

# Groton Daily Independent

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"Life is short, surround  
yourself with good people  
and only eat good cookies."

-Author Unknown



## GDILIVE.COM



Funeral Service for

**Mary Walter**

Friday, Dec. 4, 2020

2 p.m.

St. John's

Lutheran Church

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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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	

Updated December 2, 2020; 12:56 PM																
JK	KG	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	Staff	Total	
0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	4	6	

Updated December 3, 2020; 1:35 PM																
JK	KG	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	Staff	Total	
0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	4	5	

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**#284 in a series**

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

We've hit the trifecta: record new cases, record hospitalizations, and record deaths. Also, in the bonus round, we cracked the 14-million case and the 100,000 hospitalization ceilings too. The trouble everyone said was coming? They weren't wrong. It's here. On schedule. And it came in with guns blazing. Here we go:

There were 221,200 new cases reported today, close to 20,000 higher than the previous day's record set a couple of weeks ago. This adds 1.6% to our total cases, bringing them to 14,209,600. Here's the history of each million in this pandemic, along with the number of days required to reach it:

April 28 – 1 million – 98 days  
June 11 – 2 million – 44 days  
July 8 – 3 million – 27 days  
July 23 – 4 million – 15 days  
August 9 – 5 million – 17 days  
August 31 – 6 million – 22 days  
September 24 – 7 million – 24 days  
October 15 – 8 million – 21 days  
October 29 – 9 million – 14 days  
November 8 – 10 million – 10 days  
November 15 – 11 million – 7 days  
November 21 – 12 million – 6 days  
November 27 – 13 million – 6 days  
December 3 – 15 million – 6 days

We're seeing a whole lot more states blowing up, but the worst per capita over the last week are the same ones we've been watching flounder for a couple of months: North Dakota, South Dakota, Iowa, Wisconsin, Nebraska. New cases are increasing rapidly in California, in the Southwest, and in the Northeast as well; and almost no states are in a good place right now.

Hospitalizations were at record levels for the fifth consecutive day and the 22nd of the last 23 days. As mentioned, we've broken the 100,000 barrier with 100,226 Covid-19 patients hospitalized today. The system continues to creak and strain with staffing and bed shortages, as well as supplies at critical levels in some places. When the moment comes that this thing starts to crumble, we're going to discover a whole new world of hurt, and we'll discover it fairly quickly.

Deaths passed the spring peak last night and broke last night's new record tonight. We're at 2952 for the day, which raises our total by a frightening 1.1% from yesterday. We have lost 276,273 people to this virus. Illinois had a record number of deaths yesterday and approached that record again today.

The CDC has issued new guidance outlining ways to shorten quarantine times for people who have been exposed to the coronavirus. The recommended quarantine period for those who've been exposed to the virus is still 14 days; but CDC is now saying you may end your quarantine after seven days if you have a negative test within the final two days of that period or after 10 days without a test if there are no symptoms. You would continue to monitor yourself for symptoms and wear a mask until the full 14 days has passed. The principle here is that the vast majority of cases show up within 5-10 days of exposure even though the incubation period can be as long as two weeks. The thinking is that, even though this shortened period is going to miss some people who are infected and shedding virus, it may give us better compliance and more cooperation with contact tracing that will offset these missed cases. They are also issuing guidance for travelers over a holiday; even though they do not recommend travel at all, if you do travel, they suggest getting tested one to three days before the trip and again three to five days after returning, while eliminating nonessential activities for seven days. Of course, if folks are unwilling to forego travel, I'm going to guess they're also unwilling to do the testing, so I guess the guidance is only worth whatever importance people give it.

Britain gave emergency authorization to the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine on Wednesday. They expect to

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begin mass vaccination programs with 800,000 doses available by next week. I expect the US and the EU to be fairly close behind; everyone is eager to get vaccines out to the public if they're safe and effective.

You may recall that about three weeks ago the FDA issued emergency use authorization (EUA) for Eli Lilly's monoclonal antibody treatment, bamlanivimab. Monoclonal antibodies are those lab-made antibodies which are highly purified and designed to neutralize the SARS-CoV-2 virus in humans. While this therapy was not found to be effective in severely ill patients, it was effective in preventing progression to severe disease for the mildly ill, and so it was authorized for use in those patients. A problem with this drug is that it must be administered by specialized professionals, generally in a hospital setting, and now it appears there is a solution for that problem at hand. CVS is partnering with the FDA to administer this therapy in patients' homes and in long-term care facilities and thereby keep these folks out of the hospital. The current pilot program covers just seven metropolitan areas to make the very limited supplies available to people who cannot easily visit a hospital to receive the treatment.

Moderna has announced a clinical trial for its vaccine in 3000 children. Now that it is fairly well established as safe in adults, trials can begin in children. Because children generally have more active immune systems than adults, it is expected they will have stronger reactions, including side effects; so they will likely show more fever, fatigue, and aches than adults do. Although children sometimes require different doses than adults, the plan is to begin by studying the same dose in children in these early trials; information from these will inform later trials to establish efficacy and safety.

Pfizer began testing its vaccine in children as young as 12 in October. AstraZeneca is testing its vaccine in children in countries other than the US. We do not expect vaccinations for children very soon, but it is possible they'll be available sometime next year. It would be nice to have them before the 2021-2022 academic year begins, but I suspect that is not a reasonable goal. Time will tell.

We also have a little more additional data on the Moderna vaccine candidate; this latest from 34 volunteers in the first phase of human testing indicates the protection it affords lasts at least three months. This determination was made by studying the volunteers for antibody type and level; we also know that T cells increase in response to this candidate. That doesn't mean it lasts only three months; we still don't know that answer because it's been studied only for three months. The only way to establish the duration of protection is to monitor recipients for longer and longer periods of time.

We have some preliminary data on Thanksgiving festivities based on anonymized mobile home location. The good news is that more Americans stayed home this year than last year. The bad news is it wasn't many more. Of the 18 million with smartphones who were tracked this year, 36% stayed home last Thanksgiving, and 42% stayed home for the holiday this year. While 17% of us traveled a significant distance (more than 31 miles) for the holiday last year, 13% of us did last week. And even though air travel declined by about half from last year, still one million per day flew for most of the week leading up to the holiday.

What this does not capture is what people did while away from home, what safety measures they used to mitigate risk of transmission, or how many of them were staying within their social bubble, so maybe things are better than they appear. It is still being strongly recommended that, if you traveled, you should quarantine, wear a mask when with others, limiting interactions and getting tested if you develop symptoms.

At any rate, that's not great. Experts didn't think so either: Ali Mokdad, chief strategy officer for Population Health at the University of Washington, said, "This level of travel will unfortunately lead to a rise in cases."

We've talked here on many occasions about children doing remarkable things. Throughout my career as an educator, I've been treated time and time again to someone or other's theory about what's wrong with kids these days; it usually includes the words, selfish, lazy, entitled, soft; and somewhere in there will be the claim that "kids just aren't like kids were when I was a kid." There's usually some stuff about going outside more and "making our own fun" and using computers less; and there's generally a fair amount of head-shaking and lofty adult judgement. I make it a practice to slap back at those claims because I think they're dead wrong; I've been defending "kids these days" ever since Generation X broke into the big time. Here's one of a zillion reasons why:

There's this new thing called Time's Kid of the Year Award. It's a thing Time and Nickelodeon put together, and it's intended to recognize kids who are "having a positive influence on their communities and

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using their innovations to help solve problems." Over 5000 nominations were submitted by the public, and these were winnowed down a group of finalists from which a committee of kids, along with television host Trevor Noah, made the final selection. These nominees have guided discussions about racial injustice, grown food for the needy, and a whole lot of other things.

The first winner of the Kid of the Year Award is a 15-year-old from Colorado who invented a mobile device to test for lead in drinking water. Her name is Gitanjali Rao, and she's no stranger to fame: She was named America's Top Young Scientist when she was still in the seventh grade and last year to Forbes 30 Under 30 list. You see, she didn't just invent the lead-detecting device; she then collaborated with scientists to put her device on the market. After that, she developed a phone and Web tool to help kids realize they were engaging in cyber-bullying before they sent messages which could be harmful. She explained, "The goal is not to punish. As a teenager, I know teenagers tend to lash out sometimes. Instead, it gives you the chance to rethink what you're saying so that you know what to do next time around." But these accomplishments are probably not the biggest reason she was chosen as this year's winner.

The thing that makes Rao stand out is that she has followed up this sort of technical work with efforts to get other young people to tackle problems too. "I don't look like your typical scientist. Everything I see on TV is that it's an older, usually white man as a scientist," she told Time. "My goal has really shifted not only from creating my own devices to solve the world's problems, but inspiring others to do the same as well. Because, from personal experience, it's not easy when you don't see anyone else like you. So I really want to put out that message: If I can do it, you can do it, and anyone can do it."

I'm thinking back to my 16th year of life. I was one of the smart kids, but I'm pretty sure my greatest concerns might have been whether (a) my hair flipped in the correct direction and (b) whether that would mean boys thought I was cute, queries to which I'm quite sure the answers were (a) it did not and (b) it did not—and (c) this doesn't matter anyhow. Sigh.

There's nothing wrong with kids today. They're certainly not worse—and in many cases are a great deal better—than we ever were. We have a good world if we manage not to mess it up by rejecting facts and ignoring evidence and gaming the rules so our side wins whether that's a good thing or not. We olds need to do a better job of caretaking so that we have something worth having to hand on to this next wonderful generation of problem-solvers. We get just one chance to get this right. Let's hunker down and see whether we can do that.

Be well. We'll talk again.

## JH GBB

<b>Sat., Dec. 5</b>	<b>Webster</b>	<b>7th at 10:00, 8th at 11:00</b>
<b>Thurs., Dec. 10</b>	<b>at Langford</b>	<b>7th at 5:30, 8th at 6:30</b>
<b>Mon., Dec. 14</b>	<b>at Warner</b>	<b>7th at 4:30, 8th at 5:30</b>
<b>Tues., Dec. 15</b>	<b>at Waubay</b>	<b>7th at 5:00, 8th at 6:00</b>
<b>Thurs., Dec. 17</b>	<b>at Hamlin</b>	<b>7th at 4:00, 8th at 5:00</b>
<b>Fri., Dec. 18</b>	<b>Redfield</b>	<b>7th at 5:00, 8th at 6:00</b>
<b>Sat., Dec. 19</b>	<b>Mobridge-Pollock</b>	<b>7th at 1:00, 8th at 2:00</b>



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## Area COVID-19 Cases

	Dec. 3	Dec. 4
Minnesota	327,477	333,626
Nebraska	132,530	134,710
Montana	64,340	65,122
Colorado	241,172	247,209
Wyoming	29,966	30,518
North Dakota	80,135	81,105
South Dakota	82,203	83,348
United States	13,925,350	14,147,754
US Deaths	273,847	276,401

Minnesota	+5165	+6,149
Nebraska	+2,336	+2,180
Montana	+1135	+780
Colorado	+3862	+6,037
Wyoming	+577	+552
North Dakota	+480	+970
South Dakota	+1291	+1,145
United States	+199,044	+222,404
US Deaths	+3,156	+2,554

	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 3rd COVID-19 UPDATE

### Groton Daily Independent from State Health Lab Reports

Deaths from yesterday: 15, 70s=6, 60s=5, 40s=1, 19 females, 19 males.

Beadle-2, Bon Homme-1, Brookings-2, Brown-2, Buffalo-1, Butte-1, Codington-2, Grant-1, Gregory-1, Hamlin-8, Hutchinson-1, Kingsbury-1, Lake-1, Meade-1, Minnehaha-4, Oglala Lakota-1, Potter-1, Sanborn-1, Spink-1, Todd-1, Tripp-1, Turner-2, Yankton-1.

South Dakota:

Positive: +1145 (82,203 total) Positivity Rate: 18.6%

Total Tests: 6148 (620,883 total)

Hospitalized: +70 (4696 total). 538 currently hospitalized (+7)

Deaths: +38 (1033 total)

Recovered: +490 (66,841 total)

Active Cases: +617 (15474)

Percent Recovered: 81.3%

Beadle (32): +17 positive, +11 recovered (415 active cases)

Brookings (18): +32 positive, +16 recovered (410 active cases)

Brown (26): +19 positive, +23 recovered (623 active cases)

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

Clay (11): +10 positive, +5 recovered (223 active cases)

Codington (53): +34 positive, +12 recovered (461 active cases)

Davison (40): +13 positive, +40 recovered (478 active cases)

Day (11): +12 positive, +4 recovered (116 active cases)

Edmunds (2): +7 positive, +1 recovered (54 active cases)

Faulk (10): +2 positive, +0 recovered (23 active cases)

Grant (13): +20 positive, +3 recovered (154 active cases)

Hanson (3): +4 positive, +3 recovered (78 active cases)

Hughes (19): +22 positive, +9 recovered (322 active cases)

Lawrence (22): +30 positive, +21 recovered (400 active cases)

Lincoln (53): +75 positive, +26 recovered (936 active cases)

Marshall (3): +4 positive, +2 recovered (67 active cases)

McCook (17): +3 positive, +2 recovered (113 active cases)

McPherson (1): +0 positive, +0 recovery (45 active case)

Minnehaha (195): +226 positive, +111 recovered (3586 active cases)

Pennington (79): +124 positive, +56 recovered (1790 active cases)

Potter (2): +7 positive, +1 recovered (74 active cases)

Roberts (20): +13 positive, +3 recovered (162 active cases)

Spink (15): +13 positive, +5 recovered (125 active cases)

Walworth (13): +12 positive, +3 recovered (133 active cases)

### NORTH DAKOTA

COVID-19 Daily Report, Dec. 3:

- 11.5% rolling 14-day positivity
- 978 new positives
- 5,461 susceptible test encounters
- 306 currently hospitalized (+5)
- 5,461 active cases (+225)
- 977 total deaths (+11)

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Yesterday

Today

Global Cases

**64,596,395**

Global Cases

**65,323,809**

13,925,350 US

14,147,754 US

9,534,964 India

9,571,559 India

6,436,650 Brazil

6,487,084 Brazil

2,354,934 Russia

2,382,012 Russia

2,275,677 France

2,310,271 France

1,665,775 Spain

1,678,419 United Kingdom

1,663,468 United Kingdom

1,675,902 Spain

1,641,610 Italy

1,664,829 Italy

1,440,103 Argentina

1,447,732 Argentina

1,334,089 Colombia

1,343,322 Colombia

1,133,613 Mexico

1,144,643 Mexico

1,117,953 Germany

1,143,664 Germany

1,028,610 Poland

1,041,846 Poland

989,572 Iran

1,003,494 Iran

Global Deaths

**1,494,986**

Global Deaths

**1,508,906**

273,847 deaths  
US

276,401 deaths  
US

174,515 deaths  
Brazil

175,270 deaths  
Brazil

138,648 deaths  
India

139,188 deaths  
India

107,565 deaths  
Mexico

108,173 deaths  
Mexico

59,796 deaths  
United Kingdom

60,210 deaths  
United Kingdom

57,045 deaths  
Italy

58,038 deaths  
Italy

52,822 deaths  
France

54,231 deaths  
France

48,990 deaths  
Iran

49,695 deaths  
Iran



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County	Positive Cases	Recovered Cases	Negative Persons	Deceased	Community Spread	% RT-PCR Test Positivity Rate (Weekly)
Aurora	371	285	733	5	Substantial	36.54%
Beadle	2342	1895	4708	32	Substantial	21.19%
Bennett	319	270	1038	5	Substantial	7.14%
Bon Homme	1377	1253	1760	20	Substantial	23.85%
Brookings	2515	2087	8832	18	Substantial	9.32%
Brown	3748	3099	10321	26	Substantial	25.91%
Brule	582	496	1600	5	Substantial	27.07%
Buffalo	385	345	827	9	Substantial	21.62%
Butte	751	620	2630	14	Substantial	16.44%
Campbell	107	94	192	1	Moderate	16.67%
Charles Mix	922	633	3365	5	Substantial	19.08%
Clark	264	201	779	1	Substantial	20.00%
Clay	1391	1157	4169	11	Substantial	16.12%
Codington	2779	2265	7589	53	Substantial	25.30%
Corson	402	333	851	5	Substantial	41.18%
Custer	571	451	2193	7	Substantial	13.17%
Davison	2448	1930	5310	40	Substantial	26.75%
Day	396	273	1421	11	Substantial	35.19%
Deuel	332	252	911	2	Substantial	36.36%
Dewey	1026	598	3318	3	Substantial	29.55%
Douglas	312	242	755	5	Substantial	17.46%
Edmunds	268	212	854	2	Substantial	11.88%
Fall River	368	309	2122	10	Substantial	9.04%
Faulk	283	250	557	10	Moderate	18.18%
Grant	652	485	1782	13	Substantial	30.32%
Gregory	447	359	993	21	Substantial	23.76%
Haakon	161	129	455	3	Substantial	10.99%
Hamlin	503	370	1381	17	Substantial	22.67%
Hand	290	238	659	1	Substantial	30.00%
Hanson	275	194	533	3	Substantial	54.32%
Harding	77	63	134	0	Moderate	38.89%
Hughes	1709	1368	5030	19	Substantial	20.40%
Hutchinson	600	427	1857	11	Substantial	39.17%

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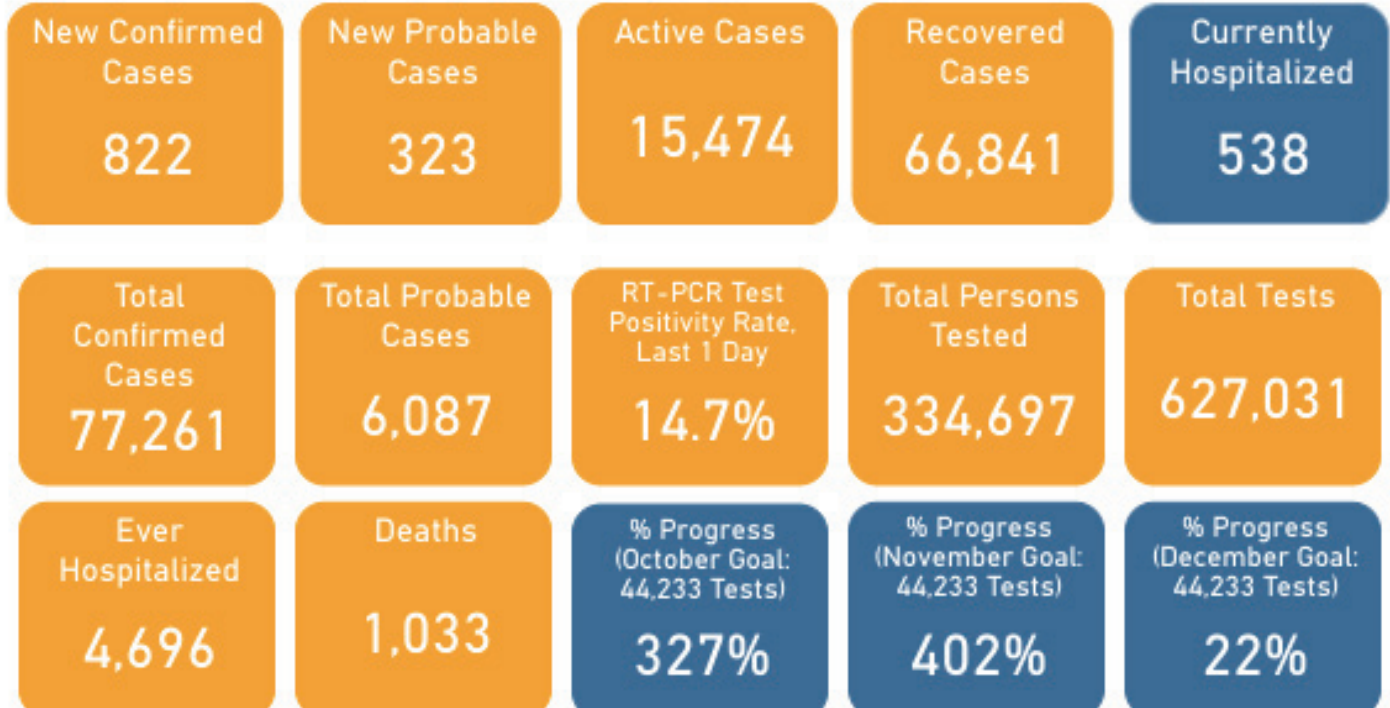
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Hyde	125	101	342	0	Substantial	50.00%
Jackson	213	169	826	8	Substantial	23.19%
Jerauld	243	200	455	13	Substantial	17.86%
Jones	63	53	154	1	Moderate	10.00%
Kingsbury	456	360	1281	12	Substantial	15.22%
Lake	881	709	2557	11	Substantial	16.60%
Lawrence	2127	1716	7088	22	Substantial	14.10%
Lincoln	5598	4609	15795	53	Substantial	23.82%
Lyman	470	386	1584	8	Substantial	24.76%
Marshall	198	128	912	3	Substantial	31.58%
McCook	607	477	1288	17	Substantial	28.18%
McPherson	153	107	471	1	Substantial	11.27%
Meade	1832	1451	6198	14	Substantial	15.08%
Mellette	186	153	615	1	Substantial	15.79%
Miner	201	161	462	5	Moderate	8.33%
Minnehaha	21173	17392	61803	195	Substantial	23.48%
Moody	428	334	1498	12	Substantial	25.22%
Oglala Lakota	1691	1348	5968	25	Substantial	22.18%
Pennington	9036	7167	31024	79	Substantial	15.67%
Perkins	210	133	570	2	Substantial	38.67%
Potter	282	207	662	2	Substantial	17.89%
Roberts	750	568	3615	20	Substantial	20.68%
Sanborn	285	198	560	2	Substantial	22.39%
Spink	587	445	1757	15	Substantial	25.32%
Stanley	235	193	686	1	Substantial	21.74%
Sully	95	80	207	3	Moderate	15.00%
Todd	1002	829	3585	14	Substantial	24.64%
Tripp	544	412	1259	5	Substantial	34.78%
Turner	814	662	2134	45	Substantial	15.09%
Union	1281	1040	4878	25	Substantial	19.27%
Walworth	517	371	1523	13	Substantial	28.26%
Yankton	1863	1369	7587	11	Substantial	18.19%
Ziebach	229	130	579	7	Substantial	42.31%
Unassigned	0	0	1767	0		

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## South Dakota



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

Age Range	# of Cases	# of Deaths
0-9 years	2918	0
10-19 years	9076	0
20-29 years	15656	3
30-39 years	13892	9
40-49 years	11934	19
50-59 years	11886	57
60-69 years	9356	139
70-79 years	4847	219
80+ years	3783	587

### SEX OF SOUTH DAKOTA COVID-19 CASES

Sex	# of Cases	# of Deaths
Female	43563	508
Male	39785	525

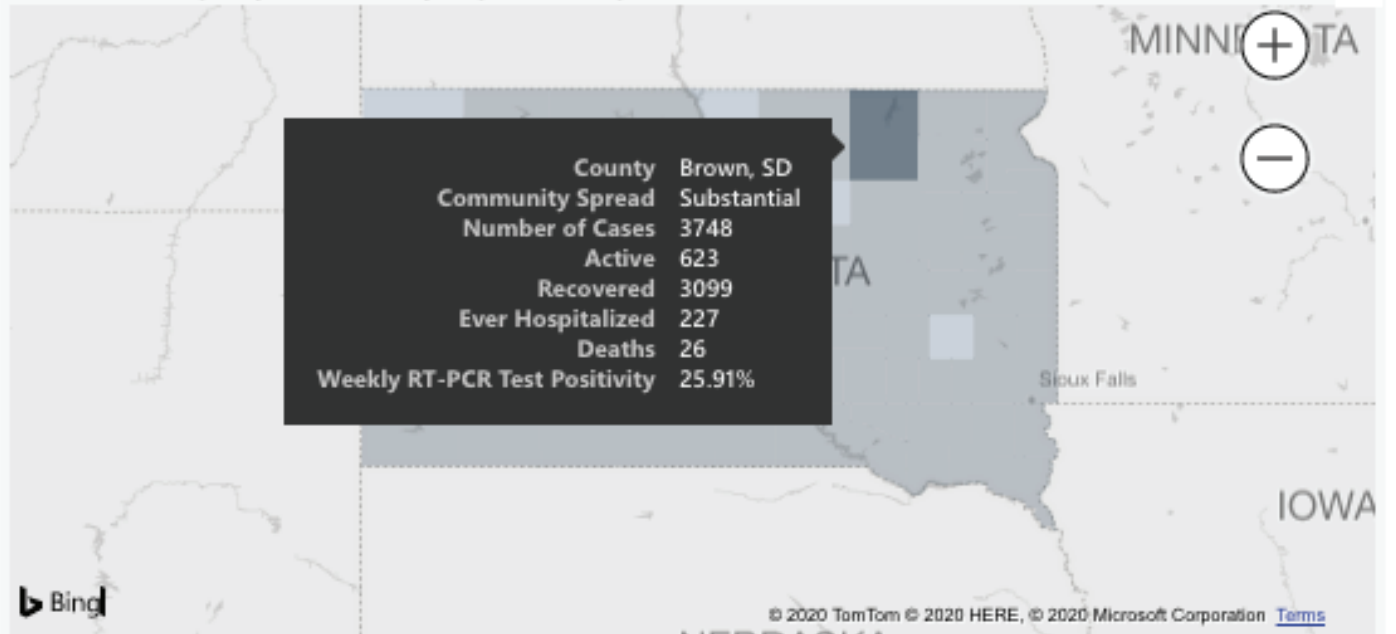
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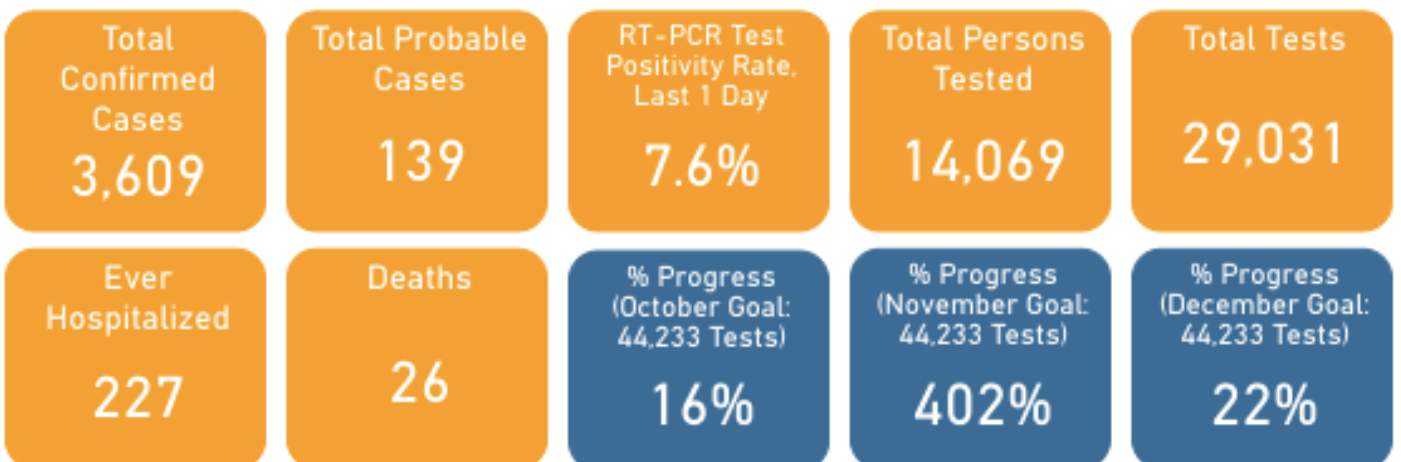
## Brown County



