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Groton Area School District															
Active COVID-19 Cases															
Updated December 4, 2020; 11:49 AM															
JK	KG	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	Staff	Total
0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	3



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

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SD COVID-19 by Marie Miller

Here is our South Dakota round-up of Covid-19 statistics, courtesy of our friend Gordon Niva.

It appears that trend I thought I spotted last week may be an actual one; our new cases are decreasing. On the other hand, so is testing, and test positivity remains way too high; so there is clearly still a great deal of spread we are not detecting. New case numbers should be higher than they are, but we're missing a lot of them to be sure.

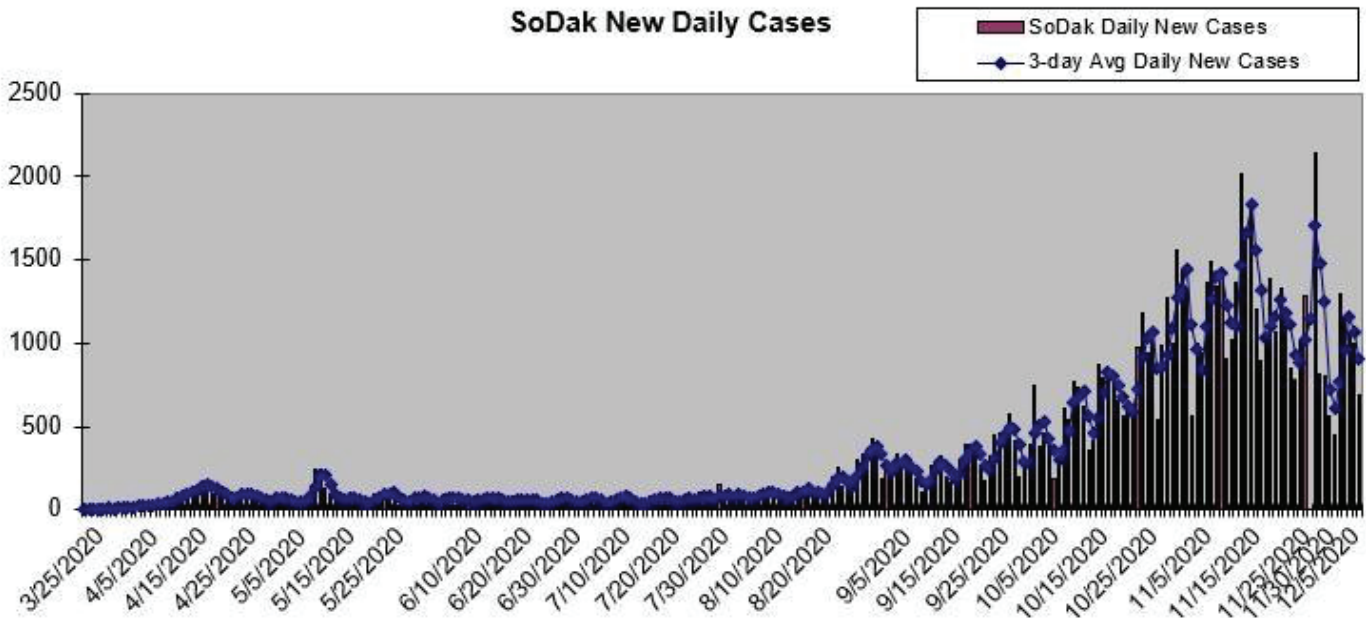
Anecdotally, I am still hearing that tests are very hard to come by unless you're symptomatic or in very close contact with someone who is symptomatic; so this remains an issue. Still, on balance, I think it's safe to say cases are on the downswing for now. I have concerns we might see that reverse itself as Thanksgiving-associated cases come in and then Christmas gatherings come home to roost; but for now, let's take a deep breath.

Test positivity is also down, lower than it's been in six weeks, but still completely out of hand. Remember that this number should be at five percent for a minimum of two weeks before restrictions are lifted, and three percent is a benchmark for having transmission under some sort of control. Of course, we never actually had any restrictions, and our test positivity has been above five percent for 133 days running and over 20 percent for 64 of the last 65 days; so we're completely off the charts. The last weekly summary that had us even in single digits for positivity was on August 16; that is a very, very long time ago. This remains a significant problem for any sort of attempt to rein this thing in. We are, after all, still #3 in the nation for per capita new cases over the last week, and that's not a great place to be in a nation that sets new records several times per week.

And our larger worry is still the death toll. We're up to #9 in the nation for per capita deaths in the US over the entire course of the pandemic, which is simply awful given we didn't see any surge until well after there were useful therapies and a whole lot of information on how to effectively treat patients; those states ahead of us are, for the most part, those hard-hit early when no one really knew what they were doing. With the benefit of that knowledge, we are losing a smaller proportion of diagnosed cases than other states did early-on, so the fact that we're catching up on deaths is a direct reflection of our out-of-control case counts over the past couple of months. And we're leading the nation, head and shoulders above every other state and territory (56 of them in all), for per capita deaths over the last week. South Dakotans are not done dying yet, and Christmas is coming.

Take care. This is a good time to renew your precautions. I want all of you to still be here next week for the next report.

