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JHGBB game scheduled for today with Webster has been cancelled

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Death Notice: Doris Spencer

Doris Spencer, 96 of Groton passed away Friday, December 4, 2020 at Avantara Groton. Services are pending with Paetznick-Garness Funeral Chapel, Groton.



“DARE TO REACH
OUT YOUR HAND
INTO THE
DARKNESS, TO PULL
ANOTHER HAND
INTO THE LIGHT.”

-NORMAN B. RICE

Chronic Wasting Disease Detected in New Area

PIERRE, S.D. – Chronic wasting disease (CWD) was recently confirmed in Ziebach County in western South Dakota. The sample from a male white-tailed deer was provided by a hunter who harvested the deer.

Ziebach County is now considered in the CWD endemic area, meaning the disease has been confirmed and hunters who harvest deer from these counties must now follow the new CWD regulations to help reduce the spread of CWD.

South Dakota has now confirmed CWD in 15 counties of western and central South Dakota, which includes three counties added during the 2020 hunting season.

Chronic wasting disease (CWD) is a fatal brain disease of deer, elk, and moose caused by an abnormal protein called a prion. Most harvested individuals with CWD will appear healthy and display no clinical signs. Animals in the later stages of infection with CWD may show progressive loss of weight and body condition, behavioral changes, excessive salivation, loss of muscle control and eventual death. Chronic wasting disease is always fatal for the afflicted animal. CWD poses serious problems for wildlife managers, and the implications of long-term management for free-ranging deer and elk is unknown.

For more information on CWD, visit gfp.sd.gov/chronic-wasting-disease or contact your local GFP office. #protectyourherd



CLOSED: Recycling Trailer in Groton

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

The Life of Mary Walter



Services for Mary Walter, 65, of Groton and formerly of Pierre was held Friday, December 4, 2020 at St. John's Lutheran Church, Groton. The Rev. Andrew Wolfgram officiated. Burial followed in Union Cemetery under the direction of Paetznick-Garness Funeral Chapel, Groton. Services were broadcast live on GDILIVE.COM and was also broadcasted on GDIRADIO at 89.3 FM, available within 1 mile of Groton.

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

Mary Jane Erdmann was born to Gerhardt & Orlean Erdmann on April 2, 1955. She was their fourth daughter. She grew up at the family farm located on the Brown County line near Verdon, SD. She was baptized May 15, 1955 at St. Paul's Lutheran Church, Ferney, SD. Her childhood Sunday mornings were spent with her family of 7 heading to church in a car that seated 5. She was confirmed in the Lutheran faith on April 17, 1969 at St. Paul's. Her confirmation verse was John 3:16. Her schooling started at the Garden Prairie Verdon school, continued at Groton until graduating from GHS in 1973, and she attended USD, Vermillion for one year.

On August 22, 1974, she married Terry Walter. To this union, two sons were born: Tate Austin Walter and Paul Vernon Walter.

Mary started her employment with South Dakota Highway Patrol in Pierre in February 1976, as a data encoder. She had many promotions with responsibilities added until she became their Business Manager in 1993. She worked under 8 Superintendents. There is no one that loved the SDHP more than Mary. She retired on 6/30/2020 after 44 years of service. Her final message to the South Dakota Highway Patrol upon her retirement was "Be Smart—Be Safe—Be Somebody". They were her family.

She battled esophageal cancer for 3 years spending her last 1-1/2 years at the home of Bill & Eileen Schuelke. Mary passed on November 30, 2020.

Survivors are: sons, Tate (Olivia) Walter, and granddaughters, Emma, and Sophie, Peoria, AZ; Paul (Nichole Galbavy) Walter & Chantalle Galbavy, Groton, SD; sisters, Eileen (Bill) Schuelke, Groton, SD; Charlotte Erdmann, West Lafayette, IN; Barbara Whicker, West Lafayette, IN; and Helen (David) Gerhard, Green Bay, WI; special friend, Jean Walter, Groton, SD and many nieces and nephews.

She was preceded in death by her parents and brother, Jan Gary Erdmann.

Pallbearers are Members of the South Dakota Highway Patrol.

Sincere thankfulness goes to Avera Hospice who provided loving care for Mary so faithfully two separate times. Her family and she appreciated their listening ear to her needs, as well as their devotion and kindness.

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Members of the South Dakota Highway Patrol were present Friday to serve as pallbearers and to pay their final respect to Mary Walter. Walter's funeral was held at St. John's Lutheran Church in Groton. (Photo lifted from GDILIVE.COM)

#285 in a series

Covid-19 Update: by Marie Miller

More records! Our situation continues to deteriorate by the day.

We're now at 14,441,700 cases diagnosed in the US in this pandemic; two days after hitting 14 million, we're nearing half-way to the next million. At this rate, we're going to break up that six-days-per-million pace we've set in the past couple of weeks. This isn't great. Our total is now 1.6% greater than yesterday's total with the addition of 232,100 new cases today, another record—second consecutive day setting one. New England is seeing a surge to rival the spring peak. New Hampshire is averaging six times its previous highs in May, and hospitalizations are also at records. Maine, Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, Delaware, and New Jersey all set single-day new-case records yesterday, and New Jersey did again today. Pennsylvania has had its worst week ever. Health systems in the region are showing signs of strain again, much as they did back in the spring.

Nationwide, hospitalizations are at a record level again for the sixth consecutive day, having set records on 23 of the immediately previous 24 days. That number sits at 100,744 today. California, especially, is in deep trouble. They set records for both new cases and hospitalizations today with huge strains on ICU capacity. Test positivity rates have climbed above 5% to 7.5% on a volume of over 200,000 tests per day. The state is reimposing some of the restrictions that have been scaled back since the summer surge there.

And we reported 2645 deaths today, a 1.0% increase over yesterday's total. We have now lost 278,918 Americans to this virus.

There is an update on that November 7 Washington wedding with 300 guests, which is well over the 30-guest limit in effect at the time. We're up to at least 50 infections in the home county and a smaller number in neighboring counties. Apparently among the guests were several staff members at long-term care facilities in the region which have recently reported deaths. Outbreaks in two homes believed to be connected to the wedding began about two weeks after the wedding, and a third is still being investigated; seven residents have died so far. According to Theresa Adkinson, administrator of the Grant County Health District, there has been some difficulty contacting tracing. "We have had people not return our calls that we believe attended the wedding."

More and more people I know are receiving positive Covid-19 test results; it's hard to think back to a time, only about two months ago, when I knew exactly one person who had been diagnosed. But with the rapid spread we're seeing now, the question arises more and more frequently about just what you should do when you're the one infected. Here's a brief summary of current recommendations:

(1) Isolate yourself from others immediately. This isolation period should last 10 days from the start of symptoms—and don't cheat on this and say, "Well, I sneezed last week, so that must have been the start of this." Err on the side of caution; you do not want to watch someone you love get sicker and sicker, knowing you were careless about exposing them.

If you live with other people, stay in separate rooms from them, including while eating and sleeping. In any common area shared by other household members, everyone should be wearing a mask at all times. Step up cleaning surfaces, especially those which are frequently touched—door knobs, light switches, and such. Keep separate cups and towels.

(2) Your close contacts need to quarantine. That includes everyone you live with and anyone else with whom you had close contact since two days before you developed your first symptoms. Close contact is 15 cumulative minutes within six feet of you, even with masks on and likely means anyone who was indoors with you in the same room. While the CDC says 14 days is still best, they are giving alternatives of 10 days from the exposure, as long as symptoms don't develop, or seven days, as long as symptoms don't develop AND they test negative. But these contacts should monitor for the full 14 days for symptoms since there are cases where it can take that long for them to develop.

(3) You are OK to stay home, rest, and drink plenty of liquids if you are experiencing nasal congestion, dry cough, body aches, loss of taste or smell, or a headache; but watch for changes. Be aware that symptoms can start out mild, get worse and then better before developing into severe disease. Seek emer-

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gency care if you experience trouble breathing, chest pain, blue lips, confusion, inability to tolerate food or drink, weakness, or inability to stay awake. These could all be signs something bad may be happening, and unless you're a trained medical professional, you are not equipped to assess their meaning. (Going to add that, even if you are a trained professional, it may be difficult to fairly assess your own symptoms, particularly if one of them is confusion. Don't mess around with this.) Likewise with a fever above 103 degrees F that doesn't come down with fever-reducing medication. And if you feel like you can't breathe, call 911 immediately.

If you're newly diagnosed, it's not a bad idea to call your physician and get advice tailored to your particular symptoms and medical history. This is especially important if you have a chronic illness, for example, lung disease or diabetes. Be aware, however, that most of the therapies available to treat Covid-19 are not recommended for milder cases, so there may not be much your doctor can do in the way of prescribing something. You may use over-the-counter medications to manage fever and aches. Fluids are important, especially if you have fever; but drinks with lots of sugar or caffeine aren't ideal. Rest, but try not to lie about in bed all day if you're strong enough to be up and around. Walking and moving around helps to expand the lungs and move air in and out of them; this is useful when you have a lung infection. Don't try to run a marathon, but move if at all possible. Light exercise is beneficial in boosting your mood as well. The advice is mixed on obtaining a pulse oximeter to monitor your blood oxygen level; these are those little clips you put on a finger for the purpose. Some experts say they are notoriously inaccurate; others say they are useful in spotting changes over time. You can ask your physician about that too.

Unfortunately, 10 days isolation isn't magic if you still have symptoms. Your isolation should end only if your symptoms are markedly improving AND you've been fever-free for 24 hours without using fever-reducing medicine.

Recovery is not a get-out-of-jail free card for the transmission precautions either; you should continue with the mask-wearing, hand hygiene, and social-distancing, even after you're all better. Don't schedule an unmasked, huggy visit with Grandpa on the premise that you are now "immune." We are still not clear that "immune" people are unable to transmit infection to others, and once again, you don't want to watch Grandpa get sicker and sicker while you wonder whether it was you who infected him.

And once you're all better, don't go around telling people this is no big deal just because you didn't get very sick—or maybe didn't get sick at all. Just don't. Everyone's experience with this virus is different, and while we know some folks are at higher risk than others for severe disease, there have been enough young, healthy, fit people who ended up in the hospital or even in a box that you must not be cavalier about the risks based on your sample of one.

A federally-organized workshop on long-term Covid-19 is suggesting there is a need to address the symptoms of what we've been calling long-haulers, those people who recover from the infection, even mild cases, who then have lingering problems that can impede their ability to return to normal life. The researchers are saying this needs to be recognized as a syndrome. Dr. Anthony Fauci, director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, said, "This is a phenomenon that is really quite real and quite extensive." He added that, even if the proportion of infected people is small, this "is going to represent a significant public health issue."

One of the questions we've been having about Covid-19 and vaccines against it is whether those who've recovered from an infection should seek the vaccine; after all, if you're protected, you're protected, right? The latest seems to be that yes, those who've already had a case of Covid-19 should receive vaccine. The thought is that immunity from vaccine will be stronger and more durable than that from a natural infection.

Another question for which we do not yet have an answer is whether the vaccine will prevent you from transmitting virus. It is possible that, even though you do not get sick after having vaccine—and it is looking very much as though that is so—you could still become infected and shed virus which can infect other. The latest thinking is the viral load, if any, in a vaccinated person will be insufficient to post a risk to your contacts; but the fact is we don't know for sure.

Major Wooten was admitted to Madison Hospital in Madison, Alabama, last week with Covid-19; he was not expected to do well, due to his advanced age. His children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren

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were all very concerned. This is a guy who's done his bit for his country; Wooten helped rebuild trains in Europe during the second world war and landed on the beaches of Normandy not long after D-Day to do that work.

Wooten struggled with the virus, but he prevailed. One of his nurses said, "[H]e is fighting off this coronavirus just like so many other things that he's fought off in his life. He served our country and we are so grateful for that. It's just a reminder that every day we need to wake up and fight coronavirus just as hard as Mr. Wooten."

And on his 104th birthday, Wooten was discharged from the hospital to finish his recovery at home. The hospital staff was on hand to sing Happy Birthday to him during his send-off; and his granddaughter was prepared to welcome him home. "We are just so blessed to have him home with us . . . and he is going to make it through." She said he is doing well.

Keep hanging in there, Mr. Wooten. We will endeavor to do the same.

So stay well, And we'll talk again.

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Area COVID-19 Cases

	Dec. 3	Dec. 4	Dec. 5
Minnesota	327,477	333,626	338,973
Nebraska	132,530	134,710	136,325
Montana	64,340	65,122	66,436
Colorado	241,172	247,209	252,222
Wyoming	29,966	30,518	31,047
North Dakota	80,135	81,105	81,949
South Dakota	82,203	83,348	84,398
United States	13,925,350	14,147,754	14,373,720
US Deaths	273,847	276,401	279,008

Minnesota	+5165	+6,149	+5,347
Nebraska	+2,336	+2,180	+1,615
Montana	+1135	+780	+1,314
Colorado	+3862	+6,037	+5,013
Wyoming	+577	+552	+529
North Dakota	+480	+970	+844
South Dakota	+1291	+1,145	+1,050
United States	+199,044	+222,404	+225,966
US Deaths	+3,156	+2,554	+2,607

	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 4th COVID-19 UPDATE

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from State Health Lab Reports

South Dakota:

Positive: +1050 (84398 total) Positivity Rate: 18.6%

Total Tests: 6625 (633656 total)

Hospitalized: +52 (4748 total). 515 currently hospitalized -22)

Deaths: +31 (1064 total)

Age: 80+=20, 70s=4, 60s=2, 50s=2, 30s=3. Males=15, Females=16.

Counties: Brown-3, Charles Mix-1, Codington-2, Dewey-2, Edmunds-1, Grant-2, Gregory-1, Hughes-2, (Jones lone death was reassigned, so Jones has no deaths), Lawrence-1, Lincoln-2, Minnehaha-7, Oglala Lakota-1, Pennington-1, Spink-1, Tripp-3, Turner-1, Yankton-1.

Recovered: +568 (67409 total)

Active Cases: +451 (15925)

Percent Recovered: 79.8%

Beadle (32) +9 positive, +4 recovered (420 active cases)

Brookings (18) +31 positive, +22 recovered (419 active cases)

Brown (29): +44 positive, +19 recovered (645 active cases)

Clark (1): +4 positive, +1 recovered (65 active cases)

Clay (11): +22 positive, +9 recovered (236 active cases)

Codington (55): +48 positive, +15 recovered (492 active cases)

Davison (40): +20 positive, +23 recovered (475 active cases)

Day (11): +6 positive, +5 recovered (117 active cases)

Edmunds (3): +3 positive, +1 recovered (55 active cases)

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

Grant (15): +14 positive, +6 recovered (160 active cases)

Hanson (3): +4 positive, +2 recovered (80 active cases)

Hughes (21): +12 positive, +17 recovered (315 active cases)

Lawrence (23): +25 positive, +9 recovered (404 active cases)

Lincoln (55): +55 positive, +30 recovered (959 active cases)

Marshall (3): +7 positive, +5 recovered (69 active cases)

McCook (17): +1 positive, +1 recovered (113 active cases)

McPherson (1): +2 positive, +1 recovery (46 active case)

Minnehaha (202): +196 positive, +150 recovered (3625 active cases)

Pennington (80): +117 positive, +67 recovered (1839 active cases)

Potter (2): +3 positive, +4 recovered (73 active cases)

Roberts (20): +13 positive, +8 recovered (167 active cases)

Spink (16): +11 positive, +5 recovered (132 active cases)

Walworth (13): +10 positive, +4 recovered (139 active cases)

NORTH DAKOTA

COVID-19 Daily Report, Dec. 4:

- 10.9% rolling 14-day positivity
- 852 new positives
- 10,381 susceptible test encounters
- 324 currently hospitalized (+18)
- 5,307 active cases (-154)
- 989 total deaths (+12)

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2 days ago

Yesterday

Today

Global Cases
64,596,395

13,925,350 US
9,534,964 India
6,436,650 Brazil
2,354,934 Russia
2,275,677 France
1,665,775 Spain
1,663,468 United Kingdom
1,641,610 Italy
1,440,103 Argentina
1,334,089 Colombia
1,133,613 Mexico
1,117,953 Germany
1,028,610 Poland
989,572 Iran

Global Deaths
1,494,986

273,847 deaths US
174,515 deaths Brazil
138,648 deaths India
107,565 deaths Mexico
59,796 deaths United Kingdom
57,045 deaths Italy
52,822 deaths France
48,990 deaths Iran

Global Cases
65,323,809

14,147,754 US
9,571,559 India
6,487,084 Brazil
2,382,012 Russia
2,310,271 France
1,678,419 United Kingdom
1,675,902 Spain
1,664,829 Italy
1,447,732 Argentina
1,343,322 Colombia
1,144,643 Mexico
1,143,664 Germany
1,041,846 Poland
1,003,494 Iran

Global Deaths
1,508,906

276,401 deaths US
175,270 deaths Brazil
139,188 deaths India
108,173 deaths Mexico
60,210 deaths United Kingdom
58,038 deaths Italy
54,231 deaths France
49,695 deaths Iran

Global Cases
66,045,464

14,373,720 US
9,608,211 India
6,533,968 Brazil
2,410,462 Russia
2,321,703 France
1,694,806 United Kingdom
1,688,939 Italy
1,684,647 Spain
1,454,631 Argentina
1,352,607 Colombia
1,159,257 Germany
1,156,770 Mexico
1,054,273 Poland
1,028,986 Iran

Global Deaths
1,521,598

279,008 deaths US
175,964 deaths Brazil
139,700 deaths India
108,863 deaths Mexico
60,714 deaths United Kingdom
58,852 deaths Italy
54,859 deaths France
50,016 deaths Iran

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County	Positive Cases	Recovered Cases	Negative Persons	Deceased	Community Spread	% RT-PCR Test Positivity Rate (Weekly)
Aurora	375	289	735	5	Substantial	36.54%
Beadle	2351	1906	4716	32	Substantial	21.19%
Bennett	323	271	1038	5	Substantial	7.14%
Bon Homme	1391	1255	1758	20	Substantial	23.85%
Brookings	2546	2109	8873	18	Substantial	9.32%
Brown	3792	3118	10396	29	Substantial	25.91%
Brule	585	498	1607	5	Substantial	27.07%
Buffalo	385	347	827	9	Substantial	21.62%
Butte	757	624	2648	14	Substantial	16.44%
Campbell	107	94	193	1	Moderate	16.67%
Charles Mix	936	638	3361	6	Substantial	19.08%
Clark	268	202	786	1	Substantial	20.00%
Clay	1413	1166	4193	11	Substantial	16.12%
Codington	2827	2280	7623	55	Substantial	25.30%
Corson	409	340	853	5	Substantial	41.18%
Custer	578	451	2209	7	Substantial	13.17%
Davison	2468	1953	5326	40	Substantial	26.75%
Day	402	278	1423	11	Substantial	35.19%
Deuel	335	252	915	2	Substantial	36.36%
Dewey	1086	598	3268	5	Substantial	29.55%
Douglas	316	246	757	5	Substantial	17.46%
Edmunds	271	213	857	3	Substantial	11.88%
Fall River	373	309	2128	10	Substantial	9.04%
Faulk	285	252	561	10	Moderate	18.18%
Grant	666	491	1794	15	Substantial	30.32%
Gregory	451	361	1002	22	Substantial	23.76%
Haakon	164	130	459	3	Substantial	10.99%
Hamlin	510	374	1389	17	Substantial	22.67%
Hand	291	239	660	1	Substantial	30.00%
Hanson	279	196	535	3	Substantial	54.32%
Harding	78	63	135	0	Moderate	38.89%
Hughes	1721	1385	5039	21	Substantial	20.40%
Hutchinson	604	440	1865	11	Substantial	39.17%

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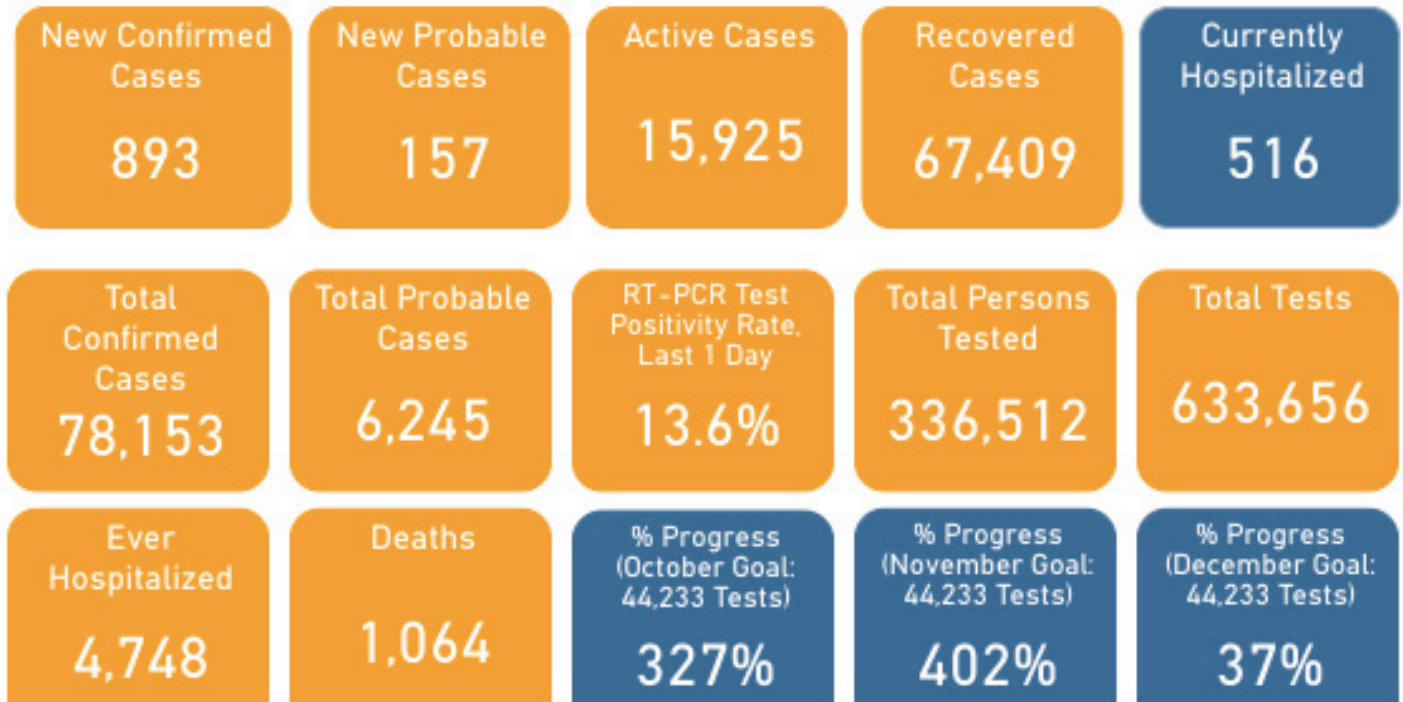
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Hyde	126	102	342	0	Substantial	50.00%
Jackson	213	172	827	8	Substantial	23.19%
Jerauld	244	200	455	13	Substantial	17.86%
Jones	63	53	157	0	Moderate	10.00%
Kingsbury	459	364	1288	12	Substantial	15.22%
Lake	889	717	2563	11	Substantial	16.60%
Lawrence	2152	1725	7127	23	Substantial	14.10%
Lincoln	5653	4639	15862	55	Substantial	23.82%
Lyman	473	390	1592	8	Substantial	24.76%
Marshall	205	133	911	3	Substantial	31.58%
McCook	606	476	1293	17	Substantial	28.18%
McPherson	155	108	471	1	Substantial	11.27%
Meade	1853	1460	6224	14	Substantial	15.08%
Mellette	188	154	617	1	Substantial	15.79%
Miner	202	161	462	5	Moderate	8.33%
Minnehaha	21369	17542	62024	202	Substantial	23.48%
Moody	433	341	1502	12	Substantial	25.22%
Oglala Lakota	1699	1361	5982	26	Substantial	22.18%
Pennington	9153	7234	31118	80	Substantial	15.67%
Perkins	214	136	571	2	Substantial	38.67%
Potter	285	211	668	2	Substantial	17.89%
Roberts	763	576	3609	20	Substantial	20.68%
Sanborn	286	201	561	2	Substantial	22.39%
Spink	598	450	1770	16	Substantial	25.32%
Stanley	236	197	689	1	Substantial	21.74%
Sully	96	80	208	3	Moderate	15.00%
Todd	1012	835	3594	14	Substantial	24.64%
Tripp	548	415	1261	8	Substantial	34.78%
Turner	820	666	2142	46	Substantial	15.09%
Union	1295	1056	4902	25	Substantial	19.27%
Walworth	527	375	1527	13	Substantial	28.26%
Yankton	2003	1380	7519	12	Substantial	18.19%
Ziebach	237	131	573	7	Substantial	42.31%
Unassigned	0	0	1774	0		

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South Dakota



AGE GROUP OF SOUTH DAKOTA COVID-19 CASES

Age Range	# of Cases	# of Deaths
0-9 years	2965	0
10-19 years	9195	0
20-29 years	15832	3
30-39 years	14097	12
40-49 years	12077	19
50-59 years	12031	59
60-69 years	9465	141
70-79 years	4907	223
80+ years	3829	607