### Community Spread Map by County of Residence



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





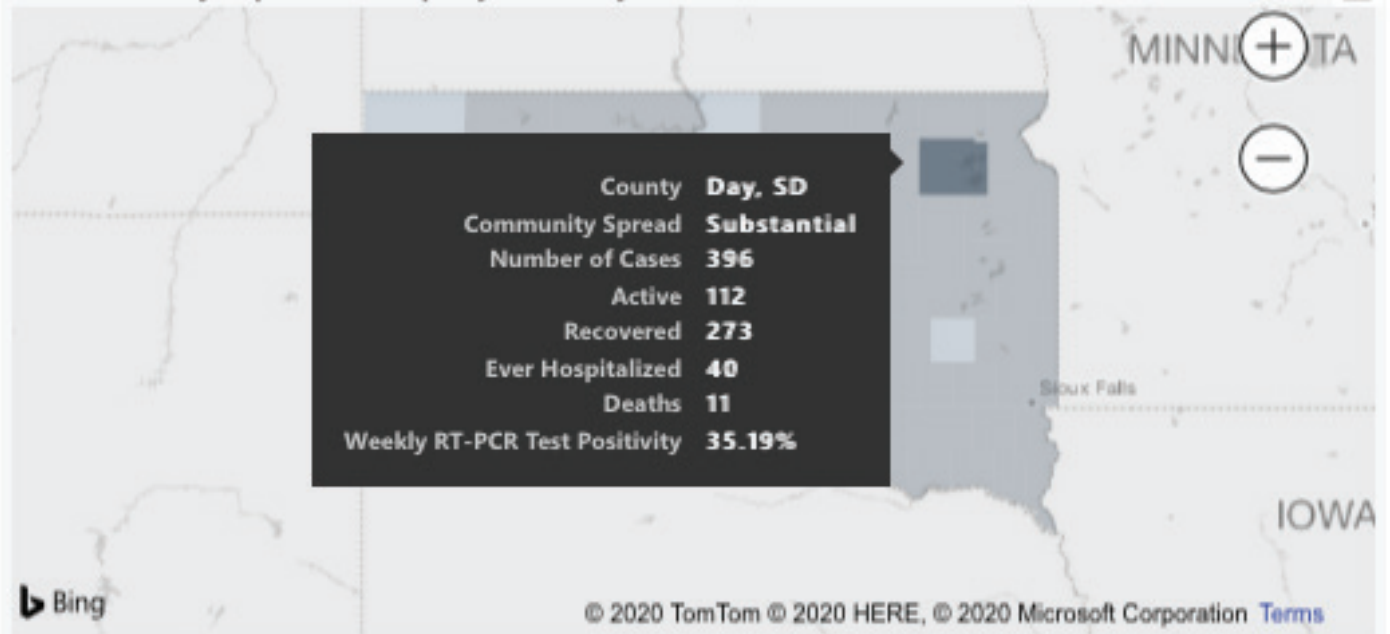
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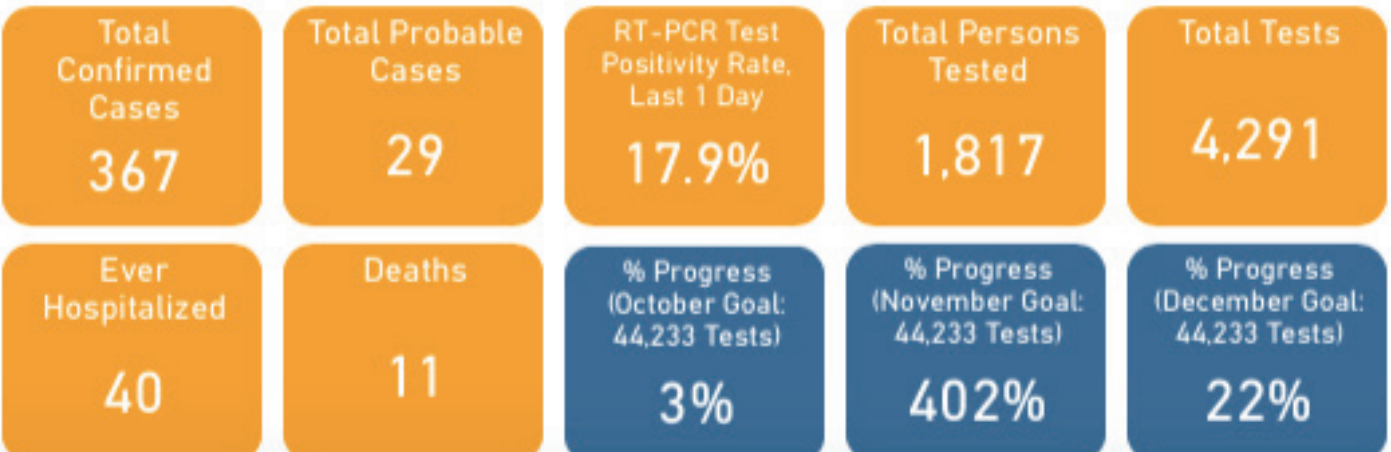
## Day County



### Community Spread Map by County of Residence



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

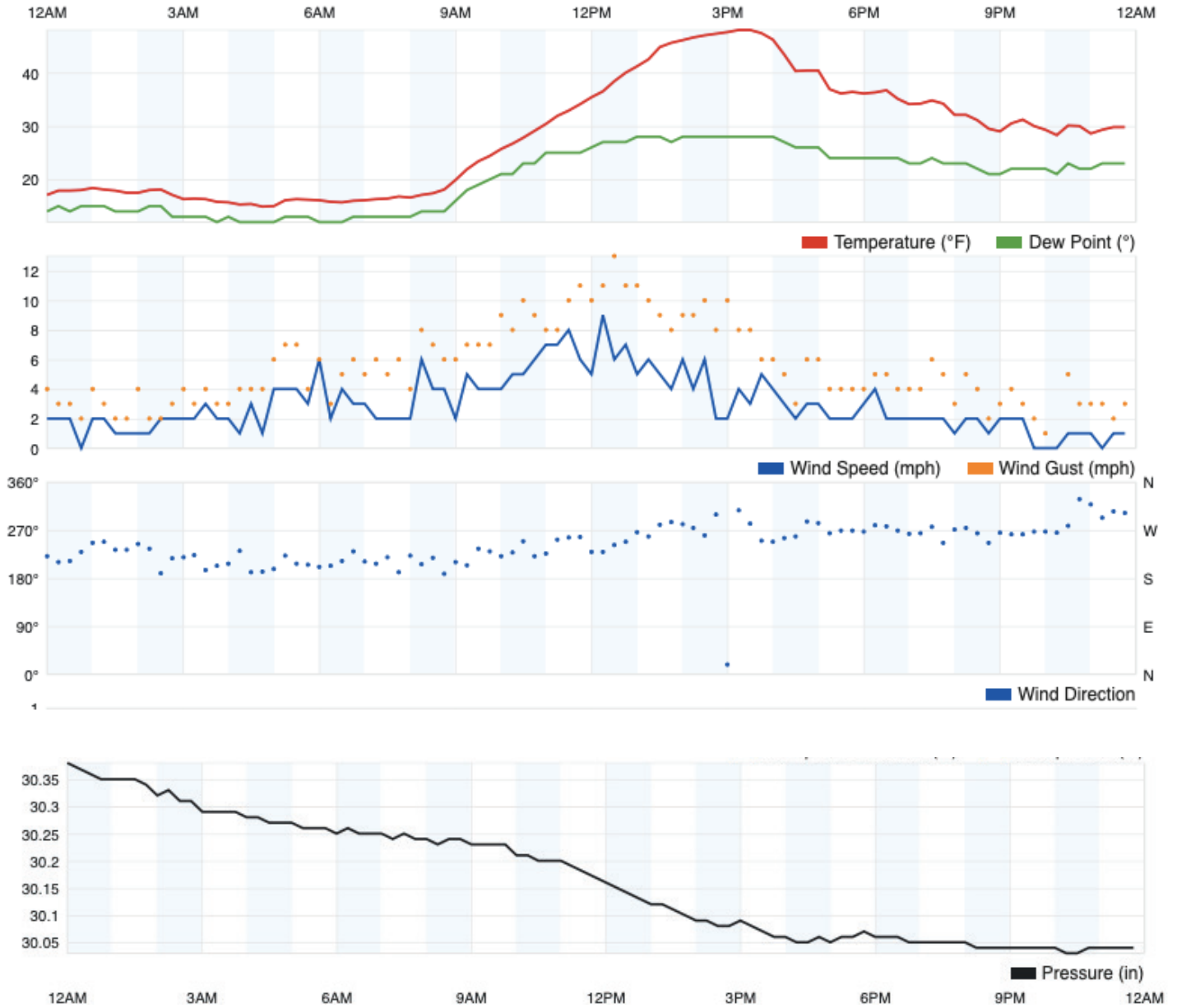




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## Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Today



Sunny

High: 50 °F

Tonight



Mostly Clear

Low: 20 °F

Saturday



Sunny

High: 48 °F

Saturday Night



Mostly Clear

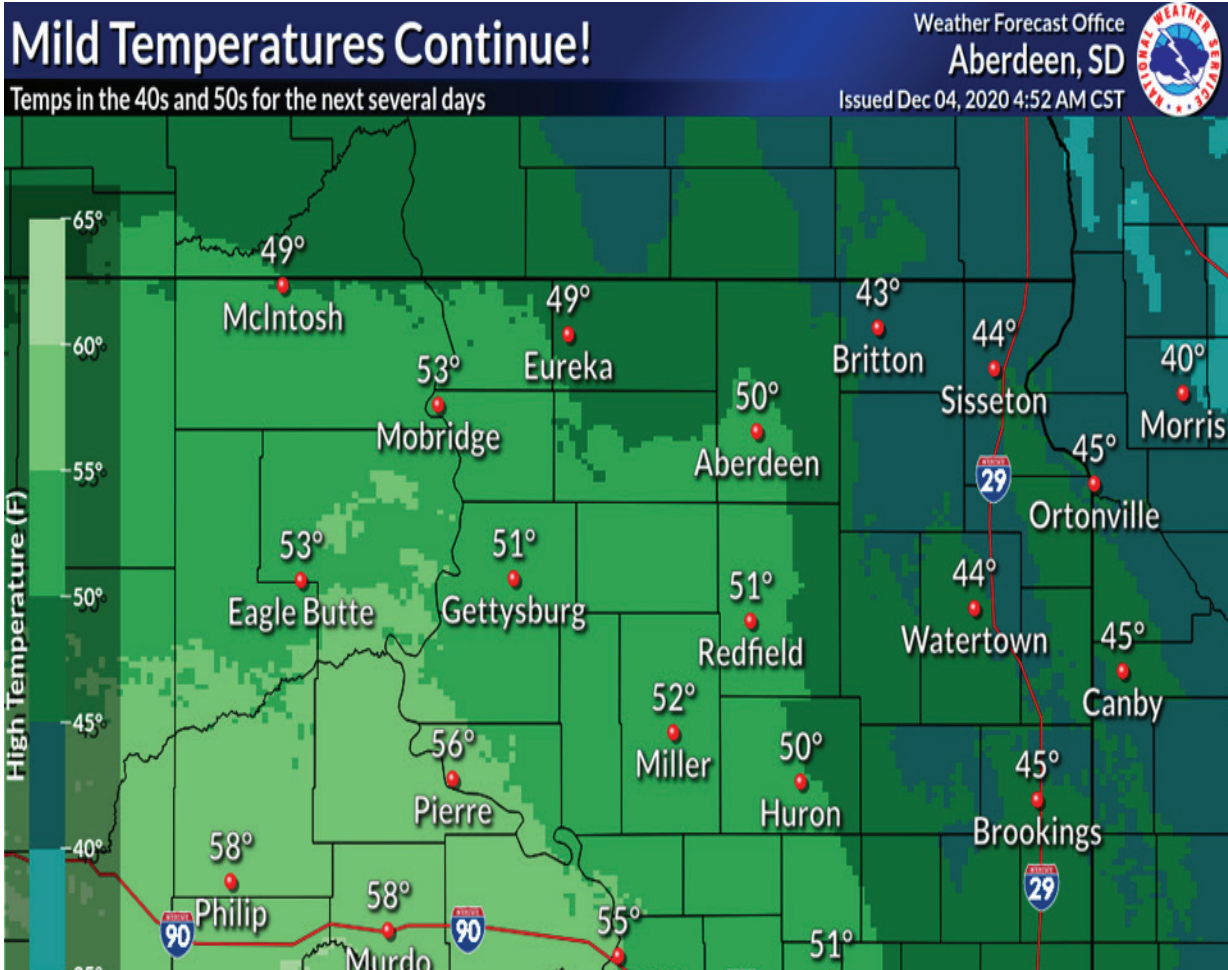
Low: 22 °F

Sunday



Mostly Sunny

High: 48 °F



The stretch of mild and dry conditions will continue for the next several days. Expect highs in the 40s and 50s today, under sunny skies. Above normal temperatures will continue into next week, with mostly 40s and 50s for highs. By Tuesday, western and central South Dakota could even be in the 60s!

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## Today in Weather History

December 4, 1993: Winds gusting to 40 to 60 mph combined with snow cover along with new snow to cause blizzard conditions making travel hazardous across north central and northeast South Dakota. Several vehicles were stranded or slid into ditches. The winds toppled a private building under construction at Selby in Walworth County. New snowfall amounts were generally from one to three inches.

December 4, 1952: The month of December started off with chilly temperatures in London. This cold resulted in Londoners to burn more coal to heat up their homes. Then on December 5, a high pressure settled over the Thames River causing a dense layer of smog to develop. The smog became so thick and dense by December 7 that virtually no sunlight was seen in London. Most conservative estimates place the death toll at 4,000, with some estimating the smog killed as many as 8,000 individuals.

December 4, 2002: A total solar eclipse was experienced by millions of people from Africa to Australia, and from space.

1786 - The first of two great early December storms began. The storm produced 18 inches of snow at Morristown NJ, and twenty inches of snow at New Haven CT. It also resulted in high tides at Nantucket which did great damage. (David Ludlum)

1972 - Winds gusting to 70 mph sent the temperature at Livingston, MT, plunging from 52 degrees to 18 degrees in just twenty minutes. (The Weather Channel)

1982 - The temperature in New York City's Central Park reached 72 degrees to establish a record high for December. The month as a whole was also the warmest of record. (The Weather Channel)

1987 - A cold front crossing the Pacific Coast Region brought high winds and heavy rain to California. Thunderstorm winds gusted to 55 mph at Newport Beach CA, and Mount Wilson CA was drenched with 2.17 inches of rain in six hours. Gale force winds prevailed along the Northern Pacific Coast, and winds in the Tehachapis Mountains of southern California gusted to 60 mph. (Storm Data) (The National Weather Summary)

1988 - Gale force winds continued to usher cold arctic air into the northeastern U.S. Winds gusted to 65 mph at Windsor Locks CT. Up to a foot of snow blanketed the higher elevations of Vermont. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 - Seventeen cities in the eastern U.S., including nine in Florida, reported record low temperatures for the date. Lakeland FL reported a record low of 31 degrees, and Watertown NY was the cold spot in the nation with a low of 20 degrees below zero. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

2002 - An early season winter storm brought an expansive shield of snow and ice through much of the eastern U.S., from the lower Ohio Valley, southern Appalachians and into the Northeast. Snow accumulations of 4-8 inches were common along the northern edge of the precipitation shield, while a significant accrual of glaze occurred in the Carolinas. The storm caused at least 17 fatalities, mostly from traffic accidents (CNN). In the Carolinas, electric utilities provider Duke Power characterized the ice storm as the worst in the company's history, with 1.2 million customers or nearly half its entire customer base without power on the morning of the 5th. This surpassed electrical outages inflicted by Hurricane Hugo as it swept through the central Carolinas in September 1989.



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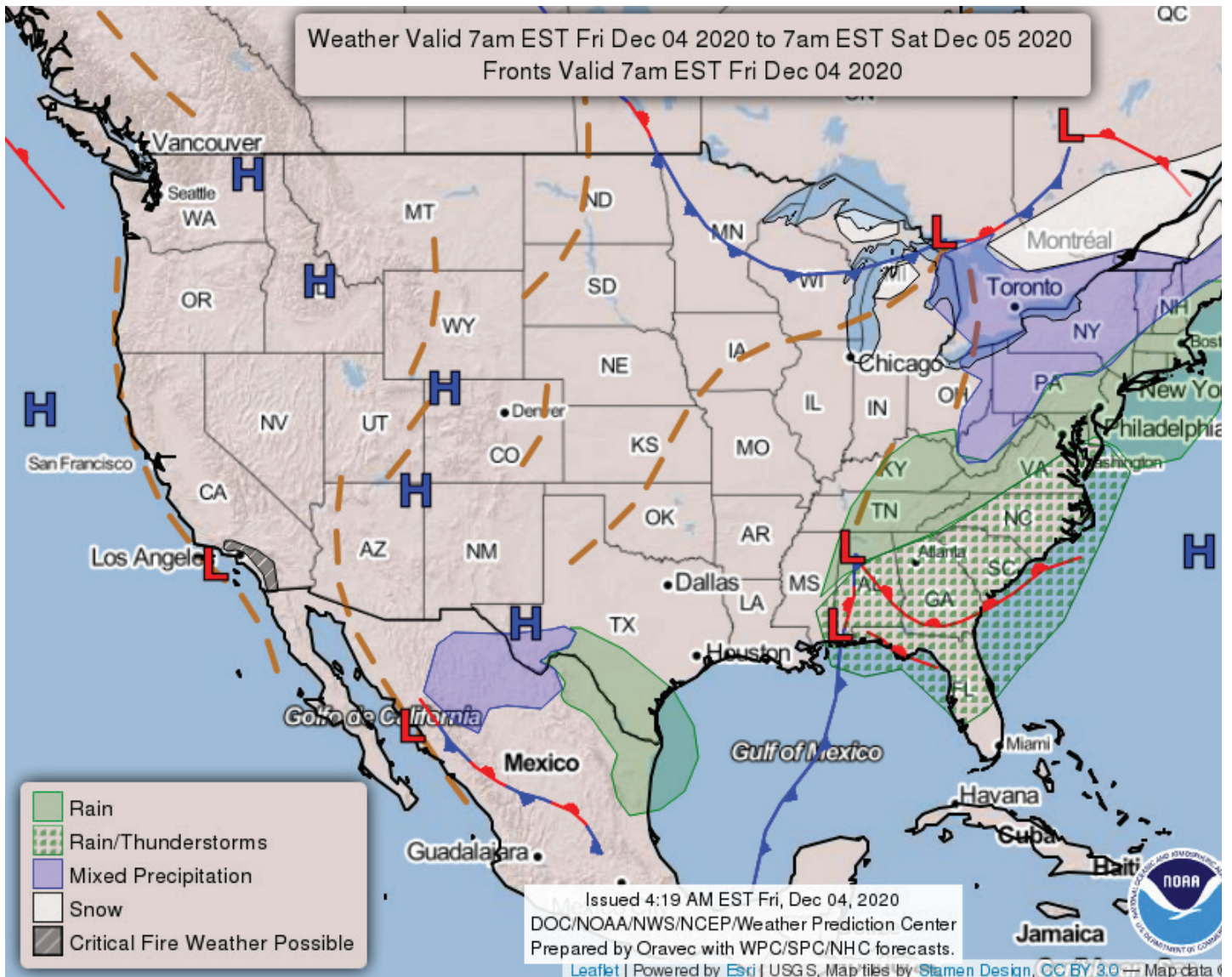
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## Yesterday's Groton Weather

**High Temp: 48 °F at 3:20 PM**  
**Low Temp: 15 °F at 4:39 AM**  
**Wind: 13 mph at 12:27 PM**  
**Precip: .00**

## Today's Info

**Record High: 56° in 1979**  
**Record Low: -18° in 1927**  
**Average High: 29°F**  
**Average Low: 10°F**  
**Average Precip in Dec.: 0.05**  
**Precip to date in Dec.: 0.00**  
**Average Precip to date: 21.25**  
**Precip Year to Date: 16.52**  
**Sunset Tonight: 4:51 p.m.**  
**Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:58 a.m.**



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## **"LOVE WITH SKIN ON IT"**

A young man, who grew up in a housing project, having little hope and few goods, heard an evangelist preaching "love" on a street corner. After listening for a few moments, he shouted to the preacher, "I'm sick and tired of you people talking about love. I want to see love. I want to feel love. I want to see love with some skin on it!"

That's Christmas: "God's love with skin on it."

Paul wrote, "For in Christ the fullness of God lives in a human body!"

In Jesus, we see Someone bringing love to life – but a very special type of love. It is God's love. We see this love coming to life when Jesus fed the hungry, gave sight to the blind, cleansed the lepers, healed the sick, offering water to a thirsty soul, calming the waves to relieve the fears of experienced fishermen, washing dirty feet, spending time with little children, teaching people the truth that brought meaning and purpose to their lives and finally hanging lifeless from a cross – abandoned and alone.

Jesus is God loving through a human heart, healing with a human hand, walking on errands of mercy with human feet, showing love, grace and mercy to those who would do Him harm.

Jesus is God loving the least, the last and the lost. In Jesus, God showed His love with "skin on it."

Prayer: Help us, Father, to put Your "love in our skin" and take Your love to those in need. May we be as faithful in caring for others as You are in caring for us. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: Colossians 2:9 For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily.



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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

### **South Dakota's death toll surpasses 1,000**

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — South Dakota's death toll from the virus surpassed 1,000 people on Thursday after the Department of Health reported 38 more deaths.

The state has seen a sharp increase in the number of deaths in recent weeks, with over half of the state's total deaths reported in the last four weeks.

The average number of new cases has declined in recent weeks, though the state still had the nation's third-highest number of new cases per capita over the last two weeks. One in every 146 people tested positive in the past week.

Health officials reported 1,145 new cases, bringing the state's count of people with active infections to 15,474. The state's hospitals are also treating 538 people for COVID-19, including 109 in ICU wards.

Meanwhile, the number of new unemployment claims filed last week dropped to 380, a decrease of nearly 50% from the previous week, according to the Department of Labor and Regulation. A total of 2,930 people in the state were receiving unemployment benefits as of Nov. 21.

### **Fire damages Lakota homeless camp near Rapid City**

RAPID CITY, S.D. (AP) — A local fire official whose department responded to a fire that swept through a Lakota-led camp for the homeless near Rapid City says the federal Bureau of Indian Affairs should have taken responsibility for the blaze.

Tuesday's fire at Camp Mniluzahan destroyed or damaged at least ten tents and burned less than a half acre of grass. The camp is on land held in trust by the Oglala, Rosebud and Cheyenne River Sioux tribes.

Pennington County Fire Service administrator Jerome Harvey said that makes it the responsibility of Wildland Fire Management at the BIA.

"We're not going to let the fire get away, but the BIA is the responsible party," Harvey said Wednesday. "You've got to attack the fire, you don't have time to play politics," but "the bottom line is it's BIA responsibility and how they're going to handle it in the future is up to them."

Harvey tells the Rapid City Journal he's reached out to the BIA to address the issue.

Harvey said he doesn't know how the fire began but that it's something the BIA should be investigating.

The Pennington County Fire Service said Tuesday's high winds elevated the fire danger and triggered a burning ban.

### **Data shows Americans couldn't resist Thanksgiving travel**

By STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — Americans couldn't resist the urge to gather for Thanksgiving, driving only slightly less than a year ago and largely ignoring the pleas of public health experts, who begged them to forgo holiday travel to help contain the coronavirus pandemic, data from roadways and airports shows.

The nation's unwillingness to tamp down on travel offered a warning in advance of Christmas and New Year's as virus deaths and hospitalizations hit new highs a week after Thanksgiving. U.S. deaths from the outbreak eclipsed 3,100 on Thursday, obliterating the single-day record set last spring.

Vehicle travel in early November was as much as 20% lower than a year earlier, but it surged around the holiday and peaked on Thanksgiving Day at only about 5% less than the pandemic-free period in 2019, according to StreetLight Data, which provided an analysis to The Associated Press.

"People were less willing to change their behavior than any other day during the pandemic," said Laura Schewel, founder of StreetLight Data.

Airports also saw some of their busiest days of the pandemic, though air travel was much lower than last year. The Transportation Security Administration screened more than 1 million passengers on four

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separate days during the Thanksgiving travel period. Since the pandemic gutted travel in March, there has been only one other day when the number of travelers topped 1 million — Oct. 18.

"If only a small percentage of those travelers were asymptotically infected, this can translate into hundreds of thousands of additional infections moving from one community to another," Dr. Cindy Friedman, a Centers for Disease Control and Prevention official, said this week during a briefing.

Wide swaths of the country saw a sudden influx of people arriving from university campuses in the days leading up to the holiday, according to a data visualization of anonymous cellphone data from a firm called Tectonix.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has urged people to stay home for the holidays, but officials acknowledged that many people would not heed that advice and advised them to get tested before and after trips. Friedman said that this year's holidays presented "tough choices" for many families.

The travelers included some elected officials who preached against trips. The mayors of Denver and Austin, Texas, faced fierce backlashes for traveling after telling other people to stay home.

Others had no regrets. Trananda Graves, who runs a travel-planning company in Keller, Texas, took a Thanksgiving road trip with her family to Nashville, Tennessee. It was a chance for her daughter to connect with relatives as they shared recipes, and Graves said everyone's mood was uplifted.

"It was just a break to get away from home," Graves said. "We work at home, we go to school at home."

She decided to drive to meet extended family after seeing that flights were crowded and said her family followed guidance to avoid spreading infections.

But infections, even from small Thanksgiving gatherings, have begun to stream in around the country, adding another burden to health departments that are already overwhelmed.

"This uptick here is really coming at a time when everyone's exhausted," said Don Lehman, a spokesman for the Warren County Public Health Department in upstate New York.

The county concluded that Thanksgiving gatherings or travel likely caused 40% of the 22 cases it reported in the last two days. That means contact tracers have to figure out where people came from or traveled to and contact health officials in those places. Lehman said it adds "a lot of legwork" to the contact-tracing process.

Graves said she expects an uptick in the travel-planning business around the holidays. Several groups have already inquired about going to Las Vegas to celebrate the end of an arduous year.

And her personal holiday plans? After the Thanksgiving trip, she said, "Now we are considering visiting my mother for Christmas."

## UK says EU trade talks at tricky point as hopes of deal dim

By JILL LAWLESS and RAF CASERT undefined

LONDON (AP) — Britain's business minister said Friday that U.K.-EU trade talks are at a "difficult" point, as British officials poured cold water on hopes of an imminent breakthrough — and France said it could veto any agreement it didn't like.

U.K. Business Secretary Alok Sharma said Britain was "committed to reaching an agreement."

"But, of course, time is short and we are in a difficult phase. There's no denying that," he told the BBC. "There are a number of tricky issues that still have to be resolved."

EU chief negotiator Michel Barnier, his British counterpart David Frost and their teams remained locked in talks in a London conference center Friday after a week of late-night sessions fueled by deliveries of sandwiches and pizza.

U.K. officials sought to dampen hopes of an imminent deal, briefing media outlets that the EU had set back negotiations by making last-minute demands — an allegation the bloc denies.

The U.K. left the EU early this year, but remains part of the 27-nation bloc's economic embrace during an 11-month transition as the two sides try to negotiate a new free-trade deal to take effect Jan. 1. Any deal must be approved by lawmakers in Britain and the EU before year's end.

Talks have dragged on as one deadline after another has slipped by. First, the goal was a deal by Oc-

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tober, then by mid-November. On Sunday, Britain said the negotiations were in their final week. Now the two sides say they could stretch into the weekend or beyond.

European Council President Charles Michel noted that it wasn't the first time that deadlines had slipped. "We will see what will happen in the next days," he said in Brussels. "But the end of December is the end of December and we know that after the 31st of December we have the 1st of January, and we know that we need to have clarity as soon as possible."

A trade deal will allow goods to move between Britain and the EU without tariffs or quotas after the end of this year, though there would still be new costs and red tape for businesses on both sides of the English Channel.

If there is no deal, New Year's Day will bring huge disruption, with the overnight imposition of tariffs and other barriers to U.K.-EU trade. That will hurt both sides, but the burden will fall most heavily on Britain, which does almost half its trade with the EU.

Months of tense negotiations have produced agreement on a swath of issues, but serious differences remain over the "level playing field" — the standards the U.K. must meet to export into the bloc — and how future disputes are resolved. That's key for the EU, which fears Britain will slash social and environmental standards and pump state money into U.K. industries, becoming a low-regulation economic rival on the bloc's doorstep.

But the U.K. government, which sees Brexit as all about "taking back control" from Brussels, is resisting curbs on its freedom to set future economic policies.

Another sticking point is fish, a small part of the economy with an outsized symbolic importance for Europe's maritime nations. EU countries want their boats to be able to keep fishing in British waters, while the U.K. insists it must control access and quotas.