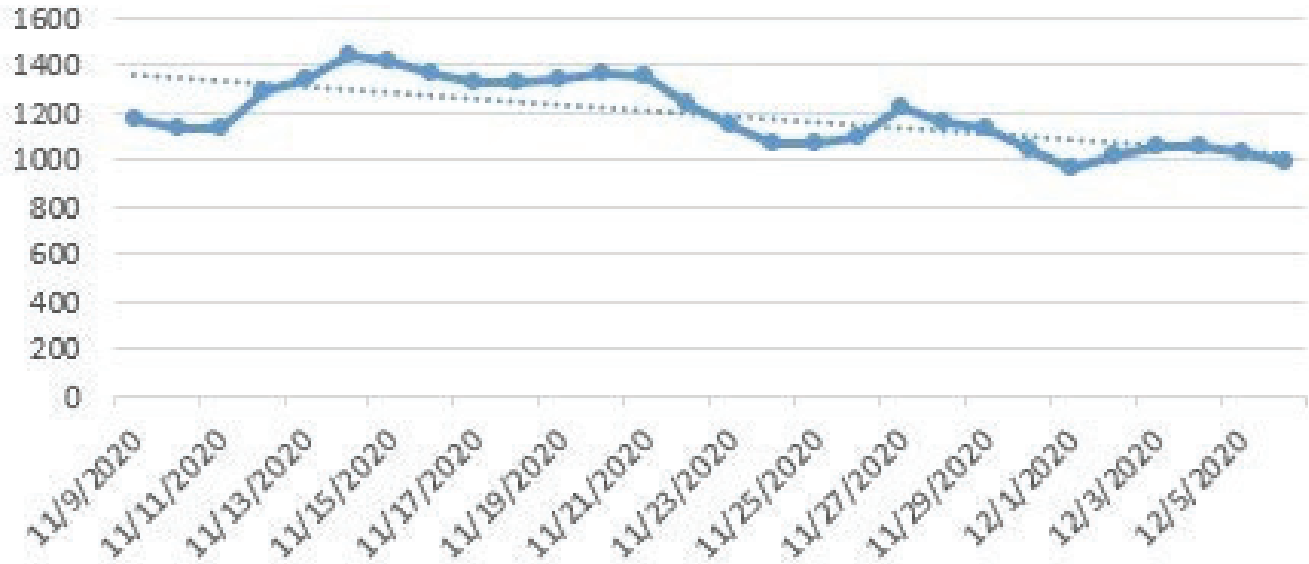
SoDak New Daily Cases



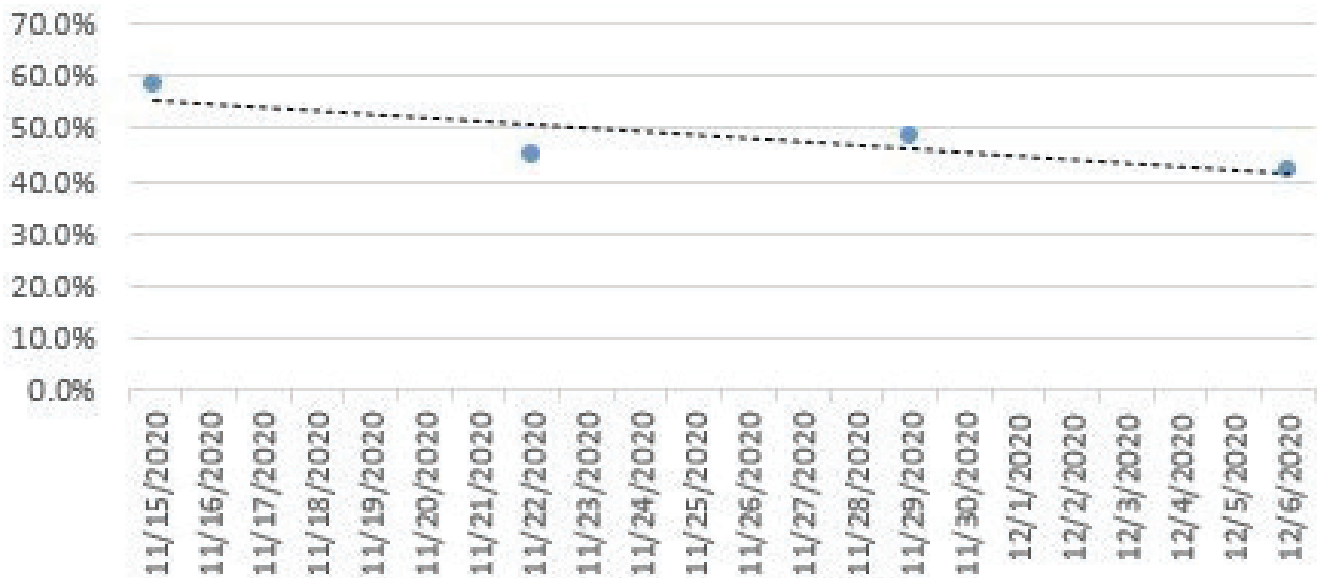
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10-day Rolling Avg of Daily New Cases
with Trendline
Four Weeks Displayed



Four Weeks of SoDak Positivity in %
Based on Total Persons Tested (SD DoH Website)
Goal Should Be Below 5%



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Area COVID-19 Cases

	Dec. 3	Dec. 4	Dec. 5	Dec. 6	Dec. 7
Minnesota	327,477	333,626	338,973	345,281	350,862
Nebraska	132,530	134,710	136,325	138,568	139,834
Montana	64,340	65,122	66,436	67,069	67,875
Colorado	241,172	247,209	252,222	257,347	260,581
Wyoming	29,966	30,518	31,047	31,250	31,561
North Dakota	80,135	81,105	81,949	82,504	82,981
South Dakota	82,203	83,348	84,398	85,304	85,991
United States	13,925,350	14,147,754	14,373,720	14,584,706	14,761,576
US Deaths	273,847	276,401	279,008	281,206	282,323

Minnesota	+5165	+6,149	+5,347	+ 6308	+5,581
Nebraska	+2,336	+2,180	+1,615	+ 2243	+1,266
Montana	+1135	+780	+1,314	+ 633	+806
Colorado	+3862	+6,037	+5,013	+ 5125	+3,234
Wyoming	+577	+552	+529	+ 203	+311
North Dakota	+480	+970	+844	+ 555	+477
South Dakota	+1291	+1,145	+1,050	+ 906	+687
United States	+199,044	+222,404	+225,966	+ 210986	+176,870
US Deaths	+3,156	+2,554	+2,607	+ 2198	+1,117

	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 6th COVID-19 UPDATE

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from State Health Lab Reports

South Dakota:

Positive: +687 (85991 total) Positivity Rate: 14.2%

Total Tests: 4830 (644,627 total)

Hospitalized: +42 (4835 total). 497 currently hospitalized -15)

Deaths: +19 (1110 total)

Age: 80+=12, 70s=4, 60s=2, 50s=1. Males=12, Females=7.

Counties: Aurora-2, Brookings-2, Davison-2, Gregory-1, Hamlin-2, Meade-1, Minnehaha-1, Pennington-6, Roberts-1, Sanborn-1.

