a nuclear weapon. The International Atomic Energy Agency says that "structured program" ended in 2003. The U.S. government has concurred with those findings, while Israel says Iran is still aiming to develop nuclear weapons, pointing to its work on ballistic missiles and other technologies. Iran insists its nuclear program is entirely peaceful.

The U.S. imposed crippling sanctions on Iran after President Donald Trump unilaterally withdrew from the nuclear agreement in 2018. In response, Iran began publicly exceeding limits set by the agreement while saying it would quickly return to compliance if the United States did the same.

Rouhani, one of the architects of the 2015 nuclear agreement with world powers, favors a return to the deal and greater diplomatic engagement with the U.S. and other Western nations. President-elect Joe Biden has also said he is in favor of returning to the nuclear deal.

## US panel: 1st vaccines to health care workers, nursing homes

By MIKE STOBBE AP Medical Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Health care workers and nursing home residents should be at the front of the line when the first coronavirus vaccine shots become available, an influential government advisory panel said Tuesday.

The panel voted 13-1 to recommend those groups get priority in the first days of any coming vaccination program, when doses are expected to be very limited. The two groups encompass about 24 million people out of a U.S. population of about 330 million.

Later this month, the Food and Drug Administration will consider authorizing emergency use of two vaccines made by Pfizer and Moderna. Current estimates project that no more than 20 million doses of each vaccine will be available by the end of 2020. And each product requires two doses. As a result, the shots will be rationed in the early stages.

The Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices will meet again at some point to decide who should be next in line. Among the possibilities: teachers, police, firefighters and workers in other essential fields such as food production and transportation; the elderly; and people with underlying medical conditions.

Tuesday's action merely designated who should get shots first if a safe and effective vaccine becomes available. The panel did not endorse any particular vaccine. Panel members are waiting to hear FDA's evaluation and to see more safety and efficacy data before endorsing any particular product.

Experts say the vaccine will probably not become widely available in the U.S. until the spring.

The panel of outside scientific experts, created in 1964, makes recommendations to the director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, who almost always approves them. It normally has 15 voting members, but one seat is vacant.

The recommendations are not binding, but for decades they have been widely heeded by doctors, and they have determined the scope and funding of U.S. vaccination programs.

It will be up to state authorities whether to follow the guidance. It will also be left to them to make further, more detailed decisions if necessary — for example, whether to put emergency room doctors and nurses ahead of other health care workers if vaccine supplies are low.

The outbreak in the U.S. has killed nearly 270,000 people and caused more than 13.5 million confirmed infections, with deaths, hospitalizations and cases rocketing in recent weeks.

As the virtual meeting got underway, panel member Dr. Beth Bell of the University of Washington noted that on average, one person is dying of COVID-19 per minute in the U.S. right now, "so I guess we are acting none too soon."

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About 3 million people are living in nursing homes, long-term chronic care hospitals, and other U.S. long-term care facilities. Those patients and the staff members who care for them have accounted for 6% of the nation's coronavirus cases and a staggering 39% of the deaths, CDC officials say.

Despite the heavy toll, some board members at Tuesday's meeting said they hesitated to include such patients in the first group getting shots.

Dr. Helen Keipp Talbot, an infectious diseases researcher at Vanderbilt University who was the lone committee member to vote against the proposal, cited flu research that found vaccinating the staff of such facilities has a greatest impact on preventing its spread there.

Dr. Richard Zimmerman, a University of Pittsburgh flu vaccine researcher who watched the meeting online, echoed Talbot's concerns.

"I think it was premature" to include nursing home residents as a priority group, said Zimmerman, a former ACIP member. "Their vote seems to assume that these people will respond well to the vaccine. ... I don't think we know that."

Committee members were unanimous in voicing support for vaccinating health care workers — about 21 million people, according to CDC officials.

That broad category includes medical staff who care for — or come in contact with — patients in hospitals, nursing homes, clinics and doctor's offices. It also includes home health care workers and paramedics. Depending on how state officials apply the panel's recommendations, it could also encompass janitorial staff, food service employees and medical records clerks.

The government estimates people working in health care account for 12% of U.S. COVID-19 cases but only about 0.5% of deaths. Experts say it's imperative to keep health care workers on their feet so they can administer the shots and tend to the booming number of infected Americans.

For months, members of the immunization panel had said they wouldn't take a vote until the FDA approved a vaccine, as is customary. But late last week, the group scheduled an emergency meeting.

The panel's chairman, Dr. Jose Romero, said the decision stemmed from a realization that the states are facing a Friday deadline to place initial orders for the Pfizer vaccine and determine where they should be delivered. The committee decided to meet now to give state and local officials guidance, he said.

But some panel members and other experts had also grown concerned by comments from Trump administration officials that suggested differing vaccine priorities.

Dr. Deborah Birx of the White House coronavirus task force said in a meeting with CDC officials last month that people 65 and older should go to the head of the line, according to a federal official who was not authorized to discuss the matter and spoke to The Associated Press on condition of anonymity.

Then last week U.S. Health and Human Services Secretary Alex Azar stressed that ultimately governors will decide who in their states gets the shots. Vice President Mike Pence echoed that view.

Asked whether Azar's comment played a role in the scheduling of the meeting, Romero said; "We don't live in a bubble. We know what he said. But that wasn't the primary reason this is being done."

Jason Schwartz, a professor of health policy at the Yale School of Public Health, said it makes sense for the panel to take the unusual step of getting its recommendation out first.

"Without that formal recommendation, it does create a void from which states could go off in all sorts of different directions," said Schwartz, who is not on the panel.

HHS officials have said they will distribute initial doses to states based on population, and it's possible that some states won't receive enough to cover all of their health care workers and nursing home residents.

CDC officials said they are optimistic such shortages would last only a few weeks.

Still, governors and local officials may have to decide which health care workers or regions get shots first, Schwartz said.

"It's up to states to figure out the more granular detail," he said.

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## Years after coming out, gay athletes upset by lack of change

By DENNIS PASSA AP Sports Writer

BRISBANE, Australia (AP) — David Kopay and Ian Roberts live on different sides of the Pacific Ocean. Both took giant leaps of faith when they came out.

And at a time when it had never been done in their sports.

Kopay is a 78-year-old former National Football League running back living in Palm Springs, California and known as the first professional athlete to reveal he was gay. He came out in 1975 after his NFL career ended.

In 1995, Roberts became the first high-profile Australian sports person and first professional rugby player in the world to come out as gay.

Some 45 years after Kopay's open disclosure, and 25 after Roberts', both men are united in their disappointment that a higher proportion of gay athletes haven't come out, and that homophobic language on the sporting fields is still rife.

"It's ignorance more than anything else, they try to hide their own insecurities by putting down other people," Kopay told The Associated Press in a telephone interview, speaking of homophobic slurs. The call interrupted his rearranging in a new apartment of photos and other memorabilia from an eight-year NFL career that spanned five teams beginning with the San Francisco 49ers in 1964.

"It's horrible to hear that kids are being targeted. I've sacrificed so much to try and change this problem," Kopay added. "I know most people don't mean anything when they use these horrible words, but . . . you have no idea what people are thinking."

Roberts, who has forged an acting career since retiring, played for two more rugby league seasons after coming out. A powerful front-row forward who played for the national team, Roberts wishes he had done it sooner.

"It was the worst-kept secret. Everyone knew I was gay. I wish I had come out from Day One," the 55-year-old Roberts told the AP in a telephone interview from a movie set near Sydney where he's working in the third season of the "Mr. Inbetween" series. "Personally, it was kind of empowering when you come out, there were some wonderful stories as well, people came to me and said how happy they were with me."

Kopay's comments about homophobic language and Roberts' about coming out as gay are at the forefront of two studies published Wednesday by Melbourne's Monash University.

The first analyzed survey responses from 1,173 lesbian, gay, and bisexual people aged 15 to 21 and living in the United States, Britain, Canada, Australia, New Zealand or Ireland. Authors described it as the first study to investigate whether LGB youth who "come out" to teammates are more likely to be a target of homophobic behavior than those who do not.

"Some gay athletes who have come out as adults have said fears that LGB young people will be the target of homophobic behaviors if they come out to their teammates are unfounded," said lead author Erik Denison from Monash's Behavioural Sciences Research Laboratory. "We hoped this was true given young people generally have positive attitudes toward gay people."

"Being the target of homophobic behavior is harmful to the health of LGB young people and increases their risk of depression, suicide, and self-harm."

The study also showed that young people who came out were significantly more likely to report they'd been the target of homophobic behaviors in sport settings.

The second Monash study investigated why some athletes use homophobic language.

"Sports organizations, LGBTQ advocacy groups, and government officials typically assume homophobic behavior is driven by homophobic attitudes in sports," Denison said. "Over the last two decades, dozens of educational resources, advertising campaigns, and initiatives such as Pride Games have been developed to end homophobia in sports. These approaches do not seem to be working because studies consistently find homophobic language continues to be frequently used by male athletes."

A sports inclusion website updated to coincide with the release of the two studies was created, it says,

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to "illustrate the lack of meaningful action on homophobia and transphobia in sport."

It includes a timeline of other famous sports people who came out, including Billie Jean King and Martina Navratilova in 1981, and English soccer player Justin Fashanu in 1990. Fashanu retired in 1997 and committed suicide in 1998 at the age of 37.

Roberts said he heard homophobic remarks on the field but he was heartened when, after he'd announced he was gay, the North Queensland Cowboys made him captain.

"The Cowboys, they were fantastic," Roberts said of the Townsville-based National Rugby League club. "Yes, they had a gay captain. Yes, there were naysayers, but they would have been in a minority."

Back across the Pacific Ocean and to Kopay in his new apartment, where the former NFL player says he "thought coming out would make it easier for other athletes to be open about their sexuality . . . I hoped to make a difference so others in my position would have the freedom to be who they are.

"But it was such a painful experience, it was horrible," Kopay added in a separate interview with Monash University. "I sacrificed so much . . . I couldn't get a job, couldn't get a coaching position, no one wanted to hire me. It was like I committed murder."

Roberts said reasons like those are behind many players not wanting to come out until they are finished their careers.

"That is a shame," Roberts said. "I have heard along the gay grapevine, that still happens . . . waiting until they retire because of their fears."

Still, Kopay remains bewildered why more gay athletes haven't come out.

"I have often been asked if I thought that more gay athletes would come out in sport, and I have always said it was just a matter of time," Kopay says. "I could never have imagined that nearly 50 years later we would still have no openly gay athletes in America's Big 4 sports (baseball, football, basketball and hockey). We also don't have many around the world.

"We now have gay marriage but we don't have any openly gay athletes in the NFL. It makes no sense."

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

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## Disputing Trump, Barr says no widespread election fraud

By MICHAEL BALSAMO Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Disputing President Donald Trump's persistent, baseless claims, Attorney General William Barr declared the U.S. Justice Department has uncovered no evidence of widespread voter fraud that could change the outcome of the 2020 election.

Barr's comments, in an interview Tuesday with the The Associated Press, contradict the concerted effort by Trump, his boss, to subvert the results of last month's voting and block President-elect Joe Biden from taking his place in the White House.

Barr told the AP that U.S. attorneys and FBI agents have been working to follow up specific complaints and information they've received, but "to date, we have not seen fraud on a scale that could have effected a different outcome in the election."

The comments, which drew immediate criticism from Trump attorneys, were especially notable coming from Barr, who has been one of the president's most ardent allies. Before the election, he had repeatedly raised the notion that mail-in voting could be especially vulnerable to fraud during the coronavirus pandemic as Americans feared going to polls and instead chose to vote by mail.

More to Trump's liking, Barr revealed in the AP interview that in October he had appointed U.S. Attorney John Durham as a special counsel, giving the prosecutor the authority to continue to investigate the origins of the Trump-Russia probe after Biden takes over and making it difficult to fire him. Biden hasn't said what he might do with the investigation, and his transition team didn't comment Tuesday.

Trump has long railed against the investigation into whether his 2016 campaign was coordinating with Russia, but he and Republican allies had hoped the results would be delivered before the 2020 election

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and would help sway voters. So far, there has been only one criminal case, a guilty plea from a former FBI lawyer to a single false statement charge.

Under federal regulations, a special counsel can be fired only by the attorney general and for specific reasons such as misconduct, dereliction of duty or conflict of interest. An attorney general must document such reasons in writing.

Barr went to the White House Tuesday for a previously scheduled meeting that lasted about three hours.

Trump didn't directly comment on the attorney general's remarks on the election. But his personal attorney Rudy Giuliani and his political campaign issued a scathing statement claiming that, "with all due respect to the Attorney General, there hasn't been any semblance" of an investigation into the president's complaints.

Other administration officials who have come out forcefully against Trump's allegations of voter-fraud evidence have been fired. But it's not clear whether Barr might suffer the same fate. He maintains a lofty position with Trump, and despite their differences the two see eye-to-eye on quite a lot.

Still, Senate Democratic leader Chuck Schumer quipped: "I guess he's the next one to be fired."

Last month, Barr issued a directive to U.S. attorneys across the country allowing them to pursue any "substantial allegations" of voting irregularities before the 2020 presidential election was certified, despite no evidence at that time of widespread fraud.

That memorandum gave prosecutors the ability to go around longstanding Justice Department policy that normally would prohibit such overt actions before the election was certified. Soon after it was issued, the department's top elections crime official announced he would step aside from that position because of the memo.

The Trump campaign team led by Giuliani has been alleging a widespread conspiracy by Democrats to dump millions of illegal votes into the system with no evidence. They have filed multiple lawsuits in battleground states alleging that partisan poll watchers didn't have a clear enough view at polling sites in some locations and therefore something illegal must have happened. The claims have been repeatedly dismissed including by Republican judges who have ruled the suits lacked evidence.

But local Republicans in some battleground states have followed Trump in making unsupported claims, prompting grave concerns over potential damage to American democracy.

Trump himself continues to rail against the election in tweets and in interviews though his own administration has said the 2020 election was the most secure ever. He recently allowed his administration to begin the transition over to Biden, but he still refuses to admit he lost.

The issues they've have pointed to are typical in every election: Problems with signatures, secrecy envelopes and postal marks on mail-in ballots, as well as the potential for a small number of ballots miscast or lost.

But they've gone further. Attorney Sidney Powell has spun fictional tales of election systems flipping votes, German servers storing U.S. voting information and election software created in Venezuela "at the direction of Hugo Chavez," – the late Venezuelan president who died in 2013. Powell has since been removed from the legal team after an interview she gave where she threatened to "blow up" Georgia with a "biblical" court filing.

Barr didn't name Powell specifically but said: "There's been one assertion that would be systemic fraud and that would be the claim that machines were programmed essentially to skew the election results. And the DHS and DOJ have looked into that, and so far, we haven't seen anything to substantiate that."

In the campaign statement, Giuliani claimed there was "ample evidence of illegal voting in at least six states, which they have not examined."

"We have many witnesses swearing under oath they saw crimes being committed in connection with voter fraud. As far as we know, not a single one has been interviewed by the DOJ. The Justice Department also hasn't audited any voting machines or used their subpoena powers to determine the truth," he said.

However, Barr said earlier that people were confusing the use of the federal criminal justice system with allegations that should be made in civil lawsuits. He said a remedy for many complaints would be a top-down audit by state or local officials, not the U.S. Justice Department.

"There's a growing tendency to use the criminal justice system as sort of a default fix-all," he said, but first there must be a basis to believe there is a crime to investigate.

"Most claims of fraud are very particularized to a particular set of circumstances or actors or conduct. ... And those have been run down; they are being run down," Barr said. "Some have been broad and potentially cover a few thousand votes. They have been followed up on."

Associated Press writers Lisa Mascaro and Eric Tucker contributed to this report.

## Thai leader faces court ruling that could cost him his job

By GRANT PECK and CHALIDA EKVITTHAYAVECHNUKUL Associated Press

BANGKOK (AP) — Thailand's highest court is set to rule Wednesday on whether Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-ocha has breached ethics clauses in the country's constitution and should be ousted from his position.

The Constitutional Court will rule on a complaint brought by the Pheu Thai Party, the largest opposition grouping in Parliament, that Prayuth has broken the law by continuing to live in his military residence after he retired as army commander in September 2014.