Fishing is especially important to France, which is seen by many on the U.K. side as the EU nation most resistant to compromise and likeliest to scuttle a deal.

"If there was to be an agreement and it was not good ... we would oppose it," Clement Beaune, France's junior minister in charge of European Affairs, told Europe 1 radio. "France like all its (EU) partners has a veto right."

If there is no weekend breakthrough, next week will bring more complications. On Monday Britain's House of Commons will vote on a bill that gives Britain the power to breach parts of the legally binding withdrawal agreement it struck with the EU last year.

Prime Minister Boris Johnson's government acknowledges that the Internal Market Bill breaches international law, and the legislation has been condemned by the EU, U.S. President-elect Joe Biden and scores of British lawmakers, including many from Johnson's own Conservative Party.

The House of Lords, Parliament's upper chamber, removed the law-breaking clauses from the legislation last month, but Johnson's government says it will ask lawmakers to reinsert them.

That would further sour the talks, demolishing any good will that remains between the two sides.

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Casert reported from Brussels. Sylvie Corbet in Paris contributed to this story.

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Casert reported from Brussels. Sylvie Corbet in Paris contributed to this story.

## Trump loves to win but keeps losing election lawsuits

By ALANNA DURKIN RICHER Associated Press

For a man obsessed with winning, President Donald Trump is losing a lot.



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He's managed to lose not just once to Democrat Joe Biden at the ballot box but over and over again in courts across the country in a futile attempt to stay in power. The Republican president and his allies continue to mount new cases, recycling the same baseless claims, even after Trump's own attorney general declared the Justice Department had uncovered no widespread fraud.

"This will continue to be a losing strategy, and in a way it's even bad for him: He gets to re-lose the election numerous times," said Kent Greenfield, a professor at Boston College Law School. "The depths of his petulance and narcissism continues to surprise me."

In an Associated Press tally of roughly 50 cases brought by Trump's campaign and his allies, more than 30 have been rejected or dropped. About a dozen are awaiting action. Trump has notched just one small victory, a case challenging a decision to move the deadline to provide missing proof of identification for certain absentee ballots and mail-in ballots in Pennsylvania.

Another legal blow came Thursday, the day after Trump posted a 46-minute speech to Facebook filled with conspiracies, misstatements and vows to keep up his fight to subvert the election.

In Wisconsin, a split state Supreme Court refused to hear Trump's lawsuit seeking to disqualify more than 221,000 ballots in the state's two biggest Democratic counties, alleging irregularities in the way absentee ballots were administered. The case echoed claims that were earlier rejected by election officials in those counties during a recount that barely affected Biden's winning margin of about 20,700 votes. Trump filed a similar lawsuit in federal court late Wednesday.

Meanwhile, in Arizona, a judge heard arguments Thursday in a case contesting the election results brought by Arizona Republican Party Chair Kelli Ward. Ward's lawyers say an inspection of 100 ballots found two problems: one person's vote for Trump was ultimately recorded as a Biden vote and another person's vote for Trump was canceled when the reproduced ballot contained votes for both the Republican incumbent and a write-in candidate.

Judges in battleground states have repeatedly swatted down legal challenges brought by the president and his allies. Trump's legal team has vowed to take one Pennsylvania case to the U.S. Supreme Court even though it was rejected in a scathing ruling by a federal judge as well as an appeals court.

After recently being kicked off Trump's legal team, conservative attorney Sidney Powell filed new lawsuits in Arizona and Wisconsin this week riddled with errors and wild conspiracies about election rigging. One of the plaintiffs named in the Wisconsin case said he never agreed to participate in the case and found out through social media that he had been included. The same lawsuit asks for 48 hours of security footage from the "TCF Center," which is in Detroit.

The issues Trump's campaign and its allies have raised are typical in every election: problems with signatures, secrecy envelopes and postmarks on mail-in ballots, as well as the potential for a small number of ballots miscast or lost. Election officials from both parties have said the election went well, and Attorney General William Barr told The Associated Press on Tuesday that the Justice Department uncovered no evidence of widespread voter fraud that could change the election's outcome.

Trump's lawyers responded by criticizing Barr, who has been one of the president's biggest allies.

Greenfield says their criticism speaks volumes. "It goes to show how vehement their ability to overlook reality is," he said.

Failing to gain any traction in court, Trump and his allies are now turning to events with Republican lawmakers and rallies in states like Pennsylvania, Georgia and Michigan where they can use unfounded claims of fraud to incite the president's loyal base.

At a rally in Georgia on Wednesday, Powell and another pro-Trump attorney, Lin Wood, suggested that Republican voters sit out of the two January runoff elections that will decide control of the Senate because of the potential for fraud. And in Michigan, Rudy Giuliani, Trump's personal lawyer, urged Republican activists to pressure, even threaten, the GOP-controlled Legislature to award the state's 16 electoral votes to Trump despite Biden's 154,000-vote victory.

In his video posted Wednesday, Trump said there were facts and evidence of a mass conspiracy created by Democrats to steal the election, a similar argument made by Giuliani and others before judges that has

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been largely unsuccessful. Most of their claims are rooted in conspiracy theories about voting machines that are not true, and affidavits by partisan poll watchers who claimed they didn't get close enough to see ballots being tallied because of safety precautions in the coronavirus pandemic. Because they couldn't see, they argued, something untoward must have happened.

"No, I didn't hear any facts or evidence," tweeted Pennsylvania Attorney General Josh Shapiro, a Democrat, after watching the video Wednesday night. "What I did hear was a sad Facebook rant from a man who lost an election."

Associated Press writers Scott Bauer in Madison, Wis., David Eggert in Lansing, Mich., and Jacques Billeaud in Phoenix contributed to this report.

## Hardships mount in Kentucky as COVID-19 relief talks drag on

By BRUCE SCHREINER and PIPER HUDSPETH BLACKBURN Associated Press

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (AP) — Paula and Anthony Hunter spun off their catering service into a restaurant serving Italian food with a "touch of soul" right before the coronavirus hit. Soon, both Louisville businesses slammed to a halt, and the couple relied on federal relief to help stay afloat.

They improvised to keep income flowing in, navigating a maze of food delivery mobile apps and prepping boxed lunches for health care workers toiling long hours at local hospitals.

Now, hit with a recent statewide order closing restaurants to indoor dining until mid-December, the couple is hoping for another round of federal aid to hang on until a vaccine arrives.

"Just a few more months, you know, get us through this," said Paula Hunter, who owns the Black Italian restaurant along with her husband.

Kentucky's senior senator, Republican Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, is at the center of congressional negotiations on another relief package. Kentucky voters didn't punish McConnell for the long-stalemated talks, awarding him a lopsided victory as he secured a seventh term in last month's election. He spent the campaign boasting about the money he delivered for the Bluegrass State in the massive federal relief package passed early in the pandemic.

While reports of hardship are growing in Kentucky, much of the political pressure there is focused not on McConnell but on the state's Democratic governor, Andy Beshear.

Beshear is under fire from business owners and state GOP leaders who think the virus-related restrictions he's imposed on daily life in Kentucky have gone too far. Emboldened by gains they made in the November elections, GOP legislative leaders are expected to push to rein in Beshear's authority to take emergency measures when the legislature convenes next year.

Beshear says he's focused on saving lives but Congress must do its part and pass more aid.

"We need people to not be Democrats or Republicans but to be human beings and do the right thing," the governor said in an interview. "People out there are dying, People out there are hurting. This is the time to invest in our people and in their safety."

With COVID-19 surging across the country, a group of Senate centrists has offered a \$908 billion federal relief package aimed at breaking the monthslong logjam. McConnell hasn't budged so far from a \$550 billion plan that failed twice this fall but said Thursday that "compromise is within reach" as bipartisan talks gained momentum in the Senate.

"There is no reason why we should not deliver another major pandemic relief package to help the American people through what seems poised to be the last chapters of this battle," McConnell said in a Senate speech this week.

In his home state, anxiety is rising along with deaths, infections and hospitalizations.

In a region already reeling from the decline of coal mining, eastern Kentucky pastor Chris Bartley has heard an unprecedented chorus of pleas for help from people whose lives have been shattered by the economic turmoil caused by COVID-19.

"You hear the desperation in the phone calls: 'I have to pay my rent today. I've done everything I can

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do. I've offered to rake leaves or mow grass or anything I can do.' They've lost their job or the stimulus has run out," said Bartley, associate pastor at a Methodist church in Pikeville, Kentucky.

Along with prayers for divine guidance, Bartley hopes to see more relief from Congress.

Beshear, meanwhile, delivers daily doses of grim news of the state's virus cases and deaths and presses for another economic lifeline for struggling businesses, the unemployed, and state and local governments.

"We saw the first round of CARES Act funding really flow through our economy in a positive manner," he said. "People needed the dollars. They spent the dollars. We saw businesses lifted up by those dollars. We were able to use funds to help people stay in their homes with an eviction-relief fund. Pay their utility bills so they didn't end up in debt."

Beshear has carefully avoided calling out McConnell or President Donald Trump as the impasse drags on. Republicans dominated federal and state elections last month in Kentucky.

The governor has fought his own battles as his restrictions on businesses, gatherings and schools have drawn opposition from GOP lawmakers, business operators and the state's Republican attorney general.

Kentucky's Supreme Court last month upheld the governor's authority to issue coronavirus-related mandates, but Beshear is now embroiled in another legal fight over his recent virus-related suspension of in-person classes at religious schools.

Some restaurant operators vow to reopen their dining rooms to 50% capacity later this month, regardless of whether Beshear chooses to extend his current order closing restaurants and bars to indoor dining until Dec. 13. Beshear said Wednesday he doesn't expect to extend the order. The governor set aside \$40 million in federal aid to help bars and restaurants reeling from the restrictions, but many say it will cover only a small portion of the revenue they're losing.

Publicly, Beshear shrugs off the pushback from his detractors.

"I'm willing to take whatever blame some people want to heap out there," he said. "If it means that their relatives are still around for Christmas this year and Christmas next year, I'll take it."

Meanwhile, Beshear this week announced the release of an additional \$50 million in federal relief funding to reimburse hard-hit city and county governments for coronavirus-related expenses.

Pike County Judge-Executive Ray Jones welcomed the influx of money but warned that without another federal relief package, the hardships will intensify for city and county governments faced with increasing demands from constituents amid shrinking tax revenues.

He's hoping any new federal package includes another round of Paycheck Protection Program subsidies for struggling businesses and an extension of supplemental federal unemployment programs.

"There's no question if there's not an extension of the unemployment benefits and another round of PPP funding, it will have a catastrophic impact on local revenues," Jones said.

Bartley sees the damage being inflicted on families firsthand.

"I'm dealing with more mental health issues than I ever have in 20 years," he said.

At his church's food pantry, demand fell after Congress passed the massive aid bill months ago, but now more and more people are showing up for bags of groceries.

"It's almost as much as we can do to keep up again," Bartley said.

Congress, he added, needs to "get past all of the politics" and provide more aid to those in need.

"I don't know a whole lot about the political scheme of all this, but it seems like we've got to do something for the betterment of our country," Bartley said. "I don't know how or what that could be. But it feels like something has to happen, or it's like the dam is going to break."

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Hudspeth Blackburn is a corps member for the Associated Press/Report for America Statehouse News Initiative. Report for America is a nonprofit national service program that places journalists in local newsrooms to report on undercovered issues.

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

## Biden adjusting agenda to reflect narrow divide in Congress

By ALEXANDRA JAFFE Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President-elect Joe Biden is adjusting the scope of his agenda to meet the challenges of governing with a narrowly divided Congress and the complications of legislating during a raging pandemic.

Rather than immediately pursue ambitious legislation to combat climate change, the incoming administration may try to wrap provisions into a coronavirus aid bill. Biden's team is also considering smaller-scale changes to the Affordable Care Act while tabling the more contentious fight over creating a public option to compete with private insurers.

Biden is already working on an array of executive actions to achieve some of his bolder priorities on climate change and immigration without having to navigate congressional gridlock.

The maneuvering reflects a disappointing political reality for Biden, who campaigned on a pledge to address the nation's problems with measures that would rival the scope of Franklin Delano Roosevelt's New Deal legislation. But Democrats acknowledge that big legislative accomplishments are unlikely, even in the best-case scenario in which the party gains a slim majority in the Senate.

"Let's assume my dream comes true," Senate Democratic Whip Dick Durbin said, referring to a tight majority for his party. "I think we have to carefully construct any change in the Affordable Care Act, or any other issue, like climate change, based on the reality of the 50-50 Senate."

"There's so many areas, which we value so much that Republicans do not, that it will be tough to guide through the Senate under the circumstances," the Illinois Democrat added.

Biden's agenda hinges on the fate of two Senate runoff races in Georgia, which will be decided on Jan. 5. If Democrats win both seats, the chamber will be evenly divided, with Vice President-elect Kamala Harris casting the tie-breaking vote.

In that event, Biden's agenda items stand a better chance of at least getting a vote. If Republicans maintain control, Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell might not bring the new president's priorities to the floor.

Biden's initial focus on Capitol Hill will be a multibillion-dollar coronavirus aid bill, which is certain to require significant political capital after lawmakers have been deadlocked over negotiations on Capitol Hill for months.

The president-elect said Thursday on CNN that while he supports a \$900 billion compromise bill introduced this week by a bipartisan group of negotiators, the bill is "a good start" but it's "not enough" and he plans to ask for more when he's in office. His team is already working on his own coronavirus relief package.

People close to Biden's transition team say they're looking at that stimulus as a potential avenue for enacting some climate reforms — like aid for green jobs or moving the nation toward a carbon-free energy system — that might be tougher to get on their own.

Durbin mentioned President Barack Obama's first term as a precedent for what Biden will encounter when he takes office.

Then, Obama was forced to focus much of his early energy on a stimulus package to deal with the financial crisis, and he spent months wrangling with his own party on his health care overhaul. Obama also enacted financial regulatory reform, but other progressive priorities, like cap and trade legislation and immigration reform, ultimately lost steam.

And he had a significant House and Senate majority at the time.

Still, some Republicans argue that if Biden approaches negotiations in good faith, there are some common areas of agreement. Rohit Kumar, the co-leader of PwC's Washington National Tax Services and a former top aide to McConnell, said it's possible to find a compromise on some smaller-scale priorities, like an infrastructure bill, addressing the opioid crisis and even a police reform bill.

"There is stuff in the middle, if Biden is willing to do deals in the middle — and that means being willing to strike agreements that progressive members don't love, and maybe have them vote no, and be at peace with that," he said.



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Indeed, speaking on CNN Thursday, Biden expressed optimism about cutting deals with Republicans. He said when it comes to national security and the "economic necessity" of keeping people employed and reinvigorating the economy, "there's plenty of room we can work."

Still, he acknowledged, "I'm not suggesting it's going to be easy. It's going to be hard."

But here, progressives, not Republicans, could be the roadblock. Waleed Shahid, spokesperson for the liberal Justice Democrats, said progressives are "worried and anxious" about Biden's history of making what he called "toxic compromises with McConnell."

"I think progressives will probably play a key role in trying to push Democrats to have a spine in any negotiations with Mitch McConnell," he said. "People will hold him accountable for what he ran on."

Shaheed said he believes progressives could play a role in pushing the Biden administration to embrace a more "aggressive approach" and pursue executive actions to address some Democratic priorities.

And indeed, Biden's transition team has already been at work crafting a list of potential unilateral moves he could take early on.

He plans to reverse Trump's rollback of a number of public health and environmental protections the Obama administration put in place. He'll rejoin the World Health Organization and the Paris climate accord and rescind the ban on travel from some Muslim-majority countries. He could also unilaterally reestablish protections for "Dreamers" who were brought illegally to the U.S. as children.

But some of his biggest campaign pledges require congressional action and are certain to face GOP opposition.

Biden has promised to take major legislative action on immigration reform and gun control, but prior legislative efforts on both of those issues — with bipartisan support — have failed multiple times.

He's also pledged to roll back the Trump tax cuts for the wealthy, forgive some student loan debt and make some public college free — all heavy lifts in a closely divided or Republican-controlled Senate.

"It's easy to be skeptical and pessimistic in this Senate," Durbin said. "I hope that they give us a chance to break through and be constructive and put an end to some of the obstruction."

## First Rohingya refugees arrive at isolated Bangladesh island

By JULHAS ALAM Associated Press

DHAKA, Bangladesh (AP) — Authorities in Bangladesh on Friday sent the first group of more than 1,500 Rohingya refugees to an isolated island despite calls by human rights groups for a halt to the process.

The 1,642 refugees boarded seven Bangladeshi naval vessels in the port of Chittagong for the trip to Bhashan Char, according to an official who could not be named in accordance with local practice.

After about a three-hour trip they arrived at the island, which was once regularly submerged by monsoon rains but now has flood protection embankments, houses, hospitals and mosques built at a cost of more than \$112 million by the Bangladesh navy.

Located 21 miles (34 kilometers) from the mainland, the island surfaced only 20 years ago and was never inhabited.

Saleh Noman, a Bangladeshi journalist who traveled with the refugees, said by phone from the island that the refugees were given rice, eggs and chickens for lunch after their body temperatures were measured by health workers as a coronavirus precaution.

Before they boarded the ships they were also given face masks to protect against COVID-19.

The United Nations has voiced concern that refugees be allowed to make a "free and informed decision" about whether to relocate to the island in the Bay of Bengal.

The island's facilities are built to accommodate 100,000 people, just a fraction of the million Rohingya Muslims who have fled waves of violent persecution in their native Myanmar and are currently living in crowded, squalid refugee camps in Cox's Bazar district.

On Thursday, 11 passenger buses carrying the refugees left Cox's Bazar on the way to the island. They camped overnight in school buildings in the southeastern city of Chittagong.

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Authorities in Cox's Bazar did not say how the refugees were selected for relocation.

About 700,000 Rohingya fled to the camps in Cox's Bazar after August 2017, when the military in Buddhist-majority Myanmar began a harsh crackdown on the Muslim group following an attack by insurgents. The crackdown included rapes, killings and the torching of thousands of homes, and was termed ethnic cleansing by global rights groups and the U.N.

Foreign media have not been permitted to visit the island.

Contractors say its infrastructure is like a modern township, with multifamily concrete homes, schools, playgrounds and roads. It also has solar-power facilities, a water supply system and cyclone shelters.

International aid agencies and the U.N. have vehemently opposed the relocation since it was first proposed in 2015, expressing fear that a big storm could overwhelm the island and endanger thousands of lives.

The U.N. said in a statement Wednesday that it has not been involved in preparations for the relocation or the selection of refugees and has limited information about the overall plan.

"The United Nations takes this opportunity to highlight its longstanding position that Rohingya refugees must be able to make a free and informed decision about relocating to Bhasan Char based upon relevant, accurate and updated information," it said.

Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch on Thursday urged the government to cancel the relocation plan.

The current refugee camps near the town of Cox's Bazar are overcrowded and unhygienic. Disease and organized crime are rampant. Education is limited and refugees are not allowed to work.

Still, most Rohingya are unwilling to return to Myanmar due to safety concerns. Government officials didn't have an estimate of how many refugees would be willing to be relocated to the island.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has repeatedly told the U.N. and other international partners that her administration would consult them before making a final decision on the relocation, and that no refugees would be forced to move.

Bangladesh attempted to start sending refugees back to Myanmar under a bilateral framework last November, but no one was willing to go.

The Rohingya are not recognized as citizens in Myanmar, rendering them stateless, and face other forms of state-sanctioned discrimination.

A U.N.-sponsored investigation in 2018 recommended the prosecution of Myanmar's top military commanders on charges of genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity for the violence against the Rohingya.

Myanmar is defending itself in the International Court of Justice in the Hague, Netherlands, after the West African nation of Gambia brought a case backed by the Organization for Islamic Cooperation, Canada and the Netherlands over the crackdown.

## US intelligence director says China is top threat to America

By DEB RIECHMANN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — China poses the greatest threat to America and the rest of the free world since World War II, outgoing National Intelligence Director John Ratcliffe said Thursday as the Trump administration ramps up anti-Chinese rhetoric to pressure President-elect Joe Biden to be tough on Beijing.

"The intelligence is clear: Beijing intends to dominate the U.S. and the rest of the planet economically, militarily and technologically," Ratcliffe wrote in an op-ed published Thursday in *The Wall Street Journal*. "Many of China's major public initiatives and prominent companies offer only a layer of camouflage to the activities of the Chinese Communist Party."

"I call its approach of economic espionage 'rob, replicate and replace,'" Ratcliffe said. "China robs U.S. companies of their intellectual property, replicates the technology and then replaces the U.S. firms in the global marketplace."

In Beijing, foreign ministry spokesperson Hua Chunying dismissed the editorial as a further move to spread "false information, political viruses and lies" in hopes of damaging China's reputation and China-

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U.S. relations.

"It offered nothing new but repeated the lies and rumors aimed at smearing China and playing up the China threat by any means," Hua said at a daily briefing on Friday. "It's another hodgepodge of lies being produced by the relevant departments of the U.S. government for some time."

Trump administration officials have been stepping up their anti-China rhetoric for months, especially during the presidential campaign as President Donald Trump sought to deflect blame for the spread of the coronavirus. On the campaign trail, Trump warned that Biden would go easy on China, although the president-elect agrees that China is not abiding by international trade rules, is giving unfair subsidies to Chinese companies and stealing American innovation.

The Trump administration, which once boasted of warm relations with Chinese President Xi Jinping, also has been ramping up sanctions against China over Taiwan, Tibet, trade, Hong Kong and the South China Sea. It has moved against the Chinese telecoms giant Huawei and sought restrictions on Chinese social media applications like TikTok and WeChat.

Ratcliffe, a Trump loyalist who has been accused of politicizing the position, has been the nation's top intelligence official since May. In his op-ed, he did not directly address the transition to a Biden administration. Trump has not acknowledged losing the election.

Ratcliffe said he has shifted money within the \$85 billion annual intelligence budget to address the threat from China. Beijing is preparing for an open-ended confrontation with the U.S., which must be addressed, he said.

"This is our once-in-a-generation challenge. Americans have always risen to the moment, from defeating the scourge of fascism to bringing down the Iron Curtain," Ratcliffe wrote in what appeared to be call for action to future intelligence officials.

Biden has announced that he wants the Senate to confirm Avril Haines, a former deputy director of the CIA, to succeed Ratcliffe as the next national intelligence director.

"This generation will be judged by its response to China's effort to reshape the world in its own image and replace America as the dominant superpower," Ratcliffe wrote.

He cited several examples of Chinese aggression against the United States:

The Justice Department has charged a rising number of U.S. academics for transferring U.S. taxpayer-funded intellectual property to China.

He noted the theft of intellectual property from American businesses, citing the case of Sinoval, a China-based wind turbine maker, which was convicted and heavily fined for stealing trade secrets from AMSC, a U.S.-based manufacturer formerly known as American Superconductor Inc. Rather than pay AMSC for more than \$800 million in products and services it had agreed to purchase, Sinoval hatched a scheme to steal AMSC's proprietary wind turbine technology, causing the loss of almost 700 jobs and more than \$1 billion in shareholder equity, according to the Justice Department.

Ratcliffe and other U.S. officials have said that China has stolen sensitive U.S. defense technology to fuel Xi's aggressive military modernization plan and they allege that Beijing uses its access to Chinese tech firms, such as Huawei, to collect intelligence, disrupt communications and threaten the privacy of users worldwide.

Ratcliffe said he has personally briefed members of Congress about how China is using intermediaries to lawmakers in an attempt to influence legislation.

## Israel urges citizens to avoid Gulf, cites Iran threat

By ILAN BEN ZION Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — The Israeli government on Thursday urged its citizens to avoid travel to the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain, citing threats of Iranian attacks.

Iran has been threatening to attack Israeli targets since its chief nuclear scientist, Mohsen Fakhrizadeh, was assassinated last Friday near Tehran. It accuses Israel, which has been suspected in previous killings of Iranian nuclear scientists, of being behind the shooting.

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Israel has not commented on the killing. But Fakhriyadeh has long been on Israel's radar screen, with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu saying at a 2018 news conference about Iran's nuclear program: "Remember that name." Israel accuses Iran of trying to develop nuclear weapons — a charge Iran denies.

In recent months, Israel has signed agreements establishing diplomatic relations with Gulf Arab states of the UAE and Bahrain — its first normalization deals with Arab countries in a quarter century.

The agreements, brokered by the Trump administration, have generated widespread excitement in Israel, and thousands of Israeli tourists are scheduled to travel to the UAE for the Jewish holiday of Hanukkah this month.

That may change following Thursday's warning.

"In light of the threats heard recently by Iranian officials and in light of the involvement in the past of Iranian officials in terror attacks in various countries, there is a concern that Iran will try to act in this way against Israeli targets," said a statement issued by the prime minister's National Security Council.

It also advised against travel to Georgia, Azerbaijan, Turkey, the Kurdish area of Iraq and Africa.

Israel's military is well prepared to deal with the threats of Iranian troops and their proxies in neighboring Syria, Lebanon and the Gaza Strip. Israeli media say the government also has beefed up security at embassies around the world.

But protecting Israeli travelers, conspicuous and spread out at countless hotels, restaurants and tourist sites, represents a different type of challenge.

"This is going to be a nightmare, and I really hope that both governments, UAE and Israel, are coordinating and doing the best they can to safeguard those Israelis," said Yoel Guzansky, a former Israeli counterterrorism official who is now a senior fellow at the Institute for National Security Studies in Tel Aviv.

"I'm really worried that that something might happen, and especially now because of the context of Fakhriyadeh, because Iran is really looking for revenge," he added. He spoke before the travel advisory was issued.

The Israel Airports Authority estimates that about 25,000 Israelis will fly to the UAE this month on the five airlines now plying the route between Tel Aviv and the Gulf state's airports in Dubai and Abu Dhabi. Celebrities, entrepreneurs and tourists already have been flocking to Dubai.

With the coronavirus appearing to be under control in the UAE, it is one of the few quarantine-free travel options for Israelis during the coming Hanukkah holiday vacation, adding to its appeal. At a time when few people are traveling, Israeli visitors speaking Hebrew could be extra conspicuous.

Israel this week also signed a tourism agreement with Bahrain.

Amsalem Tours, an Israeli travel agency, said that there was "very serious" demand for travel packages to Dubai but did not provide specific figures.

Iran and its proxies have targeted Israeli tourists and Jewish communities in the past. Agents of the Lebanese militant Hezbollah group bombed a bus carrying Israeli tourists in Burgas, Bulgaria, in 2012, killing six and wounding dozens. That year, Israel also accused Iran of being behind attacks targeting Israeli diplomats in Thailand and India. Iran and Hezbollah also bombed the Israeli Embassy and Jewish community center in Buenos Aires in 1992 and 1994, claiming the lives of scores of civilians.

Concerns for the safety of Israelis in Dubai also is not without precedent. In 2000, an Israeli ex-colonel was kidnapped by Iranian proxy Hezbollah and held captive in Lebanon until he was released in a prisoner exchange in 2004.

Today, Dubai, famous for its glittering shopping malls, ultra-modern skyscrapers and nightlife, is a crossroads for travelers from around the world, including many nations that do not have relations with Israel. Iran maintains a major presence in Dubai, due to historical and current trade ties, and Dubai is believed to be a major station for Iranian intelligence services. The family of a California-based member of an Iranian militant opposition group in exile says he was abducted by Iran while staying in Dubai just a few months ago.

In a possible sign of Emirati security concerns, travel agencies in countries across the Middle East and Africa say the UAE has temporarily halted issuing new visas to their citizens. With tens of thousands of



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Iranians working or doing business in the UAE, Iran is also among the countries facing the visa restrictions.

Israel had already had a travel warning in place advising citizens against nonessential travel to the UAE. Similar "basic concrete threat" advisories are in place for visiting other Arab states with which Israel has peace treaties. But the language of Thursday's warning was especially tough.

The UAE, for its part, is known for its strict security. Dubai, home to 3.3 million people in 2019, with just over 3 million of them foreigners, has published major crime statistics that are among some of the lowest in the world.

Before Israelis began arriving, Dubai held a highly publicized drill of a police SWAT team storming a replica metro car in October and suggested facial-recognition technology could be implemented at stations along its driverless track. Experts already believe the UAE has one of the highest per capita concentrations of surveillance cameras in the world, a system that's only grown amid the coronavirus pandemic.