SEX OF SOUTH DAKOTA COVID-19 CASES

Sex	# of Cases	# of Deaths
Female	44048	524
Male	40350	540

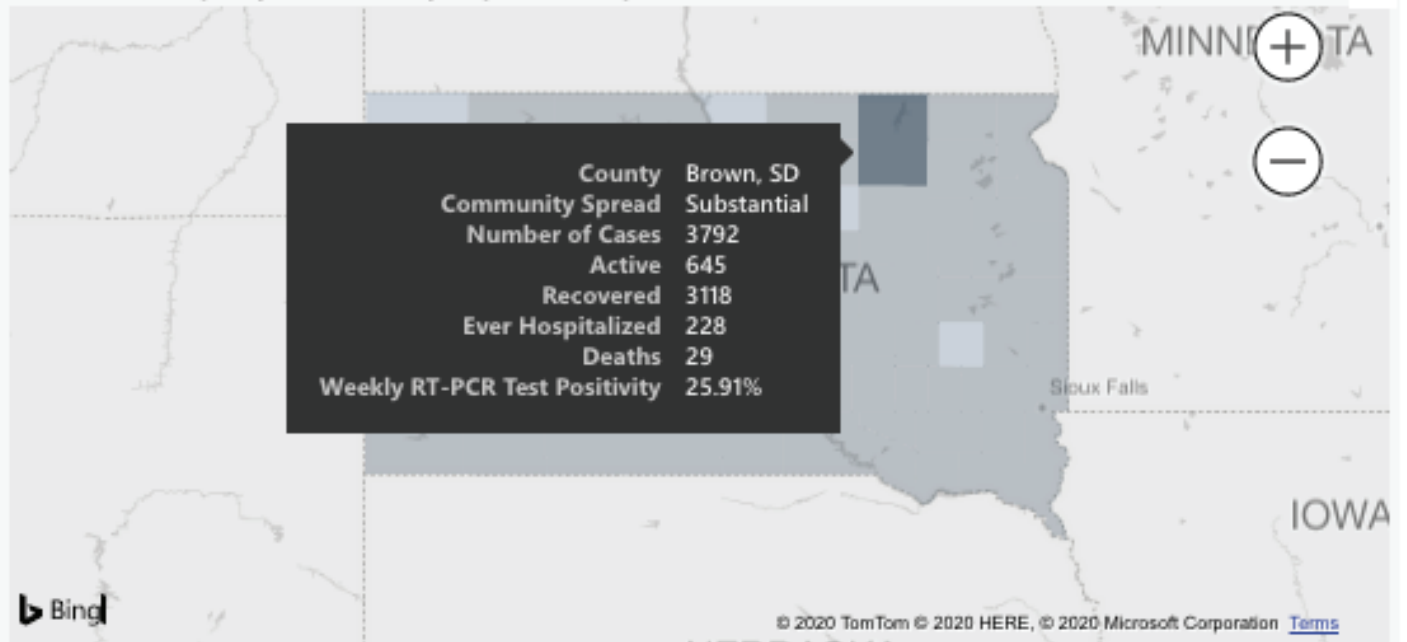
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Brown County

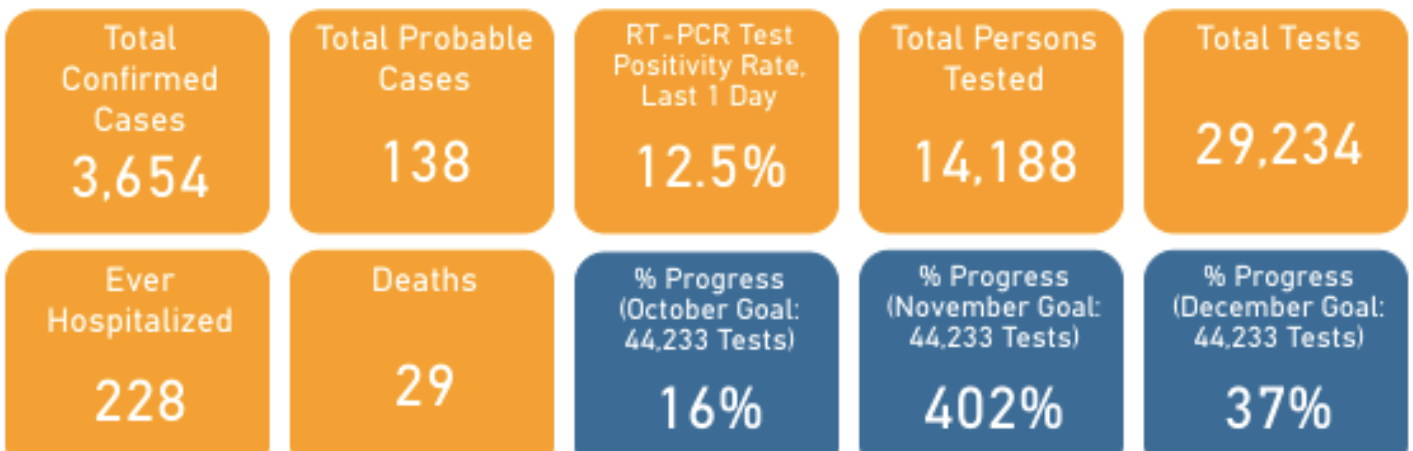


Community Spread Map by County of Residence



Community Spread ● Moderate ● Substantial

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



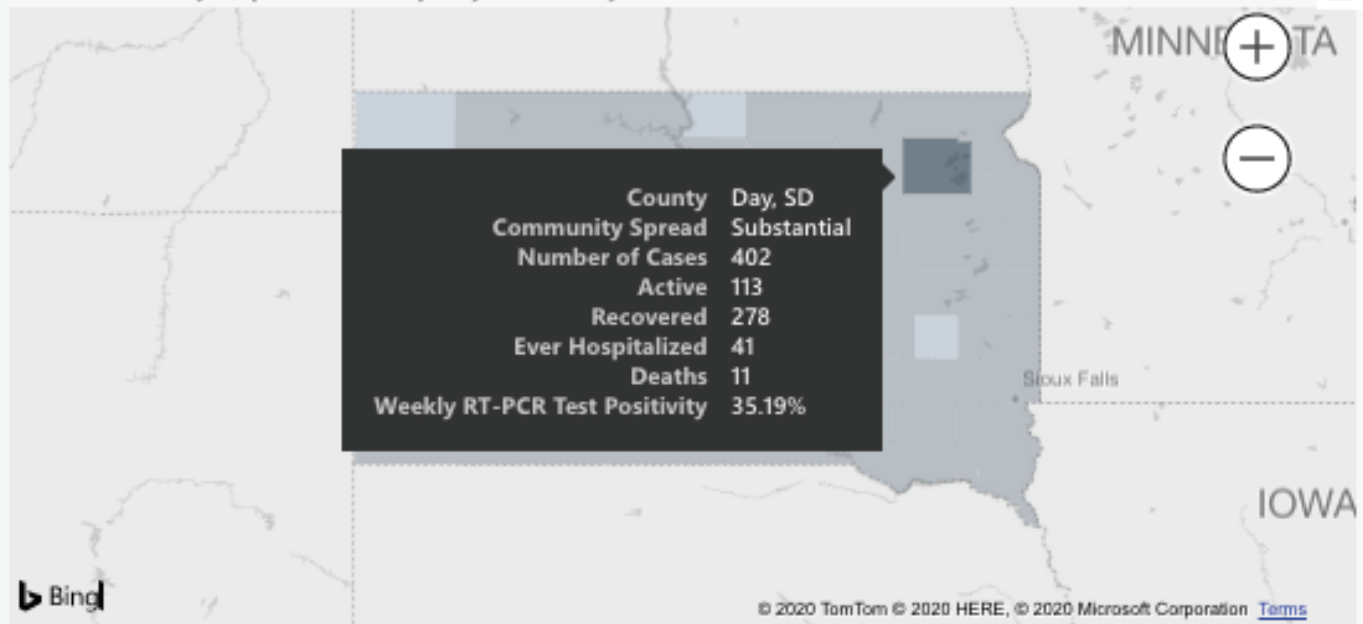
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Day County

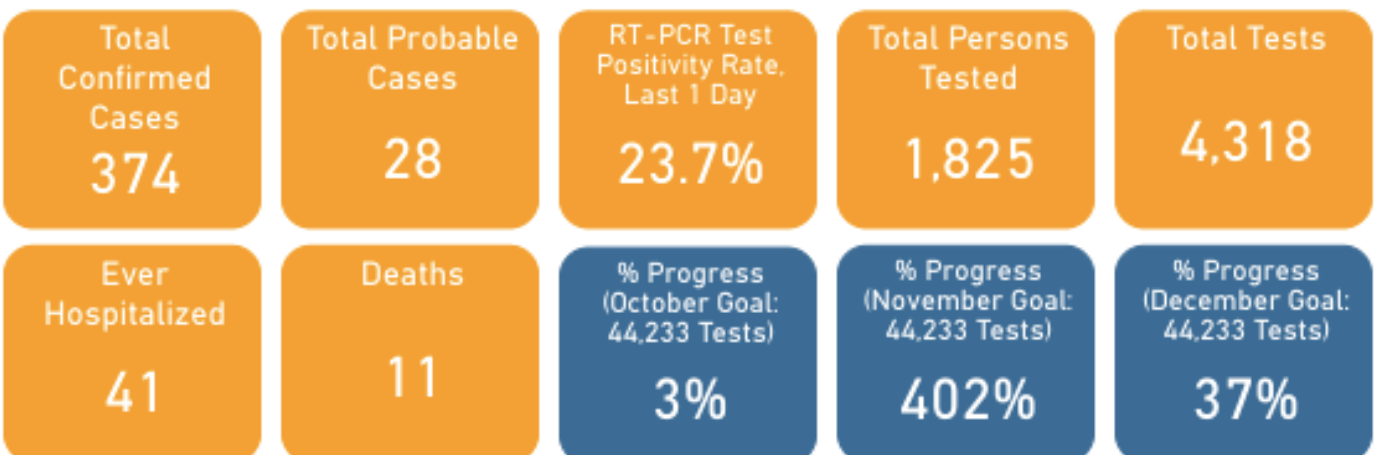


Community Spread Map by County of Residence



Community Spread ● Moderate ● Substantial

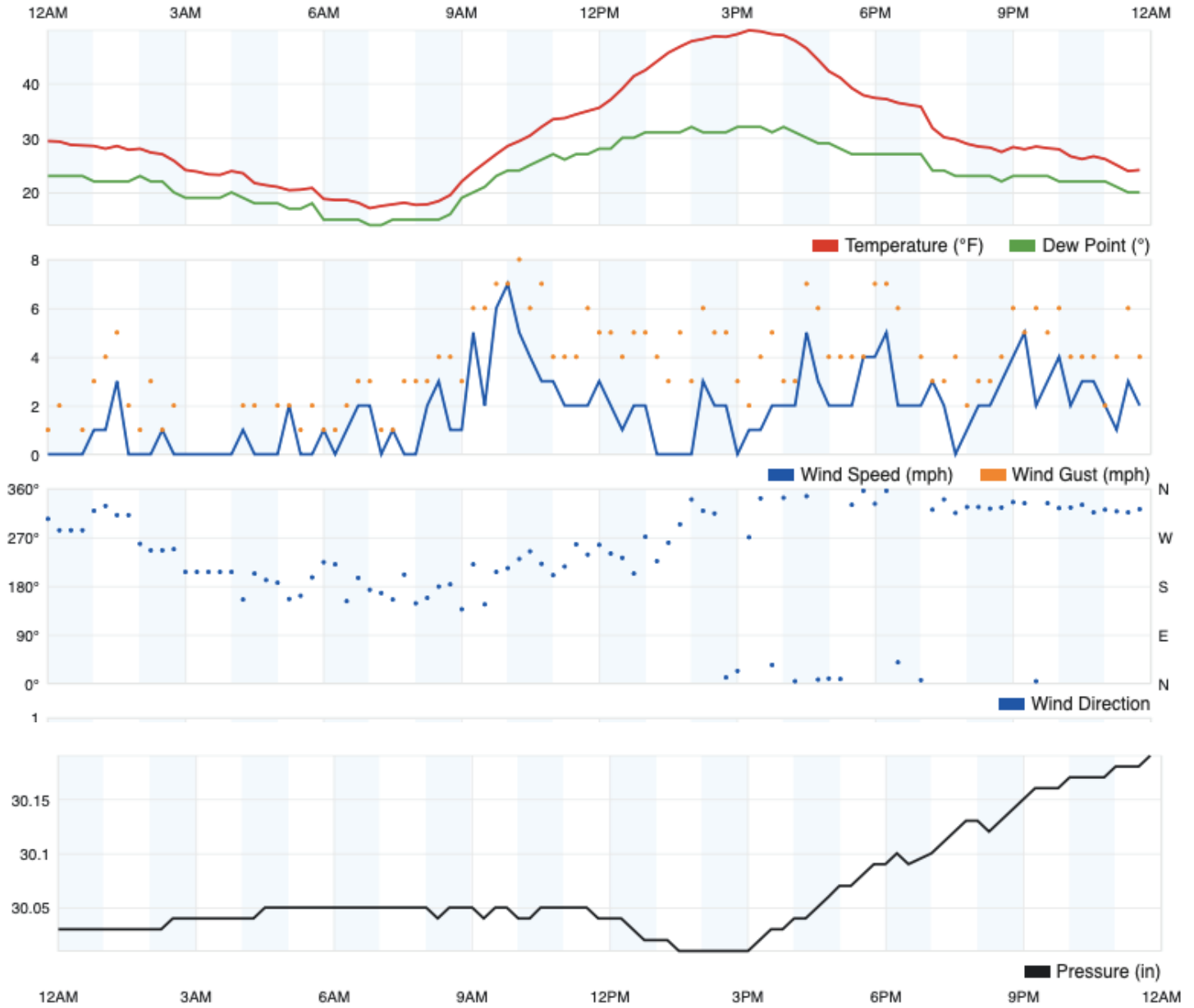
Hover over a county to see its details, or click county to update the orange boxes.



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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Today



Sunny

High: 52 °F

Tonight



Partly Cloudy

Low: 19 °F

Sunday



Sunny

High: 52 °F

Sunday
Night



Mostly Clear

Low: 22 °F

Monday



Sunny

High: 49 °F

5 Day Outlook

Above Average Temperatures

Saturday



HI: 45 to 55

Sunday



HI: 46 to 58°

Low: 18 to 27°

Monday



HI: 45 to 57°

Low: 20 to 28°

Tuesday



HI: 50 to 65°

Low: 23 to 29°

Wednesday



HI: 53 to 63°

Low: 28 to 33°

Very mild temperatures and dry conditions for the next several days, especially Tuesday and Wednesday!



NATIONAL WEATHER SERVICE
OCEANIC AND ATMOSPHERIC ADMINISTRATION

www.weather.gov/abr

Updated: 12/5/2020 5:17 AM Central

The stretch of mild temperatures and dry conditions will continue for the next several days. Above normal temperatures in the 40s and 50s can be expected through Monday, with temperatures becoming even warmer on Tuesday and Wednesday when central South Dakota will likely see readings in the 60s!

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Today in Weather History

December 5, 1960: A storm dropped snow on the entire region from the morning of the 4th to the late afternoon of the 5th, with the highest amounts in the western, central and north central parts of South Dakota. Five to 10 inches of snow fell in these areas. The snow, blown by winds of 30 to 40 mph, caused extensive drifting of streets and highways. A brief period of freezing rain preceded the snow and added to hazardous driving conditions on roads. Schools were closed for one to two days, with 27 towns reporting closed schools in the Aberdeen area alone. Telephone and power disruption was widespread in central and north central counties of the state, as poles and wires were broken by a combination of ice, snow, and the wind. The storm produced mostly rain in the extreme eastern counties of South Dakota into west central Minnesota, with a narrow band of freezing rain preceding light snow immediately to the west. No serious automobile accidents or property damage was reported in this area of freezing rain and light snow.

December 5, 1976: Cold Canadian air moved across South Dakota during the day on Sunday, December 5th. High winds gusted to 63 mph at Philip and 55 mph at Rapid City. One to two inches of snow fell over all of South Dakota; however, many counties in the southeast, south central, and east-central parts of the state received amounts varying from three to five inches. After this storm, nighttime temperatures fell to below zero. Snowfall amounts included 2 inches at Pierre, Aberdeen, and Watertown; and 3 inches at Redfield and Clear Lake.

December 5, 1886: A southern storm dumped heavy snow up into far southwest Virginia. The storm dumped 11 inches in Montgomery Alabama and 22.5 inches in Knoxville, TN. It also dropped 25 inches in Rome, Georgia, and 26 inches in Ashville, North Carolina.

December 5, 1953: A tornado outbreak occurred over northeastern Louisiana, southeastern Arkansas, and western Mississippi on this day. At least four confirmed tornadoes touched down. The strongest tornado was rated F5 as it destroyed the town of Vicksburg, Mississippi. This tornado first touched down just west of the Mississippi River in East Madison Parish in Louisiana. The tornado crossed the Mississippi River and tore through the downtown area of Vicksburg. On the ground for seven miles, this tornado caused 38 deaths, 270 injuries, and cost an estimated \$25 million in damages in 1953. Estimated cost adjusted for inflation in 2013 Dollars would be over \$200 million. The NWS Office in Jackson, Mississippi has an interactive track map of this event which includes photos and personal accounts.

1941 - The temperature at Enosburg Falls soared to 72 degrees to establish a state record for Vermont for the month of December. (The Weather Channel)

1987 - Heavy snow blanketed parts of the north central U.S., and freezing drizzle produced a coat of ice up to half an inch thick in northwestern Minnesota and eastern North Dakota. Snowfall totals ranged up to seven inches at Grand Rapids MN, and 12 inches at Seney MI. High winds in the north central U.S. gusted to 63 mph at Pellston MI, and reached 70 mph at Makinaw Bridge MI. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - There was only a "flurry" of activity, as for much of the nation winter remained on hold. The cold and snow of winter was primarily confined to the northeastern U.S. Five cities in the north central U.S. reported record high temperatures for the date, including Norfolk NE with a reading of 65 degrees. (The National Weather Summary)

1989 - A warm Pacific storm system brought high winds and heavy rain to western Washington and western Oregon. Up to ten inches of rain deluged the western slopes of the Cascade Mountain Range in Washington State over a three day period, and 500 persons had to be evacuated due to flooding along the Skagit River. Up to five inches of rain drenched northwest Oregon, and winds gusted to 71 mph at Netarts. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

2003 - A major winter storm impacted parts of the Mid-Atlantic and northeastern United States during the 5th-7th. Snowfall accumulations of one to two feet were common across areas of Pennsylvania northward into New England. Boston, MA received 16.2 inches while Providence, RI had the greatest single snowstorm on record with 17 inches, beating the previous record of 12 inches set December 5-6, 1981. Boston's Logan International Airport was closed briefly on the 7th as heavy snowfall made regular airport operations impossible (AFP).

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HOW TO GAIN UNDERSTANDING

James the Fifth of Scotland ruled his subjects quite differently than other rulers did. Historians say that he would often lay aside his royal robes, put on the clothes of an ordinary man, work as they worked and live as they lived. His disguise allowed him to move freely among his people without being recognized.

He did this, we are told, to gain an understanding of their needs and problems, sorrows and difficulties. Then, when he returned to his throne, he would have a clearer insight of his subjects and was better able to rule over them with compassion and care.

That is what Jesus, the King of kings, did. He laid aside His glory. Paul writing of this said, "Though he was God, He did not demand and cling to His right as God. He made himself nothing, He took the humble position of a slave and appeared in human form!"

It is common for most of us to be selfish and express our pride by "demanding our rights!" We want what we think is "rightfully" ours for any number of reasons. We believe that we have earned something or deserve something and therefore demand something!

But not Jesus. He laid aside every right that was rightfully His in order to serve others. As His followers, we are to live as He lived. We must develop an attitude of love and humility, and willingly and sacrificially, serve others as our Lord did!

Prayer: We thank You, Lord, for becoming like one of us and for going through everything that we go through. Knowing this enables us to know You do care. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: Psalm 2:5-8 I will declare the decree: The Lord has said to Me, 'You are My Son, Today I have begotten You. Ask of Me, and I will give You The nations for Your inheritance, And the ends of the earth for Your possession.

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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

Sioux Falls punk scene featured in Minneapolis film festival

By MAKENZIE HUBER Sioux Falls Argus Leader

SIoux FALLS, S.D. (AP) — The Sioux Falls punk rock scene of the '80s and '90s is more than demos and posters collecting dust in closets.

The all-age music scene is an undocumented piece of the city's history, said Brian Bieber. So, he took it upon himself to document it.

Bieber is the director of "I Really Get Into It: The Underage Architects of Sioux Falls Punk," a documentary exploring the punk rock, music-for-all-ages scene of the '80s and '90s in Sioux Falls and its influence on the teenagers who set up the shows and made the scene so successful, the Argus Leader reported.

"There are a lot of people who are movers and shakers in Sioux Falls right now that had a connection to that scene," Bieber said. "It's a good history lesson, but I also think it's a good reminder to people you don't have to follow the path that's prescribed to you. There aren't a lot of rules if you don't want there to be."

Sound Unseen, a Minneapolis-based film festival, is virtually screening the documentary Dec. 4 through Dec. 6. It was planned to include a Q&A with Bieber and Brienne Maner, co-producer of the film and Bieber's wife. Proceeds from the screening will be donated to the Children's Inn, Bieber said.

The documentary started when Bieber, 41, had a conversation with a friend about how the music scene impacted old acquaintances and friends. It was a young community of punk rock rebels turned into independent and skeptical adults who are forging their own paths inspired from the music scene of their youth.

"A lot of it was that we had to make it ourselves. The scene was made up of kids who weren't playing sports or doing the things where structures were in place for us already," Bieber said. "So, when we found this music, it was a natural thing we became independent-minded because you already sort of had to be. You couldn't look to adults for help because adults weren't interested."

"I Really Get Into It: The Underage Architects of Sioux Falls Punk" is a documentary exploring the punk rock, music for all ages scene of the '80s and '90s in Sioux Falls and its influence.

The teenagers were the force behind the music scene — filling not only the seats for concerts, but playing in the bands and helping organize the shows. Once the kids involved got a taste of such independence early on in life, it was tough not to find and use that as adults.

In fact, the documentary was made out of that same mindset — no one else was going to document it for them, so Bieber did it himself.

"There should be some sort of testament for what happened," he said. "If we didn't do it, no one else was going to do it."

It took about two years for Bieber to finish the project, juggling interviews and production along with his full-time job at Fresh Produce advertising agency and caring for his wife and their 3-year-old daughter.

The documentary spans eight cities and interviews dozens of people about their role in the music scene, including Total Drag owners Liz and Dan Nissen. The couple is a prime example of how the former punk rockers are creating spaces for today's kids to create their own music, echoing the environment and creative atmosphere they were part of, Bieber said.

Aside from the interviews and history, the music is pretty good, too, Bieber joked.

The film is also available for purchase through the documentary's website.

SD Lottery

By The Associated Press undefined

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

Mega Millions

03-19-24-44-50, Mega Ball: 8, Megaplier: 3

(three, nineteen, twenty-four, forty-four, fifty; Mega Ball: eight; Megaplier: three)

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Estimated jackpot: \$244 million
Powerball
Estimated jackpot: \$243 million

Freidel scores 24 to carry S Dakota St past Bradley 88-84

PEORIA, Ill. (AP) — Noah Freidel had 24 points as South Dakota State edged past Bradley 88-84 on Friday night.

Freidel made 5 of 6 3-pointers. He added six rebounds.

Baylor Scheierman had 14 points and 12 rebounds for South Dakota State (3-2). Alex Arians added 14 points and Douglas Wilson had 13 points and five assists.

Elijah Childs had 18 points and eight rebounds for the Braves (3-2). Terry Nolan Jr. added 17 points, seven rebounds and six assists, and Ja'Shon Henry had 16 points.

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

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

Friday's Scores

By The Associated Press
GIRLS BASKETBALL=
Garretson 68, Baltic 40
Sioux Falls Lincoln 45, Yankton 44

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

Sanford Health suspends merger talks with Intermountain

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — More than a week after Sanford Health parted ways with its longtime CEO, the health system announced that it has indefinitely suspended merger talks with Utah-based Intermountain Healthcare.

Sanford Health and Intermountain Healthcare made the announcement Friday, saying that with the leadership change, Sanford decided to put merger talks on hold while other organizational needs are addressed.

The two systems said roughly a month ago that they planned to merge, and that then-Sanford Health CEO Kelby Krabbenhoft would become president emeritus. But Krabbenhoft and Sanford parted ways last week, after Krabbenhoft told employees that he had recovered from COVID-19 and was not wearing a mask around the office.

The Sanford Health Board of Trustees last week appointed Bill Gassen as the organization's new president and CEO.

"With this leadership change, it's an important time to refocus our efforts internally as we assess the future direction of our organization," Gassen said in a statement. "We continue to prioritize taking care of our patients, our people, and the communities we serve as we look to shape our path forward."

Marc Harrison, the president and CEP of Intermountain Healthcare, said in a statement: "We are disappointed but understand the recent leadership change at Sanford Health has influenced their priorities. There's much to admire about the work that Sanford Health is doing. We continue to share a strong vision for the future of healthcare."

Sanford Health said last week that it "mutually agreed to part ways" with Krabbenhoft, who took over in 1996 and helped expand the organization from a community hospital into what is billed as the largest

rural nonprofit health system in the country.

Krabbenhoft's departure came after he told employees in an email that he believes he's now immune to COVID-19 for "at least seven months and perhaps years to come" and that he isn't a threat to transmit it to anyone. He said wearing a mask would be merely for show. Other Sanford executives tried to distance themselves from the comments.

Sanford Health, based in Sioux Falls, South Dakota, has 46 hospitals and more than 200 clinics concentrated in South Dakota, North Dakota, Minnesota and Iowa.