The ruling comes as Prayuth has been dealing with another major headache, a persistent student-led pro-democracy movement that has been holding frequent well-attended rallies demanding that he and his government step down, charging that they came to power illegitimately.

As army commander, Prayuth led a coup in May 2014 that ousted an elected government led by the Pheu Thai Party. He then headed the junta that ruled for five years, and was also prime minister in the military-guided government.

A general election last year brought to power a proxy party established by the military, which with its allies selected Prayuth to serve again as prime minister. The ongoing protests charge that the 2017 constitution established under military rule gave the military's proxy Palang Pracharath Party an unfair advantage in the election.

When Prayuth and several of his Cabinet ministers faced a censure debate in Parliament in February, opposition leader Sompong Amornwiwat of the Pheu Thai Party raised the issue of whether Prayuth had acted illegally by continuing to live at his army residence at a base in Bangkok.

The complaint, which was forwarded to the court, alleges that he broke the constitutional articles barring government ministers from receiving special benefits from state agencies or enterprises because that would amount to a conflict of interest. If a minister is found guilty of violating ethical standards, the official will be disqualified and forced to step down.

Prayuth's defense has been that the official residence of the prime minister is undergoing renovation, and also that he faces security concerns.

The army has argued on his behalf that his military housing is actually a VIP guest house, though critics suggest that if he did not pay at least for water and electricity, he may be breaking the law.

If the court finds Prayuth guilty, he will also be disqualified from holding a government position for two years. His Cabinet will then act as a caretaker government until Parliament can choose a new prime minister and Cabinet.

Jade Donovanik, chairman of the Law Faculty at the College of Asian Scholars in the northeastern city of Khon Kaen, thinks Prayuth stands an even chance of being found guilty. He believes the ruling may hinge on whether the army's housing arrangement for Prayuth was a "normal" privilege given to every prime minister, or whether it was a "special" privilege solely for Prayuth, in which case the court may disqualify him from office.

Prayuth has expressed seeming unconcern about what the verdict might be, telling reporters Tuesday that it was up to the court.

It is conceivable he is tired of the job. As head of his 2014-2019 military government, he had virtually unlimited power and has been irritated by criticism and operating under democratic rules.

In the past 12 years, court rulings have ousted three Thai prime ministers, but Prayuth is widely believed

to be likely to get a favorable ruling.

One theory holds that the court might toss Prayuth out of his job as a way of cooling down the pro-democracy movement, which in addition to targeting the prime minister, had made unprecedented criticism of the monarchy. But the protest leaders have made clear that they consider reform of the monarchy, which they believe holds too much power under what is supposed to be a democratic constitutional monarchy, their prime goal.

The court, like the military, is considered a pillar of the country's royalist establishment, and the ultimate bulwark against threats to it. The three ousted politicians were associated with a former prime minister, populist billionaire Thaksin Shinawatra, who was ousted by a 2006 military coup after being accused of abuse of power, corruption and disrespect to the monarchy.

## **GOP objects to Biden nominees, a sign of what's to come**

By LISA MASCARO AP Congressional Correspondent

WASHINGTON (AP) — President-elect Joe Biden's Cabinet picks are quickly running into the political reality of a narrowly controlled Senate that will leave the new Democratic administration dependent on rival Republicans to get anything done.

Under leader Mitch McConnell, the Republican senators will hold great sway in confirming Biden's nominees regardless of which party holds the majority after runoff elections in January. Biden will have little room to maneuver and few votes to spare.

As Biden rolled out his economic team Tuesday — after introducing his national security team last week — he asked the Senate to give his nominees prompt review, saying they "deserve and expect nothing less."

But that seems unlikely. Republicans are swiftly signaling that they're eager to set the terms of debate and exact a price for their votes. Biden's choice for budget chief, Neera Tanden, was instantly rejected as "radioactive." His secretary of state nominee, Antony Blinken, quickly ran into resistance from GOP senators blasting his record amid their own potential 2024 White House campaigns.

Even as most Republican senators still refuse to publicly acknowledge President Donald Trump's defeat, they are launching new battles for the Biden era. The GOP is suspended between an outgoing president it needs to keep close — Trump can still make or break careers with a single tweet — and the new one they are unsure how to approach. Almost one month since the Nov. 3 election, McConnell and Biden have not yet spoken.

"The disagreement, disorientation and confusion among Republicans will make them inclined to unite in opposition," said Ramesh Ponnuru, a visiting fellow at the American Enterprise Institute, during a Tuesday briefing.

"They don't necessarily know what they're for, but they can all agree they don't like Neera Tanden."

A new president often runs into trouble with at least a few Cabinet or administrative nominees, individuals who rub the Senate the wrong way and fail to win enough votes for confirmation or are forced to withdraw after grueling public hearings.

Trump's nominees faced enormous resistance from Senate Democrats, who used their minority-party status to slow-walk confirmation for even lower-level positions. It's been an escalation of the Senate's procedural battles for at least a decade.

But the battles ahead are particularly sharp as Biden tries to stand up an administration during the COVID-19 crisis and economic freefall, rebuilding a government after Trump chased away many career professionals and appointed often-untested newcomers.

Senate Democratic leader Chuck Schumer praised the expertise Biden's choices will bring to government. He scoffed at Republicans for complaining about Tanden's penchant for sharp tweets after four years of Trump's endless Twitter barbs that GOP senators often tried to ignore.

"After what all we went through over the past four years, I would expect that almost all of President-elect Biden's nominees would be widely acceptable," Schumer said from the Senate floor.

Instead, he warned, the "switch is starting to flip" into Republican opposition.

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To be sure, some key Biden choices will have an easier path to confirmation. Janet Yellen, who would become the nation's first female treasury secretary, drew few public complaints from Republicans. Many had voted to confirm her in 2014 as Federal Reserve chair.

Democrats have their own battles ahead. Biden faces the daunting task of keeping the party's centrist and progressive factions from splintering as he tries to put his team in place.

Republicans now hold a 50-48 advantage in the Senate, but if Democrats win both Georgia seats in the Jan. 5 runoff elections, they would wrest control, since the vice president, which will be Kamala Harris, becomes a tie-breaker.

The nomination fights will serve as an early indicator of the approach Republicans take toward Biden as they find their political footing in a post-Trump environment.

Trump continues to wield great influence over the party as he is being eased out, and senators, in particular, need to keep him close for the Georgia runoff elections.

The president is planning to visit Georgia on Saturday, where two GOP senators, David Perdue and Kelly Loeffler, failed to clear the 50% threshold to win reelection in November. Perdue faces Democrat Jon Ossoff and Loeffler faces Democrat Raphael Warnock in a state that flipped to support Biden.

McConnell has said almost nothing about Biden's nominees or next year's agenda as he continues to give Trump the time and space to challenge election results in court cases that have delivered few victories.

Instead, he's letting other Senate Republicans, particularly those seen as having White House ambitions, make names for themselves. GOP Sens. Tom Cotton, Marco Rubio and Josh Hawley, among others, have all hurled pointed complaints about Biden's picks.

Despite Trump's defeat, Republicans in Congress may have little incentive to work with Biden. They performed better than Trump, retaining many House and Senate seats they were expected to lose. One lesson Republicans learned from the November election may be to keep doing what they've been doing.

McConnell gave a nod toward what's ahead after GOP senators met Tuesday by conference call, forced to abandon their traditional sit-down lunches as the COVID-19 crisis surges and threatens to further disrupt the Capitol.

McConnell talked about finishing the remaining few weeks of "this government" and "the new administration" to come.

## China spacecraft lands on moon to bring rocks back to Earth

By JOE McDONALD Associated Press

BEIJING (AP) — A Chinese spacecraft sent to return lunar rocks to Earth collected its first samples Wednesday after landing on the moon, the government announced, adding to a string of successes for Beijing's increasingly ambitious space program.

The Chang'e 5 probe touched down shortly after 11 p.m. (1500 GMT) on Tuesday after descending from an orbiter, the China National Space Administration said. It released images of the barren scene at the landing site showing the lander's shadow.

"Chang'e has collected moon samples," the agency said in a statement carried by the official Xinhua News Agency. It said the probe also had successfully unfolded solar panels that will power it.

The probe, launched Nov. 24 from the tropical southern island of Hainan, is the latest venture by a Chinese space program that sent its first astronaut into orbit in 2003, has a spacecraft en route to Mars and aims eventually to land a human on the moon.

Plans call for the lander to spend about two days drilling into the lunar surface and collecting 2 kilograms (4.4 pounds) of rocks and debris. The top stage of the probe will be launched back into lunar orbit to transfer the samples to a capsule for return to Earth, where it is to land in China's northern grasslands in mid-December.

If it succeeds, it will be the first time scientists have obtained fresh samples of lunar rocks since a Soviet probe in the 1970s. Those samples are expected to be made available to scientists from other nations, although it's unclear how much access NASA will have, given tight U.S. government restrictions on space cooperation with China.

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From the rocks and debris, scientists hope to learn more about the moon, including its precise age, as well as increased knowledge about other bodies in our solar system. Collecting samples, including from asteroids, is an increasing focus of many space programs and China's mastery of the technology once again places it among the leading nations operating in space.

American and Russian space officials congratulated the Chinese program.

"Congratulations to China on the successful landing of Chang'e 5. This is no easy task," wrote NASA's science mission chief, Thomas Zurbuchen, on Twitter.

"When the samples collected on the Moon are returned to Earth, we hope everyone will benefit from being able to study this precious cargo that could advance the international science community."

The most recent return of lunar rocks to Earth was carried out in 1976 by Luna 24, a Soviet robot probe.

U.S. astronauts brought back 842 pounds (382 kilograms) of lunar samples from 1969 to 1972, some of which is still being analyzed and experimented on.

The Chang'e 5 flight is China's third successful lunar landing. Its predecessor, Chang'e 4, was the first probe to land on the moon's little-explored far side.

Chinese space program officials have said they envision future crewed missions along with robotic ones, including possibly a permanent research base. No timeline or other details have been announced.

The latest flight includes collaboration with the European Space Agency, which is helping to monitor the mission.

China's space program has proceeded more cautiously than the U.S.-Soviet space race of the 1960s, which was marked by fatalities and launch failures.

In 2003, China became the third country to send an astronaut into orbit on its own after the Soviet Union and the United States. It also launched a crewed space station.

China, along with neighbors Japan and India, also has joined the growing race to explore Mars. The Tianwen 1 probe launched in July is on its way to the red planet carrying a lander and a rover to search for water.

## 'Very dark couple of weeks': Morgues and hospitals overflow

By TAMMY WEBBER and HEATHER HOLLINGSWORTH Associated Press

Nearly 37,000 Americans died of COVID-19 in November, the most in any month since the dark early days of the pandemic, engulfing families in grief, filling newspaper obituary pages and testing the capacity of morgues, funeral homes and hospitals.

Amid the resurgence, states have begun reopening field hospitals to handle an influx of patients that is pushing health care systems — and their workers — to the breaking point. Hospitals are bringing in mobile morgues. And funerals are being livestreamed or performed as drive-by affairs.

Health officials fear the crisis will be even worse in coming weeks, after many Americans ignored pleas to stay home over Thanksgiving and avoid people who don't live with them.

"I have no doubt that we're going to see a climbing death toll ... and that's a horrific and tragic place to be," said Josh Michaud, associate director of global health policy at the Kaiser Family Foundation. "It's going to be a very dark couple of weeks."

November's toll was far lower than the 60,699 recorded in April but perilously close to the next-highest total of almost 42,000 in May, according to data compiled by Johns Hopkins University. Deaths had dropped to just over 20,000 in June after states closed many businesses and ordered people to stay at home.

The fast-deteriorating situation is particularly frustrating because vaccine distribution could begin within weeks, Michaud said.

At Mercy Hospital Springfield in Missouri, a mobile morgue that was acquired in 2011 after a tornado ripped through nearby Joplin and killed about 160 people has been put into use again. On Sunday it held two bodies until funeral home workers could arrive.

At the Bellefontaine Cemetery in St. Louis, burials are up by about one-third this year compared with last year, and the cremated remains of about 20 people are sitting in storage while their families wait for a safer time to hold memorial services. The dead include a husband and wife in their 80s who succumbed

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to COVID-19 five days apart.

"You want to be safe at the gravesite so you don't have to do another graveside service" for another family member, said Richard Lay, Bellefontaine Cemetery's vice president.

The Star Tribune in Minneapolis-St. Paul saw a 40% increase in the number of pages dedicated to paid obituaries in November, largely because of COVID-19, a spokesman said. By Nov. 29, the newspaper had 11 pages of obituaries, compared with about half that many on a typical Sunday.

In Worcester, Massachusetts, the National Guard trucked in cots, medical supplies, tables and other items needed to operate a 250-bed field hospital in the event the state's medical centers become overwhelmed.

Rhode Island opened two field hospitals with more than 900 beds combined. The state's regular hospitals reached their coronavirus capacity on Monday. New York City, the epicenter of the U.S. outbreak earlier in the year, reopened a field hospital last week on Staten Island. Wisconsin has a field hospital in West Allis ready to take overflow patients. A Nevada hospital has added hospital bed capacity in an adjacent parking garage.

"Hospitals all around the country are worried on a day-to-day basis about their capacity ... and we're not really even into winter season and we haven't seen the impact of Thanksgiving travel and Thanksgiving gatherings," said Dr. Amesh Adalja, a senior scholar at the Johns Hopkins Center for Health Security.

The number of hospital beds is just one concern. Many hospitals are scrambling to find enough staff to care for patients as the virus surges almost everywhere at once, Adalja said.

"You can't just say we'll have doctors and nurses from other states come because those other states are also dealing with COVID patients," he said.

The virus is blamed for over 268,000 deaths and more than 13.5 million confirmed infections in the United States. A record 96,000 people were in the hospital with the virus in the U.S. as of Monday. The U.S. is seeing on average more than 160,000 new cases per day and almost 1,470 deaths — equal to what the country was witnessing in mid-May.

State and local officials also are responding with shutdowns, curfews, quarantines and mask mandates.

California officials said the state could see a tripling of hospitalizations by Christmas and is considering stay-home orders for areas with the highest case rates. Los Angeles County already has told its 10 million residents to stay home.

In Oklahoma, Republican Gov. Kevin Stitt declared Thursday a day of prayer and fasting as the state's confirmed coronavirus infections neared 200,000. State health authorities Tuesday reported a one-day high of over 1,700 hospitalizations.

Stitt, who tested positive for the virus in July, has donated plasma to help other patients recover and said he will do it again.

"I believe we must continue to ask God to heal those who are sick, comfort those who are hurting and provide renewed strength and wisdom to all who are managing the effects of COVID-19," he said in a statement.

Webber reported from Fenton, Michigan, and Hollingsworth from Mission, Kansas. Associated Press writers Alan Clendenning in Phoenix; David Caruso and Jeff McMillan in New York City; and Juliet Williams in San Francisco contributed to this story.

## US probing potential bribery, lobbying scheme for pardon

By ERIC TUCKER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Justice Department is investigating whether there was a secret scheme to lobby White House officials for a pardon as well as a related plot to offer a hefty political contribution in exchange for clemency, according to a court document unsealed Tuesday.

Most of the information in the 18-page court order is redacted, including the identity of the people whom prosecutors are investigating and whom the proposed pardon might be intended for.

But the document from August does reveal that certain individuals are suspected of having acted to



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secretly lobby White House officials to secure a pardon or sentence commutation and that, in a related scheme, a substantial political contribution was floated in exchange for a pardon or "reprieve of sentence."

A Justice Department official said Tuesday night that no government official was or is a subject or target of the investigation. The official spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss an ongoing investigation.

President Donald Trump tweeted Tuesday night: "Pardon investigation is Fake News!"

The existence of the investigation, first reported by CNN, was revealed in a court order from U.S. District Judge Beryl Howell, the chief judge of Washington's federal court. In it, she granted investigators access to certain email communications connected to the alleged schemes that she said was not protected by attorney-client privilege. The investigative team will be able to use that material to confront any subject or target of the investigation, the judge wrote.