And despite the recent tensions, Iran may be hesitant to strike on Emirati soil, wanting to maintain its economic interests there. The UAE meanwhile has gone out of its way to say it wants to de-escalate tensions in the region despite its own suspicions over Iranian behavior. It called the killing of Fakhrizadeh a "heinous assassination."

In an interview before Thursday's advisory was issued, Pavel Israelsky, co-founder of Salam Dubai, said the boom in his UAE-based Israeli tour operator's bookings was "significant" ahead of the Hanukkah holiday. While a handful of Israeli clients canceled over security concerns, he said, "I can say that the UAE is one of the most secure places in the world in terms of the resources they invest in security."

"I don't think there's cause for worry," Israelsky said. "Today, no place is really safe."

Associated Press writers Josef Federman in Jerusalem and Jon Gambrell in Dubai, United Arab Emirates, contributed reporting.

## Fauci apologizes for suggesting UK rushed vaccine decision

By DANICA KIRKA Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — America's top infectious disease expert has apologized for suggesting U.K. authorities rushed their authorization of a COVID-19 vaccine, saying he has "great faith" in the country's regulators.

Dr. Anthony Fauci, director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, had sparked controversy with an earlier interview in which he said U.K. regulators hadn't acted "as carefully" as the U.S. Food and Drug Administration.

Fauci said late Thursday that he meant to say U.S. authorities do things differently than their British counterparts, not better, but his comments weren't phrased properly.

"I do have great faith in both the scientific community and the regulatory community at the U.K., and anyone who knows me and my relationship with that over literally decades, you know that's the case," Fauci told the BBC.

Britain on Wednesday became the first Western nation to authorize widespread use of a COVID-19 vaccine when regulators gave emergency approval to a product made by U.S. drugmaker Pfizer and Germany-based BioNTech. Critics have suggested that U.K. regulators emphasized speed over thoroughness when they reviewed data on the safety and effectiveness of the vaccine.

Fauci rejected that idea.

The FDA has to move more slowly because of the high degree of skepticism about vaccines in the U.S., Fauci said. Because of this, U.S. regulators are reviewing all of the raw data from Pfizer and BioNTech "in a way that could not possibly have been done any more quickly," he said.

It will take the FDA at least another week to complete its review, but the U.S. and Britain will ultimately end up in the same place, Fauci said.

"At the end of the day, it's going to be safe, it's going to be effective," he said. "The people in the U.K. are going to receive it, and they're going to do really well, and the people in the United States are going to receive it, and we're going to do pretty well."

## One Good Thing: Hong Kong restaurant trains the disabled

By ZEN SOO and ALICE FUNG Associated Press

HONG KONG (AP) — Located smack in the middle of Hong Kong's bustling Mong Kok neighborhood, Dignity Kitchen offers an array of mouthwatering Singaporean fare — from piping-hot laksa (noodles in a spicy coconut milk broth) to fragrant slices of chiffon cake flavored with the essence of pandan leaves.

But what sets Dignity Kitchen apart from other restaurants in the city is that it is a social enterprise, almost entirely staffed by employees with physical or mental disabilities. The restaurant trains disabled employees to prep food and cook, as well as serve customers.

"It's important to help the disabled or the disadvantaged people, because they are at society's bottom of the pyramid," said the restaurant's founder, Koh Seng Choon, a sprightly 61-year-old Singaporean entrepreneur who launched the restaurant in January.

"They are the people who need help. If we can get them a job, they will be out of the poverty cycle."

Ultimately, Dignity Kitchen aims to place its employees in other jobs in the food and beverage sector so it can then welcome and train new groups of disabled people.

Koh first came up with the concept in his hometown of Singapore, but later decided to do the same in Hong Kong after the city's government invited him to open a branch.

The kitchen is expansive, modeled after a food court in Singapore. The drink stall is operated by a deaf employee, and printed diagrams at the stall encourage customers to learn simple sign language when it comes to drink requests, or even to sign "thank you."

At the claypot rice stall, an employee with autism — who, according to Koh could barely communicate with strangers before his training — enthusiastically introduces the dish to customers who ask about it.

"We used to prepare a script for him," said Koh, smiling proudly. "But now, 8 months, 9 months later, he can't stop talking."

The training they get at Dignity Kitchen not only equips them with useful skills but also aids them in getting the self-respect and dignity that they may have lacked, Koh said.

Ming Chung, who has visual disabilities, found employment at Dignity Kitchen as an administrative assistant. Using voice-to-text technology, Chung co-ordinates with other organizations and handles email as well as phone inquiries.

"Director (Koh) told me that he doesn't care about our disabilities, he only focuses on our abilities," Chung said. "This really inspired me and touched my heart."

Others, like Carol Wong, who is mildly intellectually disabled, has picked up knife skills at the restaurant that could eventually be transferable to food preparation roles in the industry.

"At first I was afraid, but since I started working in this restaurant, I've become unafraid of chopping food," she said.

The kitchen has drawn customers in with its social mission and offers them the option of buying meals for the less unfortunate in the city.

"I think this is very meaningful, so we've come to try," said Lisa Gu, a customer who visited Dignity Kitchen for a bowl of laksa. "The food is also delicious."

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

## Dangerously viral: How Trump, supporters spread false claims

By AMANDA SEITZ and DAVID KLEPPER Associated Press

The cellphone video shot in the dark by a woman in a parked car appeared to show something ominous: a man closing the doors of a white van and then rolling a wagon with a large box into a Detroit election center.

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Within hours, the 90-second clip was being shared on news sites and conservative YouTube accounts, offered as apparent proof that illegal votes were being smuggled in after polls closed. Prominent Republicans, including Eric Trump, one of the president's sons, amplified the falsehoods on social media. Within a day, views of the video shot up past a million.

That single video serves as a powerful emblem of the trafficking in false information that has plagued the presidential election won by Joe Biden. In other videos, photos and social media posts, supporters of President Donald Trump, and most notably the incumbent himself, have raised doubts about the outcome based on problems that did not occur.

Though the clip was quickly discredited by news organizations and public officials — the man depicted was a photojournalist hauling camera equipment, not illegal votes — to many viewers it had its intended effect.

Eric Hainline, a UPS driver from Dayton, Ohio, watched the video and many like it, and said the images reinforced his suspicions that the election was stolen from Trump.

"You don't know who to believe anymore," said Hainline, 44. "I think the trust people have is broken."

Trump and his allies have fomented the idea of a "rigged election" for months, promoting falsehoods through various media and even lawsuits about fraudulent votes and dead voters casting ballots across the country.

While the details of these spurious allegations may fade over time, the scar they leave on American democracy could take years to heal.

"There will always be people who believe the Democrats stole the election in 2020," said Jennifer Mercieca, a historian of political rhetoric at Texas A&M University. "That will not change."

In fact, there is no evidence of widespread fraud in the 2020 election. Election officials confirmed there were no serious irregularities and the election went well. Attorney General William Barr said Tuesday the Justice Department has not identified voter fraud that would change the presidential election.

But from the Oval Office, Trump has consistently tried to mislead the nation about the outcome. As a result, cries of voter fraud have persisted loudly in an online media ecosystem where pro-Trump Facebook pages, Twitter accounts and fringe websites readily circulate unchecked or misleading claims about the voting process.

And one of those falsehoods sprang from the cellphone camera of Kelly SoRelle, a Republican from Texas. After shooting her video of the man with a wagon in Detroit, SoRelle took it to a conservative YouTube host who played it for his show's 5 million subscribers the day after the election. She also gave it to the Texas Scorecard, a website started by Empower Texans, a lobbying group that ranks politicians on a conservative scorecard and is bankrolled by West Texas businessman Tim Dunn. Empower Texans' PAC has pumped millions of dollars into the campaigns of ultra-conservative candidates. Texas Scorecard posted the video on its website and YouTube page, which collectively racked up 50,000 shares on Facebook. SoRelle did not respond to requests for comment.

Others soon picked up the story, and four hours later, Eric Trump had tweeted it to his 4 million followers. "WATCH: Suitcases and Coolers Rolled Into Detroit Voting Center at 4 AM, Brought Into Secure Counting Area," he tweeted.

Over the next week, there were nearly 150,000 mentions of wagons, suitcases or coolers of votes in broadcast scripts, blogs and on public Facebook, Twitter or Instagram accounts, according to an analysis that media intelligence firm Zignal Labs conducted for the AP.

An investigative reporter at local TV station WXYZ-TV clarified on Twitter the night the video was first posted that the mysterious man was one of its videographers. He was pulling in a wagon of equipment to relieve the crew inside the voting center. Mentions of the story began to fizzle out on Nov. 5 after news organizations fact-checked the claims, Zignal Labs' report found.

By then, however, many of those fringe websites and Trump associates were busy peddling new claims of voter fraud online.

Some claimed 100,000 ballots were "magically found" in Milwaukee at 3 a.m., when, in reality, the city's election director, escorted by police, had just delivered thumb drives of data with the count of roughly

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169,000 absentee ballots to the county courthouse so the results could be uploaded. Others suggested that Dominion Voting Systems, one of the country's most widely used voting technology firms, deleted or switched votes — an impossible feat that never happened, the company says, a finding confirmed by the federal agency that oversees election security.

Meanwhile, in lawsuits, tweets and Facebook posts, the Trump campaign started naming voters in Georgia, Nevada and Michigan they believed were dead. Among them was Mrs. James E. Blalock, a Georgia widow who registered to vote using her married name and is alive.

In Georgia, where Biden became the first Democratic presidential candidate to win since 1992, other false claims that voting machines deleted votes for Trump or ballots were tossed into the garbage have littered social media feeds. Propping up those false claims as evidence, fellow Republicans, including the president, accused Georgia's GOP secretary of state, Brad Raffensperger, of being a "liar" who failed to root out "illegal" votes in the state.

"There are those who are exploiting the emotions of many Trump supporters with fantastic claims, half-truths, misinformation, and frankly, they're misleading the president as well, apparently," Raffensperger said at a news conference Monday.

And even as states around the country certify election results showing that Biden won the race, Trump and his closest allies have continued their campaign against the election, reviving debunked falsehoods in front of TV cameras and late-night tweets.

Biden supporter RosaLea Schiavone, of San Diego, said she has watched with horror — but not surprise — as Trump has fanned conspiracy theories about the election's outcome. She worries the damage will last far longer than one campaign, one term or one presidency.

"This is about fear, what he's doing. He plays into people's fear and mistrust," the 71-year-old said. "It could hurt all of us."

The social media platforms have tried to slow the reach of some of those falsehoods about the U.S. election, with both Twitter and Facebook fact-checking false claims on their sites. Since Election Day, Twitter has flagged more than 100 of the president's tweets about the vote, some of which it prohibited users from sharing, commenting on or liking. Facebook has labeled the president's misleading posts but not limited users' ability to spread the falsehoods across its platform. On Wednesday, Trump used Twitter and Facebook to deliver a 46-minute diatribe of misstatements about the election to his collective following of 100 million users on the two platforms.

When the president says he was cheated in this election, 77-year-old Myra C. Ruiz believes him. Any fact-checking of his statements has done little to convince her otherwise.

"I heard two days ago that Trump said he didn't lose this election; it was taken from him," said Ruiz, a Trump supporter who lives in New Orleans.

Ruiz is among a sizable majority of Trump backers who believes the election was stolen. A survey last month by Monmouth University found that almost one-third of Americans, and more than 75% of Trump supporters, believe Biden only won because of fraud.

Falsehoods around the election have continued to reach a large audience, with nearly 2.5 million mentions of voter fraud and Stop the Steal across online sites, broadcasts and public social media accounts just last week, according to Zignal Labs' analysis.

Overwhelmed with claims of problems in the election from the president, media reports and social media posts, Americans are increasingly likely to wonder if the vote can be trusted, said Lisa Fazio, a psychology professor at Vanderbilt University who studies the impact of false information.

"There's so much repetition of this narrative that there's voter fraud," Fazio said. "There's two benefits of repetition. We know people are more likely to remember something. Repetition also increases belief in a claim."

But Michael Hobson, a 61-year-old who voted for Trump, has mostly shrugged off the complaints he's heard from the president about the election and the reports he's seen about voter fraud on the conservative TV station One America News Network he watches.



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"I think he's wrong," said Hobson, who lives in Virginia Beach, Virginia. "The amount of (voter fraud) he's talking about is not going to make a difference anyway."

## Jobs report will show how much pandemic is squeezing hiring

By CHRISTOPHER RUGABER AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — Friday's monthly U.S. jobs report will help answer a key question overhanging the economy: Just how much damage is being caused by the resurgent coronavirus, the resulting curbs on businesses and the reluctance of consumers to shop, travel and dine out?

Economists surveyed by the data provider FactSet have forecast that employers added 450,000 jobs in November. In normal times, that would be a healthy increase. But a gain that size would amount to the weakest monthly hiring since April. The unemployment rate is projected to drop one-tenth of a percentage point to 6.8%.

The Labor Department will issue the November jobs report at 8:30 a.m. Eastern time.

A loss of momentum in hiring would weaken the economy at a particularly perilous time. A multi-trillion-dollar aid package that Congress approved in the spring to ease the economic damage from the pandemic has largely run its course. Two enhanced unemployment benefit programs are set to expire at the end of this month — just as virus cases accelerate and colder weather shuts down outdoor dining and public events. The end of those programs would leave an estimated 9 million people without any jobless aid, state or federal.

U.S. deaths from the coronavirus topped 3,100 Wednesday, a new daily high, with more than 100,000 Americans hospitalized with the disease, also a record, and new confirmed daily cases topping 200,000. In the past month, at least 12 states have imposed new restrictions on businesses, according to an Associated Press tally. Health officials are urging Americans to avoid all but essential travel.

So far, the economy has regained only about 12 million of the 22 million jobs that were shed in March and April after the virus struck. Hiring has slowed for four straight months. A continuation of that trend would make it harder to heal the scars that the virus left on the job market, including the growing number of people who have been unemployed for at least six months. Those long-term jobless now make up one-third of the unemployed, up from one-fifth in September and the highest level in six years.

Most economists, along with Federal Reserve Chair Jerome Powell, have called on Congress to approve another stimulus package to carry the economy into the spring, until a vaccine is widely distributed that would allow economic activity to start returning to normal.

For now, there are signs that the economic recovery is stumbling. Consumer spending grew in October at the slowest pace in six months. Seated diners at restaurants are declining again, according to data from the reservations website OpenTable. And a Fed report on business conditions found that growth cooled last month in several Midwest regions and in the Fed's Philadelphia district.

Still, the full impact of the worsening pandemic may not be evident in Friday's jobs report, which measures hiring trends in the middle of the month. Some state restrictions weren't imposed until later in November.

David Berson, chief economist at Nationwide, said he thinks the worst consequences of the pandemic won't appear until the December jobs report is issued in early January.

The November report "will be the last hurrah for the next several months," Berson said.

## Data shows Americans couldn't resist Thanksgiving travel

By STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — Americans couldn't resist the urge to gather for Thanksgiving, driving only slightly less than a year ago and largely ignoring the pleas of public health experts, who begged them to forgo holiday travel to help contain the coronavirus pandemic, data from roadways and airports shows.

The nation's unwillingness to tamp down on travel offered a warning in advance of Christmas and New Year's as virus deaths and hospitalizations hit new highs a week after Thanksgiving. U.S. deaths from the outbreak eclipsed 3,100 on Thursday, obliterating the single-day record set last spring.

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Vehicle travel in early November was as much as 20% lower than a year earlier, but it surged around the holiday and peaked on Thanksgiving Day at only about 5% less than the pandemic-free period in 2019, according to StreetLight Data, which provided an analysis to The Associated Press.

"People were less willing to change their behavior than any other day during the pandemic," said Laura Schewel, founder of StreetLight Data.

Airports also saw some of their busiest days of the pandemic, though air travel was much lower than last year. The Transportation Security Administration screened more than 1 million passengers on four separate days during the Thanksgiving travel period. Since the pandemic gutted travel in March, there has been only one other day when the number of travelers topped 1 million — Oct. 18.

"If only a small percentage of those travelers were asymptotically infected, this can translate into hundreds of thousands of additional infections moving from one community to another," Dr. Cindy Friedman, a Centers for Disease Control and Prevention official, said this week during a briefing.

Wide swaths of the country saw a sudden influx of people arriving from university campuses in the days leading up to the holiday, according to a data visualization of anonymous cellphone data from a firm called Tectonix.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has urged people to stay home for the holidays, but officials acknowledged that many people would not heed that advice and advised them to get tested before and after trips. Friedman said that this year's holidays presented "tough choices" for many families.

The travelers included some elected officials who preached against trips. The mayors of Denver and Austin, Texas, faced fierce backlashes for traveling after telling other people to stay home.

Others had no regrets. Trananda Graves, who runs a travel-planning company in Keller, Texas, took a Thanksgiving road trip with her family to Nashville, Tennessee. It was a chance for her daughter to connect with relatives as they shared recipes, and Graves said everyone's mood was uplifted.

"It was just a break to get away from home," Graves said. "We work at home, we go to school at home."

She decided to drive to meet extended family after seeing that flights were crowded and said her family followed guidance to avoid spreading infections.

But infections, even from small Thanksgiving gatherings, have begun to stream in around the country, adding another burden to health departments that are already overwhelmed.

"This uptick here is really coming at a time when everyone's exhausted," said Don Lehman, a spokesman for the Warren County Public Health Department in upstate New York.

The county concluded that Thanksgiving gatherings or travel likely caused 40% of the 22 cases it reported in the last two days. That means contact tracers have to figure out where people came from or traveled to and contact health officials in those places. Lehman said it adds "a lot of legwork" to the contact-tracing process.

Graves said she expects an uptick in the travel-planning business around the holidays. Several groups have already inquired about going to Las Vegas to celebrate the end of an arduous year.

And her personal holiday plans? After the Thanksgiving trip, she said, "Now we are considering visiting my mother for Christmas."

## Asian stocks mixed after Wall St slips near record high

By JOE McDONALD AP Business Writer

BEIJING (AP) — Asian stock markets followed Wall Street lower Friday after Pfizer Inc. cut the number of doses of a planned coronavirus vaccine it might ship this year.

Benchmarks in Shanghai, Tokyo and Hong Kong, which are the bulk of the region's market value, retreated while Sydney advanced.

Wall Street's benchmark S&P- 500 index closed 0.1% lower on Thursday, falling short of a new record, after Pfizer reduced the number of vaccine doses it might ship this year by half to 50 million. The company told The Wall Street Journal testing and setting up a supply chain took longer than expected.

Also Thursday, U.S. health authorities reported a one-day record of 3,157 virus deaths.

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"Before we can make new gains, there is the usual sentiment tug of war between medium-term optimism and near-term COVID-19 despair," said Stephen Innes of Axi in a report.

The Shanghai Composite Index lost 0.6% to 3,423.35 and the Nikkei 225 in Tokyo sank 0.5% to 26,680.68. The Hang Seng in Hong Kong retreated 0.2% to 26,685.59.

The Kospi in Seoul gained 1.6% to 2,739.21 and Sydney's S&P-ASX 200 was 0.4% higher at 6,640.60. New Zealand and Jakarta declined while Singapore advanced.

Investor sentiments have risen on hopes one or more coronavirus vaccines might be available next year despite the challenges of making and distributing billions of doses that must be kept frozen.

On Wall Street, the S&P 500 slipped to 3,666.72. The Dow Jones Industrial Average gained 0.3% to 29,969.52. The Nasdaq composite added 0.2% to 12,377.18.

Investors have been encouraged by signs that Democrats and Republicans in Washington may get past their bitter partisanship to reach a deal to provide more financial support for the economy.

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell spoke Thursday after Pelosi signaled a willingness to make major concessions in search of a coronavirus rescue package. President-elect Joe Biden urged Congress on Wednesday to pass a relief bill now, with more aid to come next year.

An industry group reported Thursday that U.S. service industries grew in November but the pace slowed for a second month.

The Institute for Supply Management's index of services activity declined to 55.9 from October's 56.6. Readings above 50 represent expansion in industries such as restaurants and bars, retail stores and delivery companies.

A separate report said fewer Americans filed for unemployment benefits last week than forecast, though economists cautioned that number may have been distorted by the Thanksgiving Day holiday.

Oil prices edged higher after OPEC and allied countries including Russia agreed Thursday to increase oil production by 500,000 barrels per day starting from January. They slashed output earlier to shore up price as the pandemic and controls on business and travel depressed demand.

Benchmark U.S. crude gained 68 cents to \$46.32 per barrel in electronic trading on the New York Mercantile Exchange. The contract rose 36 cents on Thursday to \$45.64 a barrel. Brent crude, used to price international oils, was 91 cents higher to \$49.62 per barrel in London. It added 46 cents the previous session to \$48.71 a barrel.

The dollar declined to 103.83 yen from Thursday's 103.97 yen. The euro edged up to \$1.2145 from \$1.2143.

## Wind fans wildfire in California canyons, residents flee

By CHRISTOPHER WEBER Associated Press

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Powerful gusts pushed flames from a wildfire through Southern California canyons on Thursday, one of several blazes that burned near homes and forced residents to flee amid elevated fire risk for most of the region that prompted utilities to cut off power to hundreds of thousands.

The biggest blaze began late Wednesday as a house fire in Orange County's Silverado Canyon, where gusts topped 70 mph (113 kph).

"When crews arrived it was a fully engulfed house and the winds were extremely strong and they pushed flames into the vegetation," said Colleen Windsor, a spokeswoman for the county's Fire Authority.

The fire grew to more than 11 square miles (29 square kilometers) and blanketed a wide area with smoke and ash.

Crews struggled in steep terrain amid unpredictable Santa Ana winds that sent flames racing across major roads. Two firefighters were hospitalized after being treated on scene for injuries, said Fire Chief Brian Fennessy. He said their condition was not immediately known.

Some homes were damaged in the fire and possibly destroyed, Fennessy said. He said he couldn't immediately say how many homes were affected.

Evacuations were ordered for thousands of residents of canyon and foothill neighborhoods near the city of Lake Forest — although some orders were later lifted — and residents of other nearby areas were told

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to be ready to get out.

There was no containment of the fire.

Numerous studies have linked bigger wildfires in America to climate change from the burning of coal, oil and gas. Scientists have said climate change has made California much drier, meaning trees and other plants are more flammable.

The Bond Fire about 50 miles (80 kilometers) southeast of Los Angeles is burning near the same area of October's Silverado Fire, which forced tens of thousands of people to evacuate.

Kolbi Winters said helicopters flew overhead throughout the night and before dawn she got a warning she might need to evacuate her home. A few hours later, she got an order to get out and packed up and headed to a hotel for the second time in recent months, where she'll stay with her partner, dog and cat.

"I had one month literally to enjoy myself before another fire happened," Winters said. "If this continues happening, and we don't take care of this, one day, I'm not going to have a home."

The new blaze broke out as Southern California utilities cut the power to tens of thousands of customers to avoid the threat of wildfires during the notorious Santa Anas.

Red flag warnings of extreme fire danger through Saturday were in place because of low humidity, bone-dry brush and the winds, which sweep down from the interior, the National Weather Service said.

Utilities in the populous region began cutting power Wednesday to customers as a precaution to prevent gusts from blowing tree limbs into electrical equipment or knocking down power lines, which have sparked devastating wildfires in recent years.

Southern California Edison had cut power to nearly 50,000 homes and businesses by Thursday evening and was considering de-energizing lines serving about 190,000 other customers in seven counties throughout the windy period, which could last into Saturday.

It was one of the utility's largest precautionary blackouts.

San Diego Gas & Electric pulled the plug on about 55,000 customers with another 40,000 in the crosshairs.

"We recognize losing power is disruptive, and we sincerely thank our customers for their patience and understanding," the utility said.

A few miles to the north, a blaze near Corona Municipal Airport shut down State Route 71 and had residents getting ready to flee.

Evacuations were ordered when a small wildfire broke out near the rural community of Nuevo in Riverside County, about 50 miles (80 kilometers) to the east.

And to the south, a small blaze in San Diego County threatened about 200 homes and prompted evacuations before firefighters managed to contain 50 percent of it. At least one structure was destroyed and six others were damaged, according to 10 News San Diego.

California already has experienced its worst-ever year for wildfires. More than 6,500 square miles (16,835 square kilometers) have been scorched, a total larger than the combined area of Connecticut and Rhode Island. At least 31 people have been killed and 10,500 homes and other structures damaged or destroyed.

The latest fire threat comes as much of California plunges deeper into drought. Virtually all of Northern California is in severe or extreme drought while nearly all of Southern California is abnormally dry or worse.

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Associated Press reporter Amy Taxin contributed from Orange County, California.

## Among first acts, Biden to call for 100 days of mask-wearing

By ALEXANDRA JAFFE Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) —

Joe Biden said Thursday that he will ask Americans to commit to 100 days of wearing masks as one of his first acts as president, stopping just short of the nationwide mandate he's pushed before to stop the spread of the coronavirus.

The move marks a notable shift from President Donald Trump, whose own skepticism of mask-wearing has contributed to a politicization of the issue. That's made many people reticent to embrace a practice



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that public health experts say is one of the easiest ways to manage the pandemic, which has killed more than 275,000 Americans.

The president-elect has frequently emphasized mask-wearing as a "patriotic duty" and during the campaign floated the idea of instituting a nationwide mask mandate, which he later acknowledged would be beyond the ability of the president to enforce.

Speaking with CNN's Jake Tapper, Biden said he would make the request of Americans on Inauguration Day, Jan. 20.

"On the first day I'm inaugurated, I'm going to ask the public for 100 days to mask. Just 100 days to mask — not forever, just 100 days. And I think we'll see a significant reduction" in the virus, Biden said.

The president-elect reiterated his call for lawmakers on Capitol Hill to pass a coronavirus aid bill and expressed support for a \$900 billion compromise bill that a bipartisan group of lawmakers introduced this week.

"That would be a good start. It's not enough," he said, adding, "I'm going to need to ask for more help."

Biden has said his transition team is working on its own coronavirus relief package, and his aides have signaled they plan for that to be their first legislative push.

The president-elect also said he asked Dr. Anthony Fauci to stay on in his administration, "in the exact same role he's had for the past several presidents," as the director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, the nation's top infectious-disease expert.

He said he's asked Fauci to be a "chief medical adviser" as well as part of his COVID-19 advisory team.

Regarding a coronavirus vaccine, Biden offered begrudging credit for the work Trump's administration has done in expediting the development of a vaccine but said that planning the distribution properly will be "critically important."

"It's a really difficult but doable project, but it has to be well planned," he said.

Part of the challenge the Biden administration will face in distributing the vaccine will be instilling public confidence in it. Biden said he'd be "happy" to get inoculated in public to assuage any concerns about its efficacy and safety. Three former presidents — Barack Obama, George W. Bush and Bill Clinton — have said they'd also get vaccinated publicly to show that it's safe.

"People have lost faith in the ability of the vaccine to work," Biden said, adding that "it matters what a president and the vice president do."

In the same interview, Biden also weighed in on reports that Trump is considering pardons of himself and his allies.

"It concerns me in terms of what kind of precedent it sets and how the rest of the world looks at us as a nation of laws and justice," Biden said.

Biden committed that his Justice Department will "operate independently" and that whoever he chooses to lead the department will have the "independent capacity to decide who gets investigated."

"You're not going to see in our administration that kind of approach to pardons, nor are you going to see in our administration the approach to making policy by tweets," he said.

In addition to considering preemptive pardons, Trump has spent much of his time post-election trying to raise questions about an election he lost by millions of votes while his lawyers pursue baseless lawsuits alleging voter fraud in multiple states.

Republicans on Capitol Hill, meanwhile, have largely given the president cover, with many defending the lawsuits and few publicly congratulating Biden on his win.

But Biden said Thursday that he's received private calls of congratulations from "more than several sitting Republican senators" and that he has confidence in his ability to cut bipartisan deals with Republicans despite the rancor that's characterized the last four years on Capitol Hill.

Trump aides have expressed skepticism that the president, who continues to falsely claim victory and spread baseless claims of fraud, would attend Biden's inauguration. Biden said Thursday night that he believes it's "important" that Trump attend, largely to demonstrate the nation's commitment to peaceful transfer of power between political rivals.

"It is totally his decision," Biden said of Trump, adding, "It is of no personal consequence to me, but I

think it is to the country.”