Recovered: +438 (68,449 total)

Active Cases: +230 (16,432)

Percent Recovered: 79.6%

Beadle (32) +9 positive, +12 recovered (423 active cases)

Brookings (20) +24 positive, +15 recovered (438 active cases)

Brown (30): +34 positive, +13 recovered (677 active cases)

Clark (1): +2 positive, +3 recovered (65 active cases)

Clay (11): +7 positive, +5 recovered (242 active cases)

Codington (57): +16 positive, +19 recovered (514 active cases)

Davison (42): +12 positive, +5 recovered (485 active cases)

Day (11): +5 positive, +5 recovered (124 active cases)

Edmunds (3): +4 positive, +4 recovered (55 active cases)

Faulk (10): +1 positive, +0 recovered (25 active cases)

Grant (15): +19 positive, +5 recovered (192 active cases)

Hanson (3): +2 positive, +3 recovered (78 active cases)

Hughes (21): +14 positive, +5 recovered (320 active cases)

Lawrence (23): +16 positive, +11 recovered (425 active cases)

Lincoln (55): +45 positive, +23 recovered (1008 active cases)

Marshall (3): +0 positive, +5 recovered (58 active cases)

McCook (19): +3 positive, +3 recovered (115 active cases)

McPherson (1): +1 positive, +2 recovery (45 active case)

Minnehaha (204): +192 positive, +104 recovered (3779 active cases)

Pennington (90): +71 positive, +58 recovered (1883 active cases)

Potter (2): +0 positive, +4 recovered (66 active cases)

Roberts (22): +9 positive, +5 recovered (176 active cases)

Spink (19): +9 positive, +1 recovered (140 active cases)

Walworth (13): +4 positive, 2 recovered (148 active cases)

NORTH DAKOTA

COVID-19 Daily Report, Dec. 6:

- 10.0% rolling 14-day positivity
- 474 new positives
- 6,908 susceptible test encounters
- 305 currently hospitalized (+7)
- 4,969 active cases (-52)
- 1,013 total deaths (+6)

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2 days ago

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

Yesterday

Global Cases
66,623,914
14,584,706 US
9,644,222 India
6,577,177 Brazil
2,439,163 Russia
2,334,626 France
1,710,379 United Kingdom
1,709,991 Italy
1,684,647 Spain
1,459,832 Argentina
1,362,249 Colombia
1,183,640 Germany
1,168,395 Mexico
1,063,449 Poland
1,028,986 Iran

Global Deaths
1,530,296

281,206 deaths US
176,628 deaths Brazil
140,182 deaths India
109,456 deaths Mexico
61,111 deaths United Kingdom
59,514 deaths Italy
55,073 deaths France
50,016 deaths Iran

Today

Global Cases
67,170,838
14,761,576 US
9,677,203 India
6,603,540 Brazil
2,466,961 Russia
2,345,648 France
1,728,878 Italy
1,727,755 United Kingdom
1,684,647 Spain
1,463,110 Argentina
1,371,103 Colombia
1,194,550 Germany
1,175,850 Mexico
1,067,870 Poland
1,054,274 Iran

Global Deaths
1,537,785

282,323 deaths US
176,941 deaths Brazil
140,573 deaths India
109,717 deaths Mexico
61,342 deaths United Kingdom
60,078 deaths Italy
55,247 deaths France
50,594 deaths Iran

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County	Positive Cases	Recovered Cases	Negative Persons	Deceased	Community Spread	% RT-PCR Test Positivity Rate (Weekly)
Aurora	378	296	740	7	Substantial	36.54%
Beadle	2376	1928	4775	32	Substantial	21.19%
Bennett	328	273	1042	5	Substantial	7.14%
Bon Homme	1401	1260	1770	20	Substantial	23.85%
Brookings	2594	2136	9001	20	Substantial	9.32%
Brown	3862	3155	10447	30	Substantial	25.91%
Brule	593	505	1615	5	Substantial	27.07%
Buffalo	391	349	826	10	Substantial	21.62%
Butte	767	630	2670	14	Substantial	16.44%
Campbell	107	94	195	1	Moderate	16.67%
Charles Mix	960	690	3388	6	Substantial	19.08%
Clark	273	207	792	1	Substantial	20.00%
Clay	1429	1176	4217	11	Substantial	16.12%
Codington	2888	2317	7672	57	Substantial	25.30%
Corson	419	358	849	5	Substantial	41.18%
Custer	591	457	2226	7	Substantial	13.17%
Davison	2505	1978	5361	42	Substantial	26.75%
Day	417	286	1435	11	Substantial	35.19%
Deuel	347	256	920	3	Substantial	36.36%
Dewey	1096	599	3272	6	Substantial	29.55%
Douglas	318	247	764	5	Substantial	17.46%
Edmunds	278	220	858	3	Substantial	11.88%
Fall River	378	309	2149	10	Substantial	9.04%
Faulk	288	253	563	10	Moderate	18.18%
Grant	718	511	1790	15	Substantial	30.32%
Gregory	451	367	1011	23	Substantial	23.76%
Haakon	170	130	458	3	Substantial	10.99%
Hamlin	525	382	1403	19	Substantial	22.67%
Hand	294	242	665	1	Substantial	30.00%
Hanson	283	202	540	3	Substantial	54.32%
Harding	83	63	136	0	Moderate	38.89%
Hughes	1751	1410	5093	21	Substantial	20.40%
Hutchinson	613	445	1888	13	Substantial	39.17%

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Hyde	125	101	343	0	Substantial	50.00%
Jackson	218	174	834	8	Substantial	23.19%
Jerauld	244	201	461	13	Substantial	17.86%
Jones	63	54	161	0	Moderate	10.00%
Kingsbury	462	369	1299	12	Substantial	15.22%
Lake	902	727	2572	12	Substantial	16.60%
Lawrence	2202	1754	7171	23	Substantial	14.10%
Lincoln	5760	4697	16001	55	Substantial	23.82%
Lyman	477	395	1614	8	Substantial	24.76%
Marshall	207	146	921	3	Substantial	31.58%
McCook	614	480	1309	19	Substantial	28.18%
McPherson	157	111	473	1	Substantial	11.27%
Meade	1897	1485	6260	16	Substantial	15.08%
Mellette	192	156	623	1	Substantial	15.79%
Miner	205	164	465	5	Moderate	8.33%
Minnehaha	21771	17788	62451	204	Substantial	23.48%
Moody	453	345	1510	12	Substantial	25.22%
Oglala Lakota	1722	1377	6007	27	Substantial	22.18%
Pennington	9349	7376	31394	90	Substantial	15.67%
Perkins	224	143	571	2	Substantial	38.67%
Potter	284	219	671	2	Substantial	17.89%
Roberts	786	588	3620	22	Substantial	20.68%
Sanborn	287	204	566	3	Substantial	22.39%
Spink	610	451	1786	19	Substantial	25.32%
Stanley	240	200	699	1	Substantial	21.74%
Sully	98	80	214	3	Moderate	15.00%
Todd	1021	854	3640	15	Substantial	24.64%
Tripp	560	422	1260	9	Substantial	34.78%
Turner	843	675	2183	46	Substantial	15.09%
Union	1315	1068	4945	25	Substantial	19.27%
Walworth	539	378	1546	13	Substantial	28.26%
Yankton	2053	1405	7550	15	Substantial	18.19%
Ziebach	239	131	574	7	Substantial	42.31%
Unassigned	0	0	1779	0		