The order was dated Aug. 28, and prosecutors had sought to keep it private because they said it identifies people not charged by a grand jury. But on Tuesday, Howell unsealed select portions of that document while redacting from view any personally identifiable information.

As part of the investigation, more than 50 devices, including laptops and iPads, have been seized, according to the document.

Pardons are common at the end of a president's tenure and are occasionally politically fraught affairs as some convicted felons look to leverage connections inside the White House to secure clemency. Last week, Trump announced that he had pardoned his first national security adviser, Michael Flynn, even as a federal judge was weighing a Justice Department request to dismiss the case.

Follow Eric Tucker at <http://www.twitter.com/etuckerAP>

## Asian shares mixed after S&P 500 sets fresh record high

By ELAINE KURTENBACH AP Business Writer

Asian shares advanced Wednesday after Wall Street kicked off December with more milestones, as a broad rally pushed the S&P 500 and Nasdaq composite to new highs.

Australia reported its economy expanded 3.3% in the July-September quarter as the country recovered from pandemic lockdowns. That lifted the country out of recession, although in annual terms the economy contracted 3.8% from a year earlier.

"The rebound in Q3 GDP reversed around 40% of the decline during the first half of the year and we expect output to return to pre-virus levels by mid-2021," Ben Udy of Capital Economics said in a commentary.

Renewed talk of a possible U.S. stimulus package failed to drive major gains in Asia, however, as investors adopted a "wait and see" stance after so many failed attempts to forge an agreement on additional help as the U.S. endures fresh waves of coronavirus infections and precautions.

Hong Kong's Hang Seng fell 0.1% to 26,535.32, while the Nikkei 225 in Tokyo edged 0.1% lower to 26,756.37. Australia's S&P/ASX 200 declined 0.3% to 6,569.10.

South Korea's Kospi gained 1.4% to 2,671.71 and the Shanghai Composite index picked up 0.3% to 3,462.86. Shares rose in Taiwan, Malaysia and Indonesia but fell in Singapore.

Overnight, the S&P 500 gained 1.1% to 3,662.45, with Big Tech companies and banks driving a big part of the rally. The strong opening to December follows a 10.8% surge for the broad index in November, marking its best month since April. The tech-heavy Nasdaq climbed 1.3% to 12,355.11. Both indexes beat the record highs they set on Friday. Treasury yields also rose in another sign of optimism from investors.

The Dow Jones Industrial Average gained 0.6% to 29,823.92, while the Russell 2000 index picked up 0.9%, to 1,836.05.

Stocks have been ramping higher in recent weeks as investors focus on the possibility that coronavirus vaccines could soon help usher in a fuller global economic recovery.

News that former Federal Reserve Chairperson Janet Yellen had accepted President-Elect Joe Biden's nomination to be his treasury secretary also lifted sentiment, analysts said.

Investors are looking beyond the shocks from a resurgence of the virus to focus on promising progress

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on vaccine development. Several pharmaceutical companies have reported encouraging data recently suggesting their vaccine candidates are highly effective, raising hopes the economy will begin to turn around next year as the vaccines are distributed to a world beaten down by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development said in a report that the world economy will bounce back to its pre-pandemic levels by the end of next year, though the recovery will be uneven across the countries and many risks remain.

European regulators could approve a coronavirus vaccine developed by drugmakers Pfizer and BioNTech within four weeks. The companies have already asked for approval to begin vaccinations in the U.S. in December. Moderna is also asking U.S. and European regulators to allow emergency use of its COVID-19 vaccine.

Traders are also holding out hope that Democrats and Republicans may reach a deal on some amount of economic stimulus for the economy before 2021, but the parties remain divided on the details and the cost.

Biden on Tuesday repeated calls for Congress to pass immediate pandemic relief funding even before he takes office.

Salesforce.com shares fell 4% in after-hours trading after the business software pioneer announced it is buying work chatting service Slack for \$27.7 billion. The acquisition is by far the largest in the 21-year history of San Francisco-based Salesforce.

The yield on the 10-year Treasury was steady at 0.92% after jumping from 0.83% late Monday, a big move. The higher yields also helped bolster financial stocks, since they allow banks to charge more lucrative interest rates on loans.

In other trading, U.S. benchmark crude oil shed 47 cents to \$44.08 per barrel in electronic trading on the New York Mercantile Exchange. It lost 79 cents to \$44.55 per barrel on Tuesday. Brent crude, the international standard, declined 45 cents to \$46.97 per barrel.

The OPEC oil producers' cartel continued talks Tuesday about how much to pump next year as countries wrestled over whether to extend the production cuts that have been supporting prices depressed by the pandemic.

Members put off from Tuesday to Thursday a meeting with non-OPEC oil producers like Russia, who have been coordinating their actions with the cartel in recent years to increase their influence.

The pandemic has sapped demand for fuel across the economy, leading oil producers to cut back production this year to keep prices from sagging even further. Yet lower output means less revenue for governments depending on oil sales to fill state coffers.

The U.S. dollar strengthened to 104.41 Japanese yen, up from 104.34 yen on Tuesday. The euro advanced to \$1.2078 from \$1.2072.

AP Business Writers Damian J. Troise and Alex Veiga contributed.

## 'Big Sky' producers recognize Native American criticism

By LYNN ELBER AP Television Writer

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Native American tribes and advocates are condemning "Big Sky," a Montana-set ABC drama, for ignoring the history of violence inflicted on Indigenous women and instead making whites the crime victims.

They also have assailed the network and the show's producers for failing to respond to their complaints, which they first made known in a Nov. 17 letter. On Tuesday, the makers of "Big Sky" broke their silence.

"After meaningful conversations with representatives of the Indigenous community, our eyes have been opened to the outsized number of Native American and Indigenous women who go missing and are murdered each year, a sad and shocking fact," the executive producers said in a statement to The Associated Press.

"We are grateful for this education and are working with Indigenous groups to help bring attention to this important issue," according to the statement. The producers include David E. Kelley ("Big Little Lies,"

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"The Undoing") and novelist C.J. Box, whose 2013 book "The Highway" was adapted for the series.

Created by Kelley, "Big Sky" stars Katheryn Winnick and Kylie Bunbury as private detectives searching for two white sisters on a road trip who go missing and turn out to be part of a pattern of abductions.

With a disproportionate number of American Indians among Montana's missing and murdered girls and women, the fictional approach represents "at best, cultural insensitivity, and at worst, appropriation," said the signers, including the Rocky Mountain Tribal Leaders Council that represents all of Montana's tribal nations.

"I'm not at all surprised that they're doing this because Hollywood's been appropriating our trauma and our lived experience for years and years and years," said Georgina Lightning, an actor and longtime activist. "And we've always cried about it. We've always called it out. But nobody ever cared. Nobody ever listened and nobody cared."

In the November letter, ABC was asked to consider adding an on-screen message steering viewers to information about the entrenched peril facing Indigenous women in North America. They cited "Somebody's Daughter," a documentary detailing the murdered and missing Indigenous women and girls crisis, as it's known to those fighting the scourge.

"This is such an easy fix for ABC to make," the film's director, Rain, said in a statement. "Indigenous leaders are reaching out to ally and inform, to open a dialogue. They're not asking for 'Big Sky' to be taken off the air," he said, but instead be used to inform.

When no response was forthcoming, the coalition took its effort public and enlisted support from other tribal organizations, including Canada's Union of British Columbia Indian Chiefs and the Great Plains Tribal Chairmen's Association.

"Two-thirds of this country doesn't even know that Native Americans still exist," said Tom Rodgers, president of the Global Indigenous Council and a co-signer of the letter to ABC. "We thought, what a teachable moment."

In response to the producers' statement, a skeptical Rodgers said Tuesday he hadn't heard from anyone connected with the show and called for further details, including which Indigenous partners were being consulted.

While more than 5,000 Indigenous women were reported missing in 2016 in the U.S., reporting by The Associated Press has shown the number is difficult to determine because some cases go unreported, others aren't well-documented, and a comprehensive government database to track the cases is lacking.

Advocates, including some lawmakers representing Native Americans, also link the long-standing problem to inadequate resources, indifference and a jurisdictional maze. The rise of the #MeToo movement helped give the issue political heft, but Hollywood has lagged in paying heed.

While Lightning said she was "a little bit shocked" when she saw a Native American tragedy mirrored in a story but without Native American characters, her years working in Los Angeles meant she wasn't surprised. Now living in Alberta, she's in the Canadian miniseries "Trickster," about a dysfunctional Native family.

"There's such resistance" to change in Hollywood, she said. "When you're used to being one of the good old boys... there's no way they think they're going to have to conform to the rest of society. It's such an arrogance."

Native Americans are used to being routinely ignored by American popular culture, registering barely a blip on TV as they're usually seen on only one or two shows, such as Paramount Network's "Yellowstone." A University of California, Los Angeles, study released this year found that Indigenous actors were cast in six of 1,816 broadcast and cable series roles for the 2018-19 season.

But being slighted on the crucial issue raised by "Big Sky" is too bitter a pill to accept, said Rodgers, a Blackfeet Nation member whose Global Indigenous Council, an advocacy group for Indigenous peoples worldwide, helped organize the outreach to ABC.

"The one thing we won't be anymore is ignored. We're not going to be made invisible, we will not be erased," he said.

Lynn Elber can be reached at [lelber@ap.org](mailto:lelber@ap.org) and is on Twitter at <http://twitter.com/lynnelber>.

This story has been corrected to use the accurate pronoun for filmmaker Rain.

## Barr appoints special counsel in Russia probe investigation

By MICHAEL BALSAMO and ERIC TUCKER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Attorney General William Barr has given extra protection to the prosecutor he appointed to investigate the origins of the Trump-Russia probe, granting him authority to complete the work without being easily fired.

Barr told The Associated Press on Tuesday that he had appointed U.S. Attorney John Durham as a special counsel in October under the same federal regulations that governed special counsel Robert Mueller in the original Russia probe. He said Durham's investigation has been narrowing to focus more on the conduct of FBI agents who worked on the Russia investigation, known by the code name of Crossfire Hurricane.

Under the regulations, a special counsel can be fired only by the attorney general and for specific reasons such as misconduct, dereliction of duty or conflict of interest. An attorney general must document such reasons in writing.

The FBI in July 2016 began investigating whether the Trump campaign was coordinating with Russia to sway the outcome of the presidential election. That probe was inherited nearly a year later by special counsel Mueller, who ultimately did not find enough evidence to charge Trump or any of his associates with conspiring with Russia.

The early months of the investigation, when agents obtained secret surveillance warrants targeting a former Trump campaign aide, have long been scrutinized by the president and other critics of the probe who say the FBI made significant errors. An inspector general report last year backed up that criticism but did not find evidence that mistakes in the surveillance applications and other problems with the probe were driven by partisan bias.

Barr decided "the best thing to do would be to appoint them under the same regulation that covered Bob Mueller, to provide Durham and his team some assurance that they'd be able to complete their work regardless of the outcome of the election," he said Tuesday.

President-elect Joe Biden's transition team didn't immediately comment on the appointment.

The current investigation, a criminal probe, had begun very broadly but has since "narrowed considerably" and now "really is focused on the activities of the Crossfire Hurricane investigation within the FBI," Barr said. He said he expects Durham would detail whether any additional prosecutions will be brought and make public a report of the investigation's findings.

Durham's investigation has resulted in one prosecution so far: a guilty plea by a former FBI lawyer who admitted altering an email.

In an Oct. 19 order, obtained by The Associated Press, Barr says Durham is authorized "to investigate whether any federal official, employee or any person or entity violated the law in connection with the intelligence, counter-intelligence or law enforcement activities" directed at the 2016 presidential campaigns, anyone associated with the campaigns or the Trump administration.

House Judiciary Committee Chairman Jerrold Nadler, D-N.Y., said the appointment erodes trust in the Justice Department, and he questioned how it was allowed under the special counsel rules.

"And we should not lose sight of the larger picture: in the waning days of the Trump administration, the attorney general has once again used the powers of his office to settle old scores for the president," Nadler said.

The special counsel rules say the appointed person should be outside of government, but Barr pointed to specific provisions in his memo that would allow him to go around that rule.

A senior Justice Department official told the AP that although the order details that it is "including but not limited to Crossfire Hurricane and the investigation of Special Counsel Robert S. Mueller III," the Dur-

ham probe has not expanded.

The official said that line specifically relates to FBI personnel who worked on the Russia investigation before the May 2017 appointment of Mueller, a critical area of scrutiny for the Justice Department inspector general, which identified a series of errors and omissions in surveillance applications targeting former Trump campaign aide Carter Page.

The focus on the FBI, rather than the CIA and the intelligence community, suggests that Durham may have moved past some of the more incendiary claims that Trump supporters had hoped would yield allegations of misconduct, or even crimes — namely, the question of how intelligence agencies reached their conclusion that Russia had interfered in the 2016 election.

Republicans lauded the appointment. Senate Judiciary Chairman Lindsey Graham said it was “obvious the system failed” and he concurred with the appointment of a special counsel to continue the investigation.

## Visitor: Monolith toppled by group who said ‘leave no trace’

SALT LAKE CITY (AP) — New clues have surfaced in the disappearance of a gleaming monolith in Utah that seemed to melt away as mysteriously as it appeared in the red-rock desert — though it’s no longer the only place where a strange structure has come and gone.

A Colorado photographer told KSTU-TV that he saw four men come to the remote Utah site Friday night and push over the hollow, stainless steel object.

“Right after it had fallen over and made a loud thud, one of them said, ‘This is why you don’t leave trash in the desert,’” Ross Bernards told the Salt Lake City TV station.

The group broke down the structure into pieces, loaded it into a wheelbarrow and left.

“As they were loading it up and walking away, they just said, ‘Leave no trace,’” he said.

The sheriff’s office in San Juan County has said it’s not planning an investigation into the disappearance of the monolith, which had been placed without permission on public land. But authorities also said they would accept tips from any of the hundreds of visitors who trekked out to see the otherworldly gleaming object deep in the desert.

The sheriff and the Bureau of Land Management, which oversees the land where the object appeared, didn’t immediately respond to messages seeking comment on whether they are investigating the removal that Bernards’ group photographed.

Visitors have left behind a mess of human waste, cars parked on vegetation and other debris, the land agency said. The mysterious structure that evoked the movie “2001: A Space Odyssey” generated international attention and drew plenty of speculation about otherworldly origins, though officials said it was an earthly creation of riveted plates of stainless steel.

For Bernards, the visitors’ damage to the environment convinced him that the remote area was better off without the structure.

“Leave the art to places where art should be and let Mother Nature have her space for art,” he said.

Utah isn’t the only place a monolith emerged. A similar metal structure was found on a hill in northern Romania, in the city of Piatra Neamt but has since disappeared, according to Robert Iosub, a journalist with the local publication [ziarpiatraneamt.ro](http://ziarpiatraneamt.ro).

Like the Utah structure, whoever placed the object didn’t follow the proper steps and get a building permit, Mayor Andrei Carabelea said in a Facebook post over the weekend. Still, he took it in stride, joking that some “cheeky and terrible” alien teenagers were likely putting them up around the world.

“I am honored they chose our city,” he said.

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Associated Press photographer Vadim Ghirda in Bucharest, Romania contributed to this story.

## Salesforce buying work-chat service Slack for \$27.7 billion

By MICHAEL LIEDTKE and MATT O’BRIEN AP Technology Writers

SAN RAMON, Calif. (AP) — Business software pioneer Salesforce.com is buying work-chatting service

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Slack for \$27.7 billion in a deal aimed at giving the two companies a better shot at competing against longtime industry powerhouse Microsoft.

The acquisition announced Tuesday is by far the largest in the 21-year history of Salesforce. The San Francisco company was one of the first to begin selling software as a subscription service that could be used on any internet-connected device instead of the more cumbersome process of installing the programs on individual computers.

Salesforce's flamboyant founder and CEO Marc Benioff hailed the "cloud computing" concept as the wave of the future to much derision initially.