## States plan for vaccines as daily US virus deaths top 3,100

By SAM METZ and RYAN J. FOLEY Associated Press

States drafted plans Thursday for who will go to the front of the line when the first doses of COVID-19 vaccine become available later this month, as U.S. deaths from the outbreak eclipsed 3,100 in a single day, obliterating the record set last spring.

With initial supplies of the vaccine certain to be limited, governors and other state officials are weighing both health and economic concerns in deciding the order in which the shots will be dispensed.

States face a Friday deadline to submit requests for doses of the Pfizer vaccine and specify where they should be shipped, and many appear to be heeding nonbinding guidelines adopted this week by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to put health care workers and nursing home patients first.

But they're also facing a multitude of decisions about other categories of residents — some specific to their states; some vital to their economies.

Colorado's draft plan, which is being revised, puts ski resort workers who share close quarters in the second phase of vaccine distribution, in recognition of the \$6 billion industry's linchpin role in the state's economy.

In Nevada, where officials have stressed the importance of bringing tourists back to the Las Vegas Strip, authorities initially put nursing home patients in the third phase, behind police officers, teachers, airport operators and retail workers. But they said Wednesday that they would revise that plan to conform to the CDC guidance.

In Arkansas, Gov. Asa Hutchinson said health care and long-term care facility workers are the top priority, but the state was still refining who would be included in the next phase. A draft vaccination plan submitted to the CDC in October listed poultry workers along with other essential workers such as teachers, law enforcement and correctional employees in the so-called 1B category.

Poultry is a major part of Arkansas' economy, and nearly 6,000 poultry workers have tested positive for the virus since the pandemic began, according to the state Health Department.

“We know these workers have been the brunt of large outbreaks not only in our state, but also in other states,” said Dr. Jose Romero, the state's health secretary and chairman of the CDC's Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices.

Plans for the vaccine are being rolled out as the surging pandemic swamps U.S. hospitals and leaves nurses and other medical workers shorthanded and burned out. Nationwide, the coronavirus is blamed for more than 275,000 deaths and 14 million confirmed infections.

The U.S. recorded 3,157 deaths on Wednesday alone, according to the tally kept by Johns Hopkins University. That's more than the number of people killed on 9/11 and shattered the old mark of 2,603, set on April 15, when the New York metropolitan area was the epicenter of the U.S. outbreak.

The number of Americans in the hospital with the coronavirus likewise hit an all-time high Wednesday at more than 100,000, according to the COVID Tracking Project. The figure has more than doubled over the past month. And new cases per day have begun topping 200,000, by Johns Hopkins' count.

The three main benchmarks showed a country slipping deeper into crisis, with perhaps the worst yet to come — in part because of the delayed effects from Thanksgiving, when millions of Americans disregarded warnings to stay home and celebrate only with members of their household.

Keeping health care workers on their feet is considered vital to dealing with the crisis. And nursing home patients have proven highly vulnerable to the virus. Patients and staff members at nursing homes and other long-term care centers account for 39% of the nation's COVID-19 deaths.

As authorities draw up their priority lists for the vaccine, firefighter groups asked the Minnesota governor to be placed in the first group. The Illinois plan gives highest priority to health care workers but also calls for first responders to be in the first batch to get the shot. Other states are struggling with where to put prisoners in the pecking order.

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Arizona Gov. Doug Ducey said he wants teachers to get priority so schools can stay open. Two California lawmakers asked for that, too, saying distance learning is harming students' education.

"Our state's children cannot afford to wait," wrote Republican Assemblyman Jordan Cunningham and Democratic Assemblyman Patrick O'Donnell. "This is too important to overlook or sweep aside."

The Utah Department of Health placed the state's first order for its vaccine allotment Thursday.

Utah officials said frontline health care workers will take top priority, with the five hospitals treating the most COVID-19 patients getting the first doses. State health officials said that additional doses likely will be available in February and March for more hospital workers, and essential workers — including police officers, firefighters and teachers — also will be prioritized.

Texas is putting hospital staff, nursing home workers and paramedics at the top of the list, followed by outpatient medical employees, pharmacists, funeral home workers and school nurses. Nursing home patients did not make the cut for the first phase.

Advocates strongly expressed frustration over the way some states are putting medical workers ahead of nursing home residents.

"It would be unconscionable not to give top priority to protect the population that is more susceptible or vulnerable to the virus," said John Sauer, head of LeadingAge in Wisconsin, a group representing nonprofit long-term care facilities.

He added: "I can't think of a more raw form of ageism than that. The population that is most vulnerable to succumbing to this virus is not going to be given priority? I mean, that just says we don't value the lives of people in long-term care."

Iowa, which expects to get 172,000 doses over the next month, will make them available first to health care workers and nursing home residents and staff, while an advisory council will recommend who comes next to "minimize health inequities based on poverty, geography" and other factors, state Human Services Director Kelly Garcia said.

For example, prison inmates and residents of state institutions for the disabled aren't in the first round but will be put ahead of others, she said.

Foley reported from Des Moines, Iowa. Associated Press writers Andrew DeMillo in Little Rock, Arkansas; Geoff Mulvihill in Davenport, Iowa; Jim Anderson in Denver; Bob Christie in Phoenix; Steve Karnowski in Minneapolis; Sophia Eppolito in Salt Lake City, Utah; and Tammy Webber in Fenton, Michigan, contributed to this story.

## Ex-FBI lawyer who altered Russia probe email seeks probation

By ERIC TUCKER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — A former FBI lawyer who pleaded guilty to altering an email during the Russia investigation "made a grievous mistake" but should be spared prison time and given probation instead, his attorneys said in a sentencing memorandum Thursday.

Kevin Clinesmith admitted in August to having altered an email that was being used in support of an FBI application to monitor the communications of a former Trump campaign aide, Carter Page. Clinesmith's lawyers said that although he believed the information he wrote was accurate, he knowingly doctored the email by stating that Page was "not a source" for the CIA.

"By altering a colleague's email, he cut a corner in a job that required far better of him. He failed to live up to the FBI's and his own high standards of conduct," his lawyers wrote. "And he committed a crime."

They said it was "an aberration in a life otherwise characterized by hard work, determination, and dedication to the service of others."

Clinesmith was charged as part of U.S. Attorney John Durham's investigation into the 2016 probe of Russian election interference and possible ties to Donald Trump's presidential campaign. The Justice Department disclosed this week that Attorney General William Barr had appointed Durham as special counsel, a maneuver designed to ensure that he is not fired by the incoming Biden administration before he completes

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his work.

The prosecution is the only one brought by Durham despite Trump's claims of sweeping misconduct inside the FBI and intelligence community, and the allegations against him do not implicate anyone else at the bureau.

The sentencing range for Clinesmith is zero to 6 months in prison. In their own sentencing memorandum, Durham and his prosecutors requested a sentence between the middle and high end of those guidelines.

"As a licensed attorney and an officer of the Court, the defendant took an oath, was bound by professional and ethical obligations, and should have been well-aware of this duty of candor," Durham's team wrote.

They also said it was "plausible" that Clinesmith's political views affected his behavior, noting that he had written the phrase "Viva le resistance" to an FBI colleague the day after the 2016 election.

The case involving Clinesmith concerns applications that the FBI submitted to the secretive Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Court to eavesdrop on Page, a former national security adviser to Trump's 2016 presidential campaign, on suspicion that Page was a Russian agent. At the time, the FBI was investigating whether the campaign had coordinated with Russia to tip the election, and Page's past contacts with Russians was a concern for the FBI.

The handling of those applications has been the subject of scrutiny. A Justice Department inspector general's report last year that detailed Clinesmith's conduct also noted significant errors and omissions in each of the four applications. Page last week sued multiple FBI officials, including Clinesmith, over the warrant applications.

In 2017, as the FBI was seeking to renew its surveillance of Page, an agent working on the case instructed Clinesmith to ask the CIA whether Page had ever been a source for the intelligence agency. Page had been saying in media interviews that he had previously assisted U.S. intelligence agencies, and the FBI was trying to determine if those statements were true.

Any relationship Page had had with the CIA could have been important to disclose to the surveillance court to the extent that it could have helped explain contacts Page had with Russians, including whether they were done at the behest of the U.S. government.

"While Kevin cannot remember precisely how he arrived at his incorrect understanding," the lawyers wrote, Clinesmith was under the impression that Page was a subsource, rather than a direct source, for the CIA.

He altered an email he had received from the CIA, inserting the words "and not a source" to reflect his understanding of Page's relationship with the agency, and forwarded it to the FBI colleague involved in the case, his lawyers said.

In fact, Page had been an "operational contact" for the CIA between 2008 and 2013, meaning someone who provides information to the agency acquired as part of ordinary activities but is not tasked with doing so.

Clinesmith's lawyers say he never intended to deceive anyone, noting that he had also sent the original CIA email, unaltered and in its entirety, to an FBI case agent involved in preparing the warrant application.

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

## Wisconsin high court declines to hear Trump election lawsuit

By SCOTT BAUER Associated Press

MADISON, Wis. (AP) — A divided Wisconsin Supreme Court on Thursday refused to hear President Donald Trump's lawsuit attempting to overturn his loss to Democrat Joe Biden in the battleground state, sidestepping a decision on the merits of the claims and instead ruling that the case must first wind its way through lower courts.

In another blow to Trump, two dissenting conservative justices questioned whether disqualifying more than 221,000 ballots as Trump wanted would be the proper remedy to the errors he alleged.

The defeat on a 4-3 ruling was the latest in a string of losses for Trump's post-election lawsuits. Judges in multiple battleground states have rejected his claims of fraud or irregularities.

Trump asked the Wisconsin Supreme Court to disqualify more than 221,000 ballots in the state's two biggest Democratic counties, alleging irregularities in the way absentee ballots were administered. His lawsuit



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echoed claims that were earlier rejected by election officials in those counties during a recount that barely affected Biden's winning margin of about 20,700 votes.

Trump's attorney Jim Troupis said he would immediately file the case in circuit court and expected to be back before the Supreme Court "very soon."

"It was clear from their writings that the court recognizes the seriousness of these issues, and we look forward to taking the next step," he said in a statement. Trump's team made the filing late Thursday evening.

In asking the conservative-controlled Wisconsin Supreme Court to take the case directly, Trump had argued that there wasn't enough time to wage the legal battle by starting with a lower court, given the looming Dec. 14 date when presidential electors cast their votes.

Swing Justice Brian Hagedorn joined three liberal justices in denying the petition without weighing in on Trump's allegations. Hagedorn said the law was clear that Trump must start his lawsuit in lower courts where factual disputes can be worked out.

"We do well as a judicial body to abide by time-tested judicial norms, even — and maybe especially — in high profile cases," Hagedorn wrote. "Following this law is not disregarding our duty, as some of my colleagues suggest. It is following the law."

Trump filed a similar lawsuit in federal court on Wednesday.

Chief Justice Patience Roggensack, in a dissent where she was joined by Justice Annette Ziegler, said she would have taken the case and referred it to lower courts for factual findings, which could then be reported back to the Supreme Court for a ruling.

But she also questioned whether disqualifying ballots was appropriate, saying that "may be out of reach for a number of reasons."

Conservative Justice Rebecca Bradley wrote that the court "forsakes its duty" by not determining whether elections officials complied with the law and the inaction will undermine the public's confidence in elections. Allowing the elections commission to make the law governing elections would be a "death blow to democracy," she wrote.

"While some will either celebrate or decry the court's inaction based upon the impact on their preferred candidate, the importance of this case transcends the results of this particular election," she wrote in a dissent joined by Roggensack and Ziegler. "The majority's failure to act leaves an indelible stain on our most recent election."

Democratic Gov. Tony Evers praised the decision.

"I was frankly amazed that it was not unanimous," Evers said.

Trump's lawsuit challenged procedures that have been in place for years and never been found to be illegal.

He claimed there were thousands of absentee ballots without a written application on file. He argued that the electronic log created when a voter requests a ballot online — the way the vast majority are requested — doesn't meet the letter of the law.

He also challenged ballots where election clerks filled in missing address information on the certification envelope where the ballot is inserted — a practice that has long been accepted and that the state elections commission told clerks was OK.

Trump also challenged absentee ballots where voters declared themselves to be "indefinitely confined," a status that exempts them from having to show photo identification to cast a ballot, and one that was used much more heavily this year due to the pandemic. The Wisconsin Supreme Court in March ruled that it was up to individual voters to determine their status.

Roggensack, the chief justice, appointed Reserve Judge Stephen Simanek of Racine County to hear the case at the circuit court level. Simanek retired in 2010.

The court late Thursday also declined to hear a lawsuit brought by a Wisconsin resident, Dean Mueller, that argued that ballots placed in drop boxes are illegal and must not be counted. The court's brief order included a single line noting Roggensack, Ziegler and Bradley all dissented with the denial.

One other lawsuit filed by conservatives is still pending with the court seeking to invalidate ballots. In federal court, there is Trump's lawsuit and another one with similar claims from Sidney Powell, a conservative attorney who was removed from Trump's legal team.

Wisconsin this week certified Biden's victory, setting the stage for a Democratic slate of electors chosen earlier to cast the state's 10 electoral votes for him.

## In seismic shift, Warner Bros. to stream all 2021 films

By JAKE COYLE AP Film Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — In the most seismic shift by a Hollywood studio yet during the pandemic, Warner Bros. Pictures on Thursday announced that all of its 2021 film slate — including a new "Matrix" movie, "Godzilla vs. Kong" and the Lin-Manuel Miranda adaptation "In the Heights" — will stream on HBO Max at the same time the films play in theaters.

Among the myriad release plan changes wrought by the pandemic, no studio has so fully embraced streaming as a lifeline. But after disappointing domestic ticket sales for "Tenet," and with the majority of U.S. theaters currently closed, the AT&T-owned Warner Bros. will turn to a hybrid distribution model next year. Films will debut simultaneously in theaters and on HBO Max in the U.S. After one month, they will stop streaming and continue to play only in theaters.

The move follows Warner Bros.' decision to put "Wonder Woman 1984" on HBO Max in December, along with a concurrent theatrical run. If that pivot sent shockwaves through the industry, Thursday's announcement rattled Hollywood to the core.

"Given the unprecedented time that we're in, we needed a creative solution to address our fans, our filmmakers and our exhibitors, said Ann Sarnoff, chief executive of WarnerMedia Studios, in an interview. "Big and bold is a necessity right now."

Sarnoff called it a "temporary solution" and a "one-year plan." The studio said other options — releasing big-budget films solely in reduced capacity theaters or delaying films another year — weren't appealing. Warner Bros.' move amounts to an acknowledgement that any full rebound for theaters is still a year or more away.

"We've got to get people back in theaters at full capacity at some point. If you read the medical experts that's going to take a while to work its way through the system," said Sarnoff. "If we saw an end in sight to the pandemic, we might have a different strategy. But we don't see that at this moment."

HBO Max is only available in the United States. Internationally, the studio's 17 films planned for 2021 release will roll out exclusively in theaters.

Warner Bros.' decision resonates especially because the 117-year-old studio of "The Wizard of Oz" and "Casablanca" has long been a market-leader in Hollywood — and one known as especially supportive of theaters. The studio has generally ranked among the top two studios in market share over the past decade — most recently dwarfed only by Walt Disney. Warner's films typically account for \$1.5-2 billion annual in ticket sales in North America — a lot of money to compensate for in HBO Max subscribers. Warner Bros. confirmed the films will be available to subscribers with no further charge.

"I can't comment on the economics of how it will all work — I'd need a crystal ball for that," said Sarnoff. "But I'm very optimistic that this is a win-win-win for our fans, our filmmakers and our exhibitors. We're getting the movies out. We're allowing them be seen on the big screen which is what they were made for, but giving an alternative. The hybrid approach also allows us to market them in a fuller way than we would have had we just looked at the less-than-full capacities in theatrical right now."

Warner Bros.' 2021 slate includes many of the expected top movies of the year, including "Dune," "The Suicide Squad," "Tom & Jerry," "The Conjuring: The Devil Make Me Do It," "King Richard" and "Judas and the Black Messiah."

The move by Warner Bros. only makes the pain being felt by exhibitors all the more acute. Having been shuttered for much of the year, cinemas reopened nationwide in late summer except in some key locations, including Los Angeles and New York. But with most major releases postponed and virus cases surging, about 60% of theaters have since closed again. Regal Cinemas, the country's second largest chain, has shut all its doors. Following Warner Bros.' announcement, shares of AMC Entertainment fell 16%; Cinemark was down 22%.

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AMC vehemently disagreed with Warner Bros.' strategy. Adam Aron, chief executive of the world's largest chain, said AMC had gone along with the "Wonder Woman 1984" plans because of the virus surge. But he said AMC would oppose the same approach into 2021, when a vaccine could accelerate a recovery.

"Clearly WarnerMedia intends to sacrifice a considerable portion of the profitability of its movie studio, and that of its production partners and filmmakers, to subsidize HBO Max," said Aron in a statement. "As for AMC, we will do all in our power to ensure that Warner does not do so at our expense."

Under chief executive Jason Kilar, the former Hulu chief, WarnerMedia recently reorganized to further prioritize its streaming service. He has moved aggressively to boost HBO Max, even if it comes at the expense of the theatrical marketplace. After a rocky rollout, HBO Max said in October that nearly 9 million people were using HBO Max, though 29 million had access to the streaming service as part of their HBO subscriptions. For comparison, Disney+ has about 74 million subscribers, though it's available worldwide.

"Our content is extremely valuable, unless it's sitting on a shelf not being seen by anyone," said Kilar in a statement. "We believe this approach serves our fans, supports exhibitors and filmmakers, and enhances the HBO Max experience, creating value for all."

It's the latest in a series of sea changes sweeping through an industry convulsed by the pandemic. The demise of the traditional 90-day theatrical window — something long sought by some in Hollywood — has accelerated, and many think it's gone for good. Universal Pictures last month made deals with both AMC Theatres and Cinemark to give them the option of shifting movies into home release after just 17 days in theaters. Disney has postponed most of its releases, but redirected "Hamilton," "Mulan" and the upcoming Pixar release "Soul" to Disney+.

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

## Fatal shooting of Black teen roils liberal town in Oregon

By ANDREW SELSKY Associated Press

SALEM, Ore. (AP) — The killing of a young Black man last month by a white man who complained that he was playing loud music has roiled Ashland, Oregon, forcing the liberal college town that is famous for its Shakespeare festival to take a hard look at race relations.

The death of Aidan Ellison, 19, added another name to the list of Black men and women whose killings have sparked a nationwide reckoning with racism and fueled a surge in a Black Lives Matter movement.

"What can be said about this teenager who was full of spirit? He was just getting started on his lifelong journey when he was taken from us," Ellison's family said in a statement released by his mother, Andrea Wofford. "Enough is enough. How many Black men have to die before this community takes hate crimes seriously?"

On Nov. 23, Robert Keegan fired a single shot into Ellison's chest after complaining about the music late at night in a motel parking lot. He is being held without bail after pleading not guilty to second-degree murder, manslaughter and other charges.

Keegan, 47, is from the nearby small town of Talent, which was heavily damaged in a wildfire in September. He and Ellison were both staying at the motel but apparently did not know each other before that night.

Keegan claimed Ellison punched him in the face and that he fired in self-defense, according to court records. But a police officer reported that Keegan had no visible injuries to his face and that an autopsy showed no injuries to Ellison's hands that would have indicated he had hit Keegan.

Ashland Police Chief Tighe O'Meara said investigators have not found any evidence that would support bias crime charges against Keegan.

But Ashland Mayor-elect Julie Akins said she believes racism was behind the shooting.

"I can speak as a member of the white-bodied community in saying it is past time we take stock of systemic racism, which continues to cause the death of our brothers and sisters of color," Akins said in a statement. "It's not a coincidence that a white man, according to police, chose to take the life of a young Black man for the offense of playing his music. This is at the root of racism."

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The FBI is working with the Ashland Police Department to assess whether federal laws may have been violated, the police department announced Thursday.

On Wednesday evening, a crowd of people stood on a lawn outside the Jackson County Justice Building in nearby Medford for a vigil for Ellison. Several Black men and women spoke of how they had been racially profiled or stigmatized, and they mourned for the young life that was snuffed out.

Ashland, a city of 21,000 people that lies at the foot of a mountain range near the California border, is home to Southern Oregon University and hosts the Oregon Shakespeare Festival, which draws hundreds of thousands of people each year from around the country for plays.

Sprinkled with cafes and trendy restaurants, Ashland is considered a hip town in a conservative part of Oregon. In keeping with the Shakespeare theme, many of the community's buildings have Tudor-style architecture. The motel where the shooting happened is the Stratford Inn, recalling Shakespeare's birthplace of Stratford-Upon-Avon.

Only 1.4% of Ashland residents are Black, and 92.5% are white, according to the census. Oregon has a racist history — the state constitution once prohibited Blacks from living in the state. Consequently the state has a disproportionately low Black population compared with much of the rest of the United States.

Black activists in Ashland say the killing has exposed the town's undercurrent of racism.

"Ashland likes to believe that it is a utopia, but it isn't," activist Precious Edmonds told Oregon Public Broadcasting. "I don't feel more safe because I'm here in Ashland. And unfortunately, Aidan's murder is just an example of why that is the case."

Ellison's death recalled the killing exactly eight years earlier of Jordan Davis, a Black 17-year-old high school student, who was gunned down by a white man in Florida following an argument over loud music. Michael Dunn was convicted of murder and sentenced to life in prison.

The Oregon shooting has attracted national attention. A lobby group headed by former Rep. Gabby Giffords of Arizona, who survived being shot in the head in 2011, called the slaying "senseless."

"Listening to music should never end in death. The presence of a gun turns disputes deadly, and the victims are disproportionately people of color," the group said on Facebook.

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

## Senate confirms Christopher Waller to serve on Fed's board

By CHRISTOPHER RUGABER AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Senate on Thursday narrowly confirmed the nomination of Christopher Waller for the Federal Reserve's Board of Governors, placing another of President Donald Trump's picks on the Fed's influential board after a string of high-profile rejections.

The vote in favor of Waller was 48-47. Waller, research director at the Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis, taught economics for nearly 25 years before joining the St. Louis Fed in 2009. He has endured far less scrutiny than Judy Shelton, the controversial nominee he was paired with and who was voted down in the Senate last month.

Still, all Democratic senators voted against his nomination, making it an unusually close vote to confirm a Fed governor. Fed officials typically seek to remain above partisan politics. Waller had won some Democratic votes when the Senate Banking Committee approved his nomination in July.

But Waller's confirmation vote was also unusual in that it occurred during a lame duck session of Congress. Senate Democrats would have preferred that President-elect Joe Biden fill the seat. And some worried that Waller would agree with the Fed's recent moves to loosen regulations on large banks.

In contrast to Shelton, Waller is a conventional respected figure among economists. As an executive vice president of the St. Louis Fed, he has attended dozens of meetings of the Fed's interest rate-setting policy committee, of which he will now become a voting member. His research has focused on how the Fed's communications affect financial markets and on the benefits of an independent central bank. His term on the board will last through January 2030.



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Waller, who holds a Ph.D. in economics from Washington State University, has taught at the University of Notre Dame, the University of Kentucky and Indiana University.

He is a top aide to James Bullard, the president of the the St. Louis Fed, who is a well-known "dove." Doves are policymakers who generally favor lower interest rates to help boost job growth and who tend to worry less about the risk of inflation. Those who concern themselves more with the threat of inflation, by contrast, are referred to as "hawks."

Carl Tannenbaum, chief economist at Chicago-based Northern Trust, and a former Fed economist, suggested that Waller's economic tilt won't likely make much difference to the central bank's policymaking "because the Fed is almost as dovish as they can be."

In contrast to Waller's conventional background, Shelton's past support for the gold standard, which involves tying the dollar's value to gold and is now mostly discredited, generated vociferous opposition from Democrats and discomfort among some Republicans. She was voted out of the Senate Banking Committee on a party-line vote in July only for her nomination to languish until after the presidential election.

Shelton also came under fire for appearing to change her views on interest rates to suit the political circumstances. She opposed the Fed's policy of pinning its benchmark interest rate at nearly zero when Barack Obama was president, only to support ultra-low rates after Trump's election. Her nomination failed on a 47-50 vote. Sens. Mitt Romney, R-Mass., and Susan Collins, R-Me., voted against Shelton.

With Waller's confirmation by the Senate, four of the Fed's six governors have now been chosen by Trump. In addition, Jerome Powell was elevated to his chairmanship by Trump.

The only Democrat on the board of governors is Lael Brainard, who was considered a possible selection for treasury secretary by President-elect Joe Biden. That position went instead to former Fed Chair Janet Yellen. One seat on the Fed's seven-member board remains vacant.

Trump's two previous picks for the Fed's board, Stephen Moore and Herman Cain, ran into so much opposition that they withdrew from consideration before their nominations came before the Senate.

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Associated Press Writer Lisa Mascaro contributed to this report.

## Vaccine rollout could ease crisis, but who gets it first?

By CARLA K. JOHNSON and NICKY FORSTER Associated Press

Getting a COVID-19 vaccine to the right people could change the course of the pandemic in the United States. But who are the right people?

As the decision looms for President-elect Joe Biden's incoming administration, a new analysis argues for targeting the first vaccines to the same low-income Black, Hispanic and Native American households that have disproportionately suffered from the coronavirus. But no one at the federal level has committed to the idea, which would be a significant shift from the current population-based method adopted by Operation Warp Speed.

"It's not just a math problem. It's a question of implementing a major social justice commitment," said Harald Schmidt, a medical ethicist at the University of Pennsylvania, who compared the strategies with colleagues from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and Boston College. The Associated Press conducted an independent analysis of the findings and worked with the team to estimate how many disadvantaged people would benefit.

If the shots get to the right people, Schmidt argues, the benefits could extend to the entire nation: Fewer people would get sick, hospital capacity would improve and more of the economy could reopen. Lives would be saved.

In October, a panel advising the federal government suggested setting aside 10% of the vaccine supply to distribute as an extra boost to the states with greater shares of disadvantaged groups. But the idea from the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine has been largely ignored.

The strategy could get vaccines to 12.3 million more vulnerable people in the early phases of distribution compared with the population-based method, the AP found in a collaboration with Schmidt's team.

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Any distribution system will reverberate across the nation, with consequences for everyone. It will be shaped by the early steps of federal officials and by state leaders who will allocate vaccines in the months when there is not enough supply to go around. California and several other states have stated that they intend to direct some of their supply to disadvantaged neighborhoods, but there's no national strategy to do so.

The director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Dr. Robert Redfield, said Thursday that he looks forward to future recommendations that prioritize people 70 and older who live with younger relatives. "Often our Hispanic, Black and tribal nations families care for their elderly in multigenerational households, and they are also at significant risk," Redfield said in a statement.

Redfield has approved initial recommendations that put health care personnel and residents of long-term care facilities at the front of the line.

No vaccine has been authorized for use yet in the U.S., but the preliminary results of ongoing clinical trials have been encouraging for Moderna's and Pfizer's candidates. If the Food and Drug Administration allows emergency use of one or both of those vaccines, there will be limited, rationed supplies before the end of the year.

Operation Warp Speed officials announced last week that states would receive vaccine in proportion to their adult populations, at least for the first 6.4 million doses and possibly beyond.

"We thought it best to keep it simple," Health and Human Services Secretary Alex Azar said. "We thought that would be the fairest approach, the most consistent."

Fairness isn't that simple, Schmidt said.

"Allocating vaccines to states according to population does not help reduce inequity," Schmidt said. Vulnerable people will face more rationing in states such as New Mexico that have higher shares of vulnerable people. "That's not fair."

Schmidt worked with Parag Pathak, Tayfun Sonmez and M. Utku Unver, pioneers in devising how to distribute resources in high-stakes systems such as school choice and organ donation. The researchers shared their underlying data with the AP. Their paper was posted online ahead of publication and has not been reviewed by other researchers.

The analysis shows 15 states and Washington, D.C., have the largest shares of vulnerable, low-income minorities. These worse-off populations make up more than 25% of the states' total populations. Those states stand to gain the most from a distribution method that sets aside a 10% national reserve.

A federal set-aside is not the only way to get vaccine to vulnerable neighborhoods. In their vaccination plans, 18 states have said they will consider race and income as they map out vaccine distribution.

Tennessee plans to reserve 10% of its vaccines for use in targeted areas with high scores on a measurement known as the social vulnerability index, which is based on census data that incorporates race, poverty, crowded housing and other factors. The index was developed by the CDC to help identify communities that may need support in emergencies such as hurricanes.