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South Dakota



AGE GROUP OF SOUTH DAKOTA COVID-19 CASES

Age Range	# of Cases	# of Deaths
0-9 years	3029	0
10-19 years	9367	0
20-29 years	16106	3
30-39 years	14330	12
40-49 years	12301	20
50-59 years	12244	61
60-69 years	9673	146
70-79 years	5021	234
80+ years	3920	634

SEX OF SOUTH DAKOTA COVID-19 CASES

Sex	# of Cases	# of Deaths
Female	44910	544
Male	41081	566

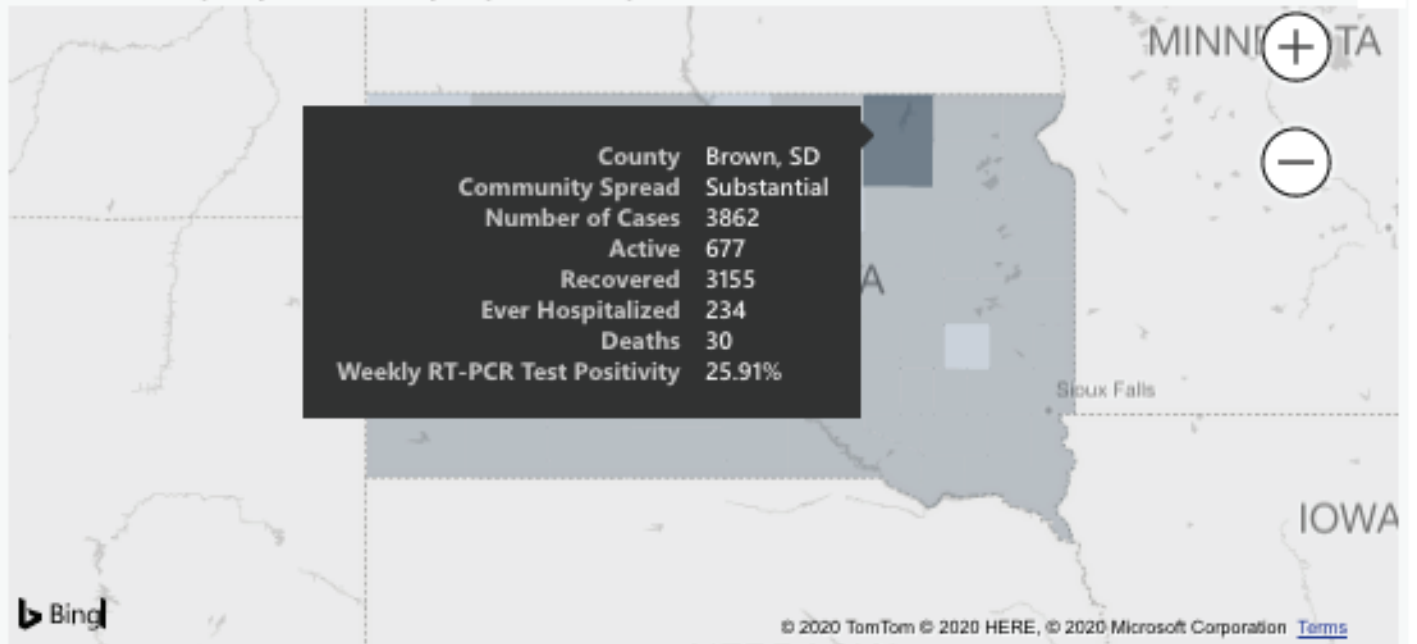
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Brown County