But software as a service has become an industry standard that has turned into a gold mine for longtime software makers. Microsoft for one has developed its own thriving online suite of services, known as Office 365, which includes a Teams chatting service that includes many of the same features as Slack's 6-year-old application.

Slack in July filed a complaint in the European Union accusing Microsoft of illegally bundling Teams into Office 365 in a way that blocks its removal by customers who may prefer Slack.

Microsoft also has been posing a threat to Salesforce's main products, a line-up of tools that help other companies manage their customer relationships.

"For Benioff, this is all about Microsoft," Wedbush Securities analyst Dan Ives said of Tuesday's deal. "It's just clear Microsoft is moving further and further away from Salesforce when it comes to the cloud wars."

Benioff left no doubt he considered the deal to be a major coup, after losing out to Microsoft in 2016 when the two companies were both vying to buy the professional networking service LinkedIn.

"It's a match made in heaven," Benioff said during an ebullient conference call. "We see in Slack a once-in-a-generation company and platform. It's a central nervous system for so many companies."

Salesforce has been building on its success in recent years to diversify into other fields, largely through a series of acquisitions that included its previous largest deal, a \$15.7 billion purchase of data analytics specialist Tableau Software last year.

Many of the deals have been financed with Salesforce's stock, which is worth nearly seven times more than it was a decade ago to lift the company's current market value to \$220 billion. Salesforce is using its stock to pay for roughly half of the Slack purchase, with the rest being covered with some cash, with some of the money being borrowed during a time of extraordinarily low interest rates.

Slack, on the other hand, hasn't proven as popular with investors, even though its service that publicly launched in 2014 is being increasingly used by companies and government agencies looking for more nimble alternatives than email. Before news reports of a potential deal with Salesforce surfaced last week, Slack's stock was still hovering around its initial listing price of \$26 when the company went public nearly 18 months ago.

"This is a stellar exit strategy for Slack," said Kate Leggett, an analyst at Forrester Research. "Microsoft Teams is eating Slack's lunch."

Slack co-founder Stewart Butterfield will be hoping this sale works out better than when another company he started, photo sharing service Flickr, was sold to Yahoo 15 years ago. Flickr got lost in the shuffle at Yahoo amid years of turmoil before it was finally sold again in 2018 to SmugMug.

In his next act after leaving Flickr, Butterfield decided to focus on gaming with a startup called Tiny Speck that launched in 2009. A few years later, he shifted to the instant messaging service whose name was an acronym for "Searchable Log of All Conversation and Knowledge."

Leggett predicted Salesforce would benefit from owning Slack because it will add a popular collaboration tool to its own software suite, which is focused on managing customer relationships for businesses and government agencies. She said the need for customer-relations agents and other Salesforce users to swarm around a topic and collaborate remotely has only grown with the coronavirus pandemic that has sent so many office workers home and got many hooked on new online tools.

If all goes smoothly, Salesforce hopes to take control of Slack sometime from May to July next year.

Slack, which is free for people who use the basic version, found quick adoption in the tech industry for

its ease of use and its fostering of a more casual mode of conversation than email. The company stopped releasing its daily user count after topping 12 million last year, focusing instead on paid customers, which Butterfield said in March have shown a "massive outpouring of interest" because of the way the pandemic has forced people to work from home.

"I think the pandemic's played a massive role" in paving the way for the deal, Ives said. "The Zooms, the Slacks, the Microsoft Teams, that's going to be a new part of the workforce."

Ives said Benioff was also running out of time to catch up to Microsoft, which remains a secondary player in Salesforce's core customer-relations-management business, known as CRM, but way ahead in providing a broader array of cloud-based services.

Slack and Salesforce are headquartered about a block away from each other in San Francisco. Slack's office is in the shadow of the 62-story Salesforce Tower, the tallest building in Northern California.

"I get to look right out my window and you know what I see? Slack," Benioff said.

O'Brien reported from Providence, Rhode Island.

## Disputing Trump, Barr says no widespread election fraud

By MICHAEL BALSAMO Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Disputing President Donald Trump's persistent, baseless claims, Attorney General William Barr declared Tuesday the U.S. Justice Department has uncovered no evidence of widespread voter fraud that could change the outcome of the 2020 election.

Barr's comments, in an interview with the The Associated Press, contradict the concerted effort by Trump, his boss, to subvert the results of last month's voting and block President-elect Joe Biden from taking his place in the White House.

Barr told the AP that U.S. attorneys and FBI agents have been working to follow up specific complaints and information they've received, but "to date, we have not seen fraud on a scale that could have effected a different outcome in the election."

The comments, which drew immediate criticism from Trump attorneys, were especially notable coming from Barr, who has been one of the president's most ardent allies. Before the election, he had repeatedly raised the notion that mail-in voting could be especially vulnerable to fraud during the coronavirus pandemic as Americans feared going to polls and instead chose to vote by mail.

More to Trump's liking, Barr revealed in the AP interview that in October he had appointed U.S. Attorney John Durham as a special counsel, giving the prosecutor the authority to continue to investigate the origins of the Trump-Russia probe after Biden takes over and making it difficult to fire him. Biden hasn't said what he might do with the investigation, and his transition team didn't comment Tuesday.

Trump has long railed against the investigation into whether his 2016 campaign was coordinating with Russia, but he and Republican allies had hoped the results would be delivered before the 2020 election and would help sway voters. So far, there has been only one criminal case, a guilty plea from a former FBI lawyer to a single false statement charge.

Under federal regulations, a special counsel can be fired only by the attorney general and for specific reasons such as misconduct, dereliction of duty or conflict of interest. An attorney general must document such reasons in writing.

Barr went to the White House Tuesday for a previously scheduled meeting that lasted about three hours.

Trump didn't directly comment on the attorney general's remarks on the election. But his personal attorney Rudy Giuliani and his political campaign issued a scathing statement claiming that, "with all due respect to the Attorney General, there hasn't been any semblance" of an investigation into the president's complaints.

Other administration officials who have come out forcefully against Trump's allegations of voter-fraud evidence have been fired. But it's not clear whether Barr might suffer the same fate. He maintains a lofty position with Trump, and despite their differences the two see eye-to-eye on quite a lot.

Still, Senate Democratic leader Chuck Schumer quipped: "I guess he's the next one to be fired."

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Last month, Barr issued a directive to U.S. attorneys across the country allowing them to pursue any "substantial allegations" of voting irregularities before the 2020 presidential election was certified, despite no evidence at that time of widespread fraud.

That memorandum gave prosecutors the ability to go around longstanding Justice Department policy that normally would prohibit such overt actions before the election was certified. Soon after it was issued, the department's top elections crime official announced he would step aside from that position because of the memo.

The Trump campaign team led by Giuliani has been alleging a widespread conspiracy by Democrats to dump millions of illegal votes into the system with no evidence. They have filed multiple lawsuits in battleground states alleging that partisan poll watchers didn't have a clear enough view at polling sites in some locations and therefore something illegal must have happened. The claims have been repeatedly dismissed including by Republican judges who have ruled the suits lacked evidence.

But local Republicans in some battleground states have followed Trump in making unsupported claims, prompting grave concerns over potential damage to American democracy.

Trump himself continues to rail against the election in tweets and in interviews though his own administration has said the 2020 election was the most secure ever. He recently allowed his administration to begin the transition over to Biden, but he still refuses to admit he lost.

The issues they've pointed to are typical in every election: Problems with signatures, secrecy envelopes and postal marks on mail-in ballots, as well as the potential for a small number of ballots miscast or lost.

But they've gone further. Attorney Sidney Powell has spun fictional tales of election systems flipping votes, German servers storing U.S. voting information and election software created in Venezuela "at the direction of Hugo Chavez," – the late Venezuelan president who died in 2013. Powell has since been removed from the legal team after an interview she gave where she threatened to "blow up" Georgia with a "biblical" court filing.

Barr didn't name Powell specifically but said: "There's been one assertion that would be systemic fraud and that would be the claim that machines were programmed essentially to skew the election results. And the DHS and DOJ have looked into that, and so far, we haven't seen anything to substantiate that."

In the campaign statement, Giuliani claimed there was "ample evidence of illegal voting in at least six states, which they have not examined."

"We have many witnesses swearing under oath they saw crimes being committed in connection with voter fraud. As far as we know, not a single one has been interviewed by the DOJ. The Justice Department also hasn't audited any voting machines or used their subpoena powers to determine the truth," he said.

However, Barr said earlier that people were confusing the use of the federal criminal justice system with allegations that should be made in civil lawsuits. He said a remedy for many complaints would be a top-down audit by state or local officials, not the U.S. Justice Department.

"There's a growing tendency to use the criminal justice system as sort of a default fix-all," he said, but first there must be a basis to believe there is a crime to investigate.

"Most claims of fraud are very particularized to a particular set of circumstances or actors or conduct. ... And those have been run down; they are being run down," Barr said. "Some have been broad and potentially cover a few thousand votes. They have been followed up on."

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Associated Press Writers Lisa Mascaro and Eric Tucker contributed to this report.

## Cosby's sex assault conviction goes before high-level court

By MARYCLAIRE DALE Associated Press

PHILADELPHIA (AP) — Pennsylvania's highest court questioned Tuesday whether Bill Cosby's alleged history of intoxicating and sexually assaulting young women amounted to a signature crime pattern, given studies that show as many as half of all sexual assaults involve drugs or alcohol. Cosby, 83, hopes to



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overturn his 2018 sex assault conviction because the judge let prosecutors call five other accusers who said Cosby mistreated them the same way he did his victim, Andrea Constand. The defense said their testimony prejudiced the jury against the actor and should not have been allowed.

"That conduct you describe — the steps, the young women — there's literature that says that's common to 50% of these assaults — thousands of assaults — nationwide," Chief Justice Thomas G. Saylor asked a prosecutor during oral arguments in the Pennsylvania Supreme Court. "So how can that be a common scheme?"

The prosecutor, in response, offered more precise details about the relationships, saying Cosby used his fame and fortune to mentor the women and then took advantage of it. And he sometimes befriended their mothers or families.

"There was a built-in level of trust because of his status in the entertainment industry and because he held himself out as a public moralist," said Assistant District Attorney Adrienne Jappe, of suburban Philadelphia's Montgomery County, where Constand says she was assaulted at Cosby's estate in 2004.

"The signature was isolating and intoxicating young women for the purpose of sexually assaulting them," Jappe said.

Cosby has served more than two years of his three- to 10-year prison sentence for drugging and molesting Constand, whom he met through the basketball program at his alma mater, Temple University.

Courts have long wrestled with decisions about when other accusers should be allowed to testify in criminal cases. It's generally not allowed, but state law permits a few exceptions, including to show a signature crime pattern or to prove someone's identity. The state's high court appears eager to address the issue, and in doing so took on the first celebrity criminal case of the #MeToo era. The court typically takes several months to issue its opinion.

Judge Steven T. O'Neill had allowed just one other accuser to testify at Cosby's first trial in 2017, when the jury could not reach a verdict. The #MeToo movement took hold months later with media reports about movie mogul Harvey Weinstein and other men accused of sexual misconduct.

O'Neill then let five other accusers testify at Cosby's retrial in 2018, when the jury convicted him of drugging and sexually assaulting Constand.

Cosby's appellate lawyer, Jennifer Bonjean, said prosecutors exploited "all of this vague testimony" about his prior behavior and his acknowledgement that he had given women alcohol or quaaludes before sexual encounters.

"They put Mr. Cosby in a position where he had no shot. The presumption of innocence just didn't exist for him," Bonjean said in the arguments Tuesday, which were held online because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Constand went to police in 2005, about a year after the night at his home. The other women knew Cosby in the 1980s through the entertainment industry, and they did not go to police.

The defense also challenged the trial judge's decision to let the jury hear damaging testimony Cosby gave in a lawsuit Constand filed against him in 2005, after then-prosecutor Bruce Castor declined to arrest Cosby.

The testimony was sealed for nearly a decade until The Associated Press asked a federal judge to release documents from the case as more Cosby accusers came forward. The judge agreed, and Castor's successor reopened the case in 2015, just months before the statute of limitations to arrest him would have expired.

Cosby, a once-beloved comedian and actor known as "America's Dad," has said he will serve his entire 10-year term rather than admit wrongdoing to the parole board.

Criminal law professor Laurie Levenson believes it's important for the court to scrutinize Cosby's conviction given the publicity the case attracted, the legal questions it raised and the potential influence of the #MeToo movement.

However, she was less sure there's data to show that intoxication was as prevalent in sex assault cases in the 1980s through 2004 as it is today.

"We have heard a lot more about doping types of sexual assaults (recently), but I'm not sure how com-

mon it was at the time of this offense," said Levenson, of Loyola Law School. "I think the court's doing the right thing, which is asking, 'Did he get convicted on legitimate evidence?'"

The AP does not typically identify sexual assault victims without their permission, which Constand has granted.

Follow Maryclaire Dale on Twitter at <https://twitter.com/Maryclairedale>.

## Pushed to rush, FDA head says feds will get vaccine 'right'

By JONATHAN LEMIRE, JILL COLVIN, MATTHEW PERRONE and ZEKE MILLER Associated Press  
WASHINGTON (AP) — The head of the agency responsible for authorizing COVID-19 vaccines said Tuesday that it would take the time needed to "get this right," despite increasing pressure from President Donald Trump to speed up the process.

"No one at FDA is sitting on his or her hands. Everyone is working really hard to look at these applications and get this done," Stephen Hahn, the head of the Food and Drug Administration, told ABC in an interview on Instagram Live. "But we absolutely have to do this the right way."

Hahn's comments came not long after he was summoned to the White House by Trump's chief of staff Mark Meadows as the agency weighs whether to allow emergency use of the first vaccines that could begin the long road to defeating the coronavirus in the U.S.

Trump has been livid with the FDA for not moving faster to approve the shots, blaming the fact that a vaccine was not available ahead of the Nov. 3 election in part for his loss. He also has leveled unfounded claims that drug companies deliberately delayed vaccine development to hinder his reelection chances, though there is no evidence to suggest that took place.

As he has refused to accept his loss, Trump also has told close confidants that he believes the vaccine is still being slow-walked in a bid to undermine his efforts to challenge the results. If the vaccine were shipped out sooner, he has argued, it would rally public opinion to his side.

Hahn emerged from the White House meeting with his job intact, but it was a sign of the pressure he is under that the FDA offered guidance that "Dr. Hahn remains FDA Commissioner."

Hahn said the FDA will thoroughly review each vaccine before making it available to the public.

"We will make sure that our scientists take the time they need to make an appropriate decision," Hahn said in a statement provided by the FDA. "It is our job to get this right and make the correct decision regarding vaccine safety and efficacy."

An FDA spokesman said the agency must review thousands of pages of technical information provided by vaccine developers to ensure the shots were studied and manufactured properly.

As for the meeting, Hahn told ABC that it was held "to provide a briefing around the issues we're discussing here and that's what occurred."

The FDA has been weighing whether to authorize two experimental vaccines that have been raced through development. Pfizer and Moderna are seeking "emergency use" that would allow people in high-risk groups to get vaccinated while final-stage testing continues.

But the meeting risked exacerbating concerns that many Americans already harbor about the potential impact of political pressure on vaccine development. Public health officials, including Hahn, have been trying to provide reassurance for months that the approval process has been free from influence.

Meanwhile, a separate scientific panel was tackling the pressing question of who should first receive vaccinations when they become available in limited supply.

The White House did not respond to requests for comment about the meeting with Hahn and his future at the agency. But many aides to the president recognize that it would look especially bad for Trump to lose Hahn on the cusp of vaccine authorization.

The president has been fuming about the pace of the vaccine approval process since he lost his reelection bid and believes that, had Pfizer and Moderna released data showing their vaccines were effective before Election Day, he would have won the race. He has also complained repeatedly about not

getting the credit he believes he deserves for the vaccines' development and has urged reporters not to give President-elect Joe Biden credit for what has happened on Trump's watch.

In the first months of his tenure, former FDA staffers and outside experts criticized Hahn, a scientific researcher and former hospital executive, for decisions that many viewed as bowing to the White House and failing to protect the agency's science-based decision-making process.

But more recently, Hahn has resisted White House pressure, including for hasty vaccine approval.