Intermountain Healthcare is based in Salt Lake City and has 225 clinics and 24 hospitals in Utah, Idaho, and Nevada.

Army Corps withdraws plan to charge for reservoir water

By JAMES MacPHERSON Associated Press

BISMARCK, N.D. (AP) — The Army Corps of Engineers reversed course on an Obama-era proposal to charge for water drawn from reservoirs the Corps manages, North Dakota's attorney general said Friday.

Attorneys general from a dozen Western and Plains states sent a letter last year to the Trump administration asking that the proposal be withdrawn.

Republican North Dakota Attorney General Wayne Stenehjem headed the effort, which was backed by attorneys general from Alaska, Arizona, Colorado, Idaho, Montana, New Mexico, Oregon, South Dakota, Utah, Washington and Wyoming. Stenehjem said the plan would usurp states' authority over their own water.

The Corps did not immediately respond Friday to telephone calls seeking comment.

"The use and management of water that flows through states always has belonged to states," Stenehjem said. "This is a very good thing that the Corps recognized what we've said all along: that the fact that a river is dammed does not diminish that the water belongs to us and always has."

President Donald Trump's administration formally withdrew the water supply rule in January, and the Corps officially withdrew its policy Thursday, Stenehjem said.

Stenehjem has said the proposal had implications for all states but would especially be harmful to the six reservoirs of the upper Missouri River, including South Dakota's Lake Oahe and North Dakota's Lake Sakakawea, the biggest along the 2,341-mile (3,767-kilometer) river.

The Corps' proposal could require municipal, industrial and domestic users of water from the reservoirs to sign a supply contract and pay the Corps, Stenehjem said. In North Dakota, 75% of Missouri River water, including through two American Indian reservations, could have been subjected to "unlawful" fees, Stenehjem said.

Judge wants remote hearings after guns allowed in courthouse

CUSTER, S.D. (AP) — The presiding judge of the 7th Judicial Circuit has written a proposed order saying judges won't appear in Custer County court after commissioners approved a measure allowing guns inside the courthouse.

County commissioners adopted the ordinance to allow firearms despite opposition from presiding Judge Craig Pfeifle and Judge Matt Brown and a state's attorney's opinion that it would be a safety risk, a legal liability and a financial burden.

Pfeifle said he's sent the proposed order to the South Dakota Supreme Court, which will review it for approval or rejection in January, the Rapid City Journal reported.

The proposed order says Custer County hearings will be overseen by a judge appearing remotely through audio or video feeds or take place at the Pennington County Courthouse in Rapid City.

It's unclear if lawyers and the public can take advantage of the video and audio feeds if they are concerned for their safety.

Custer County won't have to worry about jury trials for now since COVID-19 has paused the proceedings across the 7th Circuit, which includes Custer, Pennington, Fall River and Oglala Lakota counties. That

order expires Dec. 31.

Thai king leads thousands to remember late father's birthday

By JERRY HARMER Associated Press

BANGKOK (AP) — Thousands of yellow-clad supporters greeted Thailand's king on Saturday as he led a birthday commemoration for his revered late father, the latest in a series of public appearances at a time of unprecedented challenge to the monarchy from student-led protesters.

King Maha Vajiralongkorn, accompanied by Queen Suthida, waved as he arrived at Bangkok's Sanam Luang ceremonial ground. Supporters of the monarchy held Thai and yellow royal flags to welcome them, with some cheering "Long live the king." The crowd wore yellow shirts, the color associated with the royal institution.

The king led the crowd in a candlelit tribute to his late father, whose giant image was at the center of the stage set up outside the ornate Grand Palace.

Although King Bhumibhol Adulyadej died four years ago, his birthday remains on the national calendar as Fathers' Day.

He reigned for 70 years, acquiring a reputation for selfless work in the service of his country, an image endlessly propagated by newspapers and state media. He was widely respected, a status reinforced by strict lese majeste laws that can bring jail terms of up to 15 years for any comment or action deemed defamatory toward the monarchy.

But since his death in 2016, and the accession of Vajiralongkorn, the monarchy's standing has been under threat, with dissent on the rise.

In August this year, pro-democracy students smashed the taboo on public criticism by unveiling a 10-point demand for sweeping reform to make the powerful and wealthy institution more transparent and accountable.

Support for the move has swelled, with thousands embracing the call at a series of mass rallies, alongside demands for a new constitution and the resignation of the prime minister.

In apparent response, Vajiralongkorn has undertaken a wave of public appearances that have served as rallying points for thousands of conservative Thais outraged at the challenge to traditional norms and determined to defend them.

In contrast to his usual stern demeanor, the king has been more relaxed at the events, presenting a softer persona, while also thanking and encouraging those who have stood up for him.

At one royal walkabout in November, he appeared to hint that there could be compromises with those demanding reform, but protest leaders have dismissed that as meaningless.

In recent days, at least 12 protest leaders have been charged with royal defamation under the lese majeste laws. The laws had been suspended for the past three years after Vajiralongkorn told the government he did not want to see them used.

ER visits, long waits climb for kids in mental health crisis

By LINDSEY TANNER AP Medical Writer

When children and teens are overwhelmed with anxiety, depression or thoughts of self-harm, they often wait days in emergency rooms because there aren't enough psychiatric beds.

The problem has only grown worse during the pandemic, reports from parents and professionals suggest.

With schools closed, routines disrupted and parents anxious over lost income or uncertain futures, children are shouldering new burdens many are unequipped to bear.

And with surging numbers of hospitalized COVID-19 patients, bed space is even scarcer.

By early fall, many Massachusetts ERs were seeing about four times more children and teens in psychiatric crisis weekly than usual, said Ralph Buonopane, a mental health program director at Franciscan Hospital for Children in Boston.

"I've been director of this program for 21 years and worked in child psychiatric services since the 1980s

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and it is very much unprecedented," Buonopane said. His hospital receives ER transfers from around the state.

While ER visits for many health reasons other than COVID-19 declined early in the pandemic as people avoided hospitals, the share that were for kids' mental health-related visits climbed steadily from mid-April through October, according to a recent federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention report. Of the kids who showed up, more were for mental health than in the same period last year, although that might reflect that others stayed away, the authors cautioned.

Claire Brennan Tillberg's 11-year-old daughter was one of those kids who sought care. The Massachusetts girl has autism, depression and anxiety, and has been hospitalized twice in recent months after revealing that she'd had suicidal thoughts. The second time, in September, she waited a week in an ER before being transferred to a different hospital. The first time, in July, the wait was four days.

She'd been hospitalized before, but Tillberg said things worsened when the pandemic hit and her new school and therapy sessions went online. Suddenly the structure and rituals that many children with autism thrive on were gone.

"She'd never met the teacher, never met the kids," said Tillberg, a psychotherapist. "She felt more isolated, more and more like things aren't getting better. Without the distraction of getting up and going to school or to camp ... sitting at home with her own thoughts all day with a computer has allowed that to worsen."

Studies and surveys in Asia, Australia, the U.S., Canada, China and Europe have shown overall worsening mental health in children and teens since the pandemic began. In a World Health Organization survey of 130 countries published in October, more than 60% reported disruptions to mental health services for vulnerable people including children and teens.

Emergency rooms are often the first place kids facing a mental health breakdown go for help. Some are stabilized there and sent home. Some need inpatient care but many hospitals don't offer psychiatric treatment for kids and transfer these children elsewhere.

Some treatment centers won't take kids without proof they don't have COVID-19, "which is hard because you can't always find a rapid test," said Ellie Rounds Bloom. Her 12-year-old son has "significant mental health issues" including trauma, and has experienced several crises since the pandemic began. The Boston-area boy has been hospitalized since October, after spending 17 days in ER.

Many mental health advocates consider these waits unacceptable. For parents and their kids, they are that, and more.

"There have been moments of frustration and moments of sheer pulling your hair out," Rounds Bloom said.

State health insurance covers her son's treatment but not all providers accept it. Deficiencies in the U.S. health care system can leave families feeling helpless, she said.

"You can't give up, because it's your kid," Rounds Bloom said.

There are no national studies on kids' ER waits for mental health treatment, a practice called "boarding," according to a recent review published in the journal *Pediatrics*. The review included small studies showing that between 23% and almost 60% of U.S. kids who need inpatient care have to wait in ERs to receive it. They are kept stable but often receive little or no mental health care during those waits.

Yale-New Haven Children's Hospital has started offering teletherapy to kids waiting in its emergency room for mental health care, said Dr. Marc Auerbach, a pediatric ER physician.

One in 6 U.S. children have a diagnosed mental, behavioral or developmental disorder, according to the CDC. Data show problems like depression become more prevalent in teen years; 1 in 13 high school students have attempted suicide and at least half of kids with mental illness don't get treatment.

Shortages of psychiatrists in some areas and hospital closures have worsened the problem and contributed to rising ER mental health visits, the *Pediatrics* review said.

The number of U.S. children's mental health hospitals dropped to 38 from 50 between 2008 and 2018. The number of U.S. hospitals reporting that they offer any inpatient psychiatric services to adults or children dropped by almost 200 from 2008 to 2018, when the tally was 1,487, American Hospital Association data show.

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Children who need to be admitted for complex mental issues and behavior outbursts often have the longest ER waits. Kids like Laura Dilts' 16-year-old son, who is chronically suicidal, has mild autism, anxiety, severe depression and attention deficit disorder.

"Hospitals often refuse to take him," said Dilts, a human resources recruiter who lives near Worcester, Massachusetts.

Early this year, before the pandemic hit, he waited for a hospital bed twice, once for a week, the second time for over two weeks. He had been living at an intensive residential treatment center and has been back there since April.

Dilts worries about what will happen if he has another crisis.

"There weren't enough beds before COVID and there really aren't enough beds now," she said.

At the 66-bed Clarity Child Guidance Center in San Antonio, demand has been surging, says CEO Jessica Knudsen. About half their patients are Hispanic and 60% receive some form of public health insurance.

Some nights, there have been five or six kids sleeping in an observation area waiting for beds, she said.

"I feel OK once they get to us," even if in the observation room, she said. "They're getting eyes on them by a mental health professional."

Kids left waiting idly in ERs, or who don't seek emergency care, "that's my real worry," Knudsen said.

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

Religious right eyes Biden warily after Trump's good favor

By ELANA SCHOR Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Conservative evangelical Christians have proven some of Donald Trump's staunchest allies during his presidency. As his administration draws to a close, some of those backers are approaching President-elect Joe Biden with skepticism, but not antagonism.

Christian conservatives who stood by Trump through moments of crisis and success are hardly comfortable with his loss, and several have yet to fully acknowledge Biden as the winner of the election amid ongoing, unfounded fraud claims by the president. But they're largely not echoing the harsh tone Trump directed toward his Democratic rival during the campaign, when he claimed baselessly that Biden is "against God."

Texas-based megachurch pastor Robert Jeffress, a stalwart evangelical booster of Trump, said Christians are obliged "to pray for what appears to be President-elect Biden. If he succeeds, all of America succeeds."

Jeffress described himself as "deeply disappointed" by the apparent loss of a president he considers "a friend," but added that he would respond to any outreach attempt by Biden, just as he did with Trump. The possibility that Biden could "be pulled away from extremist positions" held by other Democrats, Jeffress said, is "a plus not just for conservative Christians, but for all of America."

It's highly unlikely that Christian conservatives could develop a close relationship with Biden, whose support for abortion rights and stances on other issues stand in stark disagreement with the religious right. However, the lack of a combative tone from pro-Trump religious conservatives could create space for some common ground between the Catholic president-elect and other evangelicals who have not tied themselves as directly to Trump.

"If Joe Biden is the president, if that's what it turns out to be, then we need to do everything we can to support him, where we can," the Rev. Franklin Graham said in a recent interview.

Graham, who leads the Christian nonprofit founded by his late father, the Rev. Billy Graham, is a Trump supporter who offered prayers at his inauguration and this year's Republican National Convention. But while he underscored that his opposition to abortion is one of several fronts where there could be no compromise, Graham said "we certainly can work with" Biden on other issues.

During the Obama administration, Graham attended a conversation Biden convened among faith-based advocates about gun legislation. The pastor also visited the White House in 2014 to discuss the Ebola crisis after a doctor at his global relief charity, Samaritan's Purse, successfully fought the deadly disease.

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Still, conservative Christians like Graham exerted scant influence over the Obama administration's agenda — and pro-Trump evangelicals are expecting a similar sideline role under Biden.

Family Research Council president Tony Perkins, a longtime Trump partner, said that during Obama's presidency, "I didn't go to that end of Pennsylvania Avenue, because I was never invited."

"If I were invited, certainly I would go, to have a conversation and represent the views our constituents have," Perkins added in an interview. "But I don't hold out hope that they're going to invite those who hold to traditional, biblical views on life, religious freedom and human sexuality."

Perkins said his socially conservative group would focus on working with the office of Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., whose party is poised to keep control of that chamber unless Democrats can win next month's two runoffs in Georgia.

Conservative Christians have no shortage of potential looming disputes with the incoming administration. Biden is likely to reverse Trump's ban on U.S. foreign aid for groups that support abortion, among other moves to shore up abortion rights, and he has pledged quick action on an LGBTQ rights measure that has drawn criticism from leading religious conservatives.

Marjorie Dannenfelser, president the Susan B. Anthony List and a Catholic outreach adviser to the Trump reelection campaign, said she saw "almost zero hope" of moving Biden on abortion, her group's priority issue, and forecast "hand-to-hand combat until we take the presidency back."

However, some groups such as Perkins' may find occasional opportunities to work with the Biden administration even while remaining critical of it in their messaging to members and fundraising, according to evangelical writer and analyst Napp Nazworth.

"They're going to be able to say, 'Please support us because your religious freedom is in danger,'" said Nazworth, who left the Christian Post last year after it published a pro-Trump editorial.

Meanwhile, evangelicals outside those most closely associated with Trump already are identifying commonalities where they could partner with Biden.

One is his plan to raise the annual refugee admissions ceiling to 125,000, a vow he reiterated recently at an event hosted by Jesuit Refugee Services. The Trump administration had slashed the refugee target to historic lows.

Nathan Bult, a senior vice president at Bethany Christian Services, said he has engaged with Biden's transition team on child welfare policy.

Bult said his group worked with the Trump administration but "we were never shy about criticizing" moves it disagreed with, and "we'll treat the Biden administration the same way."

Galen Carey, vice president for government relations at the National Association of Evangelicals, pointed to several areas for collaboration with Biden's administration, including immigration, paid family leave and criminal justice reform.

"We have principles that we think should be appealing to all Americans," Carey said, "and we'd like to be a constructive force for the common good."

Associated Press religion coverage receives support from the Lilly Endowment through the Religion News Foundation. The AP is solely responsible for this content.

High court to decide whether Nazi art case stays in US court

By JESSICA GRESKO Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Jed Leiber was an adult before he learned that his family was once part-owner of a collection of centuries-old religious artworks now said to be worth at least \$250 million.

Over a steak dinner at a New York City restaurant in the 1990s he had asked his mother about his grandfather, a prominent art dealer who fled Germany after Adolf Hitler came to power. "What was grandpa most proud of in his business?" he asked.

"He was very, very proud to have acquired the Guelph Treasure, and then was forced to sell it to the Nazis," she told him.

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That conversation set Leiber, of West Hollywood, California, on a decadeslong mission to reclaim some 40 pieces of the Guelph Treasure on display in a Berlin museum. It's a pursuit that has now landed him at the Supreme Court, in a case to be argued Monday.

For centuries, the collection, called the Welfenschatz in German, was owned by German royalty. It includes elaborate containers used to store Christian relics; small, intricate altars and ornate crosses. Many are silver or gold and decorated with gems.

In 2015, Leiber's quest for the collection led to a lawsuit against Germany and the the Prussian Cultural Heritage Foundation. The state-run foundation owns the collection and runs Berlin's Museum of Decorative Arts, where the collection is housed. Germany and the foundation asked the trial-level court to dismiss the suit, but the court declined. An appeals court also kept the suit alive.

Now, the Supreme Court, which has been hearing arguments by telephone because of the coronavirus pandemic, will weigh in. A separate case involving Hungarian Holocaust victims is being heard the same day.

At this point, the Guelph Treasure case is not about whether Leiber's grandfather and the two other Frankfurt art dealer firms that joined to purchase the collection in 1929 were forced to sell it, a claim Germany and the foundation dispute. It's just about whether Leiber and two other heirs of those dealers, New Mexico resident Alan Philipp and London resident Gerald Stiebel, can continue seeking the objects' return in U.S. courts.

In a statement, Hermann Parzinger, president of the Prussian Cultural Heritage Foundation, argued that the suit should be dismissed. The foundation and Germany have the Trump administration's support.

"Our view is that Germany is the proper jurisdiction for a case which involves a sale of a collection of medieval German art by German art dealers to a German state," Parzinger said.

The suit's claim that the Guelph Treasure was sold under Nazi pressure was also diligently investigated in Germany, he said. The foundation found that the sale was made voluntarily and for fair market value. A German commission dedicated to investigating claims of property stolen by the Nazis agreed.

Parzinger said records "clearly show that there were long and tough negotiations on the price and that the two sides met exactly in the middle of their initial starting prices."

The art dealers' heirs, however, say the purchase price, 4.25 million Reichsmark, was about one-third of what the collection was worth. Under international law principles, sales of property by Jews in Nazi Germany are also presumed to have been done under pressure and therefore invalid, said the heirs' attorney, Nicholas O'Donnell.

Leiber's grandfather, Saemy Rosenberg, and the two other Frankfurt art dealer firms he joined with to purchase the Guelph Treasure did sell other pieces of the collection outside of Germany. But their timing was unfortunate. The Great Depression hit soon after they purchased the collection. Some of the pieces were sold to The Cleveland Museum of Art or private collectors. The Nazi-controlled state of Prussia bought the remaining pieces in 1935. The two sides disagree on whether the collection was ultimately presented to Hitler as a gift.

Leiber says his grandfather never said anything to him about the collection, though the two played chess together on Sundays from the time he was 5 to when he was 11.

"He never spoke of the war. He never spoke of what he lost. He never spoke of the horrors that he and the family experienced. ... I think it was very important to him to keep moving on, to move forward," Leiber said.

Rosenberg reestablished his art business in New York. When he died in 1971, The New York Times called him a "leading international art dealer," noting that his clients had included oil tycoon Paul Getty, CBS Chairman William S. Paley and the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

In the nearly 50 years since his grandfather's death, Leiber has had his own star-studded career. In 1992, he founded NightBird Recording Studios at the Sunset Marquis Hotel in West Hollywood, where his clients have included Madonna, U2, Miley Cyrus and Justin Bieber. He's particularly proud of his work with guitarist Jeff Beck and the late Aretha Franklin. But his grandfather was a singular influence on him.

"He's a super-human figure in my life," Leiber said. "And I decided that I had to do whatever it took to have returned what was taken from him."

Moscow opens dozens of coronavirus vaccination centers

MOSCOW (AP) — Thousands of doctors, teachers and others in high-risk groups have signed up for COVID-19 vaccinations in Moscow starting Saturday, a precursor to a sweeping Russia-wide immunization effort.

The vaccinations come three days after President Vladimir Putin ordered the launch of a “large-scale” COVID-19 immunization campaign even though a Russian-designed vaccine has yet to complete the advanced studies needed to ensure its effectiveness and safety in line with established scientific protocols.

The Russian leader said Wednesday that more than 2 million doses of the Sputnik V jab will be available in the next few days, allowing authorities to offer jabs to medical workers and teachers across the country starting late next week.

Moscow, which currently accounts for about a quarter of the country’s new daily infections, moved ahead of the curve, opening 70 vaccination facilities on Saturday. Doctors, teachers and municipal workers were invited to book a time to receive a jab, and Moscow Mayor Sergei Sobyenin said that about 5,000 signed up in a few hours after the system began operating on Friday.

Russia boasted that Sputnik V was the world’s “first registered COVID-19 vaccine” after the government gave it regulatory approval in early August. The move drew criticism from international experts, who pointed out that the vaccine had only been tested on several dozen people at the time.

Putin has shrugged off doubts about it, saying in August that one of his daughters was among the early vaccine recipients.

Over the past months, Sputnik V has been offered to medical workers and teachers even as it was still in the middle of advanced trials. Several top officials said they also have received the jabs, and earlier this week the Russian military began vaccinating crews of navy ships scheduled to depart on a mission.

Health Minister Mikhail Murashko said Wednesday that more than 100,000 people in Russia already have received the shots.

The free vaccine is offered to people aged 18 to 60 who don’t suffer from chronic illnesses and aren’t pregnant or breastfeeding.

The two-shot Sputnik V was developed by the Moscow-based Gamaleya Institute. An advanced study among 40,000 volunteers was announced two weeks after the vaccine received government approval and that is still ongoing.

Last month, developers of the vaccine said interim analysis of trial data showed it was 91.4% effective. The conclusion was based on 39 infections among 18,794 study participants that received both doses of either the vaccine or a placebo, which is a much lower number of infections than Western drugmakers have looked at when assessing the effectiveness of their vaccines. Two other Russia-designed vaccines are also undergoing tests.

On Wednesday, Britain became the first country in the West to authorize the use of a vaccine against the coronavirus developed by U.S. drugmaker Pfizer and Germany’s BioNTech.

Russia has been swept with a resurgence of the outbreak this fall, with numbers of new infections exceeding the levels recorded early in the pandemic, but the authorities so far have refrained from a tight lockdown imposed in the spring.

On Saturday, Russia reported a new record high of daily infections at 28,782, including 7,993 in Moscow. The government task force has recorded a total of 42,684 virus-related deaths since the start of the outbreak.

Russia’s total of over 2.4 million confirmed cases is currently the fourth-largest caseload in the world behind the United States, India and Brazil.

Follow AP’s pandemic coverage at <http://apnews.com/VirusOutbreak> and <https://apnews.com/UnderstandingtheOutbreak>

Kuwait votes for parliament amid economic, virus challenges

KUWAIT CITY (AP) — Kuwait voted Saturday for its National Assembly, the first election since the death of its longtime ruling emir and as the oil-rich nation faces serious economic problems under the coronavirus pandemic.

This tiny country's hundreds of thousands of voters selected lawmakers for 50 seats in the parliament, the freest and most-rambunctious assembly in the Gulf Arab countries. However, Kuwait's parliament has tamped down on opposition to its ruling Al Sabah family since the 2011 Arab Spring protests that saw demonstrators storm the chamber.

Parliaments typically don't serve out their full terms in the stalwart U.S. ally, but this one did.

Kuwaitis voted across 102 schools in the nation, which is the size of the U.S. state of New Jersey. Authorities said masks and social distancing will be required due to the pandemic. Several schools will take those with active cases of the virus, with the sick first receiving permission from the government to vote.

Polls opened from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. and saw Kuwaitis wearing disposable gloves drop their ballots into clear ballot boxes.

"Life is developing so everything should develop including the election either through parties or blocs," Kuwaiti voter Issa al-Qallaf said. Major blocs include those backing the ruling family, Islamists and moderate liberals.

The vote came after the death in September of Kuwait's ruler, the 91-year-old Sheikh Sabah Al Ahmad Al Sabah. Sheikh Nawaf Al Ahmad Al Sabah, 83, quickly took power without any opposition. The outgoing parliament then approved Sheikh Nawaf's choice for crown prince, Sheikh Meshal Al Ahmad Al Jaber, the 80-year-old deputy head of Kuwait's National Guard.

The new parliament will need to make decisions on a number of matters, perhaps none more important than Kuwait's economy.

This fall, the ratings agency Moody's downgraded Kuwait for the first time in its history. The finance minister warned the government soon wouldn't be able to pay salaries. Kuwait's national bank said the country's deficit could hit 40% of its gross domestic product this year, the highest level since the financial devastation of the 1990 Iraqi invasion and subsequent Gulf War.

With crude oil prices just above \$45 a barrel, other nearby Arab states took on debt, trimmed subsidies or introduced taxes to sustain their spending. Kuwait, however, did none of that.

That's not to say Kuwait will be begging for aid at international summits anytime soon. The Kuwait Investment Authority holds assets of \$533 billion, according to the Las Vegas-based Sovereign Wealth Fund Institute, making it the world's fourth-largest such fund.

The problem is Kuwait has no legal framework to deficit-spend beyond its current limit of \$33 billion. It needs the country's parliament to grant approval. But lawmakers likely will face a popular backlash as the public fears the money will be lost to corruption amid a series of high-profile cases shaking the country.

"We have to fight corruption by choosing who will represent us inside the National Assembly," one voter, Azraa al-Rifai, remarked.

Kuwait has the world's sixth-largest known oil reserves. The country hosts some 13,500 American troops, many at Camp Arifjan south of Kuwait City, which is also home to the forward command of U.S. Army Central.

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Japan awaits capsule's return with asteroid soil samples

By MARI YAMAGUCHI Associated Press

TOKYO (AP) — Japan's Hayabusa2 spacecraft successfully released a small capsule on Saturday and sent it toward Earth to deliver samples from a distant asteroid that could provide clues to the origin of the solar system and life on our planet, the country's space agency said.

The capsule successfully detached from 220,000 kilometers (136,700 miles) away in a challenging operation that required precision control, the Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency said. The capsule — just 40 centimeters (15 inches) in diameter — is now descending and is expected to land Sunday in a remote, sparsely populated area of Woomera, Australia.

"The capsule has been separated. Congratulations," JAXA project manager Yuichi Tsuda said.

Hayabusa2 left the asteroid Ryugu, about 300 million kilometers (180 million miles) away, a year ago. After it released the capsule, it moved away from Earth to capture images of the capsule descending toward the planet as it set off on a new expedition to another distant asteroid.