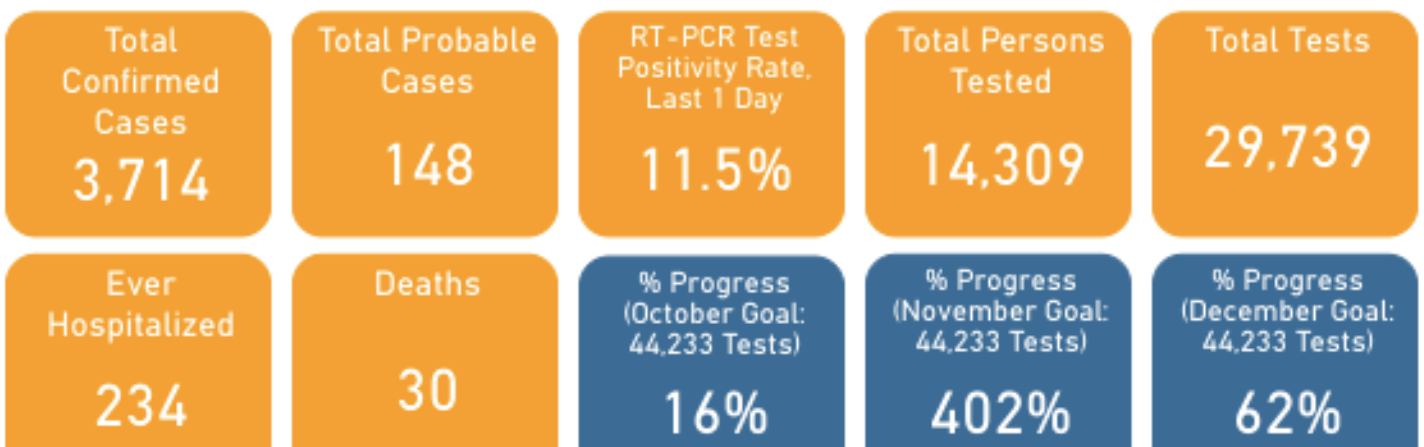


Community Spread Map by County of Residence



Community Spread ● Moderate ● Substantial

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



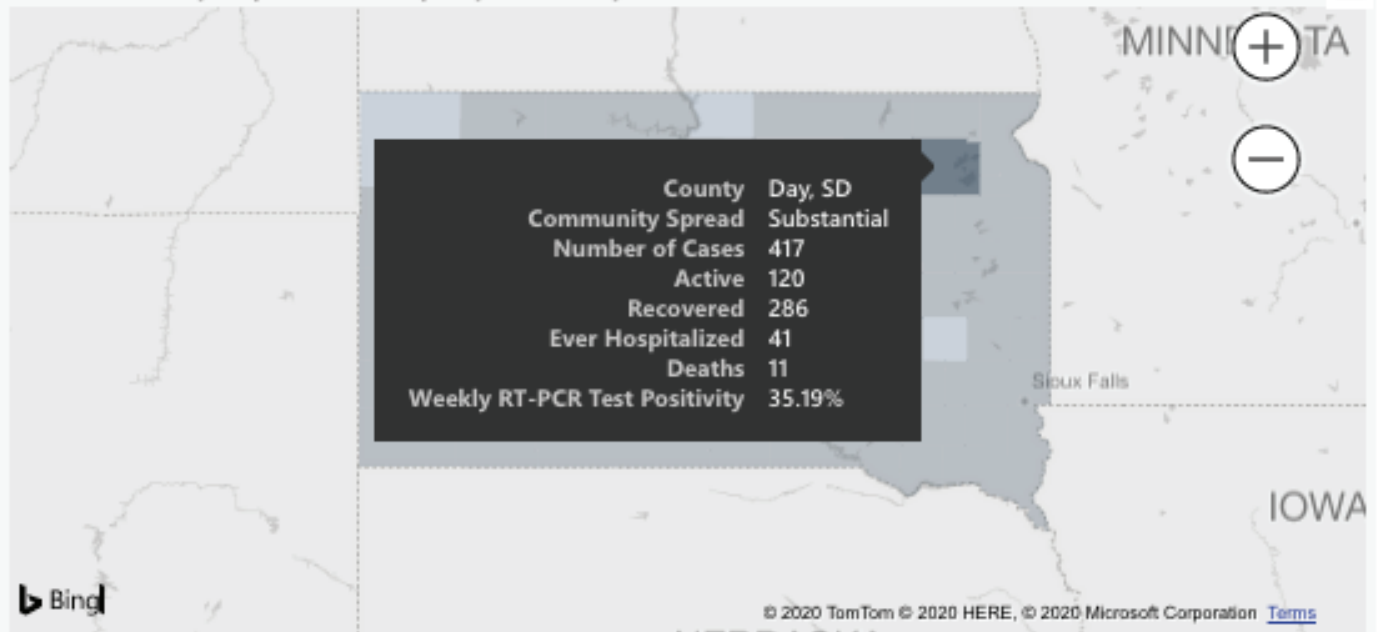
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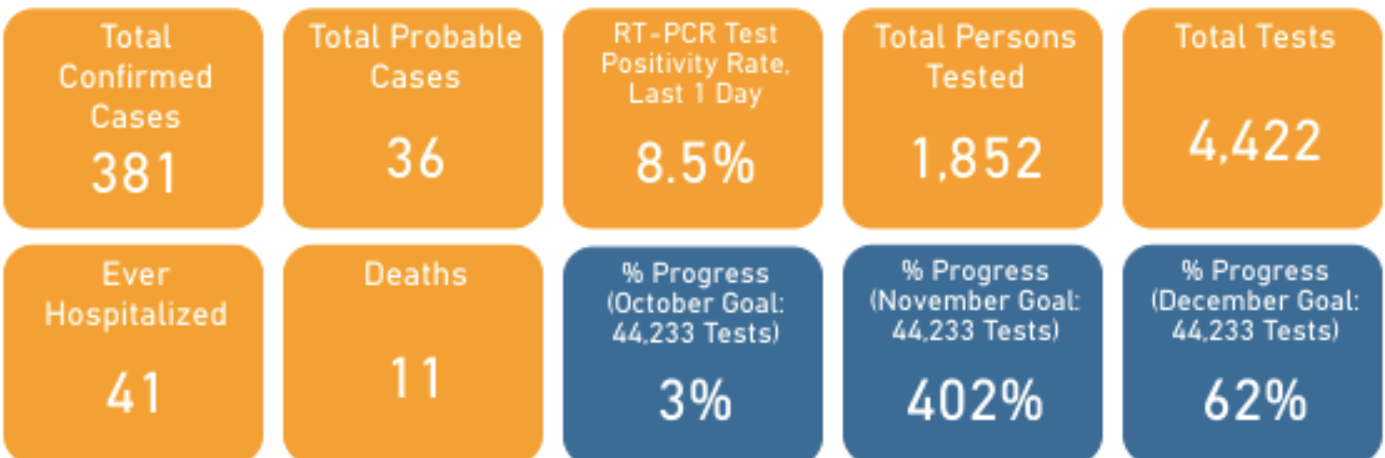
Day County



Community Spread Map by County of Residence



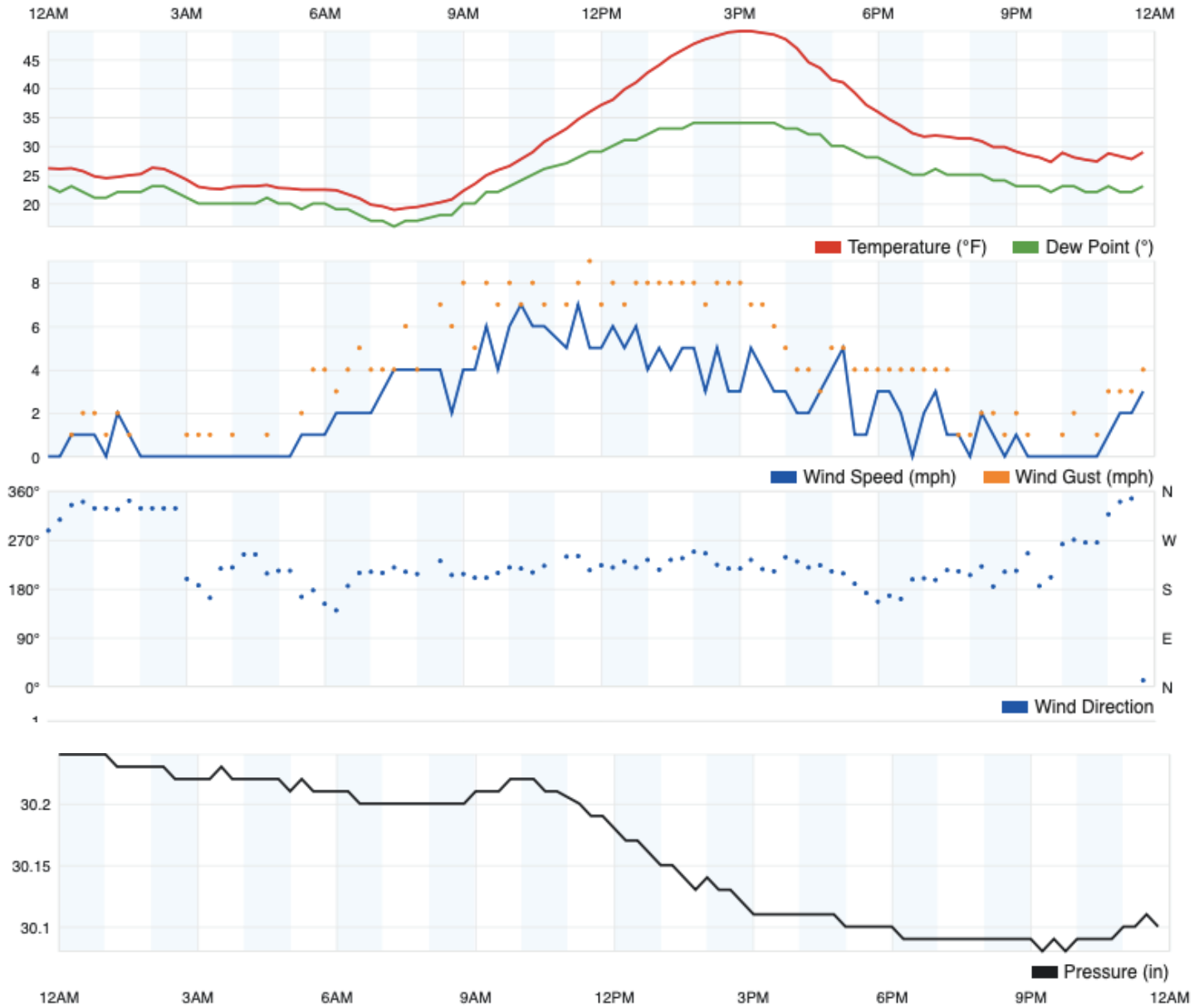
Hover over a county to see its details, or click county to update the orange boxes.