In October, Hahn published strict FDA safety guidelines that effectively closed the door on Trump's goal of delivering a vaccine by Election Day. And he has repeatedly testified to Congress that "science, not politics," would determine when a vaccine was made available.

Despite Trump's claims, the FDA has little control over when companies decide to seek government authorization for their vaccines. Each of the leading vaccine manufacturers is conducting large-scale studies of thousands of people to test their shots for safety and effectiveness.

Only an outside panel of independent experts can peek at the study data and determine when enough has accumulated to warrant FDA submission. Pfizer submitted its vaccine application on Nov. 20th and rival Moderna did the same on Monday.

The FDA has scheduled public meetings for Dec. 10 and Dec. 17 to review each vaccine and is expected to make decisions on whether to grant their use before the end of the year.

While Trump's anger with the FDA has been percolating for months, it escalated after the election, according to White House aides and a Republican close to the White House who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss private conversations.

Trump has told friends that he believes Hahn slowed down or undersold the benefits of other therapeutics — despite evidence to the contrary — and has "never been on the team." And Trump has claimed both privately and publicly that drug companies are punishing him for his efforts to lower prescription drug prices, and has made unsupported allegations that they have formed an informal Deep State-like cabal with the FDA and the media to hurt him.

Meanwhile, the administration has invited leading vaccine manufacturers, distributors and others to a "vaccine summit" next week. Not all invited companies have committed to attending for fear of being perceived as overtly political or being subjected to Trump's attacks.

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Miller reported from Wilmington, Delaware. Lemire reported from New York.

## Senate GOP leader sticking with partisan COVID relief plan

By ANDREW TAYLOR Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Top Senate Republican Mitch McConnell said Tuesday he's largely sticking with a partisan, scaled-back COVID-19 relief bill that has already failed twice this fall, even as Democratic leaders and a bipartisan group of moderates offered concessions in hopes of passing pandemic aid before Congress adjourns for the year.

The Kentucky Republican made the announcement after President-elect Joe Biden called upon lawmakers to pass a downpayment relief bill now with more to come next year. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi resumed talks with Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin about a year-end spending package that could include COVID relief provisions. Key Senate moderates rallied behind a scaled-back framework.

It's not clear whether the flurry of activity will lead to actual progress. Time is running out on Congress' lame-duck session and Donald Trump's presidency, many Republicans won't even acknowledge that Trump has lost the election and good faith between the two parties remains in short supply.

McConnell said his bill, which only modestly tweaks an earlier plan blocked by Democrats, would be signed by Trump and that additional legislation could pass next year. But his initiative fell flat with Democrats and a key GOP moderate.

"If it's identical to what (McConnell) brought forth this summer then it's going to be a partisan bill that is not going to become law," said Sen. Susan Collins, R-Maine, who joined moderates in unveiling a \$908 billion bipartisan package only hours earlier. "And I want a bill that will become law."

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Democrats declined to release details of their concessions to McConnell.

"Speaker Pelosi and I sent him the proposal in a good faith effort to start, to get him to negotiate in a bipartisan way," Schumer said.

McConnell's response was to convene conversations with the Trump team and House GOP Leader Kevin McCarthy of California. During the campaign, Trump appeared eager to sign a relief bill and urged lawmakers to "go big" but McConnell said Tuesday's modest measure is all he'll go for now.

"We don't have time for messaging games. We don't have time for lengthy negotiations," McConnell said. "I would hope that this is something that could be signed into law by the president, be done quickly, deal with the things we can agree on now." He added that there would still be talks about "some additional package of some size."

McConnell's reworked plan swiftly leaked. A summary ignores key demands of Democrats and moderates such as aid to states and local governments and additional unemployment benefits.

In Wilmington, Delaware, Biden called on lawmakers to approve a down payment on COVID relief, though he cautioned that "any package passed in lame-duck session is — at best -- just a start."

And a bipartisan group of lawmakers proposed a split-the-difference solution to the protracted impasse over COVID-19 relief in a last-gasp effort to ship overdue help to a hurting nation before Congress adjourns for the holidays. It was a sign that some lawmakers across the spectrum are reluctant to adjourn for the year without approving some COVID aid.

The group includes Senate centrists such as Joe Manchin, D-W.Va., and Collins, who hope to exert greater influence in a closely divided Congress during the incoming Biden administration.

The proposal by the bipartisan group hit the scales at \$908 billion, including \$228 billion to extend and upgrade "paycheck protection" subsidies for businesses for a second round of relief to hard-hit businesses like restaurants. It would revive a special jobless benefit, but at a reduced level of \$300 per week rather than the \$600 benefit enacted in March. State and local governments would receive \$160 billion, and there is also money for vaccines.

Previous, larger versions of the proposal — a framework with only limited detail — were rejected by top leaders such as Pelosi, D-Calif., and McConnell. But pressure is building as lawmakers face the prospect of heading home for Christmas and New Year's without delivering aid to people in need.

Lawmakers' bipartisan effort comes after a split-decision election delivered the White House to Democrats and gave Republicans down-ballot success. At less than \$1 trillion, it is less costly than a proposal meshed together by McConnell this summer. He later abandoned that effort for a considerably less costly measure that failed to advance in two attempts this fall.

"It's not a time for political brinkmanship," Manchin said. "Emergency relief is needed now more than ever before. The people need to know that we are not going to leave until we get something accomplished."

Pelosi and Mnuchin were discussing COVID relief and other end-of-session items, including a \$1.4 trillion catchall government funding bill. Mnuchin told reporters as he arrived at a Senate Banking Committee hearing to assess earlier COVID rescue efforts that he and Pelosi are focused primarily on the unfinished appropriations bills, however.

"On COVID relief, we acknowledged the recent positive developments on vaccine development and the belief that it is essential to significantly fund distribution efforts to get us from vaccine to vaccination," Pelosi said afterward.

Pelosi and Mnuchin grappled over a relief bill for weeks before the November election, discussing legislation of up to \$2 trillion. But Senate GOP conservatives opposed their efforts and Pelosi refused to yield on key points.

The bipartisan compromise proposal is virtually free of detail, but includes a temporary shield against COVID-related lawsuits against businesses and other organizations that have reopened despite the pandemic.

That's a priority for McConnell. But his warnings of a wave of destructive lawsuits haven't been borne out, and it is sure to incite opposition from the trial lawyers' lobby, which retains considerable influence

with top Democratic leaders.

The centrist lawmakers, both moderates and conservatives, billed their proposal as a temporary patch to hold things over until next year. It contains \$45 billion for transportation, including aid to transit systems and Amtrak, \$82 billion to reopen schools and universities, funding for vaccines and health care providers, and money for food stamps, rental assistance and the Postal Service.

## Trump files lawsuit challenging Wisconsin election results

By SCOTT BAUER Associated Press

MADISON, Wis. (AP) — President Donald Trump filed a lawsuit Tuesday in Wisconsin seeking to disqualify more than 221,000 ballots in the state's two most Democratic counties, a longshot attempt to overturn Joe Biden's win in a battleground state he lost by nearly 20,700 votes.

Trump filed the day after Democratic Gov. Tony Evers and the chairwoman of the Wisconsin Elections Commission certified Biden as the winner of the state's 10 Electoral College votes. Trump asked the Wisconsin Supreme Court to take the case directly, rather than have it start in a lower court, and order Evers to withdraw the certification.

The Wisconsin Supreme Court gave Evers until 8:30 p.m. Tuesday to respond to the lawsuit, an unusually tight deadline that speaks to how quickly the court is likely to decide the case.

The state's highest court, controlled 4-3 by conservatives, also is considering whether to hear two other lawsuits filed by conservatives seeking to invalidate ballots cast during the presidential election. Separately, two Wisconsin Republicans filed a new federal lawsuit Tuesday that mirrors some of Trump's claims and asks a judge to declare him the winner in Wisconsin.

Trump's lawsuit repeats many claims he made during a recount of votes in Milwaukee and Dane counties that large swaths of absentee votes were illegally cast. Local officials rejected his claims during the recount, and Trump is challenging procedures that have been in place for years and never been found to be illegal.

Trump is not challenging any ballots cast in conservative counties he won.

Biden campaign spokesman Nate Evans called the lawsuit "completely baseless and not rooted in facts on the ground." Democratic Gov. Tony Evers said it was "without merit."

Wisconsin Attorney General Josh Kaul, a Democrat, noted that the lawsuit doesn't allege that anyone was ineligible to vote, but instead seeks to create a two-tiered election system where voters in Dane and Milwaukee counties are disenfranchised "under much stricter rules than citizens in the rest of the state."

Trump's Wisconsin attorney, Jim Troupis, said in a statement that voters "deserve election processes with uniform enforcement of the law, plain and simple."

Similar Trump campaign lawsuits have failed in other battleground states.

In Phoenix, a judge has scheduled a Thursday trial in Arizona GOP Chairwoman Kelli Ward's lawsuit that seeks to annul Biden's victory in the state. A judge is letting Ward's lawyers and experts compare the signatures on 100 mail-in ballot envelopes with signatures on file to determine whether there were any irregularities. Democratic Secretary of State Katie Hobbs' office, which certified Arizona's election results on Monday, said there was no factual basis for conducting such a review.

Trump is running out of time to have his legal cases heard. The Electoral College is scheduled to meet on Dec. 14 and Congress is to count the votes on Jan. 6.

Trump's Wisconsin lawsuit seeks to discard 170,140 absentee ballots where there was not a written application on file and all absentee ballots cast in person during the two weeks before Election Day.

People who vote in person early fill out a certification envelope for their ballot that serves as the written record. But the vast majority of absentee requests these days are made online, with a voter's name entered into an electronic log with no paper record.

Trump wants to toss 5,517 ballots where election clerks filled in missing address information on the certification envelope where the ballot is inserted. The practice has been in place for at least the past 11 elections, and the state elections commission told clerks it was OK.

Trump also challenges 28,395 absentee ballots where a voter declared themselves to be "indefinitely

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confined" under the law. Such a declaration exempts voters from having to show photo identification to cast a ballot. The Wisconsin Supreme Court in March ruled that it is up to individual voters to determine whether they are indefinitely confined, a designation used by nearly four times as many voters this year than in 2016 due to the coronavirus pandemic.

Trump also alleges that Madison opened illegal voting sites when the city held events at parks where election workers accepted 17,271 completed absentee ballots from voters looking to avoid crowds and mail delays. City officials said the poll workers at the 220 parks served the same purpose as ballot drop boxes.

The federal lawsuit came from Bill Feehan, the La Crosse County Republican Party chairman, and Derrick Van Orden, who ran unsuccessfully for Congress this year in western Wisconsin. Sidney Powell, a firebrand conservative attorney who was removed from Trump's legal team, is among the lawyers.

Van Orden said after the lawsuit was filed that he had spoken with someone in Powell's office about the case but had not given permission to be named as a litigant. Van Orden said he tried calling Powell to ask that his name be removed but could not get through. Powell did not immediately respond to an Associated Press email seeking comment.

"Why they would want me on there, I'm not quite sure," Van Orden said.

The same lawsuit asks for 48 hours of security footage from the "TCF Center," which is in Detroit, not in Wisconsin.

Also Tuesday, Republicans on the Wisconsin Elections Commission asked the Democratic chairwoman to resign after she finalized election results on Monday. They argued the commission should have been involved with that process, while the chair, who refused to resign, said she was following state law and precedent.

## Ex-Arizona politician gets 6 years in adoption scheme

By JACQUES BILLEAUD Associated Press

PHOENIX (AP) — A former Arizona politician who admitted running an illegal adoption scheme in three states involving women from the Marshall Islands was sentenced in Arkansas to six years in federal prison. It was the first of three punishments he'll face for arranging adoptions prohibited by an international compact.

Paul Petersen, a Republican who served as metro Phoenix's assessor for six years and also worked as an adoption attorney, illegally paid women from the Pacific island nation to come to the U.S. to give up their babies in at least 70 adoptions cases in Arizona, Utah and Arkansas, prosecutors said.

Marshall Islands citizens have been prohibited from traveling to the U.S. for adoption purposes since 2003 and prosecutors said Petersen's scheme lasted three years.

Judge Timothy Brooks, who imposed the sentence from Fayetteville, Arkansas, said Petersen abused his position as an attorney by misleading or instructing others to lie to courts in adoptions that wouldn't have been approved had the truth been told to them.

The judge said Petersen turned what should be joyous adoption occasions into "a baby-selling enterprise." He also described Petersen's adoption practice as a "criminal livelihood" and said he ripped off taxpayers at the same time he was elected to serve them.

Brooks rejected Petersen's claims that he initially thought he was acting within the bounds of the law, but later realized what he was doing was illegal.

"You knew that lying and making these false statements to immigration officials and state courts was wrong," said Brooks, who gave Petersen two years longer in prison than sentencing guidelines recommended.

Appearing by videoconference, Petersen told the judge that his actions in the Arkansas case weren't indicative of who he is as a person and offered an apology to any birth mothers who felt disrespected by his treatment of them.

Petersen said he was horrified to learn that subordinates he did not name during the hearing had mistreated birth mothers, though he claimed he didn't know about it at the time and did not condone it.

"I take responsibility for my lack of oversight," said Petersen said.

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Petersen, who earlier pleaded guilty to conspiring to commit human smuggling in Arkansas, faces sentencing next month for convictions in Utah and Arizona.

Federal prosecutors have said the former assessor — responsible for determining property values in the county that encompasses Phoenix — defrauded state courts, violated an international adoption compact and took advantage of mothers and adoptive families for his own profit. The money Petersen made from the adoption scheme helped pay for his lavish lifestyle, including expensive trips, luxury cars and multiple residences, prosecutors said.

Prosecutors said the passports of some birth mothers were taken away to prevent them from leaving the United States and that they were threatened with arrest if they tried to back out of adoptions. Petersen's attorneys vigorously disputed that their client played any role in keeping some of the mothers' passports, much less condoned it.

He is scheduled to be sentenced on Jan. 22 in Phoenix for submitting false applications to Arizona's Medicaid system so the mothers could receive state-funded health coverage — even though he knew they didn't live in the state — and for providing documents to a county juvenile court that contained false information. Petersen has said he has since paid back \$670,000 in health care costs to the state of more than \$800,000 that prosecutors cited in his indictment.

His sentencing in Utah on human smuggling and other convictions is set for Jan. 20.

Earlier in his life, Petersen, who is a member of The Church of Jesus Christs of Latter-day Saints, had completed a proselytizing mission in the Marshall Islands, a collection of atolls and islands in the eastern Pacific, where he became fluent in the Marshallese language.

He quit as Maricopa County's assessor in January amid pressure from other county officials to resign.

Petersen has said he carried out hundreds of legal adoptions after he discovered a niche locating homes for vulnerable children from the Marshall Islands and helping needy mothers who wanted a more stable family life for their children.

Petersen in a letter to the Arkansas judge several ago said he is now ashamed, as a fiscal conservative, for imposing the pregnancy labor and delivery costs on Arizona taxpayers.

Some families whose adoptions were handled by Petersen wrote letters to the judge in support of the former assessor.

## **VIRUS TODAY: A deadly November, and who gets vaccine first**

By The Associated Press undefined

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

### THREE THINGS TO KNOW TODAY

— A scientific panel is meeting to provide guidance on who should be at the front of the line when the first vaccine shots become available. Health care workers and nursing home residents will be among the first to get the vaccine.

— More than 36,000 people died from COVID-19 in November in the United States. The monthly number is not as high as the dark days of April and May but still a sign of the deadly turn the pandemic has taken this fall.

— Field hospitals are opening up again as hospital capacity runs out. Rhode Island and New York are among the places to open such facilities in recent days.

**THE NUMBERS:** The U.S. averaged 1,200 deaths per day in November. The country is averaging 160,000 new confirmed cases per day. More than 96,000 people were hospitalized as of Monday.

**QUOTABLE:** "It would be stupidity on steroids if Congress left for Christmas without doing an interim (virus relief) package before the new administration takes over in January. — Sen. Mark Warner, D-Va.