About two hours later, JAXA said it had successfully rerouted Hayabusa2 for its new mission, as beaming staff exchanged fist and elbow touches at the agency's command center in Sagami-hara, near Tokyo.

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"We've successfully come this far, and when we fulfill our final mission to recover the capsule, it will be perfect," mission manager Makoto Yoshikawa said from the command center during a livestreaming event.

People who gathered to watch the capsule's separation at public viewing events across Japan cheered the success. "I'm really glad that the capsule has been successfully released. My heart was beating fast when I was watching," said Ichiro Ryoko, a 60-year-old computer engineer who watched at Tokyo Dome.

Hayabusa2's return with the world's first asteroid subsurface samples comes weeks after NASA's OSIRIS-REx spacecraft made a successful touch-and-go grab of surface samples from asteroid Bennu. China, meanwhile, announced this week that its lunar lander collected underground samples and sealed them within the spacecraft for their return to Earth, as space developing nations compete in their missions.

In the early hours of Sunday, the capsule, protected by a heat shield, will briefly turn into a fireball as it reenters the atmosphere 120 kilometers (75 miles) above Earth. At about 10 kilometers (6 miles) aboveground, a parachute will open to slow its fall and beacon signals will be transmitted to indicate its location.

JAXA staff have set up satellite dishes at several locations in the target area to receive the signals. They also will use a marine radar, drones and helicopters to assist in the search and retrieval of the pan-shaped capsule.

Australian National University space rock expert Trevor Ireland, who is in Woomera for the arrival of the capsule, said he expected the Ryugu samples to be similar to the meteorite that fell in Australia near Murchison in Victoria state more than 50 years ago.

"The Murchison meteorite opened a window on the origin of organics on Earth because these rocks were found to contain simple amino acids as well as abundant water," Ireland said. "We will examine whether Ryugu is a potential source of organic matter and water on Earth when the solar system was forming, and whether these still remain intact on the asteroid."

Scientists say they believe the samples, especially ones taken from under the asteroid's surface, contain valuable data unaffected by space radiation and other environmental factors. They are particularly interested in analyzing organic materials in the samples.

JAXA hopes to find clues to how the materials are distributed in the solar system and are related to life on Earth. Yoshikawa, the mission manager, said 0.1 gram of the dust would be enough to carry out all planned researches.

For Hayabusa2, it's not the end of the mission it started in 2014. It is now heading to a small asteroid called 1998KY26 on a journey slated to take 10 years one way, for possible research including finding ways to prevent meteorites from hitting Earth.

So far, its mission has been fully successful. It touched down twice on Ryugu despite the asteroid's extremely rocky surface, and successfully collected data and samples during the 1½ years it spent near Ryugu after arriving there in June 2018.

In its first touchdown in February 2019, it collected surface dust samples. In a more challenging mission in July that year, it collected underground samples from the asteroid for the first time in space history after landing in a crater that it created earlier by blasting the asteroid's surface.

Asteroids, which orbit the sun but are much smaller than planets, are among the oldest objects in the solar system and therefore may help explain how Earth evolved.

Ryugu in Japanese means "Dragon Palace," the name of a sea-bottom castle in a Japanese folk tale.

Associated Press writers Dennis Passa in Brisbane, Australia, and Chisato Tanaka in Tokyo contributed to this report.

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

California on the brink: Virus rages and closures imminent

By OLGA R. RODRIGUEZ, JULIET WILLIAMS and ROBERT JABLON Associated Press

SAN FRANCISCO (AP) — Much of California is on the brink of sweeping new restrictions on businesses

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and activities, a desperate attempt to slow the frighteningly rapid escalation of coronavirus cases that threatens to overwhelm hospitals.

Five San Francisco Bay Area counties imposed a new stay-at-home order for their residents that will take effect Sunday. Southern California and a large swath of the central portion of the state could join this weekend.

Those two regions have seen their intensive care unit capacity fall below the 15% threshold that under a new state stay-at-home order will trigger new restrictions barring all on-site restaurant dining and close hair and nail salons, movie theaters and many other businesses, as well as museums and playgrounds.

If their capacity remains below that level when the data is updated Saturday, the closures will take effect Sunday and stay in effect at least three weeks.

Gov. Gavin Newsom announced the new plan Thursday. It is the most restrictive order since he imposed the country's first statewide stay-at-home rule in March.

The new order divides the state into five regions and uses ICU capacity as the trigger for closures. Newsom also says people may not congregate with anyone outside their household and must always wear masks when they go outside.

As of Friday night, the 11-county Southern California region had only 13.1% of its ICU beds available, the California Department of Public Health reported. The figure was 14.1% for the San Joaquin Valley region, composed of a dozen counties in the agricultural Central Valley and rural areas of the Sierra Nevada.

The other three regions — Greater Sacramento, Northern California and San Francisco Bay Area — were all around 21%.

But health officers in five of the Bay Area's 11 counties didn't wait. On Friday, they adopted the state's stay-at-home order. The changes begin to take effect Sunday night in San Francisco, Santa Clara, Marin, Alameda and Contra Costa counties, as well as the city of Berkeley.

"We don't think we can wait for the state's new restrictions to go into effect. ... This is an emergency," Contra Costa Health Officer Chris Farnitano said.

"Our biggest fear all along — that we won't have a bed for you or your mother or your grandmother or grandfather when they get sick — is the reality we'll be facing unless we slow the spread," San Francisco Mayor London Breed said.

The Bay Area order will last at least through Jan. 4, a week longer than the state's timeline, and came as the state recorded another daily record number of new cases with 22,018. Hospitalizations topped 9,000 for first time and ICU patients were at a record 2,152.

The new shutdowns were a gut-wrenching move for small businesses that have struggled to survive over nearly a year in which they were repeatedly ordered to close, then allowed to reopen but with complex safety precautions.

Michelle Saunders James was in tears Friday at the thought of closing down her Oakland nail salon just five weeks after reopening it.

"We wear (face) shields. We take temperatures. We do everything we are told to do so everyone feels safe, including our staff and team," she told KGO-TV. "So I don't understand why it's not enough and I'm terribly sad and afraid."

Under Newsom's order, retail stores and shopping centers can operate with just 20% customer capacity.

In the East Bay, Berkeley Bowl's two grocery stores already had laid in stocks of essentials in case of a return of panic buying that was seen after the state issued a strict stay-at-home order in mid-March that later was eased.

"We've learned valuable lessons from last time," general manager Steve Tsujimoto told the San Francisco Chronicle. "We acted proactively and have been warehousing certain select items — toilet paper, sanitizers, wipes, beans, rice, grains, flour, bread — things of that nature."

Critics say the broad statewide order unfairly lumps too many disparate counties together into regions.

The approach "places our ability to reopen with 10 other counties including Los Angeles County which has absolutely failed to control the coronavirus and Mono County whose most populous city is 344 miles

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away," said Fred M. Whitaker, chairman of the Republican Party of Orange County.

The explosive rise in COVID-19 infections that began in October is being blamed largely on people ignoring safety measures and socializing with others.

Berkeley Health Officer Lisa Hernandez said people should not meet in person with anyone they don't live with, "even in a small group, and even outdoors with precautions."

"If you have a social bubble, it is now popped," Hernandez said. "Do not let this be the last holiday with your family."

Los Angeles County, the nation's most populous with 10 million residents, could reach ICU capacity within days. Los Angeles Mayor Eric Garcetti said that could mean people with other life-threatening illnesses, such as strokes and heart attacks, might be unable to get a bed.

The city alone could see more than 11,000 lives lost to the virus by year's end, the mayor said.

"That means 3,000 additional deaths in a single month. To put that in perspective, it's a decade of homicides," Garcetti said. "This is the greatest threat to life in Los Angeles that we have ever faced."

In the inland Central Valley, Fresno County had just 10 of its 150 ICU beds available. Health officials described a grim picture with hospitals struggling to stay staffed because of coronavirus infections and exposures. One hospital is holding ICU patients in the emergency department until beds open up, Emergency Medical Services Director Daniel Lynch said Friday.

The county has requested help from the state with staffing for a couple of weeks. But so far only one or two additional workers have shown up at three local hospitals as the whole state struggles with staffing.

At Kaweah Delta medical center in Visalia, in Tulare County, there were 18 ICU beds available Friday but only the staff to handle four additional patients, said Keri Noeske, the chief nursing officer. Some 125 employees are out sick or quarantined because of COVID-19.

Jablon reported from Los Angeles. Associated Press writer Jocelyn Gecker in San Francisco and Brian Melley in Los Angeles contributed.

Swiss slopes buzz as those of neighbors sit idle in pandemic

By JAMEY KEATEN Associated Press

GENEVA (AP) — Two weeks after beating COVID-19, Thierry Salamin huffs as his ski boots crunch through Swiss snow near the Matterhorn peak, readying for a downhill run with his mood as bright as his blue and fluorescent yellow ski getup and the sun overhead.

The 31-year-old real estate agent from the southwestern Swiss region of Wallis can't believe he is skiing during a pandemic, let alone one that he personally endured — and which has driven a wedge between his country and its Alpine neighbors over where people can ski, and where they can't.

While the coronavirus resurgence has led Austria, France, and Italy to shut or severely restrict access to their ski stations this holiday season, Switzerland has kept its slopes open — a move that has fanned grumbling about an unlevel playing field when it comes to Alpine fun.

"It's true, we're privileged," said Salamin, enthusing about the "paradise" of the Zermatt slopes and gesturing over the ridgeline toward Italy. "It's too bad that people can't go skiing on the Italian side, because those slopes are magnificent."

The discord among countries during the worst pandemic in a century cuts across issues of health, business, economy, culture and wellbeing. But it also violates one of the key tenets that the World Health Organization promotes to help fight COVID-19: solidarity.

The Swiss say they're taking reasonable action to fight the coronavirus. As across much of Europe, infection counts in Switzerland spiked in late October and peaked at more than 10,000 per day on two occasions about a month ago — a high tally for the country of 8.5 million.

Authorities require masks in ski lifts and queues, and recommend hand hygiene and physical distancing measures. These seem only minor concessions to the hundreds of faithful skiers who gleefully turned out for a weekday jaunt on the Swiss slopes near the Matterhorn on Thursday.

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France's government is all but taking aim at Switzerland, which is not a member of the European Union, warning that any residents of France who come back from ski holidays could face virus tests and quarantine orders. The French move is aimed at limiting the spread of COVID-19, but it comes as some officials and business leaders in French Alpine towns have complained about unfair restrictions.

On Friday, amid such pressure, Swiss Health Minister Alain Berset announced a "hardening" of Switzerland's rules governing ski stations. Ski areas must now receive authorizations by the cantonal, or regional, authorities by Dec. 22 to continue operating.

His ministry said trains, gondolas and cable cars in ski areas will be limited to two-thirds of maximum capacity starting Wednesday. But the stepped-up restrictions are still fewer than in other countries.

Neighboring regions are seething. Just across the border from Zermatt, in Italy, the Valle d'Aosta regional council voted to defy the national government and open its ski lifts anyway, but the issue may get tied up in court.

Nicolas Rubin, mayor of the French town of Chatel, near the Swiss border, has had his city hall draped in Swiss flags to protest the directives from Paris. He told Swiss public television Wednesday he felt "no jealousy" toward Switzerland, saying Swiss officials had fully thought through their rules.

The European Union — which counts Austria, France and Italy as members — has stopped short of recommending a holiday season travel ban. But national authorities are taking precautions, leery of superspreading events like those earlier this year at ski resorts in those three countries that helped seed devastating outbreaks in Europe.

On Thursday, Italian Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte confirmed Italian ski lifts will remain closed through Jan. 7. France is still undecided, but looking at a mid-January restart at best. Austria will allow skiing to start on Dec. 24, but will limit the capacity of ski lifts until early January.

In Zermatt, this weekend — around the time of the start of the typical high winter season — could well be pivotal to see just how much the warnings from foreign politicians, and laments from wintertime business owners abroad, will register with would-be skiers.

"Tourism is our only income, it's our life," said Zermatt mayor Romy Biner-Hauser in an interview.

"Nobody wants to be a hotspot, nobody wants to be a super spreader," she said. "Where is the difference (between) doing outdoor activity ... (in) the sun, the fresh air, mountains, versus a shopping mall in a big city? And nobody has given me that answer so far."

Zermatt tourism officials, so far, are projecting a minimum 20% drop in overnight stays this year. Traditionally, about half of all visitors come from Switzerland, the other half from abroad — many from far away, not just neighboring countries.

"We hope so much that the government will not lock down again and we hope that people from other countries will be able to cross the borders," said Dave Preis, an Italian ski instructor at Zermatt. "It makes no sense to lock down the world. It means: 'Let's stop living.'"

Nadine Achoui-Lesage in Zermatt, Switzerland, Colleen Barry in Milan, Sylvie Corbet in Paris and Samuel Petrequin in Brussels contributed to this report.

Is Georgia a swing state? Groups spend millions to find out

By BRIAN SLODYSKO and BILL BARROW Associated Press

ATLANTA (AP) — The Georgia U.S. Senate runoffs don't take place until Jan. 5. But there are already some clear winners.

At the state's most influential television station, Atlanta's WSB, an ad that cost candidates \$8,000 in July now goes for about \$18,000. In the smaller market of Savannah, ad rates have soared nearly twentyfold.

With control of the Senate, and the scope of President-elect Joe Biden's agenda in the balance, the millions in political spending verges on something close to an unlimited budget.

The contest will test the limits of how far money can go in a political climate in which both sides are entrenched and few voters seem open to changing their minds. And President Donald Trump has com-

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plicated the contest by claiming baselessly that the November election in Georgia was beset by fraud.

Also at stake: whether Georgia, long a Republican stronghold, may be on the road to swing-state status, particularly after Biden became the first Democratic presidential candidate since Bill Clinton in 1992 to carry the state.

Partisans on both sides are spending big to find out.

That puts Georgia's two Republican senators, David Perdue and Kelly Loeffler, in devilish competitions that kicked off after neither won more than 50% of the vote on Election Day. Perdue is seeking reelection against Democratic challenger Jon Ossoff, while Loeffler, who was appointed to her seat, is looking to complete the term of the retired Sen. Johnny Isakson, running against Democrat Raphael Warnock.

If Republicans win one race, they will maintain a narrow majority, and the chamber will serve as a bulwark against Democratic ambitions. But if Democrats carry both, the balance will be 50-50 —with Vice President-elect Kamala Harris delivering tie-breaking votes. That will enable Biden to enact a more ambitious agenda, assuming he can keep fellow Democrats on board.

"Everyone is aware of the stakes of these two seats," said Bradley Beychok, the president of American Bridge, a major Democratic outside group that has pledged to spend millions reaching out to rural voters. "There's a narrative that Democrats have an uphill battle, but we just won Georgia and we're ready to go fight."

As both parties shovel resources into the state, some speculate that the cost of the abbreviated contest could approach \$500 million. Already, \$329 million in advertising has been spent or reserved in the state since Election Day, according to data from the ad tracking firm Kantar/CMAG.

Campaign finance disclosures made public Thursday suggest Republican outside groups have a fundraising advantage. The National Republican Senatorial Committee, which has formed a joint big-dollar fundraising operation with the two candidates that is led by longtime Republican operative Karl Rove, reported raising \$75.5 million since Oct. 15. Its counterpart, the Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee, raised \$31.6 million during the same period.

Senate Leadership Fund, a super PAC aligned with Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, reported raising \$71 million since Election Day, compared with \$10.2 million raised by Senate Majority PAC, its Democratic rival.

The candidates won't have to make the finances public until Dec. 24.

"Money isn't everything, but fundraising is an early leading indicator of enthusiasm," Steven Law, president of Senate Leadership Fund, said during an appearance on Fox News on Thursday. "Republican voters in Georgia understand that everything is at stake. The Trump legacy, the future of freedom, the future of socialism, and right now they seem very energized to vote."

Much of the money raised by the group came from Republican megadonors, including \$15 million from Stephen Schwarzman, the CEO of the private equity firm Blackstone; \$10 million from Kenneth Griffin, the CEO of the hedge fund Citadel; and \$5 million from Steve Wynn, the former head of Wynn Resorts who stepped down after he was accused of sexual misconduct, allegations he denies.

Major Democratic committees focused on the Senate may have posted lackluster fundraising totals on Thursday, but party strategists say donors are instead routing cash to groups that are already established in the state.

Many of those groups are holding their strategy, tactics and bottom line close after record-setting hauls for Senate candidates in the fall ended in disappointment for candidates like Jaime Harrison of South Carolina, MJ Hegar of Texas and Steve Bullock of Montana. In some of those cases, the widely publicized fundraising success contributed to perceptions that they were funded by out-of-state interests.

While Biden's campaign ran operations in Georgia until the Nov. 3 election, Senate Democrats' campaign arm is in charge now. Their efforts include paid door-to-door canvassing — a difference from the fall when the Biden campaign discouraged Democrats from in-person canvassing.

Among the most high-profile movers on the left is the Fair Fight organization, which voting rights advocate Stacey Abrams organized after her loss in the 2018 Georgia governor's race. Abrams' group on Thursday

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reported raising \$34.5 million between Oct. 15 and Nov. 23. That's not the same eye-popping numbers of some of the major party PACs, but it's targeted on voter turnout. As an example, Fair Fight texted 2 million voters within days of the runoffs being set with information about how to secure absentee ballots for the second round. That's about 80% of the total number of votes that Biden received in Georgia.

"People are very inspired by the Stacey Abrams magic," said Michael Smith, a Los Angeles donor who has given to several groups raising money for the Georgia Democrats. "Everyone in LA is raising money for Georgia. It's a moral issue."

Another group, called Really American PAC, has raised over \$593,000 and hopes to put up 50 billboards in rural counties that urge Trump supporters to sit out the election, echoing a sentiment shared by some of the president's most dejected supporters.

The group says twelve billboards have gone up so far, which state: "Perdue/Loeffler Didn't Deliver For Trump, DON'T Deliver For Them." And at first blush, they look like an ad from a right-leaning group.

In reality, however, Really American PAC was created by a progressive activist from Chicago named Justin Horwitz, who says he has a "shared interest" with the president's supporters in "defeating Washington insiders Perdue, Loeffler & McConnell, who happen to be trying to destroy Trump."

That gets to the center of a preoccupation for Republicans.

Trump, who will hold a rally in the state Saturday, has refused to concede the election and has repeatedly attacked Georgia's Republican governor and secretary of state while falsely saying Biden's win there was the product of voter fraud.

That forces Loeffler and Perdue into a delicate dance of needing to both fire up Trump's core supporters who may distrust the outcome of the election, while not alienating suburban moderates, as well as anti-Trump Republicans, who swung for Biden.

Both candidates are scheduled to attend Trump's rally.

"I think it's fraught with risk. If I'm Loeffler or Perdue, I wouldn't want him to come," said Dan Eberhart, a GOP donor who has previously given more than \$190,000 to Trump's election efforts. "With the undisciplined nature of Donald Trump, there could be one, two or three sentences that completely derail and change the direction of the campaign."

Slodysko reported from Washington.

Biden weighs pick for agriculture chief from diverse slate

By MARY CLARE JALONICK Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — One leading candidate for agriculture secretary hails from Cleveland, has the backing of progressives and has worked for years to boost food stamp programs. Another is a former senator from farm-state North Dakota who has championed production agriculture and boasts of a voting record squarely in the middle.

Three other possible selections have similarly varied backgrounds — one helped write and implement federal regulations for organic foods, another is California's agriculture secretary and represented wine grape growers, and a third has spent his career ensuring protections for farm workers.

President-elect Joe Biden's choices for secretary of agriculture are as diverse as the department of 100,000 employees that she or he would represent — and is especially critical this year as USDA provides extra aid for the hungry and oversees food production amid the pandemic.

For Biden, the emerging choice between Rep. Marcia Fudge of Ohio, former Sen. Heidi Heitkamp of North Dakota and several other potential candidates seems like another test of his vision for the Democratic Party — a contest between urban and rural and liberals and moderates, with the pick potentially placing an added emphasis on anti-hunger programs, farm subsidies or worker protections.

Besides Fudge and Heitkamp, other candidates mentioned for the post — and who have been pushed by some advocacy groups — are Kathleen Merrigan, deputy agriculture secretary under President Barack Obama and one of the architects of federal organic rules; Karen Ross, California's agriculture secretary,

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former USDA chief of staff and a former longtime president of the California Association of Winegrape Growers; and Arturo Rodriguez, the former president of the United Farm Workers.

Former Iowa Gov. Tom Vilsack, who served as Obama's agriculture secretary for eight years, is also being considered.

"This isn't like the secretary of defense where you're a hawk or a dove," says Eric Kessler, a Democrat who has long worked around agriculture policy and has been holding private calls with other influencers to speak with some of the possible candidates. "The Department of Agriculture is a massive enterprise that is led by a manager who is dependent on a diverse team of people."

And as Biden has said he wants his Cabinet to reflect the country's diversity, Kessler says the decisions on USDA and other agencies will "be driven by lots of factors, not just the individual's specific resume."

The agriculture post has been closely watched as all but two agriculture secretaries in the last 120 years have been white men. If chosen, Fudge would be the first Black woman to lead a department that has for years reckoned with a history of discriminating against both Black people and women.

Under Obama, the department paid out more than a billion dollars in a settlement with Black farmers and a smaller amount to female farmers, along with Hispanics and Native Americans who had repeatedly been denied farm loans over many decades.

Fudge enjoys the strong backing of South Carolina Rep. Jim Clyburn, the No. 3 House Democrat who gave Biden a key nod of support in the primaries. Biden has said he wants a diverse Cabinet, and some Black leaders have said he needs to do more to achieve that.

Clyburn has aggressively pushed Fudge for the post, saying Biden should pick someone who "understands the other side of agriculture ... It's one thing to grow food, but another to dispense it, and nobody would be better at that than Marcia Fudge."

As a member of the House Agriculture Committee, Fudge has fiercely advocated for food stamps and other federal programs that help urban areas stem hunger and grow food. Beyond Clyburn, she has the backing of progressive groups who hope she could turn the department's focus. In a joint letter to Biden, several of those groups said Fudge "has long been an ally to farmers, food-chain workers, consumers and rural communities." Some unions have also backed her as she has pushed for worker protections in meatpacking plants during the pandemic.

Heitkamp is a favorite of farm groups that have worked closely with her and of Democrats who want to improve their outreach to rural areas. But she has also been a strong supporter of food aid programs, having represented swaths of rural poverty until her reelection defeat in 2018. And her family relied on food stamps intermittently when she was growing up as one of seven children from a town of 90 people in the state.

Farm programs — billions of dollars in subsidies for commodity crops and grants for rural infrastructure, among other benefits — and food aid for the poor have long been welded together in Washington. Lawmakers of both parties who support one piece have traditionally supported the other, creating a compact that has held firm amid growing partisanship.

Though they have different backgrounds, Fudge and Heitkamp have helped craft and voted for several multibillion-dollar farm bills that supported both sectors.

"Agriculture is one place that in a post-Trump world the secretary will play a very important role in bringing different perspectives and parties together," said Matt Paul, a longtime aide to Vilsack who worked at USDA with him. "There's really not a choice. You've got to do both."

While Vilsack, Merrigan and Ross all have significant leadership experience at USDA, Rodriguez would be an unusual pick as his experience mostly centers on the labor sector. But he has the backing of Texas Rep. Joaquin Castro, the chair of the Congressional Hispanic Caucus, who wrote in an op-ed this week that appointing him as the first Latino secretary of agriculture "would finally give Latinos real power in the agricultural industry, the industry that our labor has held up for so long."

Heitkamp would have one big advantage over all the other candidates: an easy path to confirmation in the Republican-led Senate, where she was well liked and often worked across the aisle.

She already has the backing of West Virginia Sen. Joe Manchin, a fellow moderate Democrat who joined

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her in supporting some of Trump's nominees four years ago. "You won't find a better person than Heidi Heitkamp," Manchin said in a statement, adding that she would make a "tremendous" agriculture secretary.

And at least two Republican senators have praised her as well — Iowa Sen. Chuck Grassley, who tweeted this week about her ability "to get things done," and Senate Agriculture Committee Chair Pat Roberts, who is retiring at the end of the year.

Roberts said last month that Biden "couldn't make a finer choice" than Heitkamp.

"She's easy to work with," he said. "I don't think she's that partisan, but she knows agriculture."

Associated Press writers Matthew Daly and Seth Borenstein in Washington contributed to this report.

Pressure mounts on Biden to make diverse picks for top posts

By WILL WEISSERT, LISA MASCARO and STEVE PEOPLES Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President-elect Joe Biden is facing increasing pressure to expand the racial and ideological diversity in his choices for Cabinet and other top jobs. A month and a half before he takes office, he's drawing rebukes from activists who fear he'll fall short on promises to build an administration that looks like the country it governs.

Of the nine major picks Biden has made so far, only two — Secretary of State choice Antony Blinken and chief of staff Ron Klain — are white men. That's a historic low that so far outpaces the historically diverse Cabinet that Barack Obama assembled in 2009.

But civil rights leaders are grumbling that none of the "big four" Cabinet positions — the secretaries of state, defense and treasury and the attorney general — has yet gone to a person of color. And Biden is declining to commit to doing so.

"I promise you, it'll be the single most diverse Cabinet based on race, color, based on gender that's ever existed in the United States of America," the president-elect said instead during a news conference Friday.

That came after Congressional Hispanic Democrats expressed dismay during a call with Klain and other Biden advisers on Thursday about the treatment of New Mexico Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham, who reportedly removed her name from consideration to be the new administration's interior secretary. They urged that she remain a candidate to head the more prominent Department of Health and Human Services, but it's not clear she will.