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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Today

Tonight

Tuesday

Tuesday
Night

Wednesday



Sunny



Partly Cloudy



Mostly Sunny



Partly Cloudy



Sunny

High: 53 °F

Low: 26 °F

High: 55 °F

Low: 29 °F

High: 56 °F

Today

- *Mostly Sunny*
- *Highs 45 east to 62 southwest.*

Tuesday

- *Partly Cloudy*
- *Highs 51 east to 66 southwest*

Wednesday

- *Mostly Sunny*
- *Highs 51 east to 61 southwest*

National Weather Service Aberdeen, SD

Graphic Created: 12/7/2020 3:41 AM

Dry and mild conditions will continue across the area through mid-week, with afternoon high temperatures 20 to 30 degrees above normal for this time of year.

End of the Week Storm?

Potential Growing for Winter Weather Friday/Saturday

What's the Concern?

A winter storm may materialize by the end of the week across the central plains, possibly affecting SD and MN. Confidence remains **low** at this time.

What's Uncertain?

Storm **track**

Storm **timing**

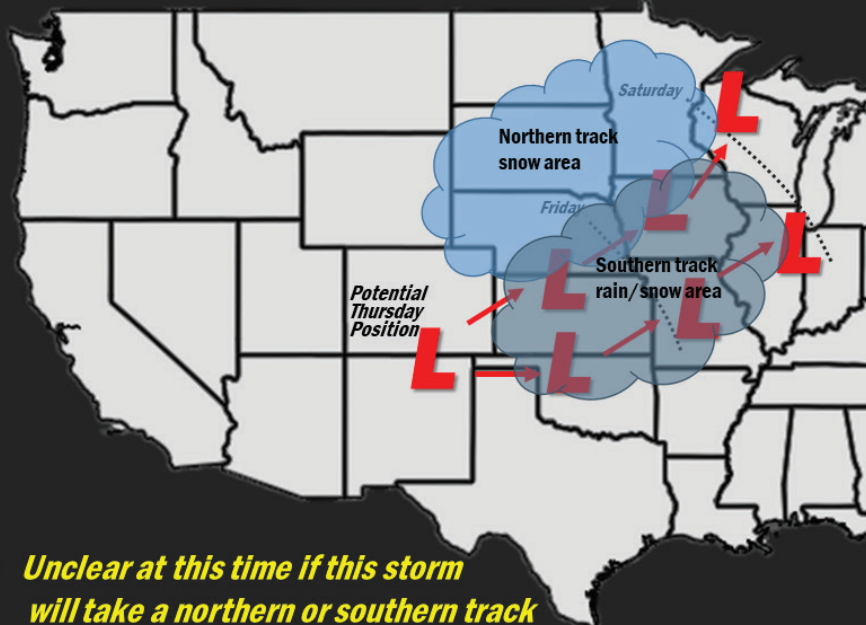
Storm **strength**

Heaviest precipitation **amounts** and **locations**

What Should You Do?

Keep **monitoring** the forecast for the end of the week and over the weekend.

Consider **preparing** your car, home, and self for the risk of winter weather.



- *Unclear at this time if this storm will take a northern or southern track*

 NATIONAL WEATHER SERVICE
OCEANIC AND ATMOSPHERIC ADMINISTRATION
Updated: 12/7/2020 4:35 AM Central

Much uncertainty remains for the potential storm system Friday and Saturday. What does seem almost certain is that a storm system will eject out into the plains during this time. What's unclear is whether or not it takes a more northern track and brings snowfall to the region, or if it goes more of a southern route and generally keeps the area free from major snow accumulations. The track of the storm will become more clear in the next day or two. In the meantime, stay informed of the latest forecasts for the end of the week and into the weekend.

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Today in Weather History

December 7, 1963: Winds of 50 to 60 mph resulted in blowing snow all day on the 7th, which reduced visibilities to near zero and produced snow drifts several feet deep in many areas. Snowfall in eastern South Dakota was generally from 3 to 7 inches with 1 to 2 inches in the western part of the state. Storm total snowfall included 8 inches at Sisseton, 5 inches at Watertown and Wheaton, 4 inches at Aberdeen, and 2 inches at Mobridge.

December 7, 1971: Heavy snow of 7 to 12 inches fell in north-central South Dakota on the 7th. Timber Lake and Eagle Butte each reported 12 inches of snow. Strong winds accompanied the snow and caused extensive drifting. Drifts up to 15 feet were reported in sheltered areas near Lemmon. Seven inches fell at Mobridge, and 11 inches fell at Selby. McIntosh received 4 inches.

December 7, 1740: By all accounts, the Merrimack River in New Hampshire flooded on this day. The flood is likely the first recorded in New Hampshire. "The snow melted, and a freshet occurred in the Merrimack River, nothing like it having been experienced there for seventy years. At Haverhill, the stream rose fifteen feet, and many houses were floated off." (Perley, Sidney, 1891, *Historic storms of New England* p. 49-51).