**ICYMI:** Small-town hospitals are feeling the crunch as beds fill up with virus patients. In a rural Missouri town, the doctor knows most of his patients by name, making the pain of the pandemic worse.

**ON THE HORIZON:** Will Congress be able to work out a deal and send additional relief money to struggling Americans and businesses before the holidays? A bipartisan group of moderate lawmakers is hoping

to pull off a \$900 billion package and break an impasse.

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

## **Unveiling economic team, Biden pledges, 'Help is on the way'**

By ZEKE MILLER and WILL WEISSERT Associated Press

WILMINGTON, Del. (AP) — President-elect Joe Biden on Tuesday introduced top advisers he says will help his administration rebuild an economy hammered by the coronavirus pandemic, declaring, "I know times are tough, but I want you to know that help is on the way."

Biden said he'd chosen a "first-rate team" that is "tested and experienced" to tackle the country's economic crisis. He picked liberal advisers who have long prioritized the nation's workers and government efforts to address economic inequality.

Unemployment remains high as the COVID-19 outbreak widens the gulf between average people and the wealthiest Americans. The virus, which has claimed more than 269,000 lives nationwide, is resurgent across the country amid holiday travel and colder weather sending people indoors.

As he did frequently while campaigning, Biden promised that the U.S. would eventually emerge with an economy that is dramatically reshaped to better stamp out economic inequality.

"From the most unequal economic and job crisis in modern history, we can build a new American economy that works for all Americans, not just some," Biden said as he introduced his choices for some of the government's top economic posts during a speech at a theater in Wilmington, Delaware, where he has led his transition to the presidency.

Tuesday also marked the president-elect's first appearance since breaking two small bones in his right foot while playing with one of his dogs over the weekend. He wore a black walking boot and moved gingerly but tried to keep things light. As he emerged from his motorcade, Biden pointed to his boot and lifted his leg briefly to show it off.

Asked about his foot by reporters, Biden responded only, "Good, thanks for asking."

The injury, while not serious, again intensifies scrutiny on Biden's age, given that he just turned 78 and is the oldest president ever to be in his first term. Still, his team has tried to keep the focus on building out its government and upcoming policy challenges, chief among them the pandemic and the economy.

Biden repeatedly evoked his work as vice president when the Obama administration oversaw the economic recovery following the 2008 financial crisis, noting that many of those on his newly formed economic team worked closely with him then.

Most of his choices will require confirmation from the deeply divided Senate, where some top Republicans have already begun voicing opposition. Biden said he hopes "that we will be able to work across the aisle in good faith, move forward as one country."

Janet Yellen, Biden's nominee for treasury secretary, served as chair of the Federal Reserve from 2014 to 2018, when she placed a greater emphasis than previous Fed chairs on maximizing employment and less focus on price inflation. Biden also named Cecilia Rouse as chair of his Council of Economic Advisers, and Heather Boushey and Jared Bernstein as members of the council.

Yellen called the economic havoc the pandemic has wrought "an American tragedy."

"To the American people: We will be an institution that wakes up every morning thinking about you," Yellen said of the Treasury Department, "Your jobs, your paychecks, your struggles, your hopes, your dignity and your limitless potential."

If confirmed by the Senate, Yellen would be the first woman to serve as treasury secretary, after breaking ground as the first woman to chair the Fed.

"We might have to ask Lin-Manuel Miranda, who wrote a musical about the first secretary of the treasury, Hamilton, to write another musical about the female secretary of the treasury," Biden joked.

Rouse would be the first Black woman to lead the CEA in its 74 years of existence. The president-elect also selected Wally Adeyemo to be Yellen's deputy, which would make him the first Black deputy treasury



secretary. Neera Tanden, Biden's pick for director of the Office of Management and Budget, would be the first South Asian American in that job.

Rouse, Tanden and Adeyemo will all require Senate confirmation, and Tanden, in particular, is already drawing heavy Republican criticism.

"Budgets are not abstractions. They are a reflection of our values," Tanden said during Tuesday's event.

All of Biden's picks are outspoken supporters of more government stimulus spending to boost growth — which Biden embraced on the campaign trail — though their proposals could face a difficult reception in Congress, which has stalemated on a new round of economic relief for months.

The prospects for a large-scale deal could hang on the outcome of runoff elections for both Georgia Senate seats. Victories in both would give Democrats control of the chamber — and its agenda — by the slimmest of margins, but Republican victories will quickly test Biden and his team's ability to negotiate across the aisle to deliver on their promised relief for Americans.

As he has in recent weeks, Biden repeated calls for Congress to pass immediate pandemic relief funding even before he takes office.

"Right now, the full Congress should come together and pass a robust package for relief," he said. But Biden added that any package passed during the lame-duck session before the end of the year is "likely to be at best just a start" and said his transition team is "already working on what I'll put forward in the next Congress to address the multiple crises we're facing."

In the meantime, grim economic news is piling up. Federal Reserve Chair Jerome Powell said Monday that the pace of improvement in the economy has moderated in recent months with future prospects remaining "extraordinarily uncertain."

And Steven Mnuchin, President Donald Trump's treasury secretary, announced last month that, over the objections of the Fed, he would not grant extensions for five lending programs being operated jointly by the Fed and the Treasury Department that are scheduled to expire on Dec. 31 — including backstops for corporate and municipal debt and the purchase of loans for small businesses and nonprofits.

Weissert reported from Washington. Associated Press writers Christopher Rugaber, Amer Madhani and Martin Crutsinger contributed to this report.

## 'All my love, Elliot': Actor Page comes out as transgender

By JAKE COYLE AP Film Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Oscar-nominated actor Elliot Page, the star of "Juno," "Inception" and "The Umbrella Academy," came out as transgender Tuesday in an announcement greeted as a watershed moment for the trans community in Hollywood.

"I love that I am trans. And I love that I am queer," Page said in a statement on social media.

Page, the 33-year-old actor from Nova Scotia, said his decision to come out as trans, which also involved changing his first name, came after a long journey and with much support from the LGBTQ community.

"I can't begin to express how remarkable it feels to finally love who I am enough to pursue my authentic self," Page wrote. "I've been endlessly inspired by so many in the trans community. Thank you for your courage, your generosity and ceaselessly working to make this world a more inclusive and compassionate place."

"The more I hold myself close and fully embrace who I am, the more I dream, the more my heart grows and the more I thrive," added Page, who said his pronouns are "he" and "they."

Page signed his statement with the words, "All my love, Elliot."

The announcement was celebrated widely on social media by LGBTQ rights advocates and many in the film industry. Netflix, maker of the comic book series "The Umbrella Academy," said, "So proud of our superhero! We love you Elliot!"

"Elliot Page has given us fantastic characters on-screen, and has been an outspoken advocate for all LGBTQ people," said Nick Adams, GLAAD's Director of Transgender Media. "He will now be an inspiration

to countless trans and non-binary people. All transgender people deserve the chance to be ourselves and to be accepted for who we are. We celebrate the remarkable Elliot Page today.”

Page broke out in Jason Reitman’s 2007 film “Juno” in a performance as a pregnant teenager that earned him an Academy Award nomination.

Page has frequently worked to bring the lives of LGBTQ characters to screen, including the 2015 film “Freeheld,” which he produced and starred in as the partner of a dying New Jersey police detective who had been denied pension benefits.

Last year, he made his directorial debut with the documentary “There’s Something in the Water,” about environmental damage on Black and First Nations communities in Nova Scotia.

## Pop-up school for US asylum seekers thrives despite pandemic

By JULIE WATSON Associated Press

MATAMOROS, Mexico (AP) — It started out simply: A pop-up school on a sidewalk to teach reading, writing, math and art to Central American children living in a camp of asylum seekers stuck at America’s doorstep.

Like countless schools, the sidewalk school, as it became known, had to go to virtual learning because of the coronavirus pandemic. Instead of being hampered by the change, though, it has blossomed, hiring about 20 teachers — all asylum seekers themselves — to give classes via Zoom to Central American children in not only the camp, but at various shelters and apartments in other parts of Mexico.

To be able to switch to distance learning, the teachers and students were outfitted with more than 200 Amazon tablets by The Sidewalk School for Children Asylum Seekers. The organization was founded by Felicia Rangel-Samponaro, who lives across the border in Brownsville, Texas, and has been crossing to help the asylum seekers by providing them food and books.

Rangel-Samponaro, 44, said that to buy the tablets, she used her own money and raised funds, including through a GoFundMe campaign. She said she felt obliged to do something for the asylum seekers because the U.S. government had upended their lives.

“This is a U.S. problem,” she said. “We created this. We’re the ones that continue to let this go on. This falls on American citizens.”

A Trump administration policy forced asylum seekers to wait south of the border as their cases proceed through U.S. courts, leaving thousands of Central American families living in tents or at Mexican shelters. Previously, asylum seekers were allowed to remain in the United States with relatives or other sponsors while their cases proceeded.

Many have spent more than a year with their lives in limbo, and the wait has only grown longer with the Trump administration suspending immigration court hearings for asylum-seekers during the pandemic.

The classes have offered children not only the chance to catch up on studies that were interrupted when their families fled violence in their homelands, but also a distraction from the long days of boredom.

On a recent Friday morning, Gabriela Fajardo held a Zoom class while sitting on an overturned bucket in a hallway of a small apartment building full of asylum seekers who have found enough work to be able to afford to move out of the camp in Matamoros. Interacting with her on her screen were several Central American children living in the Mexican border city of Ciudad Juarez, about 830 miles (1,335 kilometers) to the west along the Texas border.

“Remember, hello is hola,” she said in Spanish to a student named Jeremy, enunciating her words carefully as she leaned into her tablet set on a wooden table. “Good morning is buenos dias. You have to speak in English over there or no one is going to understand you in Spanish except your mother.”

“That’s why I’m sharing with you the little I know,” said the 26-year-old Honduran woman, who is stuck in Mexico like her students.

The boy gave an enthusiastic response: “OK, then in English! I have to speak in English,” though he was still speaking in Spanish.

Fajardo let out a big laugh and proceeded with the lesson.

Fajardo, a primary school teacher, fled from her village with her son after they received threats because her brother is a police officer. She has already spent a year and four months in Mexico as her case slowly proceeds through the U.S. courts.

Being able to teach — her life's passion — has given her a sense of purpose. She said it makes her angry to see children miss out on their education.

"I've noticed children who are older and know nothing," she said. "A child needs to start learning from the age of six to read and do math."

Fajardo left her country so that her son could have a better life.

But as they wait in this crime-ridden border city, she is grateful to be able to provide an education to so many other children whose futures are also uncertain.

"I was taught in college that the reason to get an education is to be able to educate others," Fajardo said. "That's what inspires me."

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Associated Press video journalist John Mone contributed to this report.

## EU eyes Dec 29 approval for 1st virus vaccine, later than US

By FRANK JORDANS, MARIA CHENG and SAMUEL PETREQUIN Associated Press

BERLIN (AP) — The European Union drug agency said Tuesday it may need four more weeks to approve its first coronavirus vaccine, even as authorities in the United States and Britain continue to aim for a green light before Christmas.

The European Medicines Agency plans to convene a meeting by Dec. 29 to decide if there is enough safety and efficacy data about the vaccine developed by Pfizer and BioNTech for it to be approved. The regulator also said it could decide as early as Jan. 12 whether to approve a rival shot by American pharmaceutical company Moderna Inc, which submitted its request to U.S. and European regulators this week.

If its vaccine is approved, Germany-based BioNTech said the shot's use in Europe could begin before the end of 2020 — but that seems quite ambitious, given that the EU Commission usually needs to rubber-stamp the regulator's decision. Still, the agency has also left open the possibility that the date of that meeting will be brought forward if data comes in faster.

Any approval granted by the European regulator will be conditional on companies submitting further information to confirm the vaccine's benefits outweigh the risks.

The date now being eyed would be later than some European countries had hoped. Germany, which has given BioNTech 375 million euros (\$450 million) in funding to develop the vaccine, has been preparing to start immunizing people from mid-December onward.

On Tuesday, officials in Germany, France and the Netherlands cautioned that vaccine programs likely won't start until the end of the year.

"With the information we got in recent days we have to assume that approval will only happen around the turn of the year," German Health Minister Jens Spahn said.

"It has moved because some studies obviously need a little longer to be submitted," he said. "What's important is to be prepared."

His comments were echoed by French President Emmanuel Macron and Dutch Health Minister Hugo de Jonge, who said authorities in those countries are working to begin vaccinating people in the first week of January.

"It won't be a vaccination policy for the broader public" during the first few months, Macron said at a news conference.

BioNTech and U.S. partner Pfizer have said that clinical trials showed their vaccine is 95% effective. The two companies have already submitted data to regulators in the United States and Britain, and approval might come from them first.

Hospitals in England have been told they could receive the first doses of the Pfizer shot as early as the week of Dec. 7 if it receives the OK, the Guardian and Financial Times reported. The U.S. Food and Drug Administration's scientific advisers are holding a public meeting Dec. 10 to review Pfizer's request to allow

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emergency use of its vaccine, and a decision could come shortly thereafter.

Stephen Evans, a professor at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, said that although the main drug regulators will all analyze the same data, the European regulator's decision-making process is slowed by the bureaucracy of the 27-nation bloc.

He explained that approval at the EMA "requires cooperation from member states, who each have a say in the authorization of a vaccine."

British regulators also are assessing another vaccine developed by researchers from Oxford University and drugmaker AstraZeneca.

Whichever of the three regulators — American, British or European — acts earliest would be giving the first approval of a COVID-19 vaccine that's been that's been rigorously tested in tens of thousands of people in trials that meet common scientific standards.

Numerous other vaccines are also being worked on. Russia and China have even begun administering shots of locally developed vaccines and selling them to other countries but have not published evidence from advanced studies proving the vaccines are safe and effective.

Globally, every country that has a drug regulatory agency will have to issue its own approval for any COVID-19 vaccine, although countries with weak systems usually rely on the World Health Organization to vet the shots. In the EU, countries typically accept EMA approval for vaccines and drugs unless there is a specific issue the country wants examined further.

Multiple successful vaccines will be needed to end the pandemic, which has been on the upswing in Europe and the U.S. and so far left more than 1.4 million people worldwide dead.

Authorities and drugmakers have pledged to work together to immediately begin rolling out the first shots once approval comes in, whether that's in the United States or Europe.

"Depending on how the authorities decide we can start delivering within a few hours," said BioNTech's chief operating officer, Sierk Poetting.

But officials caution that while some people may receive a vaccine in the coming weeks, it will likely take years to give billions of people around the world the shot, or two if a booster is necessary, meaning that people will be living with some virus control measures at least well into next year.

While the three major vaccines so far submitted for approval seem to prevent people from getting sick, it is still unclear whether they prevent people from picking up the virus entirely — and crucially — passing it to others.

The EU's top official said Tuesday around 2 billion doses of potential COVID-19 vaccines have been secured for the bloc's 27 nations and called hope for their quick approval "a huge step forward toward our normal life."

EU Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, however, urged EU citizens to remain "disciplined till we have reached finally a vaccination that is appropriate to eradicate this virus."

Even after vaccines are approved, manufacturers and regulators will be monitoring how well they are received by patients to determine the frequency of rarer side effects that may only appear when millions are immunized.

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Cheng reported from London and Petrequin from Brussels. Associated Press writers Kirsten Grieshaber in Berlin, Mike Corder in The Hague, Netherlands, and Sylvie Corbet in Paris contributed to this report.

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This story has been updated to correct that Pfizer and BioNTech asked for expedited approval of their vaccine, not an emergency use authorization.

**Pope book backs George Floyd protests, blasts virus skeptic**

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By NICOLE WINFIELD Associated Press

ROME (AP) — Pope Francis is supporting demands for racial justice in the wake of the U.S. police killing of George Floyd and is blasting COVID-19 skeptics and media organizations that spread their conspiracies in a new book penned during the Vatican's coronavirus lockdown.

In "Let Us Dream," published Tuesday, Francis also criticizes populist politicians who whip up rallies in ways reminiscent of the 1930s, and the hypocrisy of "rigid" conservative Catholics who support them. But he also criticizes the forceful downing of historic statues during protests for racial equality this year as a misguided attempt to "purify the past."