"I do think there needs to be a little more focus on the progressive wing of the party as well as African Americans," Martin Luther King III, the son of the slain civil rights leader, said in a phone interview Friday. "But you can't assume that that's not going to be addressed."

Biden already faces tough Senate fights to get some of his key picks confirmed by Republicans, and discontent among his own supporters over his commitment to diversity could prove especially problematic. He's urging bipartisanship but could find himself in a situation similar to Obama, who took office in 2009 talking of moving past political scuffling but underestimated strong pushback in Congress.

Today's Senate is more bare-knuckled and hyper-partisan than when Biden was vice president, including GOP senators eyeing their own 2024 White House runs. But initial meetings between nominees and senators seem to be going well.

"While we fully expected disagreement with some members of the Senate, we're gratified by the overwhelming reaction and strong bipartisan acclaim that our nominees have received overall," says transition spokesman Sean Savett.

During his decades in the Senate and even while serving as Obama's vice president, Biden relied on a small group of close advisers who were largely white. And so far after the election, he has again proven likely to choose people he's most comfortable with for key posts.

In addition to race, another point of contention could come from the progressive wing of the Democratic Party. Many activists cheered Biden's pick for treasury secretary of Janet Yellen, an advocate for policies designed to improve the lives of the working class. But they have otherwise expressed concern that Biden will make major staffing picks who won't push hard enough for significant reforms across a variety of

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policy areas.

Maurice Mitchell, national director of the Working Families Party advocacy group, said he understands Biden will want trusted advisers, meaning he could lean on people who have long been close to him. But he said that coping with such large challenges as the coronavirus pandemic and an economy in distress while combating economic inequality and institutional racism will require looking beyond "people who have been involved, in some ways, in some of the decisions over 40 years that got us here."

"The Biden administration needs to choose people who have demonstrated that they are visionaries, are tough fighters who have a large-scale approach of how to use machinery of the federal government to fight for working people," Mitchell said. "This is not the time for moderation and gradualism."

NAACP President Derrick Johnson noted that Biden has gone to great lengths to make announcements and staffing decisions related to the pandemic, the economy and climate change, but "we have not seen any of that same energy for racial justice."

"This is an opportunity for the reset button," and Biden's actions need to match his campaign rhetoric on civil rights, Johnson said. He said that Biden has agreed to meet with civil rights leaders for the first time next week — but only after weeks of requests.

Biden, with his long political experience, listens to the criticism but says, "It's each one of these groups' jobs to push, push" for diverse leaders across government.

Lorella Praeli, president of Community Change Action, cheered Biden choice of Cuban-American immigrant Alejandro Mayorkas to lead the Department of Homeland Security. But her organization and others will be watching where the president-elect goes from here.

"There are Latinos who are ready for Cabinet-level positions and senior-level roles across our government so it is a matter of choice," Praeli said.

Biden still has many top jobs to fill, and many of the top contenders are people of color.

Democratic National Committee Chairman Tom Perez, former Massachusetts Gov. Deval Patrick and California Attorney General Xavier Becerra have all been mentioned for attorney general. Ohio Rep. Marcia Fudge is thought to be a frontrunner to run the Agriculture Department.

"The president-elect has said he's going to have a Cabinet that looks like America, feels like America — and you see that coming into focus," Rodney Slater, who was transportation secretary for President Bill Clinton, said during a briefing Friday hosted by the Meridian International Center.

Still, things have not gone smoothly for all of those thought to be under consideration. On Thursday's call with Klain, Congressional Hispanic Caucus members said word that Lujan Grisham had declined to be interior secretary shouldn't have become public.

Caucus members asked that at least 20% of all nominated positions be filled by Latinos, including at least one of the "big four" posts.

Klain responded that the Biden team is working toward including Latinos in the big six Cabinet positions -- adding Homeland Security and Health and Human Services to the traditional four, according to a person familiar with the call. Given the selection of Mayorkas, that would seemingly make it less likely that a Latino might be chosen for defense or attorney general.

King said he hoped Biden would appoint an African American to one of the "big four" posts, especially attorney general.

COVID-19 relief: What's on the table as Congress seeks deal

By ANDREW TAYLOR Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — After numerous fits and starts and months of inaction, optimism is finally building in Washington for a COVID-19 aid bill that would offer relief for businesses, the unemployed, schools, and health care providers, among others struggling as caseloads are spiking.

Under pressure from moderates in both parties, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell have initiated late-game negotiations in hopes of combining a relief package of, in all likelihood, less than \$1 trillion with a separate \$1.4 trillion governmentwide omnibus spending bill. The duo

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were the architects of the \$1.8 trillion CARES Act, the landmark relief bill passed in March.

Success is not certain and considerable differences remain over items such as aid to states and local governments, liability protections for businesses and universities reopening during the pandemic, and whether to issue a second round of \$1,200 direct payments to most Americans.

But renewing soon-to-expire jobless benefits, providing a second round of "paycheck protection" subsidies, and funding to distribute vaccines are sure bets to be included in any deal.

Here are the top issues for the end-stage COVID-19 relief talks.

JOBLESS BENEFITS

The CARES Act created a \$600 per-week bonus COVID-19 unemployment benefit that sustained household incomes and consumer demand during the springtime shutdowns. It expired at the end of July and Republicans are against its renewal. The CARES Act also allowed for additional weeks of emergency pandemic unemployment payments at regular benefit levels — which are themselves about to expire, on Dec. 31. Any deal is sure to extend the emergency benefits, and a bipartisan compromise framework that's helping guide the talks calls for restoring half of the bonus benefit, or \$300 per week more.

BUSINESS SUBSIDIES

Another sure thing is a reauthorization of the Paycheck Protection Program, also established by the CARES Act, to give a second round of subsidies to businesses struggling through the pandemic and make other changes to the program, which enjoys bipartisan support but is particularly revered by Republicans. Leftover PPP funds from two springtime infusions into the program would cover almost half of the \$300 billion or so cost.

DIRECT PAYMENTS

President Trump has long supported another \$1,200 round of direct payments to most Americans, subject to income limits that make upper-bracket taxpayers ineligible. House Democrats support the idea, but it is unpopular with many Senate Republicans and was left out of a scaled-back Senate GOP plan. A bipartisan bill by Sens. Susan Collins, R-Maine, and others, leaves out the direct payments as well, and their up to \$300 billion cost could render them too expensive for inclusion in the year-end package, though lawmakers ranging from Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, D-N.Y., to Sen. Josh Hawley, R-Mo., are pushing to retain them.

STATE AND LOCAL GOVERNMENTS

This is one of the trickiest issues in the talks — another round of aid to states and local governments to follow a \$150 billion installment this spring. It's a top priority of Pelosi and other Democrats but is opposed by many Republicans, who warn it would bail out states run by Democrats like California and New York. Trump doesn't like the idea as well, but Pelosi's demands for the money have been slashed from earlier amounts approaching \$1 trillion. Revenue losses due to COVID-19 haven't been as large as feared. But smaller localities left out of the first tranche of payments are eager for funding. A plan endorsed by moderates would provide \$160 billion.

LIABILITY SHIELD

Businesses reopening during the pandemic have for months been seeking a shield against lawsuits claiming negligence for COVID-19 outbreaks. McConnell is the most potent backer of the idea and he's drafted sweeping protections against lawsuits for businesses, universities, and other organizations. The powerful trial lawyers lobby — which still holds great influence with Democrats — is opposed, and McConnell's fears of a wave of COVID-related lawsuits haven't materialized. Veteran Senate Judiciary Committee members Dick Durbin, D-Ill., and John Cornyn, R-Texas, have been deputized to negotiate the issue, a sign the talks are at a serious stage.

ODDS AND ENDS

Numerous smaller items are ripe for inclusion, including \$10 billion for the Postal Service, a \$20 billion-plus deal adding food aid sought by Democrats and farm subsidies favored by Republicans, more than \$100 billion in funding for schools seeking to reopen, along with funding for child care, Amtrak, transit systems, and health care providers.

UN health chief: World can start dreaming of pandemic's end

By EDITH M. LEDERER Associated Press

UNITED NATIONS (AP) — The U.N. health chief declared Friday that positive results from coronavirus vaccine trials mean the world “can begin to dream about the end of the pandemic,” but he said rich and powerful nations must not trample the poor and marginalized “in the stampede for vaccines.”

In an address to the U.N. General Assembly’s first high-level session on the pandemic, World Health Organization Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus cautioned that while the virus can be stopped, “the path ahead remains treacherous.”

The pandemic has shown humanity at “its best and worst,” he said, pointing to “inspiring acts of compassion and self-sacrifice, breathtaking feats of science and innovation, and heartwarming demonstrations of solidarity, but also disturbing signs of self-interest, blame-shifting and divisions.”

Referring to the current upsurge in infections and deaths, Tedros said without naming any countries that “where science is drowned out by conspiracy theories, where solidarity is undermined by division, where sacrifice is substituted with self interest, the virus thrives, the virus spreads.”

He warned in a virtual address to the high-level meeting that a vaccine “will not address the vulnerabilities that lie at its root” -- poverty, hunger, inequality and climate change, which he said must be tackled once the pandemic ends.

“We cannot and we must not go back to the same exploitative patterns of production and consumption, the same disregard for the planet that sustains all life, the same cycle of panic and meddling and the same divisive politics that fueled this pandemic,” he said.

On vaccines, Tedros said, “the light at the end of the tunnel is growing steadily brighter,” but vaccines “must be shared equally as global public goods, not as private commodities that widen inequalities and become yet another reason some people are left behind.”

He said WHO’s ACT-Accelerator program to quickly develop and distribute vaccines fairly “is in danger of becoming no more than a noble gesture” without major new funding.

He said \$4.3 billion is needed immediately to lay the groundwork for mass procurement and delivery of vaccines and a further \$23.9 billion is required for 2021. That total, Tedros said, is less than one-half of 1 percent of the \$11 trillion in stimulus packages announced so far by the Group of 20, the world’s richest countries.

U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres made a similar appeal for funding for the ACT-Accelerator at Thursday’s opening of the two-day General Assembly session. U.N. spokesman Stephane Dujarric said Friday that Guterres is frustrated and would have liked see “a much much higher rate of investment by those countries who can.”

Henrietta Fore, head of the U.N. children’s agency UNICEF, said, “When poor countries started to try to buy vaccines,” there were none available or the price was too high.

UNICEF typically distributes 2 billion vaccine doses a year, she said, and once it can get COVID-19 vaccines, “We’re going to double that next year, so we need all hands on deck.”

U.S. Health and Human Services Secretary Alex Azar said three of the six vaccine candidates that the U.S. government has supported have reported promising data and “I have every reason to believe that more good news about vaccines and other countermeasures is on the way.”

U.S. President Donald Trump has formally notified the U.N. of its withdrawal from WHO, which he has harshly criticized for its response to the pandemic and accused of bowing to Chinese influence.

Azar criticized the lack of “transparent information sharing” about COVID-19 and WHO’s investigation of the virus’ origin. But he said he wanted health ministers to know they can count on U.S. cooperation to

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defeat the virus "with no strings attached," and stressed that the U.S. "is providing to countries combating the virus more funding, equipment, and support than any other nation."

Despite years of warnings, WHO's Tedros said, many countries were unprepared for the pandemic and assumed their health systems would protect their people. Many countries that have done best dealing with the crisis had experience responding to the outbreaks of SARS, MERS, HINI and other infectious diseases, he said.

WHO has been sharply criticized for not taking a stronger and more vocal role in handling the pandemic.

Tedros told the meeting that "clearly, the global system for preparedness needs attention."

He said a WHO commission established in September is reviewing international health regulations. WHO is also working with several countries on developing a pilot program in which countries agree to regular and transparent reviews of their health preparedness, he said.

The pandemic also showed the need for a global system to share samples of viruses and other pathogens that cause disease to facilitate development of "medical counter-measures as global public goods" he said, welcoming Switzerland's offer to use a high-security laboratory to manage a new biobank.

Tedros also backed European Union chief Charles Michel's proposal for an international treaty under which WHO would monitor the risks of emerging infectious diseases in animals for transmission to humans, ensure alerts of health risks, improve access to health care, and address financing needs. He said this would provide "the political underpinning" for strengthening the global health sector.

The world spends \$7.5 trillion on health every year, almost 10% of global GDP, Tedros said, but most of that money is spent in rich countries on treating disease rather than on "promoting and protecting health."

"We need a radical rethink on the way we view and value health," he said.

"If the world is to avoid another crisis on this scale," Tedros said, "investments in basic public health functions, especially primary health care, are essential, and all roads should lead to universal health coverage with a strong foundation of primary health care."

AP Medical Writer Linda A. Johnson in Fairless Hills, Pa., contributed to this report.

Judge: Trump administration must take new DACA applications

NEW YORK (AP) — The Trump administration must accept new applications for the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program that protects some young immigrants from deportation, a federal judge ruled Friday, in vacating a memo from the acting Homeland Security secretary that had suspended it.

U.S. District Judge Nicholas Garaufis said the government had to post a public notice within three days — including on its website and the websites of all other relevant government agencies — that new DACA applications were being accepted.

The ruling follows one from November where Garaufis said Acting Department of Homeland Security Secretary Chad Wolf was unlawfully in his position.

On Friday, the judge said that invalidated the memo Wolf had issued in July suspending DACA for new applications and reducing how long renewals were valid from two years down to one year.

Wolf had issued his memo after the U.S. Supreme Court had ruled in June that President Donald Trump failed to follow rule-making procedures when he tried to end the program.

Garaufis also ordered the government to put together a status report on the DACA program by Jan. 4.

An email seeking comment was sent to the Department of Homeland Security.

"Every time the outgoing administration tried to use young immigrants as political scapegoats, they defiled the values of our nation. The court's order makes clear that fairness, inclusion, and compassion matter," said New York state Attorney General Letitia James, who led a number of state attorneys general in one of the lawsuits against the administration.

DACA, which was started in 2012 during the Obama administration, allows certain young immigrants who were brought to the country as children to legally work and shields them from deportation. Those who are approved for it must first go through background checks and regularly renew.

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The Trump administration had announced the end of the program in 2017, leading to the legal challenges that wound up in front of the Supreme Court.

In making its ruling, the Supreme Court upheld DACA, saying that the particular way the administration had gone about shutting it down was improper, but that the president did have the authority to do so.

"Dreamers have fought so hard for justice. For the second time, a court has ordered the administration to resume processing DACA applications. It's time to do the right thing," Jennifer Molina, a spokesperson for President-elect Joe Biden's transition team, said Friday. "On day one, President-elect Biden will ensure Dreamers and their families have the opportunity to live their lives free of fear and continue to contribute to our country."

About 650,000 people are currently enrolled in the program.

Biden officially secures enough electors to become president

By MICHAEL R. BLOOD and NICHOLAS RICCARDI Associated Press

California certified its presidential election Friday and appointed 55 electors pledged to vote for Democrat Joe Biden, officially handing him the Electoral College majority needed to win the White House.

Secretary of State Alex Padilla's formal approval of Biden's win in the state brought his tally of pledged electors so far to 279, according to a tally by The Associated Press. That's just over the 270 threshold for victory.

These steps in the election are often ignored formalities. But the hidden mechanics of electing a U.S. president have drawn new scrutiny this year as President Donald Trump continues to deny Biden's victory and pursues increasingly specious legal strategies aimed at overturning the results before they are finalized.

Although it's been apparent for weeks that Biden won the presidential election, his accrual of more than 270 electors is the first step toward the White House, said Edward B. Foley, a law professor at Ohio State University.

"It is a legal milestone and the first milestone that has that status," Foley said. "Everything prior to that was premised on what we call projections."

The electors named Friday will meet Dec. 14, along with counterparts in each state, to formally vote for the next president. Most states have laws binding their electors to the winner of the popular vote in their state, measures that were upheld by a Supreme Court decision this year. There have been no suggestions that any of Biden's pledged electors would contemplate not voting for him.

Results of the Electoral College vote are due to be received, and typically approved, by Congress on Jan. 6. Although lawmakers can object to accepting the electors' votes, it would be almost impossible for Biden to be blocked at that point.

The Democratic-controlled House and Republican-controlled Senate would both vote separately to resolve any disputes. One already has arisen from Pennsylvania, where 75 Republican lawmakers signed a statement on Friday urging Congress to block the state's electoral votes from being cast for Biden. But the state's Republican U.S. senator, Pat Toomey, said soon afterward that he would not be objecting to Pennsylvania's slate of electors, underscoring the difficulty in trying to change the election results through Congress.

"As a practical matter, we know that Joe Biden is going to be inaugurated on Jan. 20," Foley said.

That was clear in the days after the election, when the count of mail ballots gradually made clear that Biden had won victories in enough states to win the Electoral College. It became even more apparent in late November, when every swing state won by Biden certified him as the winner of its elections and appointed his electors to the Electoral College. Trump has fruitlessly tried to stop those states from certifying Biden as the winner and appointing electors for the former vice president.

He made no effort in deeply Democratic California, the most populous state in the nation and the trove of its largest number of electoral votes. Three more states won by Biden — Colorado, Hawaii and New Jersey — have not yet certified their results. When they do, Biden will have 306 Electoral College votes to Trump's 232.

Trump and his allies have brought at least 50 legal cases trying to overturn the results in the swing states

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Biden won — mainly Arizona, Georgia, Michigan, Pennsylvania and Wisconsin. More than 30 have been rejected or dropped, according to an AP tally.

Trump and his allies have also raised the far-fetched notion that Republican state legislatures in those states could appoint a rival set of electors pledged to Trump.

But state Republican leaders have rejected that approach, and it would likely be futile in any case. According to federal law, both chambers of Congress would need to vote to accept a competing slate of electors. If they don't, the electors appointed by the states' governors — all pledged to Biden in these cases — must be used.

The last remaining move to block the election would be the quixotic effort to vote down the electors in Congress.

This tactic has been tried — a handful of congressional Democrats in 2000, 2004 and 2016 objected to officially making both George W. Bush and Trump president. But the numbers were not enough to block the two men from taking office.

Scene from 'Elf' comes to life as Buddy meets dad in Boston

BOSTON (AP) — Just like a real-life movie, the story of Buddy the Elf meeting his biological father has come to life, just in time for the holidays.

Doug Henning wore a costume like the one actor Will Ferrell's character wore in "Elf" while meeting his father face to face for the first time last week at Boston's Logan Airport. He even broke into the same awkward song from the 2003 movie — sample lyrics: "I'm here, with my dad. And we never met, and he wants me to sing him a song!"

"When he came out of the airport, he probably thought I was a lunatic," Henning, 43, of Eliot, Maine, told Boston.com. "It was a really good way to break the ice."

His biological father didn't get the joke because he hadn't seen the movie, which is about a man raised at the North Pole who meets his dad for the first time. But that didn't stop him from giving his son a big hug.

Henning said he was raised by "amazing" adoptive parents but he was excited when cousins he met through ancestry.com helped to put him in touch with his biological father. Just like the movie, the father didn't know about his son.

The two met on Zoom and Henning's dad was able to fly to Boston for Thanksgiving.

Henning said he was inspired to dress as the character from "Elf" after watching the movie before the meetup. Henning said his father gained a son and became a grandfather. Henning is the first of the father's children to become a parent.

Trump orders most American troops to leave Somalia

By ROBERT BURNS AP National Security Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Pentagon said Friday it is pulling most U.S. troops out of Somalia on President Donald Trump's orders, continuing a post-election push by Trump to shrink U.S. involvement in counterterrorism missions abroad.

Without providing details, the Pentagon said in a short statement that "a majority" of U.S. troops and assets in Somalia will be withdrawn in early 2021. There are currently about 700 troops in that Horn of Africa nation, training and advising local forces in an extended fight against the extremist group al-Shabab, an affiliate of al-Qaida.

Trump recently ordered troop drawdowns in Afghanistan and Iraq, and he was expected to withdraw some or all troops from Somalia. Gen. Mark Milley, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, had said on Wednesday that the future structure of the U.S. military presence in Somalia was still in debate.

The adjusted U.S. presence, Milley said, would amount to "a relatively small footprint, relatively low cost in terms of number of personnel and in terms of money." He provided no specifics but stressed that the U.S. remained concerned about the threat posed by al-Shabab, which he called "an extension of al-Qaida," the extremist group that planned the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks on the United States from Afghanistan.

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"They do have some reach and they could if left unattended conduct operations against not only U.S. interests in the region but also against the homeland," he said. "So they require attention." Noting that Somalia remains a dangerous place for Americans, he said that a CIA officer was killed there recently.

The acting secretary of defense, Christopher Miller, made a brief visit to Somalia last week and met with U.S. troops.

Depending on what remains of the U.S. presence in Somalia when he takes office Jan. 20, President-elect Joe Biden could reverse Trump's drawdown or make other adjustments to reflect his counterterrorism priorities. The U.S. military also has a presence in neighboring Djibouti on the Bab al-Mandab Strait.

Army Gen. Stephen Townsend, head of U.S. Africa Command, said in a written statement that the U.S. contingent in Somalia will "decrease significantly," but he offered no specifics. "U.S. forces will remain in the region and our tasks and commitment to partners remain unchanged," he said.

"This action is not a withdrawal and an end to our efforts but a reposition to continue our efforts in East Africa," he added.

Rep. Jim Langevin, a Rhode Island Democrat, criticized the Trump pullback in Somalia as a "surrender to al-Qaida and a gift of China." Langevin is chairman of the House Armed Services Committee's Intelligence and Emerging Threats and Capabilities Subcommittee.

"When U.S. forces leave Somalia in response to today's order, it becomes harder for diplomats and aid workers to help people resolve conflicts without violence and loss of life," Langevin said. "With upcoming elections in Somalia and conflict raging in neighboring Ethiopia, abandoning our partners could not come at a worse time."

Langevin said China will use the opportunity to build its influence in the Horn of Africa.

The Pentagon said the drawdown in Somalia does not mark the end of U.S. counterterrorism efforts there.

"As a result of this decision, some forces may be reassigned outside of East Africa," it said. "However, the remaining forces will be repositioned from Somalia into neighboring countries in order to allow cross-border operations by both U.S. and partner forces to maintain pressure against violent extremist organizations operating in Somalia."

It added: "The U.S. will retain the capability to conduct targeted counterterrorism operations in Somalia, and collect early warnings and indicators regarding threats to the homeland."

The nature of the threat posed by al-Shabab and the appropriate U.S. response has been a matter of increasing debate in the Pentagon, which has been looking for opportunities to shift its focus toward China as a greater long-term challenge.

A Defense Department watchdog report last week said U.S. Africa Command has seen a "definitive shift" this year in al-Shabab's focus to attack U.S. interests in the region. Africa Command says al-Shabab is Africa's most "dangerous" and "imminent" threat.

COVID-19 relief: What's on the table as Congress seeks deal

By ANDREW TAYLOR Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — After numerous fits and starts and months of inaction, optimism is finally building in Washington for a COVID-19 aid bill that would offer relief for businesses, the unemployed, schools, and health care providers, among others struggling as caseloads are spiking.

Under pressure from moderates in both parties, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell have initiated late-game negotiations in hopes of combining a relief package of, in all likelihood, less than \$1 trillion with a separate \$1.4 trillion governmentwide omnibus spending bill. The duo were the architects of the \$1.8 trillion CARES Act, the landmark relief bill passed in March.

Success is not certain and considerable differences remain over items such as aid to states and local governments, liability protections for businesses and universities reopening during the pandemic, and whether to issue a second round of \$1,200 direct payments to most Americans.

But renewing soon-to-expire jobless benefits, providing a second round of "paycheck protection" subsidies, and funding to distribute vaccines are sure bets to be included in any deal.

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Here are the top issues for the end-stage COVID-19 relief talks.

JOBLESS BENEFITS

The CARES Act created a \$600 per-week bonus COVID-19 unemployment benefit that sustained household incomes and consumer demand during the springtime shutdowns. It expired at the end of July and Republicans are against its renewal. The CARES Act also allowed for additional weeks of emergency pandemic unemployment payments at regular benefit levels — which are themselves about to expire, on Dec. 31. Any deal is sure to extend the emergency benefits, and a bipartisan compromise framework that's helping guide the talks calls for restoring half of the bonus benefit, or \$300 per week more.

BUSINESS SUBSIDIES

Another sure thing is a reauthorization of the Paycheck Protection Program, also established by the CARES Act, to give a second round of subsidies to businesses struggling through the pandemic and make other changes to the program, which enjoys bipartisan support but is particularly revered by Republicans. Leftover PPP funds from two springtime infusions into the program would cover almost half of the \$300 billion or so cost.

DIRECT PAYMENTS

President Trump has long supported another \$1,200 round of direct payments to most Americans, subject to income limits that make upper-bracket taxpayers ineligible. House Democrats support the idea, but it is unpopular with many Senate Republicans and was left out of a scaled-back Senate GOP plan. A bipartisan bill by Sens. Susan Collins, R-Maine, and others, leaves out the direct payments as well, and their up to \$300 billion cost could render them too expensive for inclusion in the year-end package, though lawmakers ranging from Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, D-N.Y., to Sen. Josh Hawley, R-Mo., are pushing to retain them.

STATE AND LOCAL GOVERNMENTS

This is one of the trickiest issues in the talks — another round of aid to states and local governments to follow a \$150 billion installment this spring. It's a top priority of Pelosi and other Democrats but is opposed by many Republicans, who warn it would bail out states run by Democrats like California and New York. Trump doesn't like the idea as well, but Pelosi's demands for the money have been slashed from earlier amounts approaching \$1 trillion. Revenue losses due to COVID-19 haven't been as large as feared. But smaller localities left out of the first tranche of payments are eager for funding. A plan endorsed by moderates would provide \$160 billion.