December 7, 2006: A rare tornado tore through Kensal Rise in London. This T4 on the TORRO scale, equivalent to an F2 on the Fujita scale, injured six people and damaged 150 homes. According to the BBC, the last tornado which caused significant damage in London was in December 1954, in West London.

1886 - A great snowstorm hit the southern Appalachian Mountains. The three day storm produced 25 inches at Rome GA, 33 inches at Asheville NC, and 42 inches in the mountains. Montgomery AL received a record eleven inches of snow. Columbia SC received one to two inches of sleet. (4th-6th) (David Ludlum) (The Weather Channel)

1970 - A windstorm toppled the National Christmas Tree at the White House. (Sandra and TI Richard Sanders - 1987)

1987 - Another in a series of storms brought high winds and heavy rain to the northwestern U.S., with heavy snow in some of the higher elevations. In northern California, Crescent City was drenched with 2.58 inches of rain, and winds gusted to 90 mph. Up to fourteen inches of snow blanketed the mountains of northern California, and snow and high winds created blizzard conditions around Lake Tahoe NV. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - The morning low at Bismarck, ND, was eleven degrees warmer than the record low of 25 degrees at Meridian MS, and during the afternoon half a dozen cities in the north central and northwestern U.S. reported record high temperatures for the date, including Alpena MI with a reading of 57 degrees. (Storm Data) (The National Weather Summary)

1989 - Heavy snow blanketed the Central Rocky Mountain Region. Totals in the southern foothills of Colorado ranged up to 17 inches at Rye. Arctic air invaded the north central U.S. Lincoln NE, which reported a record high of 69 degrees the previous afternoon, was 35 degrees colder. International Falls MN was the cold spot in the nation with a morning low of 9 degrees below zero, and temperatures in northern Minnesota hovered near zero through the daylight hours. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

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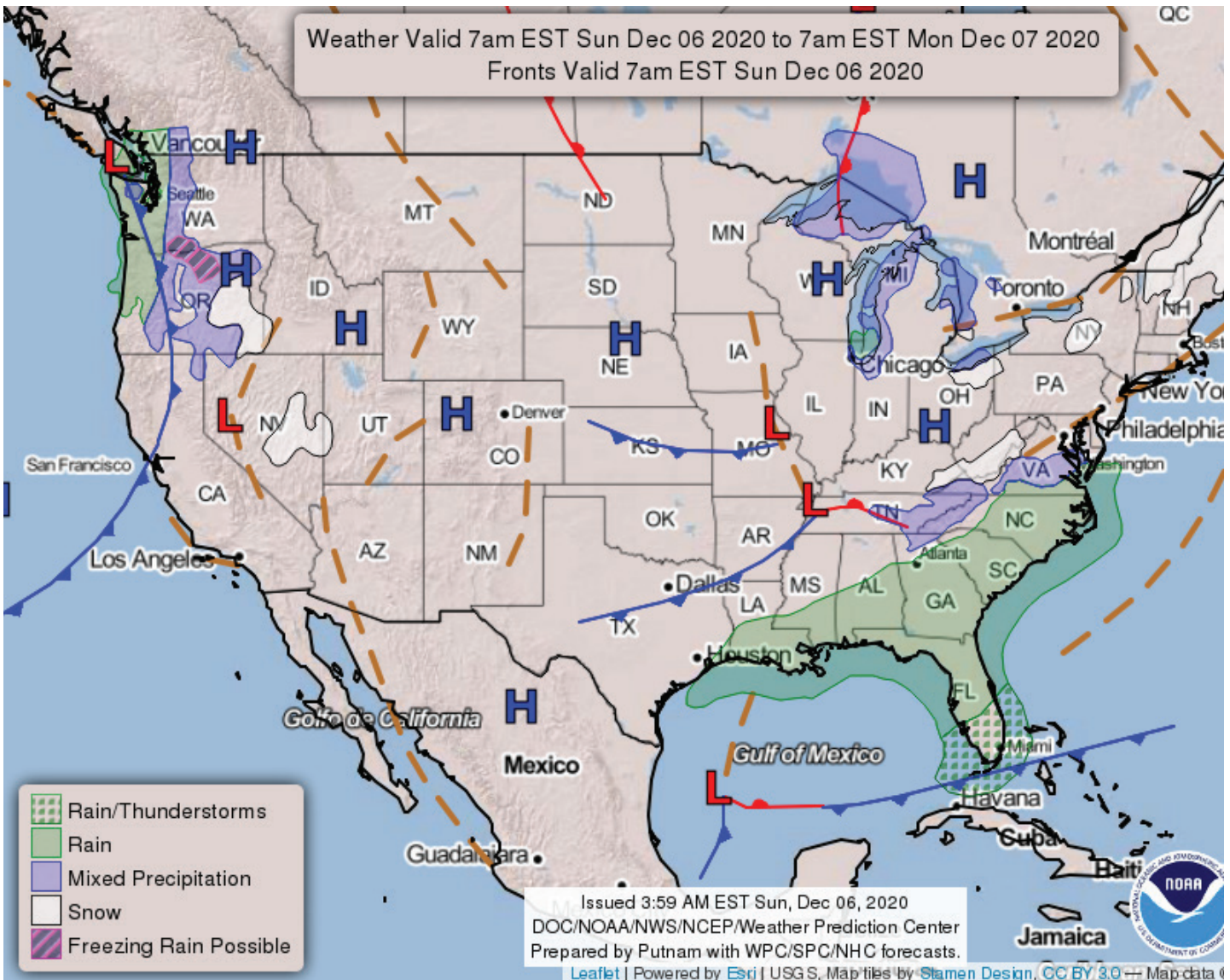
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Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 50 °F at 3:03 PM
Low Temp: 19 °F at 7:35 AM
Wind: 9 mph at 11:40 AM
Precip: .00

Today's Info

Record High: 60° in 1918
Record Low: -27° in 2013
Average High: 28°F
Average Low: 9°F
Average Precip in Dec.: 0.11
Precip to date in Dec.: 0.00
Average Precip to date: 21.31
Precip Year to Date: 16.52
Sunset Tonight: 4:51 p.m.
Sunrise Tomorrow: 8:01 a.m.



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A REASON TO BE GLAD

The word glad in Scripture carries with it the idea of happiness and joyfulness, pleasure and freedom. God's Word, however, reveals the only source of gladness: the Lord. The Psalmist wrote, "For You make me glad by Your deeds, O Lord; I sing for joy at the works of your hands."