The 150-page book was written in collaboration with Francis' English-language biographer, Austen Ivereigh, who said Monday he hopes a more colloquial English-speaking pope will resonate with English-speaking readers and believers.

At its core, "Let Us Dream" aims to outline Francis' vision of a more economically and environmentally just post-coronavirus world where the poor, the elderly and weak aren't left on the margins and the wealthy aren't consumed only with profits.

But it also offers new personal insights into the 83-year-old Argentine pope and his sense of humor.

At one point, Francis reveals that after he offered in 2012 to retire as archbishop of Buenos Aires when he turned 75, he planned to finally finish the thesis he never completed on the 20th-century German intellectual, Romano Guardini.

"But in March 2013, I was transferred to another diocese," he deadpans. Francis was elected pope, and bishop of Rome, on March 13, 2013.

The publisher said the book was the first written by a pope during a major world crisis and Ivereigh said it was done as a response to the coronavirus and the lockdown. For Francis, the pandemic offers an unprecedented opportunity to imagine and plan for a more socially just world.

At times, it seems he is directing that message squarely at the United States, as Donald Trump's administration winds down four years of "America first" policies that excluded migrants from Muslim countries and diminished U.S. reliance on multilateral diplomacy. Without identifying the U.S. or Trump by name, Francis singles out Christian-majority countries where nationalist-populist leaders seek to defend Christianity from perceived enemies.

"Today, listening to some of the populist leaders we now have, I am reminded of the 1930s, when some democracies collapsed into dictatorships seemingly overnight," Francis wrote. "We see it happening again now in rallies where populist leaders excite and harangue crowds, channeling their resentments and hatreds against imagined enemies to distract from the real problems."

People fall prey to such rhetoric out of fear, not true religious conviction, he wrote. Such "superficially religious people vote for populists to protect their religious identity, unconcerned that fear and hatred of the other cannot be reconciled with the Gospel."

Francis addressed the killing of Floyd, a Black man whose death at the knee of a white policeman set off protests this year across the United States. Referring to Floyd by name, Francis said: "Abuse is a gross violation of human dignity that we cannot allow and which we must continue to struggle against."

But he warned that protests can be manipulated and decried the attempt to erase history by downing statues of U.S. Confederate leaders. A better way, he said, is to debate the past through dialogue.

"Amputating history can make us lose our memory, which is one of the few remedies we have against repeating the mistakes of the past," he wrote.

Turning to the pandemic, Francis blasted people who protested anti-virus restrictions "as if measures that governments must impose for the good of their people constitute some kind of political assault on autonomy or personal freedom!"

He accused some in the church and Catholic media of being part of the problem.

"You'll never find such people protesting the death of George Floyd, or joining a demonstration because there are shantytowns where children lack water or education," he wrote. "They turned into a cultural battle what was in truth an effort to ensure the protection of life."

He praised journalists who reported on how the pandemic was affecting the poorest. But he took a

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broad swipe at unnamed media organizations that “used this crisis to persuade people that foreigners are to blame, that the coronavirus is little more than a little bout of flu, and that restrictions necessary for people’s protection amount to an unjust demand of an interfering state.”

“There are politicians who peddle these narratives for their own gain,” he writes. “But they could not succeed without some media creating and spreading them.”

In urging the world to use the pandemic as an opportunity for a reset, Francis offers “three COVID-19” moments, or personal crises of his own life, that gave him the chance to stop, think and change course.

The first was the respiratory infection that nearly killed him when he was 21 and in his second year at the Buenos Aires diocesan seminary. After being saved, Francis decided to join the Jesuit religious order.

“I have a sense of how people with the coronavirus feel as they struggle to breathe on ventilators,” Francis wrote.

The second COVID-19 moment was when he moved to Germany in 1986 to work on his thesis and felt such loneliness and isolation he moved back to Argentina without finishing it.

The third occurred during the nearly two years he spent in exile in Cordoba, northern Argentina, as penance for his authoritarian-laced reign as head of the Jesuit order in the country.

“I’m sure I did a few good things, but I could be very harsh. In Cordoba, they made me pay and they were right to do so,” he wrote.

But he also revealed that while in Cordoba he read a 37-volume “History of the Popes.”

“Once you know that papal history, there’s not that much that goes on in the Vatican Curia and the church today that can shock you,” he wrote.

Francis repeated his call for a universal basic income, for welcoming migrants and for what he calls the three L’s that everyone needs: land, lodging and labor.

“We need to set goals for our business sector that — without denying its importance — look beyond shareholder value to other kinds of values that save us all: community, nature and meaningful work,” he writes.

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## Mnuchin defends shut down of Fed emergency loan programs

By MARTIN CRUTSINGER AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin is defending his decision to close down a number of emergency Federal Reserve loan programs at a time when coronavirus cases are surging.

Democrats were unconvinced, however, saying that Mnuchin’s actions are politically motivated and intended to remove tools that the Biden administration could use to support the economy.

Mnuchin argued that the programs he decided not to extend into next year were being lightly utilized. He said the \$455 billion allocated for those Fed loan programs could be better used elsewhere if Congress moved the funds into relief programs for small businesses and unemployed workers.

Democrats aired their criticism Tuesday as Mnuchin and Federal Reserve Chairman Jerome Powell testified at a Senate Banking Committee oversight hearing about the \$2 trillion CARES Act approved by Congress last March.

Powell, as he had before, urged Congress to authorize further economic support, something that lawmakers have been struggling to do for months.

A bipartisan group of lawmakers pressured congressional leaders Tuesday to accept a compromise to end the impasse before Congress adjourns for the holidays.

The group including Senate centrists such as Joe Manchin, D-W.Va., and Susan Collins, R-Maine, are pushing a \$908 billion measure, including \$228 billion to extend and upgrade “paycheck protection” subsidies for a second round of relief for hard-hit businesses like restaurants.

It would revive a special jobless benefit, but at a reduced level of \$300 per week, half the amount enacted

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in March. State and local governments would receive \$160 billion, and there is also money for vaccines. Sen. Mark Warner, D-Va., and one of the lawmakers involved in the centrist effort, got both Mnuchin and Powell to agree that the proposal being discussed was something that would help the economy.

Powell told the committee to think of the additional relief as a "bridge" to get the economy from the current situation with rising virus cases, to a period when the vaccines will be widely distributed."

"We can see the end. We just need a way to get there," Powell told lawmakers. In his opening testimony, Powell described the nation's economic outlook right now as "extraordinarily uncertain."

Powell promised again that the Fed will do all it can to support an economic recovery.

As for the five lending programs that Mnuchin terminated, he insisted that the CARES Act that allowed for creation of the five lending programs did not give him the authority to extend them past Dec. 31.

While the Fed initially said after Mnuchin's Nov. 19 announcement that it would have preferred that the loan programs had been extended, Powell in his appearance Tuesday was careful not to criticize Mnuchin, who was supported by the Republican senators on the committee, including Banking Committee Chairman Mike Crapo, R-Idaho.

But Democrats charged that Mnuchin's intended to hobble Biden administration from delivering the economy a badly needed boost.

"You appear to be trying to sabotage our economy on the way out the door," Sen. Sherrod Brown, D-Ohio, told Mnuchin. He said there was "no legitimate justification" for Mnuchin's action. He said Mnuchin erred in his interpretation of congressional intent, which was to continue providing support.

The Treasury and the Fed announced on Monday that four other lending programs the Fed has been using would be extended through March. Those facilities helped to stabilize short-term funding markets when the coronavirus hit last spring, sending shockwaves through the financial system.

The five programs that will be allowed to expire after Dec. 31 included backstops for corporate and municipal debt and the purchase of loans for small businesses and nonprofits.

Countering Mnuchin's statement that the programs were not being used, Democrats said that the loan requirements were too stringent and should have been loosened so that more companies could take advantage of them.

## Dozens of bandits seize Brazilian city, loot bank

By DAVID BILLER Associated Press

RIO DE JANEIRO (AP) — Dozens of gunmen armed with assault rifles invaded a city in southern Brazil overnight Tuesday and took control of the streets as they assaulted a local bank.

Video broadcast on the Globo television network showed hooded men dressed in black walking the streets of Criciúma in the state of Santa Catarina, and local residents being held hostage during the takeover, which began around midnight and lasted almost two hours. Shots echoed across the city of some 220,000 people.

At least 30 assailants and 10 cars were involved in the well-planned operation, Anselmo Cruz, head of the state police's robbery and kidnapping department, told a news conference, speaking alongside the governor and the mayor. They blocked access to the city — including with burning vehicles — to prevent police reinforcements from responding swiftly, and deployed explosives in the robbery.

The gunmen traded fire with officers in the city center and at a police station, Santa Catarina's military police said on their official Twitter account. Two people were wounded in the firefight: a security guard and a police officer, who was shot in the abdomen and remained hospitalized in serious condition Tuesday.

"It was an unprecedented action for the state. There was never anything with this scope, this violence," Cruz said in a separate interview with Globo News. The television network quoted him as saying the robbers fired bullets with calibers capable of downing a helicopter.

José Damasio was driving home from work around 11:30 p.m. when he passed street sweepers and other municipal employees painting crosswalks. Damasio had no way of knowing they would soon be taken hostage.

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"If I had been delayed 20 minutes, just a little later, I would've been screwed," the 27-year-old Damasio told The Associated Press by phone. "I got home and 15 minutes later heard the shots."

Through a window of his home, Damasio said he saw the men firing into the air — with each high-power shot booming like a bomb. He took shelter in a back room with his mother and remained there until the shooting stopped.

Images on Globo showed a bank vault with a square-shaped hole in it and a convoy of criminals' vehicles as they made their escape. Bills were scattered across the ground in one area of the city, and newspaper Folha de S.Paulo reported that police arrested several people who collected 810,000 reais (\$150,000) worth of the notes.

Police later located the attackers' vehicles in a cornfield of a neighboring municipality. Some of the cars' interiors were stained with blood, indicating some of the gunmen had been hit by police bullets, the Santa Catarina police force said on its Twitter account.

State-run Bank of Brazil said in an emailed statement that its branch in Criciuma will remain closed, and that it doesn't provide information regarding the amount of money taken. It didn't respond to an AP request for comment about local media reports the branch was a regional treasury.

The brazen robbery resembled another that took place in July in the city of Botucatu, in Sao Paulo state. There, around 30 armed men blew up a bank branch, took residents hostage and exchanged gunfire with police officers before making their getaway.

The similarity between the two attacks indicated they may have been coordinated by one of Brazil's powerful organized crime and drug trafficking rings, said Cássio Thyone, a board member of the non-profit Brazilian Forum on Public Safety. Such incidents have occurred with some frequency over the past decade, he said.

"Crime has moved into the interior; cities that didn't suffer from crime have become vulnerable because of their characteristics," said Thyone, highlighting limited police presence and fewer access points.

Criciuma Mayor Clésio Salvaro took to Twitter overnight while the attack was still unfolding to warn residents of the "robbery of great proportions, by very well-prepared thieves."

"As mayor of Criciuma, I ask that you stay home, don't leave home, exercise all precaution," Salvaro said in a video he posted just before 2 a.m. Tuesday. "Tell your friends and families. Let the police do their job."

Thyone said the attack reflected a failure of intelligence gathering, a lack of integration between security forces and that local police are unprepared to confront threats of this magnitude.

## Azerbaijan fully reclaims lands around Nagorno-Karabakh

BAKU, Azerbaijan (AP) — Azerbaijan on Tuesday completed reclaiming territory held by Armenian forces for more than a quarter-century after a peace deal ended six weeks of fierce fighting over Nagorno-Karabakh.

Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev hailed the restoration of control over the areas as a "historic victory" and a demonstration of his nation's "unbending spirit."

"We all lived with one dream, and now we fulfilled it," Aliyev said in an address to the nation. "We won a victory on the battlefield and in the political arena, and that victory opens a new era for our country. It will be an era of development, security and progress."

Nagorno-Karabakh lies within Azerbaijan but has been under the control of ethnic Armenian forces backed by Armenia since a separatist war there ended in 1994. That conflict left not only Nagorno-Karabakh itself but large chunks of surrounding lands in Armenian hands.

In 44 days of heavy fighting that began on Sept. 27, the Azerbaijani military routed Armenian forces and moved deep into Nagorno-Karabakh, forcing Armenia to accept a Russia-brokered peace deal that took effect Nov. 10. The agreement saw the return to Azerbaijan of a significant part of Nagorno-Karabakh and also required Armenia to hand over all of the regions it held outside the separatist region.

The Lachin region, which lies between Nagorno-Karabakh and Armenia, was the last of the three areas on the rim of Nagorno-Karabakh to be surrendered by Armenian forces on Tuesday.

Russia deployed nearly 2,000 peacekeepers for at least five years to monitor the peace deal and help



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the return of refugees. The Russian troops will also ensure safe transit between Nagorno-Karabakh and Armenia across the Lachin region.

"We have restored historic truth," Aliyev said. "The Azerbaijani people will do everything to rebuild the ruined cities and villages. From now on, we will live as a great and proud people."

He said 94 Azerbaijani civilians were killed and more than 400 were wounded in the latest fighting, but he again refrained from revealing his country's military losses.

Armenia's Health Minister said last month that at least 2,425 Armenian servicemen were killed in action, and many of them were yet to be identified.

Turkey, which has strongly backed its ally Azerbaijan, has extended its clout in the region. On Tuesday, Russian and Turkish military officials signed documents to set up a joint monitoring center to ensure the fulfillment of the peace deal.

The peace agreement was celebrated as a victory in Azerbaijan, but sparked mass protests in Armenia, with thousands taking to the streets of the capital of Yerevan to demand the ouster of Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan. Several hundred protesters again rallied in Yerevan on Tuesday, repeating the demand.

After the hostilities ended, Russian peacekeepers assisted the return of refugees from the latest fighting. The Russian military said that over 25,000 people have returned to Nagorno-Karabakh from Armenia.

Armenia and Azerbaijan have remained locked in difficult talks about the exchange of war prisoners, trading accusations of their mistreatment.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov voiced hope Tuesday that "objective difficulties" hampering the prisoner exchange will be resolved quickly.

Aliyev argued that "there is no Nagorno-Karabakh conflict anymore," saying that Azerbaijan considers all residents of Nagorno-Karabakh its citizens and will ensure their well-being and improve the region's infrastructure.

As Armenian forces ceded control of the Aghdam and the Kalbajar regions after the peace deal, some Azerbaijani residents who fled them more than a quarter-century ago also started trickling back to the territories.

Gurban Hasanov, 56, who was forced to flee Lachin 26 years ago with his family, said he's longing to return.

"I and all my family dream to return to our native village," he told The Associated Press. "I lack words to explain how badly we want to come back. I'm a teacher, and I want to teach children geography."

Hasanov said he recently saw his village on video with his house intact — one of just a dozen that have survived.

Before the territorial handover, some ethnic Armenians set their houses on fire in a bitter farewell — a gesture that insulted Azerbaijanis.

"I hope the Armenians didn't burn it as they did in the Kalbajar region," Hasanov said.

## Glimmers of hope for world economy, but dangers lurk

By JEFFREY SCHAEFFER and ALEX TURNBULL Associated Press

PARIS (AP) — Vendors broke out in applause in the flagship Galeries Lafayette department store in Paris as eager shoppers returned for the first time in a month, after yet another virus lockdown.

The reopening won't be enough to make up for sales lost during the pandemic - but reflects the glimmer of hope that forecasters are starting to see in the global economy.

The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development predicted Tuesday that the world economy will bounce back to its pre-pandemic levels by the end of next year - though that recovery will be uneven across the countries and big risks remain.

In a report on the state of the economy, the OECD said that progress on coronavirus vaccines means that the outlook has improved for the first time since the pandemic began.

"The road ahead is brighter but challenging," the international watchdog said.

China, which has brought its virus infections under control better than many major economies, will lead

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that economic recovery and account for a third of global growth next year. Europe, Japan and the U.S. will lag, while many poorer countries, particularly those that rely on tourism, will continue to suffer and require international aid, the OECD said.