LIABILITY SHIELD

Businesses reopening during the pandemic have for months been seeking a shield against lawsuits claiming negligence for COVID-19 outbreaks. McConnell is the most potent backer of the idea and he's drafted sweeping protections against lawsuits for businesses, universities, and other organizations. The powerful trial lawyers lobby — which still holds great influence with Democrats — is opposed, and McConnell's fears of a wave of COVID-related lawsuits haven't materialized. Veteran Senate Judiciary Committee members Dick Durbin, D-Ill., and John Cornyn, R-Texas, have been deputized to negotiate the issue, a sign the talks are at a serious stage.

ODDS AND ENDS

Numerous smaller items are ripe for inclusion, including \$10 billion for the Postal Service, a \$20 billion-plus deal adding food aid sought by Democrats and farm subsidies favored by Republicans, more than \$100 billion in funding for schools seeking to reopen, along with funding for child care, Amtrak, transit systems, and health care providers.

This version of the story corrects that Ocasio-Cortez is from New York.

Pentagon installs 2 Trump allies on defense advisory board

By ROBERT BURNS AP National Security Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Pentagon has appointed two close allies of President Donald Trump, Corey Lewandowski and David Bossie, to a defense advisory board, continuing a post-election purge in the final weeks of the administration.

The acting secretary of defense, Christopher Miller, who was installed by Trump on Nov. 9 after he fired then-Defense Secretary Mark Esper, said in a written statement Friday that nine members of the Defense Business Board had been replaced with the appointment of 11 new members.

Lewandowski and Bossie are among Trump's most vocal supporters. The nine other appointees are Henry Dreifus, Robert McMahon, Cory Mills, Bill Bruner, Christopher Shank, Joseph Schmidt, Keary Miller, Alan Weh and Earl Matthews.

"These individuals have a proven record of achievement within their respective fields and have demonstrated leadership that will serve our department and our nation well," Miller said.

The Miller statement initially said the nine individuals removed from the board had been serving in "expired positions," implying they were overdue to leave. But later the Pentagon amended the statement to say some board members had been "terminated." It gave no reason for the firings.

The board's charter says members are appointed for terms ranging from one to four years, with annual renewals.

The board's charter says members must possess "a proven track record of sound judgment and business acumen in leading or governing large, complex private sector corporations or organizations and a wealth of top-level, global business experience in the areas of executive management, corporate governance, audit and finance, human resources, economics, technology, or healthcare."

The role of the Defense Business Board, which was established in 2002, is to provide the secretary of defense and deputy secretary of defense with independent advice and recommendations on overall Defense Department management, business processes and governance from a private-sector perspective.

Lewandowski was Trump's first of three campaign managers in 2016, and both he and Bossie were regulars on the campaign trail with Trump this year.

Bossie was brought on as part of a 2016 campaign team shakeup to help Trump defeat Hillary Clinton. He briefly fell out of favor with Trump aides over his involvement with political groups that sought to fundraise off Trump's name but did not benefit his reelection campaign. He found his way back into Trump's orbit earlier this year thanks to his vigorous advocacy of the president.

— Associated Press writer Zeke Miller contributed to this report.

Pressure mounts on Biden to make diverse picks for top posts

By WILL WEISSERT, LISA MASCARO and STEVE PEOPLES Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President-elect Joe Biden is facing increasing pressure to expand the racial and ideological diversity in his choices for Cabinet and other top jobs. A month and a half before he takes office, he's drawing rebukes from activists who fear he'll fall short on promises to build an administration that looks like the country it governs.

Of the nine major picks Biden has made so far, only two — Secretary of State choice Antony Blinken and chief of staff Ron Klain — are white men. That's a historic low that so far outpaces the historically diverse Cabinet that Barack Obama assembled in 2009.

But civil rights leaders are grumbling that none of the "big four" Cabinet positions — the secretaries of state, defense and treasury and the attorney general — has yet gone to a person of color. And Biden is declining to commit to doing so.

"I promise you, it'll be the single most diverse Cabinet based on race, color, based on gender that's ever

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existed in the United States of America," the president-elect said instead during a news conference Friday.

That came after Congressional Hispanic Democrats expressed dismay during a call with Klain and other Biden advisers on Thursday about the treatment of New Mexico Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham, who reportedly removed her name from consideration to be the new administration's interior secretary. They urged that she remain a candidate to head the more prominent Department of Health and Human Services, but it's not clear she will.

"I do think there needs to be a little more focus on the progressive wing of the party as well as African Americans," Martin Luther King III, the son of the slain civil rights leader, said in a phone interview Friday. "But you can't assume that that's not going to be addressed."

Biden already faces tough Senate fights to get some of his key picks confirmed by Republicans, and discontent among his own supporters over his commitment to diversity could prove especially problematic. He's urging bipartisanship but could find himself in a situation similar to Obama, who took office in 2009 talking of moving past political scuffling but underestimated strong pushback in Congress.

Today's Senate is more bare-knuckled and hyper-partisan than when Biden was vice president, including GOP senators eyeing their own 2024 White House runs. But initial meetings between nominees and senators seem to be going well.

"While we fully expected disagreement with some members of the Senate, we're gratified by the overwhelming reaction and strong bipartisan acclaim that our nominees have received overall," says transition spokesman Sean Savett.

During his decades in the Senate and even while serving as Obama's vice president, Biden relied on a small group of close advisers who were largely white. And so far after the election, he has again proven likely to choose people he's most comfortable with for key posts.

In addition to race, another point of contention could come from the progressive wing of the Democratic Party. Many activists cheered Biden's pick for treasury secretary of Janet Yellen, an advocate for policies designed to improve the lives of the working class. But they have otherwise expressed concern that Biden will make major staffing picks who won't push hard enough for significant reforms across a variety of policy areas.

Maurice Mitchell, national director of the Working Families Party advocacy group, said he understands Biden will want trusted advisers, meaning he could lean on people who have long been close to him. But he said that coping with such large challenges as the coronavirus pandemic and an economy in distress while combating economic inequality and institutional racism will require looking beyond "people who have been involved, in some ways, in some of the decisions over 40 years that got us here."

"The Biden administration needs to choose people who have demonstrated that they are visionaries, are tough fighters who have a large-scale approach of how to use machinery of the federal government to fight for working people," Mitchell said. "This is not the time for moderation and gradualism."

NAACP President Derrick Johnson noted that Biden has gone to great lengths to make announcements and staffing decisions related to the pandemic, the economy and climate change, but "we have not seen any of that same energy for racial justice."

"This is an opportunity for the reset button," and Biden's actions need to match his campaign rhetoric on civil rights, Johnson said. He said that Biden has agreed to meet with civil rights leaders for the first time next week — but only after weeks of requests.

Biden, with his long political experience, listens to the criticism but says, "It's each one of these groups' jobs to push, push" for diverse leaders across government.

Lorella Praeli, president of Community Change Action, cheered Biden choice of Cuban-American immigrant Alejandro Mayorkas to lead the Department of Homeland Security. But her organization and others will be watching where the president-elect goes from here.

"There are Latinos who are ready for Cabinet-level positions and senior-level roles across our government so it is a matter of choice," Praeli said.

Biden still has many top jobs to fill, and many of the top contenders are people of color.

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Democratic National Committee Chairman Tom Perez, former Massachusetts Gov. Deval Patrick and California Attorney General Xavier Becerra have all been mentioned for attorney general. Ohio Rep. Marcia Fudge is thought to be a frontrunner to run the Agriculture Department.

"The president-elect has said he's going to have a Cabinet that looks like America, feels like America — and you see that coming into focus," Rodney Slater, who was transportation secretary for President Bill Clinton, said during a briefing Friday hosted by the Meridian International Center.

Still, things have not gone smoothly for all of those thought to be under consideration. On Thursday's call with Klain, Congressional Hispanic Caucus members said word that Lujan Grisham had declined to be interior secretary shouldn't have become public.

Caucus members asked that at least 20% of all nominated positions be filled by Latinos, including at least one of the "big four" posts.

Klain responded that the Biden team is working toward including Latinos in the big six Cabinet positions -- adding Homeland Security and Health and Human Services to the traditional four, according to a person familiar with the call. Given the selection of Mayorkas, that would seemingly make it less likely that a Latino might be chosen for defense or attorney general.

King said he hoped Biden would appoint an African American to one of the "big four" posts, especially attorney general.

As hospitals cope with a COVID-19 surge, cyber threats loom

By MARION RENAULT and WILSON RING Associated Press

BURLINGTON, Vt. (AP) — By late morning on Oct. 28, staff at the University of Vermont Medical Center noticed the hospital's phone system wasn't working.

Then the internet went down, and the Burlington-based center's technical infrastructure with it. Employees lost access to databases, digital health records, scheduling systems and other online tools they rely on for patient care.

Administrators scrambled to keep the hospital operational — cancelling non-urgent appointments, reverting to pen-and-paper record keeping and rerouting some critical care patients to nearby hospitals.

In its main laboratory, which runs about 8,000 tests a day, employees printed or hand-wrote results and carried them across facilities to specialists. Outdated, internet-free technologies experienced a revival.

"We went around and got every fax machine that we could," said UVM Medical Center Chief Operating Officer Al Gobeille.

The Vermont hospital had fallen prey to a cyberattack, becoming one of the most recent and visible examples of a wave of digital assaults taking U.S. health care providers hostage as COVID-19 cases surge nationwide.

The same day as UVM's attack, the FBI and two federal agencies warned cybercriminals were ramping up efforts to steal data and disrupt services across the health care sector.

By targeting providers with attacks that scramble and lock up data until victims pay a ransom, hackers can demand thousands or millions of dollars and wreak havoc until they're paid.

In September, for example, a ransomware attack paralyzed a chain of more than 250 U.S. hospitals and clinics. The resulting outages delayed emergency room care and forced staff to restore critical heart rate, blood pressure and oxygen level monitors with ethernet cabling.

A few weeks earlier, in Germany, a woman's death became the first fatality believed to result from a ransomware attack. Earlier in October, facilities in Oregon, New York, Michigan, Wisconsin and California also fell prey to suspected ransomware attacks.

Ransomware is also partly to blame for some of the nearly 700 private health information breaches, affecting about 46.6 million people and currently being investigated by the federal government. In the hands of a criminal, a single patient record — rich with details about a person's finances, insurance and medical history — can sell for upward of \$1,000 on the black market, experts say.

Over the course of 2020, many hospitals postponed technology upgrades or cybersecurity training that

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would help protect them from the newest wave of attacks, said health care security expert Nick Culbertson. "The amount of chaos that's just coming to a head here is a real threat," he said.

With COVID-19 infections and hospitalizations climbing nationwide, experts say health care providers are dangerously vulnerable to attacks on their ability to function efficiently and manage limited resources.

Even a small technical disruption can quickly ripple out into patient care when a center's capacity is stretched thin, said Vanderbilt University's Eric Johnson, who studies the health impacts of cyberattacks.

"November has been a month of escalating demands on hospitals," he said. "There's no room for error. From a hacker's perspective, it's perfect."

A 'CALL TO ARMS' FOR HOSPITALS

The day after the Oct. 28 cyberattack, 53-year-old Joel Bedard, of Jericho, arrived for a scheduled appointment at the Burlington hospital.

He was able to get in, he said, because his fluid-draining treatment is not high-tech, and is something he's gotten regularly as he waits for a liver transplant.

"I got through, they took care of me, but man, everything is down," Bedard said. He said he saw no other patients that day. Much of the medical staff idled, doing crossword puzzles and explaining they were forced to document everything by hand.

"All the students and interns are, like, 'How did this work back in the day?'" he said.

Since the attack, the Burlington-based hospital network has referred all questions about its technical details to the FBI, which has refused to release any additional information, citing an ongoing criminal investigation. Officials don't believe any patient suffered immediate harm, or that any personal patient information was compromised.

But more than a month later, the hospital is still recovering.

Some employees were furloughed for weeks before returning to their regular duties.

Oncologists could not access older patient scans which could help them, for example, compare tumor size over time.

And, until recently, emergency department clinicians could take X-rays of broken bones but couldn't electronically send the images to radiologists at other sites in the health network.

"We didn't even have internet," said Dr. Kristen DeStigter, chair of UVM Medical Center's radiology department.

Soldiers with the state's National Guard cyber unit have helped hospital IT workers scour the programming code in hundreds of computers and other devices, line-by-line, to wipe any remaining malicious code that could re-infect the system. Many have been brought back online, but others were replaced entirely.

Col. Christopher Evans said it's the first time the unit, which was founded about 20 years ago, has been called upon to perform what the guard calls "a real-world" mission. "We have been training for this day for a very long time," he said.

It could be several more weeks before all the related damage is repaired and the systems are operating normally again, Gobeille said.

"I don't want to get peoples' hopes up and be wrong," he said. "Our folks have been working 24/7. They are getting closer and closer every day."

It will be a scramble for other health care providers to protect themselves against the growing threat of cyberattacks if they haven't already, said data security expert Larry Ponemon.

"It's not like hospital systems need to do something new," he said. "They just need to do what they should be doing anyway."

Current industry reports indicate health systems spend only 4% to 7% of their IT budget on cybersecurity, whereas other industries like banking or insurance spend three times as much.

Research by Ponemon's consulting firm shows only about 15% of health care organizations have adopted the technology, training and procedures necessary to manage and thwart the stream of cyberattacks they face on a regular basis.

"The rest are out there flying with their head down. That number is unacceptable," Ponemon said. "It's

a pitiful rate.”

And it's part of why cybercriminals have focused their attention on health care organizations — especially now, as hospitals across the country are coping with a surge of COVID-19 patients, he said.

“We're seeing true clinical impact,” said health care cybersecurity consultant Dan L. Dodson. “This is a call to arms.”

Renault reported from New York.

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Biden predicts 'bleak future' if Congress doesn't act on aid

By ZEKE MILLER and ALEXANDRA JAFFE Associated Press

WILMINGTON, Del. (AP) — President-elect Joe Biden is predicting a “bleak future” if Congress doesn't take speedy action on a coronavirus aid bill amid a nationwide spike in the virus that's hampering the country's economic recovery.

He also expressed concern that so far he's seen “no detailed plan” from the Trump administration on how to distribute an approved coronavirus vaccine, but said he and his team are working on their own proposal to fill in the gaps.

Biden delivered remarks Friday afternoon reacting to November's national jobs report, which showed a sharp decrease in U.S. hiring even as the country is about 10 million jobs below pre-pandemic levels. The Democrat called the report “dire” and said it “shows the economy is stalling,” but he said quick action from Congress can halt some of the damage.

“If we act now — I mean now — we can begin to regain momentum and start to build back a better future,” he said. “There's no time to lose.”

Surging cases of the virus have led states and municipalities to roll back their reopening plans. And more restrictions may be on the way as lower temperatures and holiday travel lead to records for confirmed cases and deaths. Biden has said that while he doesn't support a nationwide lockdown, he plans to ask Americans to commit to 100 days of mask-wearing to help combat the virus as one of his first acts as president.

But one of his major challenges in turning the tide of the coronavirus pandemic will be distributing a vaccine. While the Trump administration has undertaken some planning around vaccine distribution, Biden said Friday that their proposal lacks significant details.

“There is no detailed plan — that we've seen, anyway — as to how you get a vaccine out of a container, into an injection syringe, into someone's arm,” he said.

The president-elect said that while his team agrees with some of the priorities the Trump administration has laid out in its vaccine distribution plan, more work needs to be done.

One of the major questions, Biden added, is how to get the vaccine to minority communities, which are disproportionately affected by the virus. He is working on an “overall plan,” and he asked government infectious-disease expert Dr. Anthony Fauci to be part of his COVID-19 team to help with that planning. Biden said the distribution alone was a “very expensive proposition.”

That's part of the reason the president-elect has issued calls for Congress to take action on a coronavirus relief bill now.

While he's thrown his support behind a bipartisan economic relief bill of about \$900 billion, Biden has called it just a “down payment” and has said much more will be needed once he takes office next year.

On Friday, he said he and his team have been consulting with labor leaders, CEOs, mayors and governors in crafting their own coronavirus aid bill, which will be his first legislative priority as president.

“The fight against COVID won't be won in January alone,” he said.

Biden expressed optimism that he'll be able to cut a deal with Republicans when he takes office, but

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he's certain to face a heavy lift in navigating any bill through a closely divided Senate. Democrats and Republicans have been deadlocked on a coronavirus aid bill for months, with Republicans opposed to a previous, more expensive bill that passed the House.

Biden said Friday that he plans to ask Congress for funding for expanded testing, vaccine distribution, jobless aid and help for those at risk of eviction. He said it will be important to work together with Congress to pass additional aid because "the country's going to be in dire, dire, dire straits if they don't."

He also cited his long-standing relationship with Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., as evidence for his optimism.

"He knows me," Biden said. "He knows I'm as straight as an arrow when I negotiate. He knows I keep commitments and never try to embarrass the opposition."

The coronavirus pandemic will affect more than just Biden's legislative focus when he takes office. He said Friday that it's also certain to affect his Jan. 20 inauguration and that public health concerns mean he'll have to skip some of the traditional festivities that go along with the event.

He said there likely won't be "a gigantic inaugural parade" down Pennsylvania Avenue or "a million people on the Mall" to watch his swearing-in. He predicted it would look more like the Democratic National Convention, which was largely virtual and broadcast on television and online.

"First and foremost in my objective is to keep America safe, but still allow people to celebrate," Biden said. "To celebrate and see one another celebrating."

Niece says 'cruel and traitorous' Trump belongs in prison

By MICHAEL R. SISAK Associated Press

President Donald Trump's niece says her uncle is "criminal, cruel and traitorous" and belongs in prison after he leaves the White House.

Mary Trump, a psychologist, author and outspoken critic of her estranged relative, rejects the notion that putting a former president on trial would deepen the nation's political divisions.

"It's quite frankly insulting to be told time after time that the American people can handle it and that we just need to move on," Mary Trump told The Associated Press in an interview this week.

"If anybody deserves to be prosecuted and tried, it's Donald," she added. "(Otherwise) we just leave ourselves open to somebody who, believe it or not, is even worse than he is."

Asked about her comments, a spokesperson for Donald Trump's presidential campaign emailed a one-sentence response: "Did she mention she has a book to sell?"

Mary Trump, the daughter of the president's elder brother, Fred Jr., announced this week she is writing a follow-up to this summer's scathing bestseller about her uncle, "Too Much and Never Enough, How My Family Created The World's Most Dangerous Man."

Her new book, "The Reckoning," from publisher St. Martin's Press won't be out until next July. It will trace what she says is America's collective trauma from its founding on the backs of enslaved Africans to the burgeoning economic and mental health impacts of the coronavirus pandemic.

America is "looking down the barrel of an explosion of psychological disorders" from the "trauma of living in a country in which the pandemic didn't just strike, but it was completely mishandled," Mary Trump told the AP.

With a doctorate in clinical psychology, she argues that the U.S. needs to reimagine how it deals with mental health and mental illness, treating them with the same vigor as physical maladies.

Mary Trump's critical writings come amid legal fights with her family.

Her uncle, Robert Trump, sued to block "Too Much and Never Enough" from hitting store shelves, citing a family agreement not to publish stories about core family members without their approval, but a court rejected that.

In September, Mary Trump sued the president, Robert Trump and their sister Maryanne Trump Barry, a retired federal judge, alleging that they cheated her out of millions of dollars while squeezing her out of the family business. Robert Trump died in August and the lawsuit is pending.

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When her book about the family was published in July, Trump tweeted that Mary Trump was “a seldom seen niece who knows little about me, says untruthful things about my wonderful parents (who couldn’t stand her!) and me,” and violated a non-disclosure agreement.

The announcement of Mary Trump’s second book came as her uncle continued to falsely insist he won reelection but that the vote was rigged in favor of Democratic rival Joe Biden.

The president has spent the better part of the last month complaining about the results, dispatching a band of lawyers led by former New York City Mayor Rudy Giuliani to mount futile legal challenges.

Mary Trump said the president’s post-election behavior “makes perfect sense,” given his personality, psychology, and lifelong disdain for losers.

“This is somebody who’s never won legitimately in his life,” she said. “But he’s never lost either. Because in his view, winning is so important and he always deserves to win that it’s OK to lie, cheat and steal.”

Mary Trump said the president inherited his acerbic behavior from his father, Fred Trump, a real estate developer who died in 1999. She called her grandfather “a horrible human being who just reveled in other people’s humiliation.”

“It’s not simply that Donald is horrible and incompetent and cruel, it’s that he’s been allowed to be,” she said. “Every transgression that’s gone on unpunished has been an opportunity for him to push the envelope even further. That’s partially why we’re going to see him smashing as much stuff on his way out the door as he can.”

Mary Trump acknowledges that she has seen the president only sporadically over the last 20 years — she wrote in “Too Much and Never Enough” that he invited her to a family dinner at the White House in 2017 — but, she argues, “he hasn’t changed at all.”

“I’m essentially looking at the same person I knew when I was growing up,” she said.

Donald Trump is facing at least one pending criminal investigation, a probe into his business dealings by the Manhattan district attorney that has been slowed by a legal fight over access to his tax returns.

No ex-president has ever been arrested after leaving office, but Mary Trump argues that shielding powerful people from punishment has historically harmed the country. She used Confederate General Robert E. Lee’s post-war absolution as an example.

“I think it would be a tragedy if Donald and everybody who’s enabled him and committed crimes with him is not held accountable,” Mary Trump said. “It would make it impossible for this country to recover in the long term.”

On Twitter, follow Michael Sisak at twitter.com/mikesisak

US imposes visa restrictions on more Chinese citizens

WASHINGTON (AP) — The State Department said Friday that it would deny visas to Chinese citizens linked to overseas influence operations involving violence and other means of intimidation.

Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said the restrictions would apply to Chinese Communist Party officials or anyone else taking part in such propaganda or influence campaigns affiliated with the United Front Work Department.

The United Front has been involved in efforts to put pressure on people outside China’s borders who raise concerns about human rights abuses in the Uighur region, Tibet and elsewhere. Its “coercive tactics” have included publicly releasing personal details about critics and their family members online as a means of intimidation, Pompeo said in announcing the new restrictions.

The measure is intended to show that “those responsible for actions that contravene the rules-based international order are not welcome in the United States,” he said.

The restrictions are the latest punitive measure taken against China’s leadership and economy in response to sharpening disputes over human rights, the coronavirus pandemic, trade, technology, Taiwan and a host of other issues.

Chinese citizens would be denied a visa to enter the United States if they have taken part in United

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Front efforts using violence, threats or other means of pressure against overseas Chinese communities, academics or civil society groups in the U.S. or elsewhere to advance the "CCP's authoritarian narratives and policy preferences," the State Department said in a separate statement on the measure.

It wasn't immediately clear how many people would potentially be covered by the new restrictions.

The move comes the same week that the U.S. announced plans to place new time limits on visas for members of the Chinese Communist Party and their families, cutting the time that the travel documents are valid from 10 years to one month.

China responded to those restrictions by accusing the U.S. government of "an escalation of political suppression." Foreign Ministry spokesperson Hua Chunying said Thursday that the travel restrictions were "totally inconsistent with the U.S.'s own interests" and would damage America's global image.

States submit vaccine orders as coronavirus death toll grows

By FARNOUSH AMIRI and BOB CHRISTIE Associated Press

COLUMBUS, Ohio (AP) — States faced a deadline on Friday to place orders for the coronavirus vaccine as many reported record infections, hospitalizations and deaths, while hospitals were pushed to the breaking point — with the worst feared yet to come.

The number of Americans hospitalized with COVID-19 hit an all-time high in the U.S. on Thursday at 100,667, according to the COVID Tracking Project. That figure has more than doubled over the past month, while new daily cases are averaging 210,000 and deaths are averaging 1,800 per day, according to data compiled by Johns Hopkins University.

Arizona reported more than 5,000 new COVID-19 cases for the second straight day Friday as the number of available intensive care unit beds fell below 10% statewide. Hospital officials have said the outbreak will exceed hospital capacity this month.

The state expects to get enough doses of new coronavirus vaccines by the end of the year to inoculate more than 383,000 health care workers and long-term care facility residents, the state's health director said Friday. Next in line are teachers and other essential workers, followed by older Arizonans or people otherwise at higher risk of serious cases of COVID-19.

Nevada reported 48 new deaths from the coronavirus Thursday, marking the deadliest day since the onset of the pandemic as cases and deaths continued to rise more than a week after new restrictions were implemented on businesses. One hospital was so full it was treating patients in an auxiliary unit in the parking garage.

State officials said Friday that they expect to receive 164,000 doses this month.

North Carolina reported a record 5,600 new confirmed cases Thursday and 2,100 hospitalizations, as it awaited nearly 85,000 doses of the Pfizer vaccine, perhaps as early as Dec. 15.

Health care workers at a limited number of mostly large hospitals will be the first in line to receive the vaccine, prioritizing those who are at highest risk of exposure to the virus, officials said. Future doses will be distributed to more hospitals and to local health departments, followed by nursing home staff and residents.

Health officials fear the pandemic will get worse before it gets better because of delayed effects from Thanksgiving, when millions of Americans disregarded warnings to stay home and celebrate only with members of their household.

At the same time, hospitals — and their workers — were stretched to the limit.

In Pennsylvania, almost half of all hospitals in the south-central region and a third of those in the south-west anticipated staffing shortages within a week, according to the state Department of Health.

The state's top health official, Dr. Rachel Levine, said Thursday that 85% of the state's intensive care beds were occupied and modeling shows they'll be full this month. Meanwhile, nurses in the Philadelphia area said the overwhelming number of COVID-19 patients was affecting the quality of care they can provide.