Vaccines will remain in limited supply for a time after Biden is sworn in, so rationing will continue into the spring.

"I think it's early to say what the Biden and Harris administration will ultimately do on that front," said Dr. Marcella Nunez-Smith, associate dean for health equity research at Yale University's medical school. She co-chairs Biden's advisory board on the pandemic and has been a leading voice on reducing health disparities for the transition.

Nunez-Smith said there are several data-based models to consider for distributing vaccines to communities hardest hit by the virus.

"Thinking about equity has to be a top priority and cannot be an afterthought in the work," she said.

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## In some parts of New York, vote count shrouded in secrecy

By MARINA VILLENEUVE Associated Press

ALBANY, N.Y. (AP) — Policies favoring secrecy over transparency have meant that New Yorkers will be among the last Americans to learn the final vote tallies in the 2020 election, with results in a few races still unknown one month after Election Day.

Several of the locally run elections boards responsible for processing a record 2 million absentee ballots cast in the state decided not to release any rolling updates on how their count of those mail-in votes was progressing until the very last vote was tallied.

While elections officials in battleground states like Pennsylvania, Arizona and Nevada updated the public daily on how their count of the mail-in vote was going, their counterparts in some parts of New York maintained radio silence, and refused all media requests for information as to how the vote was unfolding.

"The country was looking down their noses at Pennsylvania, Georgia for taking so long," said Senate Deputy Majority Leader Michael Gianaris. "New York makes them look good. We are the last in the nation in terms of finishing our vote counts and it's an embarrassment that would have been more widely known were we at play in the presidential election."

New York City's Board of Elections kept information about its count of more than 662,000 absentee ballots secret until Tuesday. As of Thursday, Suffolk County, on the eastern end of Long Island, still hadn't given any public updates on its tally of more than 160,000 absentee ballots.

Some county election boards chose to give absentee vote tallies to the candidates, but not the public. That left media organizations that have historically played an important role in declaring election winners and losers, including The Associated Press, partly in the dark.

"The transparency has been a problem a long time in New York state," said Jennifer Wilson, the deputy director of League of Women Voters of New York State, a nonpartisan voting rights advocacy group.

Part of the delay in getting results has to do with a state law that generally makes counties wait about a week before they start counting absentee ballots. But Gianaris, a Democrat, said that doesn't account for the lack of transparency once that count began.

"Why counties have not provided absentee totals on a very public and ongoing way, there is no reason," Gianaris said. "They should."

"Even those of us that are involved in campaigns were forced to rely on informal information or people on site witnessing it to get our own numbers," Gianaris said. "The process lacks for transparency."

The slowness of some New York counties in releasing absentee vote tallies has been less of an issue in past years because, historically, the state hasn't had a very big mail-in vote.

But a record number of mail-in ballots were cast this year after state officials decided to allow anyone to vote by absentee as a way of thinning crowds at polling stations during the coronavirus pandemic.

In-person votes cast on Election Day are generally reported quickly in the state, with many counties publicly reporting results as they come in from each precinct following the close of polling stations. That happened this year as well.

Results in many places, though, then stagnated for weeks as mail-in votes were counted. As those votes were tallied in secret, some results took huge swings.

Former U.S. Rep. Claudia Tenney, a Republican trying to unseat U.S. Rep. Anthony Brindisi, a Democrat, in central New York, saw an Election Day lead of nearly 28,000 votes evaporate as the weeks went by — a similar phenomenon that impacted many races up and down the ticket across the country. But news of that dwindling lead came mostly from the candidates themselves, not the county election boards tallying the vote.

In Oswego County, one of the eight counties involved in tabulating that race, Elections Commissioner Laura Brazak, a Democrat, defended her board's practice of giving updates on absentee vote totals only to the candidates' representatives and not to the media or public.

"The candidates and the candidates' campaigns attorneys have all the most updated information if you want to contact them," Brazak said Wednesday. "My county attorney, my legal representation, says don't

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talk to the press.”

The county released nothing publicly until this week, when it gave its totals to a judge overseeing disputes over some ballots.

Spokespeople for New York City’s Board of Elections did not respond to numerous attempts to reach them for an explanation as to why they chose to adopt a policy of secrecy.

Gianaris, who has been in the Senate and Assembly for a combined nearly 20 years, recently proposed legislation to require counties to start counting absentee ballots earlier, among other voting reforms.

Several Democratic legislative leaders have expressed support for Gianaris’ bill, while Republican Assembly Minority Leader Will Barclay said he supports election reforms to increase transparency and speed.

“I can’t fathom a good substantive reason we shouldn’t be doing that,” Barclay said.

Tom Speaker, policy analyst for good government group Reinvent Albany, said it’s “wrong” for counties to have the public depend on candidates for election results instead of the government.

“Basically we don’t pay our tax dollars so that we can get our information from candidates from political office,” Speaker said. “We pay it so we can get transparency from our boards of election.”

The state leaves it up to counties to decide when to release updates on their tallies of the absentee vote, said Jerry Goldfeder, an election law attorney who’s represented New York candidates for 40 years.

“Our decentralized election system apparently allows counties to set their own rules regarding transparency,” he said.

Some county officials said they believed they weren’t allowed to update the public on absentee vote totals in races where candidates had gone to court over ballot issues, but Goldfeder said he’s never recalled a state judge ruling that a county cannot release updates on absentee ballot tallies before results are made official.

“This race is quickly becoming a poster child for the need for a fundamental overhaul of the way we conduct elections in New York State,” he said.

## **VIRUS TODAY: State action on vaccine, virus relief package**

By The Associated Press undefined

Here’s what’s happening Thursday with the coronavirus pandemic in the U.S.:

### THREE THINGS TO KNOW TODAY

— States are crafting plans that decide who should be at the front of the line for a COVID-19 vaccine and where the doses should be shipped once the federal government provides emergency authorization, which could happen as early as next week. State officials are prioritizing groups such as nursing home residents and staff members, front-line health care workers and first responders.

— An analysis argues for targeting the first vaccines to the same low-income Black, Hispanic and Native American households that have disproportionately suffered from the coronavirus. The federal government is taking a different approach, allocating the vaccine to states based on population.

— House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and Senate Republican Leader Mitch McConnell had a telephone conversation about an end-of-year virus relief package, providing a sign that a stalemate could be broken in gridlocked Washington.

**THE NUMBERS:** The nation keeps posting dismal numbers on every level of virus metrics: Deaths topped 3,000 and new cases exceeded 200,000 Wednesday, and the number of people hospitalized pushed past 100,000.

**QUOTABLE:** “I may end up taking it on TV or having it filmed, just so that people know that I trust this science.” — Barack Obama on the news that he and other former presidents are willing to get COVID-19 shots publicly.

**ICYMI:** The pandemic has made it impossible for veterans to travel to Hawaii for the anniversary of the 1941 attack on Pearl Harbor that plunged the U.S. into World War II. The National Park Service and Navy have closed the anniversary ceremony to the public, and the event will be livestreamed instead.

**ON THE HORIZON:** The monthly jobs report. The government on Friday releases its monthly unemployment



ment figure for November in a report that will show the strain the surging virus is placing on the economy.

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

## Trump aide banned from Justice after trying to get case info

By MICHAEL BALSAMO and ZEKE MILLER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The official serving as President Donald Trump's eyes and ears at the Justice Department has been banned from the building after trying to pressure staffers to give up sensitive information about election fraud and other matters she could relay to the White House, three people familiar with the matter tell The Associated Press.

Heidi Stirrup, an ally of top Trump adviser Stephen Miller, was quietly installed at the Justice Department as a White House liaison a few months ago. She was told within the last two weeks to vacate the building after top Justice officials learned of her efforts to collect insider information about ongoing cases and the department's work on election fraud, the people said.

Stirrup is accused of approaching staffers in the department demanding they give her information about investigations, including election fraud matters, the people said. They spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to publicly discuss the matter.

The effort came as Trump continues to level baseless claims that he won the election and alleges without evidence that massive voting fraud was responsible for his defeat to President-elect Joe Biden.

Stirrup had also extended job offers to political allies for positions at some of the highest levels of the Justice Department without consulting any senior department officials or the White House counsel's office and also attempted to interfere in the hiring process for career staffers, a violation of the government's human resources policies, one of the people said.

The Justice Department declined to comment. Attempts to reach Stirrup for comment were not immediately successful.

On Thursday, Trump appointed Stirrup to be a member of the board of visitors of the U.S. Air Force Academy, according to a White House press release.

Earlier this week, Attorney General William Barr told the AP that U.S. attorneys and the FBI had looked into allegations of election irregularities and found no evidence of widespread voting fraud that would change the outcome of the election.

"To date, we have not seen fraud on a scale that could have effected a different outcome in the election," he said on Tuesday.

Trump shot back at Barr on Thursday, saying the Justice Department "hasn't looked very hard" and calling it a disappointment. But he stopped short of implying Barr's future as attorney general could be cut short.

"Ask me that in a number of weeks from now," Trump said when asked if he still has confidence in Barr. "They should be looking at all of this fraud," Trump said.

He was also critical of Barr's statement that much of what has been presented so far by the Trump campaign and its allies amounts to allegations that belong in lawsuits, not federal crimes.

"This is not civil. This is criminal stuff. This is very bad, criminal stuff," Trump said.

Stirrup, who previously was a central figure in the Trump administration's push for hard-line immigration policies, technically still remains in her position after being placed at the Justice Department by the White House Office of Presidential Personnel.

The Trump administration has been working to have liaisons report directly to the White House instead of the agencies where they work. Across the administration, there have been concerns that the liaisons were undercutting the work not just of career professionals but also of Trump's own political appointees.

Shortly after the election, the presidential personnel office had also instructed the liaisons to fire any political appointees who were looking for jobs while Trump refused to accept the election results. Trump's term ends at noon on Jan. 20. Several thousand political appointees across the government will see their jobs end by that date.

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The White House personnel office has been headed by former Trump personal assistant John McEntee, who has renewed Trump's push to rid the administration of those deemed "disloyal" to the president.

In September, Housing and Urban Development Secretary Ben Carson inadvertently made public his anger with McEntee when cameras captured writing on the back of a page he was consulting during a speech.

In a reference to the White House Presidential Personnel Office, Carson's notes said: "I am not happy with the way PPO is handling my agency." It's a sentiment that has been shared across the government.

Stirrup, a close ally of Miller, previously served as the acting director of the Office of Refugee Resettlement and was also a deputy White House liaison at the Department of Health and Human Services.

## Georgia GOP seeks mail-in ballot changes after Biden's win

By BEN NADLER and KATE BRUMBACK Associated Press

ATLANTA (AP) — After weathering criticism for certifying President Donald Trump's narrow election loss to Democrat Joe Biden, Republican officials in Georgia are proposing additional requirements for the state's vote-by-mail process, despite no evidence of systemic fraud or irregularities.

Two state Senate committees held hearings Thursday to begin a review of Georgia's voting laws. Republicans are zeroing in on a plan to require a photo ID for ballots cast by mail. Voting rights activists and Democrats argue that the change isn't necessary and would disenfranchise voters.

Biden beat Trump by just over 12,500 votes in Georgia, with Biden receiving nearly twice as many of the record number of absentee ballots as the Republican president, according to the secretary of state's office. A recount requested by Trump was wrapping up and wasn't expected to change the overall outcome.

Trump, who for months has sowed unsubstantiated doubt about the integrity of mail-in votes, has also made baseless claims of widespread fraud in the presidential race in Georgia.

Secretary of State Brad Raffensperger and his staff have vehemently rebuffed those claims, stating unequivocally that there is no evidence of systemic errors or fraud in last month's election. Yet Raffensperger and Gov. Brian Kemp, both Republicans who have been publicly lambasted by Trump, have joined the push to require a photo ID for absentee voting.

"Voters casting their ballots in person must show a photo ID, and we should consider applying that same standard to mail-in balloting," Kemp said in remarks streamed live online.

Kemp faced accusations of voter suppression during his successful 2018 run for governor against Democrat Stacey Abrams, an election he oversaw as Georgia's previous secretary of state. He vehemently denied the allegations. Kemp faces reelection — and a possible rematch against Abrams — in 2022.

Raffensperger also has suggested allowing state officials to intervene in counties that have systemic problems with administering elections and broadening the ways in which challenges can be posed to votes cast by residents who don't live where they say.

The photo ID idea has support among several members of the state legislature, including Republican Senate Majority Leader Mike Dugan. "I don't think there should be different standards for the same process," Dugan said in an interview.

Republican House Speaker David Ralston has been skeptical of voting by mail, telling a local news outlet in April that increased mail voting "will be extremely devastating to Republicans and conservatives in Georgia." Political analysts have said that typically more Democrats than Republicans use mail-in ballots.

Ralston later said he was not talking about his party losing an advantage but the potential for fraud. "We must do everything in our power to ensure votes are not stolen, cast fraudulently or plagued by administrative errors," he said in a statement this week.

Deputy Secretary of State Jordan Fuchs said in an interview with The Associated Press that currently anyone who knows someone's name, address and date of birth can request an absentee ballot on that person's behalf. She said that while signature matches provide some security for mail-in ballots, the process should be shored up.

One way to do that could be to require a person's driver's license number or a photocopy of a separate form of ID, she said.

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"We need to secure all avenues that we can of absentee ballots so we never have a candidate run around this state again saying the election was stolen because of absentee ballots," she said.

While Republicans seem ready to press forward with the photo ID requirement during the upcoming legislative session, Democrats and civil rights organizations are raising alarms.

With no evidence of widespread fraud or other problems in the election, it doesn't make sense to talk about measures that could ultimately prove to be barriers to voting, said Andrea Young, executive director of the American Civil Liberties Union of Georgia.

"What is the problem that you're trying to solve?" she asked. "The rule should be first, 'Do no harm' when it comes to democracy, and whenever there are more restrictions being put on a process, you run the risk of disenfranchising Georgia citizens."

Young says adding a photo ID requirement for absentee voting would be harmful because "we know that these barriers have a different impact on African American voters, on younger voters and, in this instance, on seniors who have certainly earned the right" to vote.

State Sen. Jen Jordan, an Atlanta Democrat, echoed Young's concerns, saying Republicans were offering solutions in search of a problem.

"What this says to me is that they just don't want people voting," Jordan said. "And they specifically don't want Democrats voting, or people that don't support their chosen candidates voting, and they're going to try to make it as hard as possible."

Democrats and voting rights groups have for years sought to decrease rejections of absentee ballots in Georgia, arguing that minorities have been disproportionately affected. Absentee ballots are sometimes rejected because signatures on the outer envelope are deemed not to match signatures in the voter registration system, or because the envelope is not signed at all.

An agreement signed in March to settle a lawsuit filed by the Democratic Party spells out a standard process that must be used statewide to judge the signatures. That agreement has been the subject of much of Trump's online ire, and he has incorrectly said it "makes it impossible to check & match signatures on ballots and envelopes."

## **Biden eyes defeated candidates for key administration roles**

By THOMAS BEAUMONT Associated Press

DES MOINES, Iowa (AP) — In politics, there can sometimes be an upside to losing.

President-elect Joe Biden is eyeing several Democrats who lost congressional reelection races last month for key positions in his administration. They include outgoing Reps. Abby Finkenauer of Iowa and Donna Shalala of Florida and Sen. Doug Jones of Alabama.

Their consideration continues a long Washington tradition of defeated politicians seeking shelter in a new White House. Landing a job in a new administration can both position the losing candidates for future campaigns and provide the incoming president with important relationships on Capitol Hill.

"It's good to have people who know how to roam the halls of Congress," said Andrew Card, who directed George W. Bush's transition and later served as the Republican president's chief of staff.

Biden's transition team declined to comment on the prospects of any individual contender for an administration role. He has already unveiled much of his economic and national security team and is expected to announce picks soon for key health positions.

But there are still a large number of major Cabinet positions to be filled, including attorney general and leaders of the departments of Labor, Commerce and Transportation. As Biden considers his options, his personal connection with some of the defeated lawmakers could carry significance.

Finkenauer, who is under consideration as Labor secretary, owes her start in politics in part to Biden. As a college student, she worked on his ill-fated 2008 presidential campaign. A decade later, he headlined a rally for her winning congressional campaign. She was a key surrogate for Biden ahead of the Iowa caucuses.

"I know they have a long relationship, and it's been mutually supportive," said former Assistant Dubuque City Manager Teri Goodman, who is a decades-long Biden supporter and has watched Finkenauer's rise.

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Finkenauer narrowly lost her bid for a second term in a rural northeast Iowa district. But since then, the former state legislator, who made a name promoting public employee unions, has had conversations with senior Biden transition officials about leading the Labor Department, according to Democratic sources familiar with the communications.

Jones, meanwhile, is in the mix to lead the Justice Department, partly due to his work as a U.S. attorney who helped convict Ku Klux Klansmen for the Birmingham church bombing that killed four Black girls.

He narrowly won a special Alabama Senate election in 2017, but lost reelection last month. He also has a longstanding personal relationship with Biden dating to Biden's first presidential campaign in 1988.

Biden spoke at Jones' campaign kickoff in 2017, saying of Jones, "He knows your heart and will never let you down," and was the first to telephone him on Nov. 3 after he'd lost the seat to Republican Tommy Tuberville.

Shalala is perhaps the most administration-ready of 2020's losing Democratic class. She spent eight years as secretary of health and human services under Bill Clinton and then served as president of the University of Miami before winning a south Florida House seat in 2018. She has heard from Biden transition officials.

Beyond the outgoing members of Congress, Biden is also considering his former rivals in the Democratic primary for jobs. He already tapped California Sen. Kamala Harris as his vice president.

Biden is weighing roles for Pete Buttigieg, the former South Bend, Indiana, mayor who mounted a surprisingly strong campaign in the early stretch of the Democratic primaries. Biden has expressed deep affection for Buttigieg, who was one of the first major candidates to drop out of the race and endorse Biden.

Montana Gov. Steve Bullock, who lost his Senate bid after leaving the White House race, is part of discussions for a Biden administration role, perhaps as secretary of agriculture. Another name under consideration for agriculture is former North Dakota Sen. Heidi Heitkamp, who lost in 2018 but has been a champion of reinvigorating rural America.

"If they think I can be helpful, then good," Heitkamp told The Associated Press recently.

Presidents have often sought losing rivals for positions. Republican Donald Trump chose fellow 2016 GOP presidential candidates Rick Perry as energy secretary and Ben Carson for housing and urban development. Democrat Barack Obama notably chose former rival Hillary Clinton to be secretary of state after the 2008 election.

Missouri Sen. John Ashcroft's defeat in 2000 paved the way for his four years as attorney general under George W. Bush, including during the aftermath of the 2001 terrorist attacks in the United States.

Former Senate Majority Leader Tom Daschle of South Dakota, who lost election to a third term in 2004, was tapped after the 2008 election by Obama to head health and human services, which would have put him at the forefront of the health care debate. Daschle withdrew from consideration after questions arose about his failure to properly report and pay income taxes.

The most successful losing congressional candidate of the past 50 years is George H. W. Bush, who as a two-term Republican U.S. House member from Texas lost his 1970 bid for Senate against Democrat Lloyd Bentsen.

As a consolation, President Richard Nixon picked Bush to be ambassador to the United Nations, a disappointment for the up-and-comer who was hoping for a treasury job. But the post led to an ambassadorship to China, and the experiences were valuable when as president he found himself leading a global coalition in Operation Desert Storm.

"The significance is that was the beginning of his self schooling and expertise in foreign affairs," said Chase Untermeyer, director of White House personnel during George H. W. Bush's administration.

In a White House led by a Capitol Hill veteran like Biden, a team with a background in Congress is particularly valuable to those around the president, since Biden remains well acquainted with the rules and many members.

But considering Biden hasn't been a senator in nearly a dozen years, Card said those with more recent experience in Congress will be helpful.

"More than helping the president, these people can help the White House staff dealing with members of Congress," said Card. "They know where the congressional gym is, and how to get invited to a congress-



sional luncheon. And that's an advantage."

Associated Press writer Kim Chandler in Montgomery, Alabama, contributed to this report.

## Police: 4 die after explosion at UK wastewater plant

LONDON (AP) — Four people died following an explosion in a silo that holds treated biosolids at a wastewater treatment plant near the southwest England city of Bristol, police said Thursday.

Three Wessex Water employees and one contractor died in the incident, which is not being treated as terror-related, Avon and Somerset Police Chief Inspector Mark Runacres said at a media briefing. A fifth person was injured during the explosion at the plant in the industrial area of Avonmouth, but the injuries are not considered life-threatening, Runacres said.

"The fire service led the rescue operation but sadly, despite the best efforts of all those involved, we can confirm there have been four fatalities," he said.

Runacres would not speculate on the cause of the explosion. He said it took place in a silo holding organic matter from sewage before it "is recycled to land as an organic soil conditioner."

He said the explosion did not create any ongoing concerns for public safety.

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson said "our hearts go out" to the victims and their families.

"Deeply saddened to learn that four people have lost their lives in the water works explosion in Avonmouth," Johnson said on Twitter.

Wessex Water Chief Executive Colin Skellett said he was "devastated" by the incident, and the company is working to understand what happened and why.

Sean Nolan, who witnessed the aftermath of the explosion, said he had heard a "boom and echo" and at first thought it was from a vehicle collision.

The Avon Fire and Rescue Service was alerted at 11:22 a.m. to the "very challenging" incident in Avonmouth, located near Bristol, about 120 miles (195 kilometers) west of London. Six fire engines and rescue dogs were soon on the scene.

"Luckily, our local fire station is not too far from here so we had crews in attendance very, very quickly and they were able to gain an element of situational awareness," rescue service manager Luke Gazzard said.

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## As some pandemic aid ends, what's next for hurting Americans

By SARAH SKIDMORE SELL AP Personal Finance Writer

Americans who struggled through 2020 could face more hardship in the year ahead as pandemic related payments and protections come to an end.

Expanded unemployment benefits will cease by the end of the year, reducing much-needed income for as many as 12 million Americans. Federal eviction protection will expire as well. And student loan payments, which had been paused since March, are scheduled to resume in January.

Meanwhile, the pandemic shows no signs of abating and broad distribution of any vaccine is likely months away. Both sides in Congress have shown interest a new relief package, they've been unable to reach an agreement and time is running short.

Here's what you should know about the changes ahead and how to cope:

### STUDENT LOANS

The U.S. Department of Education suspended payments for federal student loans, stopped collections on defaulted loans and set interest rates at 0% in March. This relief period concludes at the end of the year, unless extended by the government.

Loan servicers are expected to start contacting borrowers in early December about resuming payments, said Mark Kantrowitz, a financial aid expert with the website Savingforcollege.com.

If you don't hear anything, contact your servicer to find out about the status of your loans.

If a borrower is unemployed or otherwise unable to resume payments, they can seek an economic hardship deferment, unemployment deferment or a forbearance — all of which will result in a further pause

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in payments. There are also income-driven repayment plans, which base the size of a monthly payment on a percentage of your discretionary income. For those whose income is less than 150% of the poverty line, the monthly loan payment will be zero.

Some private student loan lenders are extending their pandemic related forbearance on a case-by-case basis, Kantrowitz said. In the case of federal or private student loans, he suggests borrowers ask their lender about their options.

## EVICCTIONS

A moratorium put in place by the Centers for Disease Control in September that protects certain renters from eviction expires at the end of the year.

It only applies to renters who earn less than \$99,000, or \$198,00 for couples, who are unable to pay rent because of COVID-19 hardships and can affirm they would become homeless if they are evicted.

A patchwork of federal, state and local eviction moratoriums has not kept everyone from being kicked out of their home, however. The Eviction Lab at Princeton University has been tracking evictions in 27 cities and says more than 151,000 evictions have taken place during the pandemic.

Experts are expecting a wave of evictions ahead as moratoriums expire and back rent becomes due.

Anyone who is struggling to pay rent, unable to pay or is behind in payments should contact their landlord or property management company to discuss their options. They may be willing to negotiate.

Renters should also find out what local protections they have, if any. The Eviction Lab maintains a list of local and regional actions to protect eviction of renters.

If you are on the brink of eviction or already facing action, consider legal help.

The Stanford Legal Design Lab along with Pew Charitable Trusts, has a user-friendly website to inform renters about their rights and options. Just Shelter, a tenant advocacy group, offers information on local and national help for renters in distress. The Consumer Financial Protection Bureau and the National Low Income Housing Coalition both have information online to assist renters.

Renters can also contact the Department of Housing and Urban Development to see if they qualify for housing assistance or to get help with eviction issues.

## UNEMPLOYMENT

Unemployment hit record highs due to the pandemic. And millions of Americans are at risk of running out of benefits when two key federal pandemic relief programs expire.

People who have exhausted their state's unemployment benefits have been able to seek an additional 13 weeks of payments through the Pandemic Emergency Unemployment Compensation program. However, that program expires at the end of the December.

Someone who uses up both of these payments may be able to apply for extended benefits, which states make available during times of high unemployment. All states enabled extended benefits during the pandemic, but some have since ceased them because of an improvement in employment.

Anyone who has exhausted their traditional state benefits should ask their state employment agency if extended benefits are available. A separate application may be required, said Michele Evermore, senior policy analyst at the National Employment Law Project.

Additionally, the Pandemic Unemployment Assistance program — known as the PUA — allows self-employed, part-time workers and others who aren't typically eligible for unemployment to receive payments. It has enabled millions to get aid but those who have exhausted their PUA payments have no alternative.

The Century Foundation estimates that 12 million people will be on PEUC or PUA when it expires on Dec. 26. The nonpartisan think tank estimates that 2.9 million of those running out of PEUC will be able to collect extended benefits in 2021.

Beyond that, the foundation estimates 4.4 million workers will have already exhausted benefits under the federal virus relief package before this cutoff, sending into the new year with little or no aid.

The economy has improved but the unemployment rate is still 6.9%, below its peak but a far cry from the pre-pandemic rate of 3.5%. And the full impact of a third wave of COVID-19 cases has yet to be seen. "Sadly, after this cliff, there just isn't much for people," said Evermore. "Food pantries, the other frayed

components of the safety net, high interest loans like credit cards or pawn shops – people are going to have nowhere to turn in the dead of winter during a pandemic.”

For those in need, United Way’s 211 service can connect people with charitable assistance for housing, food and other essentials. The National Foundation for Consumer Credit Counseling also has free financial counselors available to help those struggling financially.

## **VP-elect Harris picks Tina Fournoy to be her chief of staff**

By KATHLEEN RONAYNE Associated Press

SACRAMENTO, Calif. (AP) — Vice President-elect Kamala Harris has named Tina Fournoy, a veteran Democratic strategist and aide to the Clintons, as her chief of staff, the transition team announced Thursday.

Fournoy’s appointment as Harris’ top staffer adds to a team of advisers led by Black women. Harris, who is of Jamaican and Indian heritage, is the nation’s first female vice president. Fournoy joins Ashley Etienne as Harris’ communications director and Symone Sanders as her chief spokeswoman.

Fournoy has served as chief of staff for former President Bill Clinton since 2013. That follows a career that took her to top posts at the Democratic National Committee, in the presidential campaigns of former Vice President Al Gore and former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and with the American Federation of Teachers.

Bill Clinton called her appointment “great news for our country.”

“Tina Fournoy is incredibly smart, strong, and skillful, with deeply rooted values. She’s done a wonderful job as my chief of staff for nearly 8 years, and I will miss her—but I’m thrilled about VP-elect Harris’ choice,” he tweeted.

Harris also announced Rohini Kosoglu as her domestic policy adviser and Nancy McEldowney as her national security adviser. Kosoglu had served as Harris’ top adviser during the general election campaign. McEldowney is a former ambassador to Bulgaria and has 30 years of service in various diplomatic and foreign affairs jobs.

“Together with the rest of my team, today’s appointees will work to get this virus under control, open our economy responsibly and make sure it lifts up all Americans, and restore and advance our country’s leadership around the world,” Harris said in a statement.

Former colleagues describe Fournoy as a no-nonsense operative who has both policy and political chops. Matt McKenna, who was Bill Clinton’s spokesperson from 2007 to 2015, noted the historic nature of Harris’ candidacy and said Fournoy will skillfully manage competing demands for her time.

“(Harris) represents so many things to so many people, and they’re all going to want some of her time. She needs someone who can honor the historic nature of her candidacy and her victory and her place in the world,” he said.