It predicts the global economy will shrink about 4.2% this year and rebound by the same rate in 2021 before growing 3.7% the following year.

Across Europe, governments are reopening their economies as they get a handle on a second virus surge – but only gradually, and partially. Vast cobblestone plazas stand empty this festive season instead of hosting Christmas markets that usually electrify historic cities.

Lines of shoppers reappeared this week outside the Louis Vuitton boutique on the Champs-Elysees Avenue in Paris, glittering with holiday lights -- but France's famed cafes remained shuttered for several more weeks, the tourists that are the country's lifeblood are gone, and many small businesses aren't expected to survive.

With just a few weeks until Christmas, luxury shops and conventional retail stores alike are all hoping to claw back a pinch of sales in what will be a catastrophic year.

Jean-Noel Reinhardt, who presides over the Champs-Elysees Committee that oversees the avenue's businesses, estimates a loss this year of up to 1 billion euros, and a downturn in business activity of 70%.

"The Champs-Elysees thrives on two types of visitors: foreign tourists who have not come, and the second population are those who work in the neighborhood ... and these people are working from home online," Reinhardt told The Associated Press.

The only saving grace, he said, is that most Champs-Elysees shops are worldwide brands that are part of larger conglomerates that might be able to absorb the losses in a way that smaller businesses can't.

The OECD, which advises countries on economic policy, warned about this and other kind of economic inequalities that have been worsened by the pandemic.

It recommended investing public money in reducing these inequalities as well as in other areas that deliver long-term benefits, including health, education and fighting climate change.

It said that governments should continue to support people who have been hit hardest by the virus and ensuing lockdowns, and that global cooperation is sorely needed to maximize the impact of government efforts to bring economies back to health.

Despite still-high virus infections in many countries, some consumers are eager to be able to shop in person again.

"I bought myself a computer, a telephone, of course. I didn't just buy to buy. I could have done it online but the pleasure of buying from a boutique is not the same as shopping online," said 25-year-old legal expert Alexandra Esquier, carrying her bags down the Champs-Elysees.

At the Galeries Lafayette, vendors and shoppers seemed equally excited to see each other again, at a reopening accompanied by Christmas music, animated holiday decorations, lots of hand sanitizer and the chatter of masked crowds.

"It's about trying to do some shopping and have our relatives and the family enjoy everything we can buy, and kickstart the economy," said Stephane Ney, a 41-year-old customer from the Paris region. "It's important."

Angela Charlton in Paris and Carlo Piovano in London contributed to this report.

## In 2020, AP photographers captured a world in distress

By JERRY SCHWARTZ Associated Press

Behold, a world in distress:

A 64-year-old woman weeps, hugging her husband as he lay dying in the COVID-19 unit of a California hospital. A crowded refugee camp in Lesbos, Greece, engulfed in flames, disgorges a string of migrants fleeing this hell on Earth. Rain-swept protesters, enraged by the death of George Floyd in police custody, rail against the system and the heavens.

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This is the world that Associated Press photographers captured in 2020, a world beset by every sort of catastrophe -- natural and unnatural disaster, violent and non-violent conflict.

And, in every corner of that world, the coronavirus.

There are the living: Women cover themselves head to toe with chadors, protective clothing and gas masks to prepare a body for burial in Iran. An octogenarian couple kiss through plastic in Spain.

There are the dead: Relatives, traveling by night and by boat, travel down a Peruvian river to bring a body home for burial. Row upon row of new graves are dug in the largest cemetery in Latin America.

And there are those who negotiate the grim space between life and death -- among them, 16 Italian doctors and nurses exhausted from their labors, their faces haunted and haunting.

Amid the pandemic, it was sometimes easy to overlook the world's other turmoil -- and its tragedies. A loving uncle carries his 11-year-old niece away from the devastation of a massive explosion in Beirut -- her neck was broken, and her older sister died. In Syria, emergency workers pull the body of a boy killed in a government airstrike from the wreckage.

Wildfires gave the American West an eerie glow; a volcano eruption clouded the sky over Manila.

Across the United States, photographers documented an epic and bilious presidential campaign. An exultant Joe Biden, projected on a massive monitor under fireworks after he accepted the Democratic presidential nomination. A dejected Donald Trump, after a sparsely attended rally in Oklahoma.

And perhaps the most appropriate image of 2020? It was captured during the waves of protests and riots in the aftermath of George Floyd's death. A protester strides past a burning building in Minneapolis; in his hands he holds the American flag.

The flag is upside down -- the international signal of distress.

## Iran's parliament approves bill to stop nuclear inspections

By NASSER KARIMI Associated Press

TEHRAN, Iran (AP) — Iran's parliament on Tuesday approved a bill that would suspend U.N. inspections of its nuclear facilities and require the government to boost its uranium enrichment if European signatories to the 2015 nuclear deal do not provide relief from oil and banking sanctions.

The vote to approve the bill, which would also require approval by the Guardian Council, a constitutional watchdog, was a show of defiance after the killing of a prominent Iranian nuclear scientist last month. Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei has the final say on all nuclear policies.

Parliament Speaker Mohammad Baqer Ghalibaf was quoted by state TV as saying lawmakers were "hopeful to remove sanctions through this stern decision."

The final vote tally wasn't immediately released. But in a vote on whether to discuss the bill earlier Tuesday, the official IRNA news agency said 251 lawmakers in the 290-seat chamber voted in favor, after which many began chanting "Death to America!" and "Death to Israel!"

The bill would give European countries one month to ease sanctions on Iran's key oil and gas sector, and to restore its access to the international banking system. The U.S. imposed crippling sanctions on Iran after President Donald Trump unilaterally withdrew from the nuclear agreement, triggering a series of escalations between the two sides.

The bill would have authorities resume enriching uranium to 20%, which is below the threshold needed for nuclear weapons but higher than that required for civilian applications. It would also commission new centrifuges at nuclear facilities at Natanz and the underground Fordo site.

Lawmakers have pressed for a more confrontational approach since the U.S. withdrew from the nuclear agreement in 2018.

Cabinet spokesman Ali Rabiei acknowledged the limitations of such an approach on Tuesday, saying the nuclear file is under the authority of the Supreme National Security Council, and "nobody can work on it independently." President Hassan Rouhani, a relative moderate, heads the Guardian Council, which answers to the supreme leader.

The bill was first tabled in parliament in August but gained new momentum after the killing of Mohsen

Fakhrizadeh, who headed a program that Israel and the West have alleged was a military operation looking at the feasibility of building a nuclear weapon. The International Atomic Energy Agency says that "structured program" ended in 2003. U.S. intelligence agencies concurred with that assessment in a 2007 report.

Israel insists Iran still maintains the ambition of developing nuclear weapons, pointing to Tehran's ballistic missile program and research into other technologies. Iran long has maintained that its nuclear program is for peaceful purposes.

Iran has blamed Fakhrizadeh's killing on Israel, which has long waged a covert war against Tehran and its proxies in the region. Israeli officials have declined to comment on the killing, and no one has claimed responsibility.

Some Iranian lawmakers have suggested that the International Atomic Energy Agency, which has been regularly inspecting Iran's nuclear facilities in recent years as part of the 2015 agreement, may have been a source of intelligence for Fakhrizadeh's killers.

Iran began publicly exceeding uranium enrichment levels set by the nuclear agreement after the U.S. restored sanctions. It currently enriches a growing uranium stockpile up to 4.5% purity.

That's still far below weapons-grade levels of 90%, though experts warn Iran now has enough low-enriched uranium to reprocess into fuel for at least two atomic bombs if it chose to pursue them.

## **At tiny rural hospitals, weary doctors treat friends, family**

By JEFF ROBERSON and JIM SALTER Associated Press

MEMPHIS, Mo. (AP) — As Dr. Shane Wilson makes the rounds at the tiny, 25-bed hospital in rural north-eastern Missouri, many of his movements are familiar in an age of coronavirus. Masks and gloves. Zippered plastic walls between hallways. Hand sanitizer as he enters and exits each room.

But one thing is starkly different. Born and raised in the town of just 1,800, Wilson knows most of his patients by their first names.

He visits a woman who used to be a gym teacher at his school, and later laughingly recalls a day she caught him smoking at school and made him and a friend pick up cigarette butts as punishment. Another man was in the middle of his soybean harvest when he fell ill and couldn't finish.

In November, Wilson treated his own father, who along with his wife used to work at the same hospital. The 74-year-old elder Wilson recovered from the virus.

The coronavirus pandemic largely hit urban areas first, but the autumn surge is devastating rural America, too. The U.S. is now averaging more than 170,000 new cases each day, and it's taking a toll from the biggest hospitals down to the little ones, like Scotland County Hospital.

The tragedy is smaller here, more intimate. Everyone knows everyone.

Memphis, Missouri, population 1,800, is the biggest town for miles and miles amid the cornfields of the northeastern corner of Missouri. Agriculture accounts for most jobs in the region. The area is so remote that the nearest stoplight, McDonald's and Walmart are all an hour away, hospital public relations director Alisa Kigar said.

People come to the hospital from six surrounding counties, typically for treatment of things like farm and sports injuries, chest pains and the flu. Usually, there's plenty of room.

Not now. The small hospital with roughly six doctors and 75 nurses among 142 full-time staff, is in crisis. The region is seeing a big increase in COVID-19 cases, and all available beds are usually taken.

Scotland County Hospital's doctors already are making difficult, often heartbreaking decisions about who they can take in. Wilson said some moderately ill people have been sent home with oxygen and told, "If things get worse, come back in, but we don't have a place to put you and we don't have a place to transfer you."

Meanwhile, a staffing shortage is so severe that the hospital put out an appeal for anyone with health care experience, including retirees, to come to work. Several responded and are already on staff, including a woman working as a licensed practical nurse as she studies to become a registered nurse.

The hospital's chief nursing officer, Elizabeth Guffey, said nurses are working up to 24 extra hours each

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week. Guffey sometimes sleeps in an office rather than go home between shifts.

"We're in a surge capacity almost 100% of the time," Guffey said. "So it's all hands on deck."

It's especially difficult to watch friends and relatives struggle through the illness while a large majority of the community still doesn't take it seriously, she said.

"We spend our time indoors taking care of these very sick people, and then we go outdoors and hear people tell us the disease is a hoax or it doesn't really exist," Guffey said.

Glen Cowell wasn't so sure about the virus until it knocked him to his knees.

At 68, Cowell still works his 500-acre farm near Memphis and is healthy enough that he takes no daily pills. He started feeling poorly around Nov. 11, tested positive four days later, then gradually got sicker. On Nov. 18, an ambulance took him to the emergency room. He was treated and went home.

"They only had one bed left and I didn't feel I was sick enough to take somebody else's bed," Cowell said.

But soon, breathing became difficult and nausea set in. Worst of all, his temperature spiked to 104 degrees. Another ambulance trip was followed by a lengthy hospital stay.

He's not sure where he got the virus but admits he wasn't overly cautious.

"I'm as independent as a hog on ice," Cowell said. "I was pretty ambivalent about it. If Dollar General said I had to wear a mask, I wore a mask. If I walked across the street to Farm & Home, I didn't wear a mask. I really wasn't aware of the fact that it could get ahold of you and not let go."

Brock Slabach, senior vice president of the National Rural Health Association, based in suburban Kansas City, said it takes "space, staff and stuff" to run a rural hospital. "If you don't have any one of those three, you're really hamstrung," he said, noting that many hospitals face shortages in all three areas.

Wilson spent hours on the phone one day, trying to find a larger hospital capable of providing the critical care that might save a man in his 50s who was critically ill with the virus.

By the time the University of Iowa Hospital agreed to take him, it was clear he couldn't survive the 120-mile trip.

"I don't know that getting him to Iowa City would have made a difference," Wilson said. "Sometimes people are sick enough that they're not going to survive, and that's the reality of what we have to deal with. But it's still pretty damn frustrating when you're sitting here with your hands tied."

Salter reported from O'Fallon, Mo.

## Today in History

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Wednesday, Dec. 2, the 337th day of 2020. There are 29 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On Dec. 2, 1982, in the first operation of its kind, doctors at the University of Utah Medical Center implanted a permanent artificial heart in the chest of retired dentist Dr. Barney Clark, who lived 112 days with the device.

On this date:

In 1804, Napoleon crowned himself Emperor of the French.

In 1816, the first savings bank in the United States, the Philadelphia Savings Fund Society, opened for business.

In 1823, President James Monroe outlined his doctrine opposing European expansion in the Western Hemisphere.

In 1859, militant abolitionist John Brown was hanged for his raid on Harpers Ferry the previous October.

In 1942, an artificially created, self-sustaining nuclear chain reaction was demonstrated for the first time at the University of Chicago.

In 1954, the U.S. Senate passed, 67-22, a resolution condemning Sen. Joseph R. McCarthy, R-Wis., saying he had "acted contrary to senatorial ethics and tended to bring the Senate into dishonor and disrepute."

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In 1957, the Shippingport Atomic Power Station in Pennsylvania, the first full-scale commercial nuclear facility in the U.S., began operations. (The reactor ceased operating in 1982.)

In 1970, the newly created Environmental Protection Agency opened its doors under its first director, William D. Ruckelshaus.

In 1980, four American churchwomen were raped and murdered in El Salvador. (Five national guardsmen were convicted in the killings.)

In 1993, Colombian drug lord Pablo Escobar was shot to death by security forces in Medellin (meh-deh-YEEN').

In 2000, Al Gore sought a recount in South Florida, while George W. Bush flatly asserted, "I'm soon to be the president" and met with GOP congressional leaders. Actor Gail Fisher died in Culver City, Calif. at age 65.

In 2016, 36 people died when fire erupted in an illegally converted warehouse in Oakland, California, during a dance party.

Ten years ago: The House voted, 333-79, to censure Rep. Charles Rangel, D-N.Y., for financial and fundraising misconduct; it was only the 23rd time that the House had invoked its most serious punishment short of expulsion. LeBron James scored 38 points to lead the visiting Miami Heat to a 118-90 victory over the host Cleveland Cavaliers; it was James' first game back in the city where he had played for seven years before leaving via free agency.

Five years ago: A couple loyal to the Islamic State group opened fire at a holiday banquet for public employees in San Bernardino, California, killing 14 people and wounding 21 others before dying in a shootout with police.

One year ago: The House's impeachment report on President Donald Trump was unveiled behind closed doors for key lawmakers. Montana Gov. Steve Bullock ended his Democratic presidential campaign; he was the third Western governor to fail to gain traction in the race. Chicago's retiring police chief, Eddie Johnson, was fired in connection with an incident in which he had been found asleep at the wheel of his car. As representatives from nearly 200 countries gathered in Madrid for a two-week meeting on tackling global warming, U.N. Secretary-General António Guterres urged countries not to give up in the fight against climate change.

Today's Birthdays: Former Attorney General Edwin Meese III is 89. Former Sen. Harry Reid, D-Nev., is 81. Actor Cathy Lee Crosby is 76. Movie director Penelope Spheeris is 75. Actor Ron Raines is 71. Country singer John Wesley Ryles is 70. Actor Keith Szarabajka is 68. Actor Dan Butler is 66. Broadcast journalist Stone Phillips is 66. Actor Dennis Christopher is 65. Actor Steven Bauer is 64. Country singer Joe Henry is 60. Rock musician Rick Savage (Def Leppard) is 60. Actor Brendan Coyle is 57. Rock musician Nate Mendel (Foo Fighters) is 52. Actor Suzy Nakamura is 52. Actor Rena Sofer is 52. Rock singer Jimi (cq) HaHa (Jimmie's Chicken Shack) is 52. Actor Lucy Liu (loo) is 52. Rapper Treach (Naughty By Nature) is 50. Actor Joe Lo Truglio is 50. International Tennis Hall of Famer Monica Seles is 47. Singer Nelly Furtado is 42. Pop singer Britney Spears is 39. Actor-singer Jana Kramer is 37. Actor Yvonne Orji is 37. Actor Daniela Ruah (roo-ah) is 37. NFL quarterback Aaron Rodgers is 37. Actor Alfred Enoch is 32. Pop singer-songwriter Charlie Puth is 29. Actors Deanna and Daniella Canterman are 28.