"I hear from physicians and from hospital leadership all the time about how strained the hospitals are," Levine said.

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Officials also are concerned that Americans will let down their guard once states begin administering vaccines.

It will take weeks to months before many of the nation's most vulnerable residents can be immunized, White House coronavirus response coordinator Dr. Deborah Birx said Thursday. Until then, Americans should not hold indoor gatherings with people they don't live with or take off their masks when they're outdoors, and should continue to keep their distance from others and wash their hands, she said.

"I think everyone can see that this current surge that we're experiencing is much faster and broader across the United States and is lasting longer," Birx said after a meeting at United Nations headquarters in New York.

Nationwide, the coronavirus is blamed for almost 277,000 deaths and 14 million confirmed infections.

An influential modeling group at the University of Washington said Friday the expected U.S. vaccine rollout will mean 9,000 fewer deaths by April 1. The Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation predicts that warmer temperatures and then rising vaccination rates will lead to steady declines in the daily death toll starting in February.

But even with a vaccine, the death toll could reach 770,000 by April 1 if states do not act to bring current surges under control, the group said.

States learned only this week how many doses to expect and when, and received guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommending that health care workers and nursing home patients get the first doses. That meant that some had to make last-minute adjustments.

"2020 has taught us to plan for what you can and then expect something to happen that you never dreamed would happen," Dr. Michelle Fiscus, medical director of the Tennessee Department of Health's immunization program, said during a Friday webinar. "I can't tell you how many plans we've crumpled up and thrown away."

Connecticut Gov. Ned Lamont said nursing home residents, along with front-line health care workers, will get the first doses in his state.

"These are the folks most likely to suffer complications. These are the older folks who most likely suffer fatalities. And these are the folks most likely to go into the hospital," Lamont said Thursday. Connecticut expects to receive its first shipment of 31,000 doses of vaccine from Pfizer on Dec. 14 and its first shipment of 61,000 from Moderna on Dec. 21.

But states also were balancing concerns about the economy and protecting essential workers.

Kansas Gov. Laura Kelly said the state's vaccine plan calls for the first shots to go to front-line health care workers with a high risk of coronavirus exposure, including workers in nursing homes, as well as nursing home residents. Meatpacking plant workers and grocery store employees will be next in line, along with first responders.

In Ohio, health care workers and others caring for COVID-19 patients and emergency medical responders will be first in line for the vaccine, Republican Gov. Mike DeWine said Friday. Vulnerable people who live together and those who care for them, including nursing home and assisted facility residents and staff, will be next.

The state expects more than 500,000 in combined doses from Pfizer and Moderna by the end of December, the governor said, with the first distribution starting on Dec. 15. DeWine said it's too soon to know when adults without health problems will receive a vaccine and warned Ohioans will have to remain vigilant.

"We're in a very dangerous situation and ... we can't let our hospitals get to the point where health care is threatened," DeWine said. "The curfew, mask-wearing, retail inspection have helped, but they haven't helped enough. We'll have to do more. We don't have a choice."

Christie reported from Phoenix. Associated Press writers Bryan Anderson in Raleigh, North Carolina; Carla K. Johnson in Seattle; Edith Lederer in New York City; John Hanna in Topeka, Kansas; Michael Rubinkam in northeastern Pennsylvania; Paul Davenport in Phoenix; Sam Metz in Carson City, Nevada; Susan Haigh in Hartford, Connecticut; and Tammy Webber in Fenton, Michigan, contributed to this story.

Gripped by surging pandemic, US employers cut back on hiring

By CHRISTOPHER RUGABER AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — With the viral pandemic accelerating across the country, America's employers sharply scaled back their hiring last month, adding 245,000 jobs, the fewest since April and the fifth straight monthly slowdown.

At the same time, the unemployment rate fell to a still-high 6.7%, from 6.9% in October as many people stopped looking for work and were no longer counted as unemployed, the Labor Department said. November's job gain was down drastically from a 610,000 gain in October.

Friday's report provided the latest evidence that the job market and economy are faltering in the face of a virus that has been shattering daily records for confirmed infections. Economic activity is likely to slow further with health officials warning against all but essential travel and states and cities limiting gatherings, restricting restaurant dining and reducing the hours and capacity of bars, stores and other businesses.

Most experts say the economy and job market won't be able to fully recover until the virus can be controlled with an effective and widely used vaccine. And the picture could worsen before it improves.

"The recovery is not insulated from the effects of the pandemic," said Daniel Zhao, senior economist at employment website Glassdoor. "This is the calm before the storm. We face a long and difficult winter ahead."

The jobs slowdown comes at a particularly fraught time. Two enhanced federal unemployment benefit programs are set to expire at the end of this month — just as viral cases are surging and colder weather is shutting down outdoor dining and many public events. Unless Congress enacts another rescue aid package, more than 9 million unemployed people will be left without any jobless aid, state or federal, beginning after Christmas.

Renewed efforts in Congress to reach a deal have picked up momentum. A bipartisan group of senators has proposed a \$900 billion plan that would include expanded unemployment benefits, more small business loans and aid to state and local governments. President Donald Trump has voiced support for more financial assistance, though key differences between the two sides remain.

Speaking at a news conference Friday in Wilmington, Delaware, President-elect Joe Biden said the jobs report was "grim" and "shows an economy that is stalling." Biden urged Congress to act quickly to approve another rescue aid package.

Before the pandemic, last month's job gain would have been considered healthy. But the U.S. economy is still nearly 10 million jobs below its pre-pandemic level, with a rising proportion of the unemployed describing their jobs as gone for good. Faster hiring is needed to ensure that people who were laid off during this spring can quickly get back to work.

There is also evidence that the pandemic is inflicting long-term damage on millions of workers. People who have been out of work for six months or more — one definition of long-term unemployment — now make up nearly 40% of the jobless, the highest such proportion in nearly seven years. The long-term unemployed typically face a harder time finding new jobs.

And the proportion of Americans who are either working or seeking work fell in November, suggesting that many people soured on their prospects for finding a job and stopped looking. That proportion declined to 61.5%, a level that before the pandemic hadn't been seen since the 1970s.

In Columbus, Ohio, Agnes Makokha is unemployed and receiving jobless benefits for the first time in her life. Makokha, 45, lost her job as a human resources administrator nearly a year ago, well before the pandemic struck. Yet since the virus intensified, it's become much harder for her to find work.

Makokha doesn't have a car. And in April, bus service on her route was temporarily canceled. She struggled to buy groceries, much less look for work. Since then, Makokha has been scraping by with the help of food pantries and unemployment benefits. But those benefits are set to run out Dec. 26.

"I am a little bit scared now about the help coming to an end because I'm not quite sure what's going to happen," Makokha said. "If McDonald's will hire me, I will take that job. If anyone will hire me, I would take the job."

The consequences of the slowdown aren't falling evenly on all Americans. Low-wage industries, like restaurants and bars and retail stores, actually cut jobs last month. And many mothers have been forced

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to stop working to take care of children that are in school online.

The unemployment rates for Black and Latino workers fell much more last month than for whites. Still, the Black unemployment rate was 10.3% and for Latinos 8.4%, compared with 5.9% for whites.

Friday's jobs report also reflects how the coronavirus has transformed the holiday shopping season. Transportation and warehousing firms added 145,000 jobs in November, more than half the total job gain for the month. That trend reflected rapid hiring by shipping and logistics firms that are benefiting from the surge in online purchases by consumers shopping at home. That was the biggest monthly job gain for that industry on records dating back to 1972.

Retailers, by contrast, shed 35,000 jobs — a reflection of fewer consumers shopping in physical stores.

Becky Frankiewicz, president of the temporary staffing firm Manpower Group's North American division, said that roughly 20% of the online job postings in November that her firm tracks were related to warehousing and logistics. Manpower's clients were still interested in hiring last month. But the worsening virus and the uncertainty it brings have made them more cautious.

Frankiewicz summarized their views as: "We are seeing increased demand, we know we have to hire but... are they going to shut us down again?"

The impact of the pandemic last month was particularly visible in an employment category that includes hotels and entertainment industries such as casinos and movie theaters. This group added just 31,000 jobs in November. That's only about one-tenth of the gains of the previous two months and suggests that the virus spread, new business restrictions and colder weather are forcing many businesses to closer their doors or limit hours.

U.S. deaths from the coronavirus topped 2,800 Thursday, a new high, with more than 100,000 Americans hospitalized with the disease, also a record, and new daily cases topping 200,000. In response, at least 12 states have imposed new restrictions on businesses in the past month, according to an Associated Press tally.

Jon Tigges, who owns a bed-and-breakfast and wedding venue near Leesburg, Virginia, has lost about two-thirds of his normal wedding events this year, dealing a sharp blow to his bottom line. Out of about 35 part-time workers Tigges had employed before the pandemic, just a handful are likely to work on any given weekend.

"We're hoping there will be another relief bill — I need another loan to bridge the winter months," he said. "It's going to take me 10 years to dig out of the hole that I'm in."

AP Writer Farnoush Amiri in Columbus, Ohio, contributed to this report.

NFL further limits player access to facilities amid virus

By BARRY WILNER AP Pro Football Writer

The NFL is further limiting player access to team facilities as it attempts to enhance safety measures during the COVID-19 pandemic.

In a memo sent to the 32 clubs and obtained by The Associated Press, teams must close their facilities for two days after games, with some exceptions.

Beginning Monday, that all teams playing on a Sunday must close those facilities the next two days — except for clubs playing on the subsequent Thursday. Only players needing medical attention for injuries or in rehab programs may enter the team complex.

Coaches can access the facility but must work in their own offices and can't conduct meetings except virtually.

Teams playing on Monday nights can next have players in their facilities on Thursday, and teams with Thursday night games must close the complex to players until Sunday.

"There are no exceptions to this prohibition," the league wrote. "Approvals previously received for in-person meetings will not apply on these two days."

Locker rooms and cafeterias must be closed during those days.

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Tryouts will be permitted on those days with only "essential football personnel" attending. Players trying out for a team are subject to current testing rules.

Such arrangements were agreed to by the players' union.

USA Today first reported the memo being sent to the clubs.

The NFL also is lifting the 62-player game travel limit for teams. Each team can determine how many players to take to road games, including practice squad players. That takes effect for this week's games, and should help with filling out the 48-man roster in case of issues with the coronavirus on game days.

All players who attend games for both home and visiting teams and will be on the sideline or in a designated stadium space with other players and personnel must stay at the team hotel the night before the game.

NFL protocols have been adjusted constantly since training camps, with stiffer restrictions put in place in recent weeks as the nation undergoes a surge in the novel coronavirus.

The league had its second major outbreak in the last two weeks, with the Baltimore Ravens having at least two dozen people testing positive. That led to shuffling Baltimore games at Pittsburgh from Thanksgiving night to last Sunday, then to Tuesday and again to Wednesday, when the Steelers won 19-14.

"Finally," the league wrote in the memo, "please remind all players and staff that gatherings among players and/or club staff of any number outside of the club facility are prohibited at all times pursuant to the intensive protocol."

More AP NFL: <https://apnews.com/NFL> and https://twitter.com/AP_NF

VIRUS TODAY: States face deadline to place vaccine order

By The Associated Press undefined

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

THREE THINGS TO KNOW TODAY

— The job market is slowing down as the fall surge in the virus puts severe strain on the economy and health care system. Employers added 245,000 jobs in November, the fewest since the pandemic's dark days of April.

— States have a Friday deadline to place orders for the Pfizer vaccine that is awaiting emergency federal authorization. The orders are meant to pave the way for the distribution of the vaccine to specific locations across the country in the coming weeks.

— Congressional leaders appear to be making progress on securing another virus relief package by the end of the year. The package would boost jobless benefits, give money to state and local governments, schools and businesses, among other interests.

THE NUMBERS: The U.S. has gone over 200,000 new cases the past two days. The U.S. has had more than 14 million cases overall, and is now averaging more than 1,800 deaths a day over the past week.

QUOTABLE: "People were less willing to change their behavior than any other day during the pandemic."

— Laura Schewel, founder of StreetLight Data, said in describing a data analysis of Americans' movement on Thanksgiving.

ICYMI: As hospital systems struggle through the pandemic, some are dealing with another threat: cyberattacks. A Vermont hospital was attacked in October, forcing the facility to produce hand-written laboratory results and rely on fax machines with the internet down.

ON THE HORIZON: The vaccine. Next week will be crucial for the vaccine, including a Thursday meeting by Food and Drug Administration advisers to discuss emergency authorization of the Pfizer vaccine.

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

House votes to decriminalize marijuana at federal level

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By MATTHEW DALY Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Democratic-controlled House on Friday approved a bill to decriminalize and tax marijuana at the federal level, reversing what supporters call a failed policy of criminalizing pot use and taking steps to address racial disparities in enforcement of federal drug laws.

Opponents, mostly Republicans, called the bill a hollow political gesture and mocked Democrats for bringing it up at a time when thousands of Americans are dying from the coronavirus pandemic.

"With all the challenges America has right now, (Republicans) think COVID relief should be on the floor, but instead, the Democrats put cats and cannabis" on the House floor, said House Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy, R-Calif. "They're picking weed over the workers. They're picking marijuana over (providing) the much-needed money we need to go forward" to address the pandemic.

McCarthy's comment about cats referred to a separate bill approved by the House to ban private ownership of big cats such as lions and tigers, a measure boosted by the Netflix series "Tiger King." That bill, approved by the House on Thursday, would allow most private zoos to keep their tigers and other species but would prohibit most public contact with the animals.

Democrats said they can work on COVID-19 relief and marijuana reform at the same time and noted that the House passed a major pandemic relief bill in May that has languished in the Senate.

Supporters say the pot bill would help end the decades-long "war on drugs" by removing marijuana, or cannabis, from the list of federally controlled substances while allowing states to set their own rules on pot. The bill also would use money from a new excise tax on marijuana to address the needs of groups and communities harmed by the so-called drug war and provide for the expungement of federal marijuana convictions and arrests.

"For far too long, we have treated marijuana as a criminal justice problem instead of as a matter of personal choice and public health," said Rep. Jerry Nadler, D-N.Y., chairman of the House Judiciary Committee and a key sponsor of the bill. "Whatever one's views are on the use of marijuana for recreational or medicinal use, the policy of arrests, prosecution and incarceration at the federal level has proven unwise and unjust."

Drug reform advocates called the House vote historic, noting it is the first time comprehensive legislation to decriminalize marijuana has passed the full House or Senate.

"The criminalization of marijuana is a cornerstone of the racist war on drugs. Even after a decade of reform victories, one person was arrested nearly every minute last year for simply possessing marijuana," said Maritza Perez, director of national affairs at the Drug Policy Alliance, an advocacy group. "Today the House took the most powerful step forward to address that shameful legacy."

The vote comes at a time when most Americans live in states where marijuana is legal in some form, and lawmakers from both parties agreed that national cannabis policy has lagged woefully behind changes at the state level. That divide has created a host of problems — loans and other banking services, for example, are hard to get for many marijuana companies because pot remains illegal at the federal level.

Four states, including New Jersey and Arizona, passed referenda allowing recreational cannabis this year. Voters made Oregon the first state in the nation to decriminalize possession of small amounts of cocaine, heroin and methamphetamine.

Rep. Barbara Lee, D-Calif., called the House bill an important racial justice measure. The bill "is a major step, mind you, a major step toward ending the unjust war on drugs and racial inequities that are central to these laws," said Lee, who is African American.

The bill, which passed 228-164, now goes to the Republican-controlled Senate, where it is unlikely to advance. A related bill that would give pot businesses access to traditional banking services has languished in the Senate after being approved by the House last year.

Five Republicans supported the bill: Reps. Matt Gaetz and Brian Mast of Florida; Tom McClintock of California, Denver Riggleman of Virginia and Don Young of Alaska.

Six Democrats opposed it: Reps. Cheri Bustos and Daniel Lipinski of Illinois; Collin Peterson of Minnesota; Chris Pappas of New Hampshire; Conor Lamb of Pennsylvania; and Henry Cuellar of Texas.

Louisiana Rep. Steve Scalise, the No. 2 House Republican, said GOP lawmakers have been pushing for

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weeks to bring up a bill that allows small businesses to receive another round of Paycheck Protection Program loans. Many small businesses are struggling or have closed as a result of the pandemic.

Instead of allowing a vote on the GOP bill, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., is "actually focused more on legalizing pot," Scalise said. "It's just unbelievable how tone deaf (Democrats) are to these small businesses and the jobs, the families that are tied to them."

Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell also mocked the bill, saying in a floor speech that "the House of Representatives is spending this week on pressing issues like marijuana. You know, serious and important legislation befitting this national crisis."

The Big Cat Public Safety Act also is unlikely to move forward in the Senate. Sen. Ted Cruz, R-Texas, said in a tweet that Democrats were moving to "Prosecute Tiger King" rather than address issues related to the COVID-19 pandemic.

But Carole Baskin, whose animal rescue organization is featured in the Netflix series, said the legislation would culminate a decades-long effort to end abuse of tiger cubs and other big cats, and protect the public and first responders from injuries and death.

"None of these important goals are partisan in any way, and we hope the Senate will follow suit quickly to make it into law," said Baskin, CEO and founder of Florida-based Big Cat Rescue.

EXPLAINER: 5 key takeaways from the November jobs report

By PAUL WISEMAN AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — Evidence was abundant in the November jobs report that the U.S. economy's tentative recovery is sputtering as coronavirus cases accelerate and federal aid runs out.

Hiring slowed sharply. Hundreds of thousands of people gave up looking for work. The proportion of the unemployed who have been jobless for at least six months rose.

All told, the Labor Department said Friday, employers added 245,000 jobs in November — the fewest since April, the fifth straight monthly slowdown and well short of the gain economists had been expecting.

Back in March and April when the virus slammed the economy, the United States lost a staggering 22 million jobs. It's been clawing them back ever since — but at an ever-diminishing rate: 4.8 million added jobs in June, 1.8 million in July, 1.5 million in August, 711,000 in September, 610,000 in October and 245,000 in November.

Total it all up and the American economy is still 9.8 million short of the jobs it had in February.

Meantime, the viral outbreak keeps worsening. The nation is now suffering an average of 189,000 new confirmed infections a day, up from fewer than 35,000 three months ago. States and localities are imposing curbs on business and persuading more Americans to stay home, which means less money spent and fewer jobs needed.

What's more, 9 million people could lose all their unemployment benefits the day after Christmas — unless Congress approves a rescue aid package before then. Negotiators on Capitol Hill are seeking an agreement.

"The American labor market hit a major speedbump in November due to the second wave of the coronavirus," Sal Guatieri, senior economist at BMO Capital Markets, wrote in a research note Friday.

Here are five takeaways from the November jobs report:

UNEMPLOYMENT FELL FOR THE WRONG REASON

The unemployment rate declined to 6.7% last month from 6.9% in October. It's the lowest rate since the outbreak struck in March. But the explanation was not encouraging: 400,000 Americans stopped working or looking for work in November. Because those people weren't actively looking for a job, they weren't counted as unemployed. In fact, 74,000 fewer Americans told the Labor Department they were employed last month.

The proportion of adults who are either working or looking for work — what economists call the labor force participation rate — dropped to 61.5% last month from 61.7% in October.

JOB LOSSES TURN PERMANENT

Many of the job gains since April have come from businesses recalling workers they had furloughed

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when the pandemic struck. The trend continued last month. The number of Americans on temporary layoff dropped by 441,000 to fewer than 2.8 million, down from a peak of 18.1 million in April.

But permanent job losses continued to pile up. That suggests that the coronavirus recession will leave lasting scars on the job market. The number of Americans who regard themselves as permanently laid off rose by 59,000 to 3.7 million, up from just 2 million in April. And the number of people who've been out of work for six months or more rose last month by 385,000 to 3.9 million — more than four times April's 939,000.

These long-term unemployed now account for about 37% of America's jobless. That's the highest such proportion since 2013.

RETAIL'S TURMOIL PERSISTS

Retailers are contending with a fall-off in walk-in traffic and intensifying competition from e-commerce as Americans stay home. It showed last month: Retailers shed nearly 35,000 jobs. They now employ 550,000 fewer people than they did in February. The coronavirus crisis has forced a number of well-known retailers to seek bankruptcy protection, including Brooks Brothers and J.C. Penney.

Conversely, the surge in online shopping has sparked a hiring boom at warehouses and transportation companies: They added 145,000 jobs in November, the most in any month since 1997.

WANTED: CONSTRUCTION WORKERS

Builders added 27,000 workers last month, on top of 72,000 they added in October and 35,000 in September.

Fueled by record-low mortgage rates and pent-up demand from homebuyers, the housing market is defying the coronavirus. Home construction rose 4.9% in October after climbing 1.9% in September.

Sales of existing homes have risen for five straight months. In October, sales hit their highest level since February 2006, which was not long before the housing bust that triggered the 2007-2009 Great Recession.

GAINS FOR BLACK AND HISPANIC WORKERS

Last month, employment grew by 136,000 jobs for Black workers and 83,000 for Hispanics but fell by 508,000 for whites. (The racial breakdown comes from a survey that is separate from the one that showed the economy gaining 245,000 jobs last month; the two surveys sometimes diverge from month to month.)

Moreover, 662,000 whites and 33,000 Hispanics dropped out of the labor force last month, while 48,000 African Americans jumped in.

Still, the unemployment rate remained much lower in November for whites compared with the others: 5.9% unemployment versus 10.3% for Black workers and 8.4% for Hispanics.

With red carpets rolled up, the Oscar race goes virtual

By JAKE COYLE AP Film Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — This is the time of year when Hollywood's awards-season-industrial complex usually shifts into high gear. It's a frothy, festive run of the year's final premieres and screenings — all part of a carefully orchestrated dance to court tastemakers and, ultimately, academy voters.

The movies may be finished -- picture locked -- but their Oscar fortunes are in flux right up until ballots are cast. And a glittering, glad-handing ecosystem of cocktails and Q&As works very hard to steer the conversation.

This year, with many under quarantine, theaters shuttered in Los Angeles and New York and, well, some more pressing concerns than who's campaigning for best supporting actor, awards season is operating in a strange COVID-19 vacuum with only a whiff of the stuff it thrives on: buzz.

For Awards Daily founder Sasha Stone, who has been covering the Oscars since 2000, it's like nothing she's ever seen — an awards season without glamour, without red carpets, without anything that feels real. She compares this year's race to the floating debris left by a sinking ship.

"There's no there there," says Stone. "What's missing is the 'wow' factor. That's really what the Oscars have kind of been built on."

Nevertheless, Oscar season is pushing ahead, despite the pandemic, despite a year where most of the

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biggest releases were postponed. The timetable has shifted two months: The Academy Awards are to be held April 25. And awards season, such as it is, has gone virtual. The Oscar race will Zoomed.

Awards campaigns normally focused on doing everything they can to lure guild members and others to see their film on the big screen have had to accept that this year they'll be watching in their living room, maybe on a laptop, potentially with a lot of pausing and probably with many glances at their phone.

"The biggest challenge is: How are we going to get people to see the movies? Are they really going to watch them? What are they going to watch?" says Cynthia Swartz, one of the industry's top Oscar campaign strategists. "Ninety-five percent of an academy campaign is getting people to see the movie, ideally on the big screen. Now you can't get them to the big screen. Everyone's seeing it at home."

Keeping any movie not named "Borat" in the zeitgeist has been nearly impossible this year, either because people are overburdened by the pandemic, movies lack a physical presence beyond a box on your TV screen or because viewers would rather just binge "The Queen's Gambit." Swartz, who has helped steer campaigns for everything from "Boyhood" to "Black Panther," acknowledged, "Right now, it's hard for films to feel real and to feel like they're sticking."

The whole rhythm of the season's calendar, from one awards group to another, is also off kilter. With Oscar nominations ballots usually due in early January, most voters plow through screeners over the holidays.

"It's going to be a challenge to keep your movie sort of in the awareness all the way to April or to March, when voting happens," said Tom Bernard, co-president of Sony Pictures Classics, whose contenders this year include the dementia drama "The Father," with Anthony Hopkins. "It's going to be a very different journey between now and the end of April."

It has undoubtedly reshuffled the usual kinds of movies in the race. Many of the films that might have been among the favorites this year -- Steven Spielberg's "West Side Story" or Wes Anderson's "The French Dispatch" -- have been postponed. That's left open leading positions for smaller films that might have had to fight harder for the spotlight -- among them Chloe Zhao's open-road ode "Nomadland," Lee Isaac Chung's Korean-American family drama "Minari" and Regina King's fictional gathering of '60s Black icons "One Night in Miami."

For some, it's a tantalizing possibility that this year's unusual circumstances could expand the traditional notions — and frustrating restrictions — of what is an Oscar movie.

"It's going to be interesting because there were no blockbusters. We didn't have any blockbusters this year, so how do we know what was a hit. I'm curious if it will skew more indie-cinephile," says Steven Soderbergh, whose Meryl Streep-led "Let Them All Talk" is among the many films going straight to streaming. "The question is: Do you embrace that and say: 'That was this year,' and not be pants-on-fire about it. Just go: That was this year."

It's also left the field for Netflix to dominate. The streamer, which has fiercely sought a best-picture win after close calls with "Roma" and "The Irishman," this year has at least three best-picture candidates, including David Fincher's "Mank," Aaron Sorkin's "The Trial of the Chicago 7" and George C. Wolfe's "Ma Rainey's Black Bottom." One of few sure things is a posthumous nomination for Chadwick Boseman for his performance in "Ma Rainey." This year, the film academy relaxed its requirement of a theatrical run for nominees — a change some are already lobbying to make permanent.