Harris has regularly joined President-elect Joe Biden and offered remarks at briefings on the economy, the coronavirus and health care since the two won the November election. The transition team has yet to announce whether she’ll focus on any specific issues or initiatives.

Fournoy has never held a position with Harris. But Minyon Moore, another former Clinton aide and close friend of Fournoy’s, is assisting Harris with staffing during the transition. It’s unclear if any of Harris’ former Senate staff or longtime political advisers will join the vice president’s office.

## **Biden is facing high hopes, tough choices on border wall**

By NOMAAN MERCHANT and JOHN L. MONE Associated Press

LOS EBANOS, Texas (AP) — The U.S. government has been trying to take Pamela Rivas’ land for a border wall since before Joe Biden was vice president.

From a brushy bluff, Rivas can look across the Rio Grande to Mexico on the other side. She spent her childhood fishing on the river. The government wants to bisect this property with steel fencing that would cut her off from the water, paying her just for the strip of land where it would build. In the meantime, the

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land is under constant surveillance from border agents who drive across it without her permission.

"We've been in court for 12 years now," Rivas said. "It's devastating. This is my inheritance from my family."

Biden faces immediate pressure when he enters the White House in January to fulfill a pledge to stop border wall construction. But he also will confront tough choices left behind by President Donald Trump, whose administration has ramped up construction efforts across the Southwest in its final weeks, as well as skepticism about his own record on border walls.

As a senator, Biden voted for efforts to take private land under the Secure Fence Act of 2006. And while he was vice president to President Barack Obama, the government continued building and pursuing lawsuits against border landowners. About 650 miles (1,050 kilometers) of barriers were completed under that law through 2011.

In South Texas' Rio Grande Valley, where Rivas and dozens of landowners are fighting construction, Obama built more barriers than Trump.

"We're a little less naïve than last time," said Ricky Garza, a lawyer with the nonprofit Texas Civil Rights Project, which represents Rivas and other landowners. "What we saw 10 years ago was a failure to prioritize the border as an important place where policy was happening."

Biden will inherit a massive wall-building effort that accelerated in Trump's final year. Work crews are blasting through mountains and destroying tree-like cactus and other habitat in Arizona and New Mexico. Almost all of the construction under Trump has taken place in wildlife refuges and Indigenous territory that already belongs to the U.S. government. While the work is considered "replacement" of older barriers, crews are removing small vehicle barriers and installing towering steel posts and lighting that are far more restrictive.

The Trump administration says it has completed 400 miles (644 kilometers) and pledged to reach 450 miles (725 kilometers) by the end of the year. And it has locked in contracts to build hundreds of miles more. More than two dozen projects are underway and contracts are signed with at least five construction companies, totaling \$7 billion, according to government figures.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, which oversees construction paid with military funds reappropriated by Trump under a national emergency declaration, "will not speculate on actions the administration may or may not take" and "expects contractors to continue work as obligated under their contracts," spokesman George Jozens said in November.

Following the election, the Justice Department has continued suing landowners in Texas, with several new cases each week. It has faced the same obstacles as previous administrations in trying to determine whom to sue. Some properties sought for the wall have dozens of potential heirs scattered nationwide.

That work at times has been haphazard, leading a federal judge during one land condemnation hearing to accuse the government of "wasting this court's resources."

"You don't do your work to determine whether people have passed away," said Judge Micaela Alvarez, an appointee of former President George W. Bush. "You have out cases where you name somebody and then, a month or two later, you come back to court and say, 'We want to dismiss them,' because they died two, three, four years ago."

The week after the election, the government sued Minnie G. Saenz, a 78-year-old widow who was with her son when they learned of the lawsuit from The Associated Press.

"They're in a hurry — not in a hurry to pay, but in a hurry to build," said her son, Leonel Saenz Jr.

Taken together, it will be difficult for Biden to stop immediately.

He pledged in August to build "not another foot" of border wall and said he would "withdraw the lawsuits." A spokeswoman for Biden's transition team, Jennifer Molina, said in a statement this week that the president-elect would end Trump's national emergency declaration and "invest in real solutions" at the border, such as "smart border enforcement efforts" and "investments in improving screening infrastructure" at official ports of entry.

Molina did not elaborate or answer questions about how Biden would implement a shutdown of wall construction.

Stopping the work could force crews to leave projects half-finished and abandon steel and concrete al-



ready purchased. But allowing some construction to be finished well into 2021 could leave Biden open to criticism that he violated his pledge.

Biden's administration could exercise termination clauses in the contracts. But the contractors could then seek settlements under federal rules, according to U.S. Customs and Border Protection. It's not clear how much those settlements might cost because the government has not released the contracts.

Gil Kerlikowske, who served as CBP commissioner under Obama, said he expected Alejandro Mayorkas, Biden's nominee to lead the Department of Homeland Security, to listen to recommendations from border agency employees who predated Trump.

"You can certainly hit the pause button and say, 'We're going to reexamine what's being done,'" Kerlikowske said.

Trump's rhetoric about building a wall, often accompanied by nativist attacks on immigrants, obscured what was once a bipartisan consensus on border security, illustrated by Biden's vote for the Secure Fence Act. Obama and George W. Bush built barriers and added Border Patrol agents, watch towers, blimps and helicopters, and other surveillance technology.

"If you look at it as a whole package, then it makes a lot more sense," Kerlikowske said.

Some border residents and activists say stopping the wall should begin a reversal of that overall strategy, which they call a "militarization" of borderlands. They argue the government should redirect money to public health and infrastructure, especially given how the coronavirus has ravaged border communities.

"We need to not be trapped and stuck in this idea that we need to seal off the border somehow," said Garza of the Texas Civil Rights Project.

Merchant reported from Houston.

## Theater uses its creativity to defy pandemic and stage shows

By MARK KENNEDY AP Entertainment Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — There's theater on Broadway. You just have to adjust your sights.

More than a hundred blocks north of Manhattan's shuttered theater district but on that same famed thoroughfare, an actor recently read his lines from a huge stage.

But there was no applause. Instead, all that was heard was a strange command for the theater: "And cut!"

Tony Award-winner Jefferson Mays was performing multiple roles for a high-tech "A Christmas Carol" that was being filmed for streaming this month at the empty 3,000-seat United Palace.

The one-man show is an example of how many who work in theater are increasingly defying COVID-19 by refusing to let it stop their art, often creating new hybrid forms.

"Because it's such a roll-up-your-sleeves business, theater people figure it out," said Tony Award-winning producer Hunter Arnold, while watching Mays onstage. "Of everything I've ever done in my life, it's the place where people lead from 'how?' instead of leading from 'why not?'"

The coronavirus pandemic shut down theater and the TV/movie industries in the spring. Film and TV production have slowly resumed. Live theater is uniquely tested by the virus, one reason it will be among the last sectors to return to normal. Props and costumes are usually touched by dozens each night, an orchestra is crammed into a pit, backstage areas are small and shared, and audiences are usually packed into seats. New ways are needed.

Mays' "A Christmas Carol," which was filmed on a high-tech LED set, veers much more filmic than most other streaming theater options and is raising money for suffering regional theaters — one stage production helping others during the pandemic.

Other green shoots include radio plays, virtual readings, online variety shows and drive-in experiences that combine live singing with movies. The cast of the musical "Diana" reunited on Broadway to film the show for Netflix before it opens on Broadway.

The San Francisco Playhouse recently offered screenings of Yasmina Reza's play "Art," an onstage production captured live by multiple cameras, with a crucial wrestling scene reimaged to keep social distancing.

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A musical version of the animated film "Ratatouille" is being explored on TikTok.

"We will conquer it. We are theater people. By God, we will conquer it and get it done," says Charlotte Moore, the artistic director and co-founder of the acclaimed Irish Repertory Theatre in New York City.

Her company has put on a free streaming holiday production of "Meet Me in St. Louis" with a dozen cast members, each filmed remotely and then digitally stitched together. Moore directed it — appropriately enough — from St. Louis. Other theater pros are calling to ask how she did it.

The cast was mailed or hand-delivered props, costumes and a green screen. They rehearsed via Zoom and FaceTime. A masked and socially distant orchestra recorded the score, and the sets were beamed onto the actors' screens.

"You learn minute by minute by minute along the way what works, what doesn't, what to do, what not to do," said Moore, who starred in the original Broadway run of "Meet Me in St. Louis" in 1989. "It's torture and it's thrilling — thrilling torture."

Like many other theatrical hybrids venturing into the digital world these days, it's not clear what to call it. It's not technically live theater, but its soul is theatrical.

"It's not definable in our current vocabulary," Moore said. "It has to have a new definition, truly, because it's certainly unlike anything that has been done."

One of the companies to show the way forward was Berkshire Theater Group in western Massachusetts, whose "Godspell" in August became the first outdoor musical with union actors since the pandemic shut down productions.

Artistic director and CEO Kate Maguire refused to entertain the notion that the company — established in 1928 — would have an asterisk beside 2020 that said no shows were produced that year.

"We're theater makers, we're creators, she said. "We should be able to figure out how to create something."

So they used plexiglass partitions between each masked actor. The performers were tested regularly — at a cost of close to \$50,000 — and had their own props and a single costume. Each was housed in their own living space — bedroom, living area and little kitchenette. In an open-air tent, they managed to pull off a crucifixion scene without any touching or lifting, itself a miracle.

Audiences underwent temperature checks and were separated by seats. Staff were placed in three protective bubbles: artistic, production and front-of-house. And there was monitoring: Last year it was an intimacy officer; this year it was a COVID-19 one.

Maguire thrashed out a 40-page agreement with the stage union Actor's Equity Association. "We never had a positive test," Maguire said. "We had five false positive tests," which was "harrowing."

She thanked grants for allowing her to keep her staff on payroll, making the stress level tolerable. It was clear audiences were hungry for theater: "I would watch people shoulders shaking as the show started because they were weeping," she said. They're doing another outdoor show now — "Holiday Memories."

Since that first brave step, other theater companies have plunged into the void. Play and musical licensor Concord Theatricals says theater companies across the country are looking for flexibility in case of virus restrictions.

"We're seeing many groups applying for small cast, easy to produce, plays and musicals. They're even seeking casting flexibility and asking for permission to perform with or without an ensemble," said Sean Patrick Flahaven, chief theatricals executive.

"There's also a trend for groups to apply for both live performance and streaming rights. Many amateur theaters are producing single virtual performances to keep revenue flowing."

Playwright Natalie Margolin decided to write a new play during the pandemic but not a conventional one. She imagined what the world would look like when it was a given that all social life existed on Zoom.

Hence "The Party Hop," a play specifically to be performed on Zoom that's set three years into quarantine in which three college girls hit the town — online. It became her first published play, and she got stars such as Ben Platt, Kaitlyn Dever, Beanie Feldstein and Ashley Park to perform in an online version, currently on YouTube. She hopes high schools and colleges will be attracted to a play reflecting the era.

"It was just exciting to take part in something where it wasn't a placeholder or a replacement, and no one needed to imagine they were anywhere else than where they were to fully realize the piece," she said.

"It's been exciting and heartwarming to see different ways theater has reinvented itself during this time."

Theater makers have also leaned into the storytelling part of their craft, making The Broadway Podcast Network a hub for everything from audition advice to behind-the-scenes stories.

Launched shortly before the pandemic with 15 podcasts, the theater shutdown initially wiped out its revenue streams, advertising and sponsorship. The network has since righted itself and is growing with some 100 podcasts — from the likes of Tim Rice and Tonya Pinkins — plus benefits, show reunions and original programs, like the digital theater-based frothy soap opera, "As the Curtain Rises" with stars Alex Brightman, Sarah Stiles and Michael Urie.

"Even though we had lost all of our advertising, we just knew that this was important to our community, to keep our community connected and continue to tell stories," said Dori Berinstein, co-founder of the network and a four-time Tony-winning Broadway producer. "It's not anything that will ever replace live theater, but it's an extension. It's a different way of doing that."

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

## Facebook to remove COVID-19 vaccine-related misinformation

LONDON (AP) — Facebook said Thursday it will start removing false claims about COVID-19 vaccines, in its latest move to counter a tide of coronavirus-related online misinformation.

In the coming weeks, the social network will begin taking down any Facebook or Instagram posts with false information about the vaccines that have been debunked by public health experts.

The U.S. tech giant is taking action as the first COVID-19 vaccines are set to be rolled out. Britain this week became the first country to give emergency authorization for a vaccine developed by American drugmaker Pfizer and Germany's BioNTech, and inoculations could start within days. Regulators in the U.S., the European Union and Canada are also vetting vaccines.

Facebook said it's applying a policy to remove virus misinformation that could lead to "imminent physical harm."

Posts that fall afoul of the policy could include phony claims about vaccine safety, efficacy, ingredients or side effects.

"For example, we will remove false claims that COVID-19 vaccines contain microchips, or anything else that isn't on the official vaccine ingredient list," the company said in a blog post.

Conspiracy theories about the vaccines that are already known to be false will also be removed.

Facebook has taken other steps to try to stop the spread of vaccine and coronavirus-related misinformation on its platform. From March to October, it has removed 12 million posts with coronavirus-related misinformation. The deleted posts include one by President Donald Trump with a link to a Fox News video of him saying children are "virtually immune" to the virus.

In October, the company banned ads discouraging vaccinations, though it made an exception for advocacy ads about government vaccine policies. The company has also promoted articles debunking COVID-19 misinformation on an information center.

## Survivors remember Pearl Harbor at home this year amid virus

By AUDREY McAVOY Associated Press

HONOLULU (AP) — Navy sailor Mickey Ganitch was getting ready to play in a Pearl Harbor football game as the sun came up on Dec. 7, 1941. Instead, he spent the morning — still wearing his football padding and brown team shirt — scanning the sky as Japanese planes rained bombs on the U.S. Pacific Fleet.

Seventy-nine years later, the coronavirus pandemic is preventing Ganitch and other survivors from attending an annual ceremony remembering those killed in the attack that launched the United States into World War II. The 101-year-old has attended most years since the mid-2000s but will have to observe the moment from California this year because of the health risks.

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"That's the way it goes. You got to ride with the tide," Ganitch said in a telephone interview from his home in San Leandro, California.

Nearly eight decades ago, Ganitch's USS Pennsylvania football team was scheduled to face off against the USS Arizona team. As usual, they donned their uniforms aboard their ships because there was nowhere to change near the field. The pigskin showdown never happened.

The aerial assault began at 7:55 a.m., and Ganitch scrambled from the ship's living compartment to his battle station about 70 feet (21 meters) above the main deck. His job was to serve as a lookout and report "anything that was suspicious."

He saw a plane coming over the top of a nearby building. Sailors trained the ship's guns on the aircraft and shot it down.

"I was up there where I could see it," Ganitch said.

The Pennsylvania was in dry dock at the time, which protected it from the torpedoes that pummeled so many other vessels that day. It was one of the first to return fire on the attacking planes. Even so, the Pennsylvania lost 31 men. Ganitch said a 500-pound (227-kilogram) bomb missed him by just 45 feet (14 meters).

He didn't have time to think and did what he had to do.

"You realize that we're in the war itself and that things had changed," he said.

The USS Arizona suffered a much worse fate, losing 1,177 Marines and sailors as it quickly sank after being pierced by two bombs. More than 900 men remain entombed on the ship that rests on the seafloor in the harbor.

Altogether, more than 2,300 U.S. troops died in the attack.

They're why Ganitch likes returning to Pearl Harbor for the annual remembrance ceremony on Dec. 7.

"We're respecting them by being there, and showing up and honoring them. Cause they're really the heroes," Ganitch said.

But the health risks to the aging survivors of the attack and other World War II veterans mean none of them will gather at Pearl Harbor this year.

The National Park Service and Navy, which jointly host the event, also have closed the ceremony to the public to limit its size. The gathering, featuring a moment of silence, a flyover in missing man formation and a speech by the commander of the U.S. Pacific Fleet, will be livestreamed instead.

Ganitch served the remainder of the war on the Pennsylvania, helping in the U.S. recapture of the Alaskan islands of Attu and Kiska. The battleship also bombarded Japanese positions to help with the amphibious assaults of Pacific islands like Kwajalein, Saipan and Guam.

Ganitch remained in the Navy for more than 20 years. Afterward, he briefly worked in a bowling alley before becoming the shop foreman at a fishnet manufacturing plant.

Along the way, he had four children, 13 grandchildren, 18 great-grandchildren and nine great-great grandchildren. He and his wife, now 90, have been married for 57 years.

Ganitch still shows glimpses of his days as a running guard protecting his quarterback: He recently crouched down to demonstrate his football stance for visiting journalists.

Kathleen Farley, California chairwoman of the Sons and Daughters of Pearl Harbor Survivors, said many survivors are already talking about going to Hawaii next year for the 80th anniversary if it's safe by then.

Farley, whose late father served on the USS California and spent three days after the attack picking up bodies, has been attending for two decades.

"I know deep down in my heart that one of these days, we're not going to have any survivors left," she said. "I honor them while I still have them and I can thank them in person."

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Associated Press journalists Terry Chea and Eric Risberg in San Leandro, California, contributed to this report.

**Ho, ho — Whoa! Virus keeping most Santas at a distance**



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By TERRY SPENCER Associated Press

MIAMI (AP) — Brad Six becomes Santa Claus, pulling his black boots over his red pants in the office of a Miami outdoor supply company. It's hot, so he forgoes the traditional heavy jacket for a lightweight vest and grabs his Santa hat.

But before sliding it on, the gray-bearded 61-year-old dons a plastic face shield and then takes his chair positioned behind a plexiglass sheet.

"Getting paid is nice, but to get your battery recharged and to really get something lasting out of it requires interacting with the kids — you don't get a lot of that this year," said Six, who first portrayed Santa 35 years ago.

This is Santa Claus in the Coronavirus Age, where visits are conducted with layers of protection or online. Putting hundreds of kids daily onto Santa's lap to talk into his face — that's not happening for most. The physical attributes that make the perfect Santa align perfectly with those that make COVID-19 especially deadly.

"Most of us tick all the boxes: We are old, we are overweight, we have diabetes and if we don't have diabetes, we have heart disease," said Stephen Arnold, the president of IBRBS, an association formerly known as the International Brotherhood of Real Bearded Santas.

That has spurred creativity in Santa's workshops. Santas conducting in-person visits are using some combination of masks, the outdoors, barriers and distance for safety. Others are doing virtual visits, where children chat with Santa online for prices typically ranging from \$20 to \$100, depending on the length and extras, such as whether customers want a recording. Some Santas are taking the season off.

"Santa safety is our No. 1 concern" and negotiated into every contract, said Mitch Allen, president of HireSanta, one of the nation's largest agencies. He said the pandemic initially dried up his business, but it bounced back, especially online.

The average Santa makes \$5,000 to \$10,000 during a normal season, Allen said. That's a welcome bonus for men often retired on a fixed income, but many Santas say revenue is down as corporate parties and other lucrative gigs evaporated.

Jac Grimes, a Santa in Greensboro, North Carolina, gave up home visits, about a third of his business. He did it not just for his own health, but to prevent becoming a superspreader, fearing he'd pass the virus from one family to the next.

At a farmers market he annually works, Grimes and his wife dress up as Santa and Mrs. Claus and sit in a parking lot where they talk to people who remain inside their cars. Some homeowners associations are moving their annual Santa-visitation parties outdoors; Grimes will arrive in his red convertible to greet the crowds from afar.

One of the hardest adjustments Santas have made is wearing masks that hide their painstakingly grown beards.

"Santa performers are fairly vain people — if they are good," Grimes said.

The virus has many Santas and parents turning to virtual visits, which are booked through each Santa's personal website or agencies like Allen's. That often has Santas turning to their children and others for help mastering the computer skills needed.

"It has been a challenge," said Christopher Saunders, a Santa performer in Tool, Texas, a small town near Dallas.

But Saunders and others say virtual sessions are a good if imperfect substitute for in-person visits. Parents fill out questionnaires, allowing performers to personalize their patter, and a side benefit is that the sessions aren't rushed. Many Santa mall visits last no more than two minutes to keep the line moving.

"You get a different energy," Saunders said of the virtual visits. "You can see the child's expressions, as pure as they are."

Jim Beidel, a Santa performer near Seattle, said knowing the children's personal stories, such as their friends and school, helps Santas sell their Christmas magic.

"It really enhances the engagement, the suspension of disbelief, especially among the older children," he said.

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But even Santas with the best gigs are hurting. Howard Graham usually portrays Santa in the grand foyer of New York's Radio City Music Hall during its Christmas show featuring the Rockettes. That's gone, so he's doing virtual visits and five days with a historic railroad in Pennsylvania. Still, he's taking a financial and emotional hit.

"I love what I do ... bringing them (children) a little bit of smiles and hope," said Graham, who has played Santa at Radio City for eight years. "I am going to do what I can not to change that."

That was also Six's goal as he settled recently into Santa's throne for a three-hour shift at Miami's Bass Pro Shops.

As families sat in front of the plexiglass for photos, Six tilted his head so his face shield didn't reflect the camera's flash. He cheerfully waved children around the plexiglass so they could tell him their wish list, keeping them 6 feet (1.8 meters) back. As he wished them a Merry Christmas, an elf swooped in with disinfectant, wiping the plexiglass and bench before the next group sat.

Six said the arrangement is "a little easier physically on Santa's back because he doesn't have to pick anybody up, but it's not as enjoyable because Santa doesn't get the interaction he normally gets."

But for families, sitting with Santa, even if behind a shield, is a bit of normalcy in abnormal times.

Paul and Sarah Morris and their children, 5-year-old Theo and Sophy, 4, were among the first to visit Six that night. An Air Force family visiting from Hawaii, the Morrises cajoled their children into hugging for their photo. "Stop wiggling," Theo said, scolding his sister before each sibling told Santa their Christmas wish. Sophy wanted candy; Theo, a remote control Ford Mustang.

"This is definitely different," Sarah Morris said of the setup, "but the kids are excited and that's what matters."

## School closings threaten gains of students with disabilities

By CAROLYN THOMPSON Associated Press

Without any in-school special education services for months, 14-year-old Joshua Nazzaro's normally sweet demeanor has sometimes given way to aggressive meltdowns that had been under control before the pandemic.

The teenager, who has autism and is nonverbal, often wanted no part of his online group speech therapy sessions, and when he did participate, he needed constant hands-on guidance from aides hired by his family. He briefly returned to his private Denville, New Jersey, school for two days a week, but surging coronavirus infections quickly pushed learning back online through at least Dec. 10.

Some of Josh's progress "has been undone, and there are no plans to make it up," said Sharon MacGregor, who has been involved in the boy's care since she began dating his father several years ago.

The same frustrations are shared by many of the nation's 7 million students with disabilities — a group representing 14% of American schoolchildren. Advocates for these students say the extended months of learning from home and erratic attempts to reopen schools are deepening a crisis that began with the switch to distance learning in March.

Some schools have prioritized high-needs students in reopening plans, bringing small numbers of them back to campuses that otherwise are sticking with distance learning. But those options have only fueled further anguish when they have been reversed because of the virus, and educators say personalized video sessions remain poor substitutes for classroom experience.

Alarmed by their children's setbacks in skills and behaviors, parents are pursuing legal challenges and requesting makeup services. Many worry that the ground lost will be impossible to recover.

"Regression is something that will be very, very hard to recuperate from," said Robin Lake, director of the Center on Reinventing Public Education.

In a move that seemed to acknowledge the importance of in-person learning, New York City announced Sunday that it will reopen the nation's largest school system to in-person learning, including programs serving special-needs students at all grade levels. The announcement marked a major reversal after New York schools were shut down because of rising COVID-19 cases.

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School districts have also struggled to deliver guaranteed services such as physical therapy that must be done in person or that require equipment, according to a recent report from the Government Accountability Office.

To his family's relief, sixth-grader Griffin Stinner returned to school four days a week in mid-October when special education students were among the first to return to the Kenmore Town of Tonawanda Union Free School District in western New York state. But it did not last. Shortly before Thanksgiving, the district announced it would revert to fully remote learning because of the region's rising virus caseload.

Griffin's mother, Dawn, a teacher who is leading her preschool class of 4- and 5-year-olds remotely, called the situation "frustrating beyond belief." After the initial shutdown in the spring, Griffin, who is nonverbal and has autism, would put on his shoes after breakfast to await the bus and cry over the loss of routine.

His mother would stand next to him and sign him in and out of lessons on a computer multiple times a day. "It was just really hard for him to grasp the concept that this was school," she said.

Having to pivot again is "going to be a huge disruption in his life," she said.

The federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act guarantees a free public education to children with disabilities and allows for "compensatory" services if a state education agency, in response to a complaint, determines that more needs to be done. Now parents are starting to make requests.

"It is becoming a major issue for our local directors," said Phyllis Wolfram, executive director of the Council of Administrators of Special Education, or CASE.

To make up every hour lost — on top of providing services going forward — would be impossible. Educators will need to make individual decisions based on where a student is today, compared with their status before services stopped or changed, she said.

Speech pathologist Tara Kirkpatrick said the video sessions she conducts from her Comal, Texas, school office bear little resemblance to speech therapy delivered face to face. On video, she cannot tap a student's desk to get them back on track.

Still, she believes teachers and families are doing their best under the circumstances.

"It's not ideal ... and there's nothing that we can do about that right now," she said.

Not everyone agrees. A federal class-action lawsuit that named every state education department in the country sought a court order to either immediately reopen schools for students with special needs or issue vouchers for parents who have had to leave jobs or hire outside help to fill in the gaps.

A judge in New York City dismissed the suit, ruling that the court lacked jurisdiction, but not before more than 500 families in 35 states had moved to sign on.

"It's a horror what's going on," said attorney Patrick Donohue, who filed the complaint and plans to appeal its dismissal. "We have kids who were walking, now aren't walking. Kids who were talking, now aren't talking. Kids who didn't have any potty-training issues, now they're not potty-trained."

Older students aging out of services will not have time to recover, Donohue said. Federal law entitles students with disabilities educational services up to the age of 21.

Educators, Wolfram said, share parents' concerns about students falling behind, but they are "at the mercy of the pandemic" and the rules adopted by governors and health departments.

Even fully reopening schools will not be enough, she said.

"It's going to depend a lot on the resources that are available," she said, citing potential help from local, state and federal governments. "And do we have the staff to do it? There are a lot of obstacles."

## US, Estonia partnered to search out cyber threat from Russia

By ERIC TUCKER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — In a modern twist on old-fashioned war games, the U.S. military dispatched cyber fighters to Estonia this fall to help the small Baltic nation search out and block potential cyber threats from Russia. The goal was not only to help a NATO partner long targeted by its powerful neighbor but also to gain insight on Russian tactics that could be used against the U.S. and its elections.

The U.S. Cyber Command operation occurred in Estonia from late September to early November, officials from both countries disclosed this week, just as the U.S. was working to safeguard its election systems

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from foreign interference and to keep coronavirus research from the prying reach of hackers in countries including Russia and China.

Estonian officials say they found nothing malicious during the operation.

The mission, an effort analogous to two nations working jointly in a military operation on land or sea, represents an evolution in cyber tactics by U.S. forces who had long been more accustomed to reacting to threats but are now doing more — including in foreign countries — to glean advance insight into malicious activity and to stop attacks before they reach their targets.

The Defense Department has worked to highlight that more aggressive “hunt forward” strategy in recent years, particularly after Russia interfered through hacking and covert social media campaigns in the run-up to the 2016 presidential election. American officials were on high alert for similar interference in 2020 but described no major problems on Nov. 3.

“When we look at the threats that we face, from Russia or other adversaries, it really is all about the partnerships and our ability to expand really the scope, scale and pace of operations in order to make it more difficult for adversaries to execute operations either in the United States, Estonia or other places,” Brig. Gen. William Hartman, commander of the Cyber National Mission Force, said in a conference call with a small group of reporters this week.

Estonia, a former Soviet republic, was in some ways a natural fit for a partnership with Cyber Command because in years past it has been a cyber target of nearby Russia, including crippling attacks on government networks in 2007.

Estonian officials say they have since strengthened their cyber defenses, created a cybersecurity strategy and developed their own cyber command, which like the U.S. version is part of the country’s military.

While nothing malicious was found on the networks during the exercise, “what we did learn is how the U.S. conducts these kinds of operations, which is definitely useful for us because there are a lot of kind of capability developments that we are doing right now,” said Mihkel Tikk, a deputy commander in Estonia’s Cyber Command.

Tikk added: “In some areas, it is wise to learn from others than having to reinvent the wheel.”

Hartman declined to discuss specifics of the operation but said the networks in Estonia were “very well defended.”

“I don’t want anyone to leave here with the impression that Estonian networks were full of adversary activity from a broad range of nation states” because that is not the case, he added.

Gen. Paul Nakasone, the commander of Cyber Command and the director of the National Security Agency, has hinted at a more aggressive, proactive federal government approach to cyber threats.

In an August piece for Foreign Affairs magazine, for instance, Nakasone wrote that U.S. cyber fighters have moved away from a “reactive, defensive posture” and are increasingly engaging in combat with foreign adversaries online.

Cyber Command has worked in past years with countries including Montenegro and North Macedonia on similar missions. Estonian officials say they believe the partnership could be a deterrent to countries such as Russia.

“These kinds of operations, I think, they will continue,” said Undersecretary of Defense Margus Matt. But, he added, “I don’t know how much we will speak of them publicly.”

U.S. officials say they think the risks of a proactive approach — a country, for instance, could regard such an operation as a provocation toward a broader international cyber conflict — are outweighed by the benefits.

“We believe that inaction in cyberspace contributes to escalation more than reasonable action in cyberspace,” said Thomas Wingfield, deputy assistant secretary of defense for cyber policy.

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

**US jobless claims remain high at 712,000 as virus escalates**



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By PAUL WISEMAN AP Economics Witer

WASHINGTON (AP) — The number of Americans applying for unemployment benefits fell as the nation celebrated Thanksgiving last week to a still-high 712,000, the latest sign that the U.S. economy and job market remain under stress from the intensified viral outbreak.

Thursday's report from the Labor Department said that initial claims for jobless aid dropped from 787,000 the week before. Before the virus paralyzed the economy in March, the number of people applying for unemployment benefits each week had typically amounted to roughly 225,000. The chronically high pace of applications shows that nearly nine months after the pandemic struck, many employers are still slashing jobs.

"Thanksgiving seasonals likely explain the drop" in jobless claims last week, Ian Shepherdson, chief economist at Pantheon Macroeconomics, wrote in a research note. "Expect a rebound next week."

The total number of people who are continuing to receive traditional state unemployment benefits declined to 5.5 million from 6.1 million. That figure is down sharply from its peak of nearly 23 million in May. It means that some jobless Americans are finding jobs and no longer receiving aid. But it also indicates that many of the unemployed have used up their state benefits, which typically expire after six months.

With layoffs still elevated and new confirmed viral cases in the United States now exceeding 160,000 a day on average, the economy's modest recovery is increasingly in danger. States and cities are issuing mask mandates, limiting the size of gatherings, restricting restaurant dining, closing gyms or reducing the hours and capacity of bars, stores and other businesses.

Most experts say the economy won't be able to sustain a recovery until the virus is brought under control with an effective and widely used vaccine.

Many jobless Americans are now collecting checks under two federal programs that were set up this year to ease the economic pain inflicted by the pandemic. But those programs are set to expire the day after Christmas. When they do, benefits will end completely for an estimated 9.1 million unemployed people.

The number of people collecting aid under one of those programs — the Pandemic Unemployment Assistance program, which offers coverage to gig workers and others who don't qualify for traditional benefits — fell by 339,000 to 8.9 million for the week ending Nov. 14.

But the number of people receiving aid under the second program — the Pandemic Emergency Unemployment Compensation program, which provides 13 weeks of federal benefits to people who have exhausted their state aid — rose by 60,000 to 4.6 million.

All told, roughly 20.2 million people are now receiving some type of unemployment aid. (Figures for the two pandemic-related programs aren't adjusted for seasonal variations.)

Still, the Government Accountability Office, a federal watchdog, has concluded that the jobless claims numbers are being distorted by flaws in the way the government collects the data. The GAO said the problem arose because the Labor Department uses state numbers as a proxy for the number of people claiming benefits nationwide. But backlogs in state processing of claims and other data-collection problems have resulted in inaccurate counts, the GAO reported.

For months, Congress has failed to agree on any new stimulus aid for jobless individuals and struggling businesses after the expiration of a multi-trillion dollar rescue package enacted in March. This week, though, efforts to forge some limited short-term rescue package have intensified. Democrats have scaled back their demands for a \$2 trillion-plus measure by more than half in hopes of breaking the logjam.

Democratic leaders have given their support to a nearly \$1 trillion package as a "basis" for discussions. This plan would establish a \$300-a-week jobless benefit, send \$160 billion to help state and local governments, boost schools and universities, revive "paycheck protection" subsidies for businesses and bail out transit systems and airlines. So far, though, Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell has been unwilling to abandon a \$550 million Senate Republican plan that failed twice this fall.

President-elect Joe Biden lent his support to the bipartisan effort Wednesday, saying the developing aid package "wouldn't be the answer, but it would be the immediate help for a lot of things." Biden said he wants a relief bill to pass Congress now, with more aid to follow next year.

Regardless of what happens on Capitol Hill, the promise of a vaccine could help ease the health and

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economic crises in coming months. In the meantime, with the virus still raging, the economic damage has become increasingly visible. The data firm Homebase reports that its measures of job market health — employees working, hours worked and businesses open — have deteriorated from where they stood in the summer.

“We expect conditions to worsen, placing increased pressure on Main Street as small businesses continue to struggle to survive,” Homebase researchers wrote.

Likewise, the data firm Womply estimates that 21% of small businesses were shuttered at the start of November, up from June’s 16% rate. Womply also said that consumer spending at local businesses declined 30% last month from a year earlier, marking a deterioration from a 20% year-over-year decline in October.

Americans are bracing for the picture to worsen: Thirty percent of adults surveyed by the Commerce Department from Nov. 11 to 23 reported that they or someone in their household expected to lose income in the next four weeks, up from 23% of those surveyed from Sept. 30 to Oct. 12.

## China testing blunders stemmed from secret deals with firms

By DAKE KANG Associated Press

WUHAN, China (AP) — In the early days in Wuhan, the first city struck by the virus, getting a COVID test was so difficult that residents compared it to winning the lottery.

Throughout the Chinese city in January, thousands of people waited in hours-long lines for hospitals, sometimes next to corpses lying in hallways. But most couldn’t get the test they needed to be admitted as patients. And for the few who did, the tests were often faulty, resulting in false negatives.

The widespread test shortages and problems at a time when the virus could have been slowed were caused largely by secrecy and cronyism at China’s top disease control agency, an Associated Press investigation has found.

The flawed testing system prevented scientists and officials from seeing how fast the virus was spreading — another way China fumbled its early response to the virus. Earlier AP reporting showed how top Chinese leaders delayed warning the public and withheld information from the World Health Organization, supplying the most comprehensive picture yet of China’s initial missteps. Taken together, these mistakes in January facilitated the virus’ spread through Wuhan and across the world undetected, in a pandemic that has now sickened more than 64 million people and killed almost 1.5 million.

China’s Center for Disease Control and Prevention gave test kit designs and distribution rights exclusively to three then-obscure Shanghai companies with which officials had personal ties, the reporting found. The deals took place within a culture of backdoor connections that quietly flourished in an underfunded public health system, according to the investigation, which was based on interviews with more than 40 doctors, CDC employees, health experts, and industry insiders, as well as hundreds of internal documents, contracts, messages and emails obtained by the AP.

The Shanghai companies — GeneoDx Biotech, Huirui Biotechnology, and BioGerm Medical Technology -- paid the China CDC for the information and the distribution rights, according to two sources with knowledge of the transaction who asked to remain anonymous to avoid retribution. The price: One million RMB (\$146,600) each, the sources said. It’s unclear whether the money went to specific individuals.

In the meantime, the CDC and its parent agency, the National Health Commission, tried to prevent other scientists and organizations from testing for the virus with their own homemade kits. In a departure from past practice for at least two epidemics, the NHC told Wuhan hospitals to send virus samples — from which tests can be developed — only to central labs under its authority. It also made testing requirements to confirm coronavirus cases much more complicated, and endorsed only test kits made by the Shanghai companies.

These measures contributed to not a single new case being reported by Chinese authorities between Jan. 5 and 17, even though retrospective infection data shows that hundreds were infected. The apparent lull in cases meant officials were slow to take early actions such as warning the public, barring large gatherings and curbing travel. One study estimates that intervention two weeks earlier could have reduced

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the number of cases by 86 percent, although it's uncertain whether earlier action could have halted the spread of the virus worldwide.

When tests from the three companies arrived, many didn't work properly, turning out inconclusive results or false negatives. And technicians were hesitant to use test kits that would later prove more accurate from more established companies, because the CDC did not endorse them.

With few and faulty kits, only one in 19 infected people in Wuhan was tested and found positive as of Jan. 31, according to an estimate by Imperial College London. Others without tests or with false negatives were sent back home, where they could spread the virus.

Days after he first started coughing on Jan. 23rd, Peng Yi, a 39-year-old schoolteacher, waited in an eight-hour line at a Wuhan hospital. A CT scan showed signs of viral infection in both his lungs, but he couldn't get the test he needed to be hospitalized.

When Peng finally got a test on Jan. 30, it turned out negative. But his fever wouldn't drop, and his family begged officials for another test.

His second test, on Feb. 4, turned out positive. It was too late. Weeks later, Peng passed away.

"There were very, very few tests, basically none...if you couldn't prove you were positive, you couldn't get admitted to a hospital," his mother, Zhong Hanneng, said in a tearful interview in October. "The doctor said there was nothing that could be done."

China was hardly the only country to grapple with testing, which varied widely from nation to nation. Germany, for example, developed a test that became the World Health Organization gold standard days after the Chinese government released genetic sequences on Jan. 12. But in the U.S., the CDC declined to use the WHO design and insisted on developing its own kits, which turned out to be faulty and led to even longer delays than in China.

Other countries also had the benefit of learning from China's experience. But China was grappling with a new pathogen, and it wasn't yet clear how bad the pandemic would be or how many tests would be needed.

"It was very early," said Jane Duckett, a professor at the University of Glasgow examining the Chinese government's response to the coronavirus. She said the government was "just trying to figure it out."

Still, the hiccups and delays in China were especially consequential because it was the first country to detect the virus.

"Because you have only three companies providing testing kits, it kept the capacity of testing very limited," said Yanzhong Huang, a senior fellow for global health at the Council on Foreign Relations. "It was a major problem that led to the rapid increase in cases and deaths."

China's foreign ministry and China's top medical agency, the National Health Commission, did not respond to requests for comment.

"We did a brilliant job, we worked so hard," said Gao Fu, the head of China CDC, in a videoconference in July. "Unluckily, unfortunately, this virus we are facing, it's so special."

None of the first three diagnostics companies tapped to make test kits for the biggest pandemic in a century were well-known in the industry. For one engineer from a Wuhan-based diagnostics firm, the Shanghai competitors popped out of nowhere "like bamboo shoots" – all the more so because his company had the factories and expertise to produce testing kits in the city where the virus was first detected.

"We were surprised, it was very strange," the engineer said, declining to be named to speak on a sensitive topic. "We hadn't heard about it at all, and then suddenly there's test kits from certain companies you have to use, and you can't use ones from anyone else?"

BioGerm was officially founded just over three years ago in a conference room, where the CEO mulled how to survive in a small and crowded market for test kits. GeneoDx had fewer than 100 employees, according to Tianyancha, a Chinese corporate records database – compared to competitors that employ hundreds or even thousands of staff.

But what the companies lacked in resources or experience, they made up for in connections.

Company posts, along with hundreds of internal emails and documents obtained by The Associated

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Press, show extensive ties between the three companies and top China CDC researchers in Beijing and Shanghai. Chinese regulators barred AP attempts to obtain credit reports on the companies, saying they were classified as “confidential enterprises” during the outbreak.

Despite China’s efforts over the years to reform public health and push for open bidding in a competitive marketplace, medical companies still cultivate personal relationships with officials to secure deals, according to seven executives from different competitors. Under President Xi Jinping, China has cracked down on corruption, but industry insiders say a lack of firm boundaries between public and private in China’s health system can create opportunities for graft.

It’s unclear whether the agreements between the China CDC and the three test kit companies violated Chinese law.

They raise questions around potential violations of bribery laws, along with rules against abuse of authority, self-dealing and conflicts of interest, said James Zimmerman, a Beijing-based corporate attorney and former chairman of the American Chamber of Commerce in China. Even amid the uncertainty of the pandemic, “there is no excuse for the flow of cash from these companies to the CDC,” he said.

Chinese bribery laws also state that any financial transaction has to be recorded and documented clearly. The AP was unable to ascertain whether the agreements between the CDC and the Shanghai companies were documented, but a CDC employee with access to some of the agency’s finances said there was no record of them.

Despite the questions around bribery, other experts caution that the state may have designated the three companies to make test kits under special laws on the procurement of emergency goods during major natural disasters. The Chinese government is pushing to cultivate domestic companies focused on emergency response technologies, including test kits, to protect its national interest.

“Things will be different in the middle of a crisis,” said Lesli Ligorner, a Beijing-based attorney specializing in anti-corruption law. “Anything affecting the national interest can be deemed to be of utmost importance for special regulations... I wouldn’t be so quick to rush to judgement.”

China CDC guidelines state that the agency is responsible for maintaining a reserve of testing chemicals to screen for rare pathogens, but do not specify how to procure them. An AP search of CDC procurement bids did not turn up any records, even though some other emergency procurements were publicly documented.

Funding for the China CDC has stagnated in recent years, and researchers there often earn far lower wages than in the private sector. Many employees have departed for private sector jobs over the past decade, draining its labs of talent.

Among those who left was BioGerm’s founder, Zhao Baihui, the former chief technician of the Shanghai CDC’s microbiology lab. Emails and financial records obtained by the AP show that Zhao first started BioGerm’s predecessor through an intermediary in 2012, while she was still at the Shanghai CDC. In the next five years, she sold thousands of dollars’ worth of test kits to her own workplace through the intermediary even as she herself was at times in charge of purchasing, internal emails, records and contracts obtained by the AP show.

After quitting the CDC in 2017, Zhao spearheaded lucrative contracts with government officials – such as one worth 400,000 RMB (\$60,000) with Shanghai customs officials where her husband worked, and another worth 55,500 RMB (\$8,400) with CDC officials in Shanghai’s Pudong district, the emails and contracts show. Zhao declined to speak when reached by phone, and did not respond to an emailed request for comment.

Another of the three companies, GeneoDx, enjoyed special access because it is a subsidiary of the state-run firm SinoPharm, which is managed directly by China’s cabinet. Before the outbreak, GeneoDx largely imported kits and acquired foreign technology to expand its business rather than develop its own products, according to company posts and a China CDC employee familiar with its operations.

In October 2019, GeneoDx co-organized an internal CDC training conference on emerging respiratory diseases in Shanghai. Tan Wenjie, the CDC official who ran the training, was later put in charge of developing test kits, according to an internal document the AP obtained. In November, the company won a contract to sell 900,000 RMB (\$137,000) worth of test kits to Tan’s institute.



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GeneDx did not respond to requests for comment or interviews. The National Health Commission did not respond to a request for a comment or an interview with Tan.

Also in attendance at the invitation-only event was BioGerm, as well as other companies that used the conference to promote their products, blurring the line between the government and the private sector. China CDC staff were invited to join a BioGerm group on WeChat, a Chinese messaging application, which CEO Zhao later used to sell coronavirus test kits, according to a CDC employee and a screenshot seen by the AP.

The last company, Huirui, is a longtime partner with Tan, the CDC official in charge of test kits. Its founder, Li Hui, coauthored a paper with Tan on coronavirus tests in 2012 and "jointly developed" a test kit for the MERS outbreak in 2015 with Tan's institute.

In an interview, CEO Li said the CDC routinely contracted with his company to make emergency testing chemicals. He said Tan's lab at the China CDC had contacted him on Jan. 4 or 5 to make testing chemicals for the coronavirus based on CDC designs. He denied any personal relationship with Tan or any payments to the CDC.

"We've been working with the CDC to respond to emerging new diseases for about ten years, not just for a day or two, it's normal," Li said.

Their connections situated the three little-known companies in prime position in January, when a then-unknown pathogen was about to sweep the country and the world and change their fortunes.

The first step in making test kits is to get samples of the virus and decode its genetic sequence. This leads to test designs, essentially a recipe for the tests.

In the past, such as with H7N9 in 2013, the China CDC sent test designs to laboratories across the country just days after identifying the pathogen. It also shipped along the chemical compounds needed – in effect the ingredients – for hospitals and CDC branches to mix their own test kits as soon as possible.

At first it looked like the China CDC was using the same playbook this time. The CDC had found the genetic map, or genome, of the virus by Jan. 3. By the next day, under CDC official Tan, the Emergency Technology Center at its Institute for Viral Disease Control had come up with test designs.

But this time, the government held back information about the genome and test designs. Instead, the China CDC finalized "technology transfer" agreements to give the test designs to the three Shanghai companies, according to four people familiar with the matter. The selection process was kept secret.

The CDC did not have the authority to altogether prevent other scientists with competing agencies and companies from getting samples through back door routes and coming up with their own test recipes. But it tried to stymie such efforts and stop testing from being carried out.

For example, Dr. Shi Zhengli, a renowned coronavirus expert at the Wuhan Institute of Virology, obtained patient samples on her own, found the genome from them and came up with a test by Jan. 3, according to a slideshow presentation she gave in March. But her lab fell under the jurisdiction of a competing agency to the CDC, the Chinese Ministry of Science and Technology. The CDC barred her from obtaining more samples and testing for cases.

"There's no open collaboration mechanism," said a public health expert who often works with the China CDC, declining to be named for fear of damaging relations there. "Everyone wants their turf."

Provincial CDC staff were told that instead of testing and reporting cases themselves, they had to send patient samples to designated labs in Beijing for full sequencing, a complicated and time-consuming procedure. Otherwise, the cases would not be counted in the national coronavirus tally.

"It was absolutely abnormal," said a CDC lab technician, who declined to be identified out of fear of retribution. "They were totally trying to make it harder for us to report any confirmed cases."

In secret evaluations of test kits on Jan. 10, the CDC also approved only those from the three Shanghai companies, according to internal plans and instructions obtained by the AP.

The Chinese government finally made its genomes public on Jan. 12, a day after another team published one without authorization. That opened the door for more companies to make their own test kits.

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However, China's top health agency, the National Health Commission, still urged medical staff to buy the test kits from Huirui, BioGerm and GeneoDx that the CDC had validated, according to internal instructions obtained by the AP.

The evaluations and selections of test kits were conducted with the knowledge and direction of China's top health official, Ma Xiaowei, according to a CDC post on Jan. 13.

On Jan. 14, Ma held an internal teleconference to order secret preparations for a pandemic, as AP earlier reported. After that, China's health authorities relaxed the requirements to confirm cases and started distributing the CDC-sanctioned test kits. BioGerm began taking orders from provincial CDC staff across the country on WeChat, a Chinese social media application.

"We've been entrusted by the national CDC to issue kits for you," Zhao said, according to a screenshot of one of the group chats obtained by The Associated Press.

"Quick! Give me, give me," said one staffer in the Sichuan CDC.

But the kits from GeneoDx kept showing inconclusive results, the CDC technician told the AP, and eventually her superior ordered her to toss them aside. The kits from Huirui were also unreliable, and the only ones that worked consistently were from BioGerm, she said.

"The quality was not good. Bad, poor quality," said a public health expert familiar with the matter, who declined to be identified to avoid damaging ties with the China CDC. "But because they had a collaboration with the (CDC) Institute for Viral Disease Control and... they paid a million yuan, they were on the list."

BioGerm's test kits were more dependable in part because they used chemicals from Invitrogen, a subsidiary of U.S. biotech giant Thermo Fisher. Huirui and GeneoDx used their own mixes instead, with more unreliable results.

Much larger competitors, including Chinese genetics giant BGI and Tianlong, developed their own kits in January, which were later found to be more effective than those made by the Shanghai companies. But those test kits weren't endorsed by the China CDC.

"No test protocol, no primers and probes, then of course there's no way to confirm cases," said another China CDC employee who declined to be identified for fear of retribution. "And then, all of a sudden, you tell all the CDCs: purchase from these companies, now go for it. Then – chaos and shortage. Valuable time wasted."

Chen Weijun, BGI's chief infectious disease scientist, also said the early products recommended by the China CDC had "quality problems." When asked why the China CDC selected the three Shanghai companies, Chen demurred.

"You better ask the CDC this question," said Chen, who collaborated with CDC researchers to publish the first paper on the virus. "But actually, everyone understands what's going on, why this happened, right? You can reach your own conclusions, right?"

A day after the first test kits finally arrived in Wuhan on Jan. 16, the case count began to rise again. But test kits were scarce. Some other cities in the same province didn't get kits until Jan. 22, and even those were often flawed.

Samples from 213 patients in February using GeneoDx tests suggested a false-negative rate of over 30 percent, a study by Shenzhen doctors found. A March clinical trial report showed that among the test kits certified at the time, GeneoDx was the worst performer, followed by BioGerm. In general, the rate of false negatives for COVID tests varies widely, from 2% to more than 37%.

Philippe Klein, a French doctor who treated foreign patients in Wuhan during the outbreak, estimated that about 20 percent of the tests turned up false negatives. Still, he said, delays in producing accurate tests kits are natural at the start of an outbreak.

"The Chinese did a lot in a short time," Klein said. "It was a new test, so in the beginning, there was a lack of tests, of course."

On Jan. 22, the National Health Commission quietly removed the names of the three Shanghai companies from its coronavirus guide as preferred distributors. After the Chinese government ordered Wuhan shut

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down on Jan. 23, the three companies faced massive logistical hurdles to getting their tests in.

On Jan. 26, officials set up a fast-track "green channel" for companies to get their test kits approved. The National Medical Products Administration approved test kits from seven companies, including BioGerm and GeneoDx but not Huirui. Li, Huirui's CEO, said it was because his company was inexperienced in obtaining regulatory approvals for commercial tests.

But it took time for other companies to ramp up production and ship tests in, leaving Wuhan struggling to meet demand into early February and depriving many residents of treatment.

Peng died on Feb. 19. His mother now passes the days gazing blankly out her window, sobbing and lighting candles in his memory.

"In the eyes of officials, he was like a grain of sand or a blade of grass. But in our home, he was our sky, he was our everything," Zhong said. "Without him, we can never be happy again."

The same pandemic that killed Peng brought the Shanghai test kit companies and related scientists fame and fortune.

In September, Tan, the China CDC researcher in charge of developing test kits, was appointed the inaugural director of a new National Novel Coronavirus Center. In a nationally televised ceremony, GeneoDx's parent firm won plaudits from President Xi for "outstanding" contributions in the struggle against COVID-19, including developing a test kit.

Huirui has expanded and is now selling commercial test kits for the first time — not in China, but in Latin America, CEO Li said. And the pandemic has allowed BioGerm to "stand out," reaching its business targets much faster than planned, said top marketing executive Guo Xiaoling at a trade show in late August at a five-star hotel.

"Because of the epidemic, 2020 has been a really special year," Guo said. "The country and the economy suffered major damage. But for our nucleic acid diagnostics industry, this year has actually been a bonus."

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Associated Press journalists Emily Wang in Wuhan, Maria Cheng in London and Robert Bumsted in South Orange, New Jersey, contributed to this report. Contact AP's global investigative team at [Investigative@ap.org](mailto:Investigative@ap.org). Follow Dake Kang on Twitter at [@dakekang](https://twitter.com/dakekang)

## Today in History

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Friday, Dec. 4, the 339th day of 2020. There are 27 days left in the year.

Today's Highlights in History:

On Dec. 4, 1783, Gen. George Washington bade farewell to his Continental Army officers at Fraunces Tavern in New York.

On this date:

In 1875, William Marcy Tweed, the "Boss" of New York City's Tammany Hall political organization, escaped from jail and fled the country.

In 1918, President Woodrow Wilson left Washington on a trip to France to attend the Versailles (vehr-SY') Peace Conference.

In 1942, during World War II, U.S. bombers struck the Italian mainland for the first time with a raid on Naples. President Franklin D. Roosevelt ordered the dismantling of the Works Progress Administration, which had been created to provide jobs during the Depression.

In 1956, Elvis Presley, Johnny Cash, Jerry Lee Lewis and Carl Perkins gathered for the first and only time for a jam session at Sun Records in Memphis.

In 1965, the United States launched Gemini 7 with Air Force Lt. Col. Frank Borman and Navy Cmdr. James A. Lovell aboard on a two-week mission. (While Gemini 7 was in orbit, its sister ship, Gemini 6A, was launched on Dec. 15 on a one-day mission; the two spacecraft were able to rendezvous within a foot of each other.)

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In 1978, San Francisco got its first female mayor as City Supervisor Dianne Feinstein (FYN'-styn) was named to replace the assassinated George Moscone (mahs-KOH'-nee).

In 1980, the bodies of four American churchwomen slain in El Salvador two days earlier were unearthed. (Five Salvadoran national guardsmen were later convicted of murdering nuns Ita Ford, Maura Clarke and Dorothy Kazel, and lay worker Jean Donovan.)

In 1986, both houses of Congress moved to establish special committees to conduct their own investigations of the Iran-Contra affair.

In 1991, Associated Press correspondent Terry Anderson, the longest held of the Western hostages in Lebanon, was released after nearly seven years in captivity.

In 1992, President George H.W. Bush ordered American troops to lead a mercy mission to Somalia, threatening military action against warlords and gangs who were blocking food for starving millions.

In 2000, in a pair of legal setbacks for Al Gore, a Florida state judge refused to overturn George W. Bush's certified victory in Florida and the U.S. Supreme Court set aside a ruling that had allowed manual recounts.

In 2018, long lines of people wound through the Capitol Rotunda to view the casket of former President George H.W. Bush; former Sen. Bob Dole steadied himself out of his wheelchair to salute his old friend and one-time rival.

Ten years ago: President Barack Obama praised a newly sealed trade deal with South Korea as a landmark agreement that promised to boost the domestic auto industry and support tens of thousands of American jobs.

Five years ago: Germany stepped up its contribution to the fight against the Islamic State group, with lawmakers voting in favor of sending reconnaissance jets, a tanker plane and a frigate to provide broad noncombat support to the U.S.-led coalition. President Barack Obama signed legislation reviving the federal Export-Import Bank five months after Congress allowed it to expire. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported that an outbreak of E. coli linked to the Mexican food chain Chipotle had expanded to nine states, with a total of 52 reported illnesses. Actor Robert Loggia, 85, died in Los Angeles.

One year ago: The House Judiciary Committee held its first hearing in the impeachment inquiry, with three leading legal scholars testifying that President Donald Trump's attempts to have Ukraine investigate Democratic rivals were grounds for impeachment; a fourth expert called by Republicans warned against rushing the process. Trump wrapped up a 52-hour trip to the NATO summit in London, where his personal and policy differences with alliance members were on stark display. A U.S. Navy sailor whose submarine was docked at Pearl Harbor shot three civilian shipyard workers, killing two of them, at the military base in Hawaii before taking his own life.

Today's Birthdays: Game show host Wink Martindale is 87. Pop singer Freddy Cannon is 84. Actor-producer Max Baer Jr. is 83. Actor Gemma Jones is 78. Rock musician Bob Mosley (Moby Grape) is 78. Singer-musician Chris Hillman is 76. Musician Terry Woods (The Pogues) is 73. Rock singer Southside Johnny Lyon is 72. Actor Jeff Bridges is 71. Rock musician Gary Rossington (Lynyrd Skynyrd; the Rossington Collins Band) is 69. Actor Patricia Wettig is 69. Actor Tony Todd is 66. Jazz singer Cassandra Wilson is 65. Country musician Brian Prout (Diamond Rio) is 65. Rock musician Bob Griffin (formerly with The BoDeans) is 61. Rock singer Vinnie Dombroski (Sponge) is 58. Actor Marisa Tomei is 56. Actor Chelsea Noble is 56. Actor-comedian Fred Armisen is 54. Rapper Jay-Z is 51. Actor Kevin Sussman is 50. Actor-model Tyra Banks is 47. Country singer Lila McCann is 39. Actor Lindsay Felton is 36. Actor Orlando Brown is 33. Actor Scarlett Estevez (TV: "Lucifer") is 13.



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