Last Oscars, the win for "Parasite," the first non-English language film to take best picture, was heavily fueled by social-media support. This year, in the absence of real conversation, the race will likely be won online, making critics and pundits even more influential.

Not everyone is sorry that awards season — an increasingly bloated, overlong, high-priced slog from September to February — has been turned upside down. Publicists used to racing from event to event can do it this year with a click, while wearing sweatpants. Costs will be lower. Stars less worn out. Maybe, some hope, it will slim down for good.

Meanwhile, Zoom boxes are getting more dressed up all the time. For the launch of the black-and-white "Mank," Netflix outfitted its video conference in handsome monochrome. For a Q&A for his dystopic space drama "The Midnight Sky," George Clooney could track down a better-than-average moderator via video

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conference: Cate Blanchett.

The IFP Gotham Awards, one of the first big parties of the year, will livestream their Jan. 11 show from the cavernous Cipriani's in Manhattan, with guests arranged virtually on tables. To pull off the digital trick, organizers are relying on an online poker interface. On the bright side, said producer Jeffrey Sharp, executive director of the Independent Filmmaker Project, more people will see the typically untelevised ceremony than ever before.

"If there are any lessons learned, we're happy to pass them on to the next guy. I do feel like we're all in this together," says Sharp. "This year, everyone's trying to figure it out, and I think deserves credit for at least trying to keep the ball rolling."

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

Venezuela's Maduro seeks to tighten his grip via election

By FABIOLA SÁNCHEZ and SCOTT SMITH Associated Press

CARACAS, Venezuela (AP) — With the political opponents of President Nicolás Maduro boycotting Sunday's election for the National Assembly, his socialist party is expected to dominate the vote, giving him control of the last major institution in Venezuela outside his grasp.

The opposition contends the election is rigged and has called its own referendum to counter it. Both votes are playing out in the waning days of the Trump administration, which leaves office with Maduro firmly entrenched despite its efforts to bring about his departure through diplomacy and sanctions.

By taking over the National Assembly, some experts say Maduro's United Socialist Party of Venezuela will effectively smother the last remnants of democracy in the country.

"Everything indicates that he will achieve what he has always sought, which is to have total, authoritarian, hegemonic control of all the country's institutions," said Michael Shifter, president of the Washington-based Inter-American Dialogue.

He expects U.S. President-elect Joe Biden, who has not hesitated in calling Maduro a "dictator," to maintain a tough position against the South American leader, and even refine the strategy further, such as taking steps to work more closely with European allies.

Once an oil-producing powerhouse, Venezuela has been embroiled for years in a deepening political and economic crisis. More than 5 million people have fled the country in recent years, the world's largest migration after war-torn Syria. The International Monetary Fund projects a 25% decline this year in Venezuela's GDP, while hyperinflation diminishes the value of its currency, the bolivar.

Maduro, the hand-picked successor to the late President Hugo Chávez, won a second term in 2018. But Washington and several nations accused him of fixing the outcome by banning his most popular opponents from challenging him.

Opposition leader Juan Guaidó, 37, rose to head the National Assembly in early 2019, declaring presidential powers and vowing to oust the 58-year-old Maduro. The dramatic move sparked massive street demonstrations across Venezuela and won support from dozens of nations.

The Trump administration took the lead by hitting Maduro with punishing sanctions, targeting the state-run oil firm PDVSA and cutting him off from billions of dollars annually. The U.S. Justice Department also indicted Maduro as a "narcoterrorist," offering a \$15 million reward for his arrest.

But he remains in power with backing from Venezuela's military and international support from nations like Iran, Russia, China and Cuba. Maduro's domestic allies also control the supreme court, prosecutor's office and elections commission.

Maduro has campaigned for his party's congressional candidates — including his son and wife — promising to finally silence the right-wing opposition, which he accuses of inciting violent protests.

Ahead of the election, state TV has broadcast video of large campaign rallies with cheering crowds led by Maduro and his political allies, despite polls showing he is widely unpopular.

"We've had to suffer under five years of horror, plots, conspiracies and failure," Maduro said. "Our people

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are aware that it was a mistake to elect the opposition.”

International bodies like the European Union have refused to send observers to Sunday’s election, saying the conditions for a democratic process don’t exist.

Guaidó’s once-high approval has fallen since early last year as Venezuelans grow frustrated that the opposition hasn’t been able to topple Maduro and restore stability.

Rejecting Sunday’s vote, the opposition will instead hold a referendum asking Venezuelans a series of questions to gauge support for ending Maduro’s rule, holding new elections and seeking international help in solving Venezuela’s crisis.

The referendum is being held over several days immediately following the congressional election. Venezuelans can register their votes digitally and in person in cities across Venezuela and abroad. Civil organizations are organizing it without any independent audit or observation.

Guaidó is banned from television and radio broadcasts in Venezuela. Instead, he has appeared in public by talking with people waiting in long lines to buy gas, or speaking to representatives of a teachers’ union. He urged them to take part in the referendum.

Despite the boycott by the Guaidó-led coalition, a small number of opposition parties not associated with him have had dialogue with the government and are participating in the election. Critics say this will allow Maduro to maintain the semblance of a valid contest.

Carlos Vecchio, Guaidó’s ambassador to Washington, said opposition leaders realize the risk of carrying out the referendum as once-fervent support fades and they face potential aggression from Maduro’s armed forces and roving groups of his supporters on motorcycles.

“I can understand that frustration, but we have no alternative. We have to keep fighting for a transition,” Vecchio said. “I feel frustration as well.”

He cited the lack of access to Venezuelan media and the Maduro government’s decision earlier this year to strip the main opposition parties of their leaders and replace them with its own representatives.

Vecchio wouldn’t say whether his delegation in Washington has made contact with Biden’s incoming administration, saying they remain focused on keeping up support from both Republicans and Democrats.

Elliott Abrams, the U.S. special representative to Venezuela, said the U.S. will continue to recognize the opposition lawmakers in the current National Assembly and Guaidó’s role as interim president, despite Sunday’s outcome. Without being re-elected, their term ends in early January.

Abrams said he also expects broad international support for Venezuela’s opposition to remain firm, even as Maduro’s government tries to push them out of Venezuela’s political landscape.

“They’ve done everything they can to make sure this is not a free election,” Abrams said. “We’re getting instead an election that doesn’t deserve to be called an election.”

Follow Fabiola Sánchez on Twitter: @fisanchezn

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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

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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.

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

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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."

UK defends vaccine decision amid criticism it moved too fast

By DANICA KIRKA Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — U.K. regulators went on the offensive Friday to beat back criticism that they rushed their authorization of a COVID-19 vaccine, saying they rigorously analyzed data on safety and effectiveness in the shortest time possible without compromising the thoroughness of their review.

The comments from the Medicines and Healthcare Products Regulatory Agency came as the Times newspaper reported that the agency's chief executive, Dr. June Raine, planned to give a series of radio interviews so she could speak directly to people who may be concerned about getting vaccinated.

The MHRA reiterated earlier statements that the agency is conducting rolling reviews of COVID-19 vaccine candidates, allowing regulators to speed up the review process by looking at data as it becomes available. The agency gave emergency approval on Wednesday to a vaccine produced by U.S. drugmaker Pfizer and Germany-based BioNTech, making Britain the first Western country to authorize a vaccine against the coronavirus.

The ability to act more quickly "does not mean steps and the expected standards of safety, quality and effectiveness have been bypassed," the MHRA said. "No vaccine would be authorized for supply in the U.K. unless the expected standards of safety, quality and efficacy are met."

The media blitz comes amid concerns that criticism of the approval process could undermine public confidence in the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine, leading some individuals to shun shots. Britain plans to begin vaccinating people within the next few days, starting with nursing home residents, caregivers and people over age 80.

Britain will initially receive 800,000 doses, enough to vaccinate 400,000 people, so the first shots will go to those who are most at risk of dying from COVID-19 and those who are most likely to spread the coronavirus.

America's top infectious disease expert late Thursday apologized for suggesting that U.K. authorities had rushed their authorization of the vaccine.

Dr. Anthony Fauci, director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, had told U.S. media outlets that U.K. regulators hadn't acted "as carefully" as the Food and Drug Administration. He later clarified to the BBC that he had meant to say that U.S. authorities do things differently than their British counterparts, not better, but didn't phrase his comments 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.

Stephen Evans, a professor of pharmacoepidemiology at the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine, said the different approaches of various regulators may be one reason Britain was first to authorize the vaccine.

The FDA, for example, goes back to the raw data supplied by drugmakers and reanalyzes it to verify the findings. Virtually no other regulatory agency regularly does this, said Evans, who has worked with regulators in the U.K. and the European Union.

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In addition, Britain decided to take advantage of EU rules that allow individual countries to allow the emergency use of new products inside their own borders in response to public health emergencies. The EU's European Medicines Agency chose a more time-consuming authorization process that will allow the vaccine to be used in all 27 member nations.

While Britain left the European Union on Jan. 31, it remains bound by the bloc's rules and regulations until the end of December under a transition agreement designed to ease the shock of Brexit.

Brexit helped the Medicines and Healthcare Products Regulatory Agency move faster because it is no longer involved in assessing products intended for the entire bloc as are regulators in the remaining EU countries, according to Evans. MHRA therefore had more resources to devote to the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine and could respond more quickly when new data was submitted, he said.

"Consequently, the U.K. has almost undoubtedly had greater capacity to respond to a new application for authorization of a vaccine than any other country," Evans said.

When the MHRA announced its decision on the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine, chief executive Raine said people should be confident "no corners have been cut." British experts reviewed more than 1,000 pages of information, including raw data, on safety, quality and effectiveness before deciding to give temporary authorization for use of the vaccine, she said.

But European officials reacted sourly to the U.K. decision.

The European Medicines Agency, which plans to make its own decision by Dec. 29, issued a statement saying its process was "more appropriate" than Britain's.

Bavarian Governor Markus Soeder was more pointed, suggesting U.K. authorities had acted "without even sufficient basis."

"This will reduce the readiness to get vaccinated rather than increase it, because people expect a safe immunization process," he said.

In his latest comments, Fauci rejected the idea that the U.K. skipped vital steps.

The FDA has to move more slowly amid 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."

Associated Press Writer Frank Jordans contributed.

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Six vice presidents talk about job once considered invisible

By DAVID BAUDER AP Media Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — After interviewing Dan Quayle in Arizona for his documentary on the vice presidency, filmmaker Jeffrey Roth was rushing to the airport to catch a flight to Wyoming, where he had an appointment with Dick Cheney the next morning.

He had little time to spare. Suddenly, traffic halted for a motorcade to pass. It was Vice President Mike Pence and his entourage.

Roth appreciates the irony. At least, he can now. He made his flight, "President in Waiting" is finished and set to debut on CNN Saturday at 9 p.m. Eastern.

He interviewed all six living vice presidents and four presidents about a job that for much of American history was considered a joke, an appendage to government with few real duties other than being avail-

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able to become the world's most powerful figure at a moment's notice.

"Ben Franklin, when the Constitution was written, said, 'we should refer to the vice president as 'his superfluous excellency,'" President-elect Joe Biden, who served eight years as Barack Obama's vice president, says in the film.

Roth's doc includes several similar quotes, including the classic by John Nance Garner, Franklin Roosevelt's first vice president, who said the job was "not worth a bucket of warm piss." Cheney said Gerald Ford described it as the worst nine months of his life and urged him not to become George W. Bush's running mate.

So why would Roth want to devote three years of his life to making it?

"For whatever reason, I was always fascinated by the office of the vice presidency and I thought there was an intriguing story behind it," he said.

Achieving access was his most important task. Two or three veeps wouldn't do. He needed them all, and each wanted to know the others were participating. Walter Mondale was his first interview; Al Gore and Pence took a year and a half to set up, he said.

Ultimately, his only scheduling failure was Donald Trump.

Roth also didn't want to make the type of film that would unspool in a high school social studies class, putting all the students to sleep.

"It's a tough bunch of people to squeeze comedy out of," said Courtney Sexton, senior vice president of CNN Films.

But it has moments, like when Obama and Biden both struggle to edit the language of some of their conversations for public consumption. Both Cheney and his boss, George W. Bush, tell a funny story about their dogs clashing at Camp David.

Cheney is a revelation in the film, considering he knows he was considered the Darth Vader of the Bush administration. He's engaging and entertaining, with a keen awareness of his own role and the job's spot in history.

His insider look at what happened on Sept. 11, 2001, as well as Biden's description of the deliberations before the killing of Osama bin Laden, are particularly illuminating.

The film also describes the role of Mondale and his president, Jimmy Carter, in essentially creating the modern vice presidency. It's a turning point many viewers are likely unaware of; Roth said it was news to him.

Mondale, a Minnesota senator, knew how Hubert Humphrey felt about his treatment at the hands of President Lyndon Johnson, and "President in Waiting" contains audio of Johnson essentially treating Humphrey as a lapdog. He told Carter he'd only become his running mate if given a meaningful role in the administration and an office in the White House. He composed a memo outlining his ideas that's still referenced today.

Vice presidents lost their invisibility. Biden talks about being in the room when key decisions are made, and being copied in on internal correspondence. It's difficult to imagine a repeat of 1945, when Harry Truman succeeded Roosevelt and didn't know that the United States had developed an atomic bomb.

Still, the limitations are visible when you listen to Bush. His vice president, Cheney, is widely considered the most powerful vice president, or close to it.

"I don't know what the definition of a powerful vice president is," Bush says in the film. "I think people have got to recognize that the vice president is empowered by the president."

That's also stated explicitly by Pence, whose role in the Trump administration gets little examination in the film. Whatever the modern precedent, a president can easily render the vice president's role meaningless again.

In another month, the first woman, Kamala Harris, will join the vice president's club.

Considering its title, the film spends surprisingly little time talking about the most important part of the job. No American under age 60 has any memory of a vice president suddenly elevated because of a president's death. Ford took over upon the resignation of President Richard Nixon 46 years ago.

How did that knowledge change each man's life? How did they keep prepared for the possibility?

Roth said none of the politicians had much illuminating to say on the topic. "There was not much of a story to be told there," he said.

India's winter of discontent: Farmers rise up against Modi

By SHEIKH SAALIQ Associated Press

NEW DELHI (AP) — A chilly breeze whirls through New Delhi in the mornings and the sun is partly obscured by toxic haze, a marker of another winter in the Indian capital. But along the city's borders, this year is visibly and viscerally different.

The perpetually busy arterial highways that connect most northern Indian towns to this city of 29 million people now pulse to the cries of "Inquilab Zindabad" — "Long live the revolution." Tens and thousands of farmers with distinctive, colorful turbans and long, flowing beards have descended upon the city's borders, choking highways in giant demonstrations against new farming laws that they say will open them to corporate exploitation.

For more than a week, they've marched toward the capital on their tractors and trucks like an army, pushing aside concrete police barricades while braving tear gas, batons and water cannons. Now, on the outskirts of New Delhi, they are hunkered down with food and fuel supplies that can last weeks and threatening to besiege the capital if Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government doesn't meet their demands to abolish the laws.

"Modi wants to sell our lands to corporates," said one of them, Kaljeet Singh, 31, who traveled from Ludhiana city in Punjab, some 310 kilometers (190 miles) north of New Delhi. "He can't decide for millions of those who for generations have given their blood and sweat to the land they regard as more precious than their lives."

At night, the farmers sleep in trailers and under trucks, curling themselves in blankets to brave the winter chill. During the day, they sit huddled in groups in their vehicles, surrounded by mounds of rice, lentils and vegetables that are prepared into meals at hundreds of makeshift soup kitchens, in enormous pots stirred with wooden spoons the size of canoe paddles.

Anmol Singh, 33, who supports his family of six by farming, said the new laws were part of a larger plan to hand over the farmers' land to big corporations and make them landless.

"Modi wants the poor farmer to die of hunger so that he can fill the stomachs of his rich friends," he said. "We are here to fight his brutal decrees peacefully."

He paused, then reconsidered: "Actually, let him and his ministers take us on. We will give them a bloody nose."

Many of the protesting farmers hail from northern Punjab and Haryana, two of the largest agricultural states in India. An overwhelming majority of them are Sikhs. They fear the laws passed in September will lead the government to stop buying grain at minimum guaranteed prices and result in exploitation by corporations who will push down prices. Many activists and farming experts support their demand for a minimum guaranteed price for their crops.

The new rules will also eliminate agents who act as middlemen between the farmers and the government-regulated wholesale markets. Farmers say agents are a vital cog of the farm economy and their main line of credit, providing quick funds for fuel, fertilizers and even loans in case of family emergencies.

The laws have compounded existing resentment from farmers, who often complain of being ignored by the government in their push for better crop prices, additional loan waivers and irrigation systems to guarantee water during dry spells.

The government has argued the laws bring about necessary reform that will allow farmers to market their produce and boost production through private investment. But farmers say they were never consulted.

With nearly 60% of the Indian population depending on agriculture for their livelihoods, the growing farmer rebellion has rattled Modi's administration and allies. His leaders have scrambled to contain the protests, which are fast resembling last year's scenes when a contentious new citizenship law that discriminated against Muslims led to demonstrations that culminated in violence.

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Those demonstrations were much bigger in scale, but the farmers' rumblings are growing fast and gaining widespread support of ordinary citizens who have started joining them in large numbers.

Modi and his allies have tried to allay farmers' fears about the new laws while dismissing their concerns. Some of his party leaders have called the farmers "misguided" and "anti-national," a label often given to those who criticize Modi or his policies.

The government is holding talks with the farmers to persuade them to end their protests, but they have dug in their heels.

On Friday, a group of 35 leaders of the farmers called for a nationwide shutdown on Tuesday and said the protests would continue until the laws are revoked.

Farmer Kulwant Singh, 72, said that when he left his home in Haryana for the protests, he gave his wife a garland of flowers for two possible scenarios.

"Either I return victorious and she places it around my neck in celebration, or I die here revolting and the same garland is put on my body when it reaches home," Singh said.

Such passions run deep among the protesters who have found social, economic and generational barriers tumbling during the demonstrations.

Singh isn't the only one from his family who traveled to New Delhi for what he called "Qilah Fatehi," an Urdu term that translates to "laying a siege." His son and grandson also accompanied him.

"It's a fight for my generation too," said Amrinder Singh, 16.

As demonstrations grow, the protesters have also started to drive a political message home.

Not satisfied with Modi's federal policies, many of which have attracted widescale resentment from his critics and minorities, protesting farmers say it's time he stops what they call his "dictatorial behavior."

"India is in a recession. There are hardly any jobs and our country's secular fabric is in tatters," said Gurpreet Singh, 26, a biotechnology student who comes from a farming family. "At a time when India needs a healing touch, Modi is coming up with divisive, controversial laws. This is unacceptable and defies our constitutional values."

Modi's second term in power since May 2019 has been marked by several convulsions. The economy has tanked, social strife widened, protests have erupted against discriminatory laws and his government has been questioned over its response to the pandemic.

The farmer protests present a new challenge for the government.

The protesters' desire to stand up to Modi and his policies extends to a sexagenarian farmer couple who drove 250 kilometers (155 miles) from Chandigarh city in a hatchback Sunday to participate in the demonstrations.

Dharam Singh Sandhu, 67, and Vimaljeet Kaur, 66, are spending nights in their car parked near the protest site. In the morning, they share breakfast at a makeshift soup kitchen. The latter part of the day is spent taking part in the demonstrations.

"Our land is our mother. If we can't protect it then we have no right to live," Sandhu said about the protests.

His wife spoke passionately of a larger purpose as she made her way to the protest site through a stream of vehicles honking incessantly to get past congested traffic.

"Our country is like a bunch of flowers, but Modi wants it to be of the same color. He has no right to do that. I am here to protest against that mindset," Kaur said.

As Kaur walked hand in hand with her husband, a great cry emerged from one of the vehicles: "Inquilab Zindabad."

The crowd turned and followed their gaze toward a young man with a black beard who held up his fist through the car's window.

The protesters, including Kaur, roared back: "Inquilab Zindabad!"

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

By ALEXANDRA JAFFE Associated Press

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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 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. Fauci told NBC's "Today" show on Friday, "I said yes right on the spot."

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 sit-

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ting 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.”

Today in History

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Saturday, Dec. 5, the 340th day of 2020. There are 26 days left in the year.

Today’s Highlight in History:

On Dec. 5, 2013, Nelson Mandela, the anti-apartheid leader who became South Africa’s first Black president, died at age 95.

On this date:

In 1791, composer Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart died in Vienna, Austria, at age 35.

In 1792, George Washington was re-elected president; John Adams was re-elected vice president.

In 1848, President James K. Polk triggered the Gold Rush of ’49 by confirming that gold had been discovered in California.

In 1932, German physicist Albert Einstein was granted a visa, making it possible for him to travel to the United States.

In 1933, national Prohibition came to an end as Utah became the 36th state to ratify the 21st Amendment to the Constitution, repealing the 18th Amendment.

In 1952, the Great Smog of London descended on the British capital; the unusually thick fog, which contained toxic pollutants, lasted five days and was blamed for causing thousands of deaths.

In 1977, Egypt broke diplomatic relations with Syria, Libya, Algeria, Iraq and South Yemen in the wake of criticism that followed President Anwar Sadat’s peace overtures to Israel.

In 1998, James P. Hoffa claimed the Teamsters presidency after challenger Tom Leedham conceded defeat in the union’s presidential election.

In 2002, Strom Thurmond, the oldest and (until Robert Byrd overtook him) longest-serving senator in history, celebrated his 100th birthday on Capitol Hill. (In toasting the South Carolina lawmaker, Senate Republican leader Trent Lott seemed to express nostalgia for Thurmond’s segregationist past; the resulting political firestorm prompted Lott to resign his leadership position.)

In 2008, the Labor Department reported that an alarming half-million jobs had vanished in Nov. 2008 as unemployment hit a 15-year high of 6.7 percent. A judge in Las Vegas sentenced O.J. Simpson to 33 years in prison (with eligibility for parole after nine) for an armed robbery at a hotel room. (Simpson was released to parole on Oct. 1, 2017.)

In 2009, a jury in Perugia, Italy convicted American student Amanda Knox and her former Italian boyfriend, Raffaele Sollecito (rah-fy-EHL’-ay soh-LEH’-chee-toh), of murdering Knox’s British roommate, Meredith Kercher, and sentenced them to long prison terms. (After a series of back-and-forth rulings, Knox and Sollecito were definitively acquitted in 2015 by Italy’s highest court.) A nightclub blaze in Perm, Russia, killed more than 150 people.

In 2018, former President George H.W. Bush was mourned at a memorial service at Washington National Cathedral attended by President Donald Trump and former Presidents Barack Obama, Bill Clinton and Jimmy Carter along with their spouses; former president George W. Bush was among the speakers, eulogizing his dad as “the brightest of a thousand points of light.”

Ten years ago: On the eve of talks with six world powers, Iran announced that it had produced its

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first batch of locally mined uranium ore for enrichment. The Kennedy Center Honors paid tribute to Paul McCartney, Oprah Winfrey, Merle Haggard, Broadway composer Jerry Herman and dancer Bill T. Jones. Serbia celebrated its first Davis Cup title, becoming only the second unseeded nation to win the trophy when Viktor Troicki beat Michael Llodra 6-2, 6-2, 6-3 to complete a 3-2 comeback win over France. Football player-turned-sportscaster Don Meredith, 72, died in Santa Fe, New Mexico.

Five years ago: In the wake of a commando-style shooting rampage by a Muslim extremist couple in Southern California that left 14 people dead, The New York Times called for more gun regulation in its first Page 1 editorial in 95 years; Liberty University President Jerry Falwell Jr. urged students, staff and faculty at his Christian school to get a permit to carry a concealed weapon on campus to counter any copycat attack. A rare pressing of the Beatles' White Album from Ringo Starr's record collection sold at auction in New York for \$790,000.

One year ago: House Speaker Nancy Pelosi announced that she had asked the relevant House committee chairs to begin drawing up articles of impeachment against President Donald Trump, saying his actions left them "no choice" but to act swiftly; in response, Trump tweeted that Democrats had "gone crazy." Four people, including a UPS driver, were killed after robbers stole the driver's truck and led police on a chase that ended in gunfire at a crowded intersection in Miramar, Florida; the two robbers also died along with a motorist who had been waiting at the intersection when officers ran up and opened fire. In a long-anticipated safety report, ride-sharing giant Uber said more than 3,000 sexual assaults had been reported during its U.S. rides in 2018, including 235 rapes.

Today's Birthdays: Author Joan Didion is 86. Author Calvin Trillin is 85. Actor Jeroen Krabbe (yeh-ROHN' krah-BAY') is 76. Opera singer Jose Carreras is 74. Pop singer Jim Messina is 73. College Football Hall of Famer and former NFL quarterback Jim Plunkett is 73. World Golf Hall of Famer Lanny Wadkins is 71. Actor Morgan Brittany is 69. Actor Brian Backer is 64. Pro and College Football Hall of Famer Art Monk is 63. Country singer Ty England is 57. Rock singer-musician John Rzeznik (REZ'-nihk) (The Goo Goo Dolls) is 55. Country singer Gary Allan is 53. Comedian-actor Margaret Cho is 52. Writer-director Morgan J. Freeman is 51. Actor Alex Kapp Horner is 51. Actor Kali Rocha is 49. Rock musician Regina Zernay (Cowboy Mouth) is 48. Actor Paula Patton is 45. Actor Amy Acker is 44. Actor Nick Stahl is 41. Actor Adan Canto is 39. Rhythm-and-blues singer Keri Hilson is 38. Actor Gabriel Luna is 38. Actor Frankie Muniz is 35. Actor Ross Bagley is 32. Milwaukee Brewers All-Star outfielder Christian Yelich is 29.