This source for our gladness does not come from anything we have done or accomplished or any ladder of success that we might have climbed. It does not come from the wealth that we may have accumulated or records we have set. It does not come from any amount of power we have because of our position. The gladness that the Psalmist writes about comes from what God has done for us.

Another Psalmist wrote, "But may all who search for You be filled with joy and gladness. May those who love Your salvation repeatedly shout, 'The Lord is great.'" And another Psalmist said, "Let the godly rejoice. Let them be glad in God's presence."

We often set "goals" for ourselves that we think will bring a sense of well-being and fulfillment to us - the "if only" statements we make: "If only I can get a promotion I will be satisfied," or "If only we had a larger home our family would be happy," or "If only...If only..." and the list goes on.

But the "glad" that comes from God that can fill our hearts and lives comes as a result of what He has done and will do for us: He made possible our salvation through Jesus Christ, His Son, and our Savior. Because of Him we can be glad and sing for joy, knowing that "all things are working together" for our good and His glory.

Prayer: Thank you, Lord, for filling our hearts with gladness because of Your goodness, love, and grace. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: For You make me glad by Your deeds, O Lord; I sing for joy at the works of your hands. Psalm 92:4

News from the Associated Press

State warns South Dakota pot smokers about lighting up early

By ARIELLE ZIONTS Rapid City Journal

RAPID CITY, S.D. (AP) — South Dakotans should expect legal consequences if they're caught smoking or selling marijuana before new laws go into effect July 1 and will continue to face restrictions after that.

"I caution people not to get ahead of themselves," said Mark Vargo, Pennington County State's Attorney.

People "should refrain from using marijuana until that constitutional amendment takes effect," echoed Eric Whitcher, director of the county's Public Defender's Office.

However the recreational amendment may also be voided if a judge agrees with the Pennington County Sheriff and Highway Patrol Superintendent that it violates the constitution, the Rapid City Journal reported.

Sheriff Kevin Thom and Colonel Rick Miller filed a lawsuit last week in Hughes County that asks a judge to void the amendment that was approved by 54% of voters statewide and 59% in Pennington County. The lawsuit argues that Amendment A violates the South Dakota Constitution because it doesn't follow the "one-subject rule" and because it's actually a revision, not an amendment.

If the amendment is upheld there will still be age limits as well as restrictions on how much marijuana people can possess and sell, and in what locations and scenarios they can smoke it in.

People with prior arrests or convictions related to possessing or selling soon-to-be legal amounts of marijuana will still have arrest records and convictions, including possible felony ones. Past arrests and convictions can make it harder find a job, housing and financial aid. It can also impact bond and sentencing if they're arrested and convicted for a new crime.

Unlike some other states, South Dakota's new marijuana laws don't automatically erase relevant arrest records and convictions, or create a streamlined process like North Dakota. People will have to individually ask a court to expunge their arrest records or seek a pardon through the Board of Pardons and Parole and Gov. Kristi Noem.

The new laws will create significant change even with all of the restrictions, said Whitcher and Brendan Johnson, a former U.S. Attorney who introduced Amendment A.

"I think the impact will be a reduction in arrests and law enforcement having more time to focus on higher priority cases," Johnson said. "I anticipate significant economic savings and fewer lives being permanently damaged with arrest records."

While most people convicted of possessing or selling small amounts of marijuana aren't sent to prison, "going through the criminal justice system, regardless of what the outcomes is a stressful process," Whitcher said. "It's expensive, you lose work."

He said defendants are often fined \$400, a "significant amount of money for a lot of people."

There will also be less "collateral consequences," Whitcher said. He said some jobs and student aid programs bar people with marijuana convictions, even misdemeanors ones.

Recreational and medical marijuana are set to go into effect July 1 but the Department of Revenue has until April 1, 2022 to create rules and regulations related to sales.

The constitutional amendment says that people 21 and older can possess, use, transport and sell paraphernalia and up to one ounce of marijuana. People who live in areas without licensed marijuana stores can have up to three plants.

It will be illegal to drive under the influence of marijuana and smoke it on school grounds, where tobacco is banned, and in public places. The amendment allows landlords and employees to ban renters and workers from using marijuana. Cities and counties can ban marijuana shops.

The amendment legalizes commercial growers, manufacturers and sellers. Recreational pot will have a 15% sales tax with the revenue being split between public schools and the state's general fund.

The medical marijuana law allows people of any age to possess up to three ounces of marijuana if their doctor signs a document saying the drug will help them with a "debilitating medical condition or symptom."

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The patient will receive a registration card from the Department of Health, which must set up its system in 140 days after the law goes into effect. Minors must receive permission from their parents or guardian to receive a card.

Patients can't smoke in public or drive while under the influence. Schools, landlords and employees can't reject cardholders unless it would jeopardize their federal funding or licensing.

South Dakota St women topple No. 18 Gonzaga in OT

BROOKINGS, S.D. (AP) — Myah Selland scored 11 of her 18 points beginning in the final 20 seconds of regulation and assisted on Lindsey Theuninck's 3-pointer with 3.5 seconds left in overtime to lift South Dakota State to a 75-72 win over No. 18 Gonzaga on Sunday.

Selland had a three-point play with 16 seconds remaining to force the overtime, tying it at 64. She had another three-point play that put the Jackrabbits up by one in the middle of OT and a 3-pointer that was good for a 72-70 lead with 28 seconds left before setting up the winner.

Selland drove from the left side into the lane before kicking the ball out to Theuninck in the right corner. Jill Townsend, who led Gonzaga with a career-high 29 points, came up short on a half-court heave at the buzzer.

South Dakota State (3-0) opened its season with a seven-point win over then No. 15 Iowa State and now has 13 wins over ranked opponents.

Gonzaga (1-2) has played all three of its games in South Dakota. Thanksgiving weekend they lost a close game to No. 1 South Carolina before rallying from 18-points down to edge South Dakota.

This time the Bulldogs only fell behind by eight midway through the second quarter but led 30-28 at the half.

Theuninck finished with 11 points, hitting three of the Jackrabbits' 11 3-pointers on 25 attempts. Tylee Irwin scored 16 points and Paiton Burckhard added 14. Haley Greer had 10 assists.

LeeAnne Wirth scored 10 points on 5-for-5 shooting and twin Jenn Wirth had 10 rebounds for Gonzaga.

More AP college basketball: <https://apnews.com/hub/womens-college-basketball> and https://twitter.com/AP_Top25

Rapid City officials investigate string of suspicious fires

RAPID CITY, S.D. (AP) — The Rapid City Fire Department said Sunday it responded to five overnight fires in less than seven hours, including four that are considered suspicious and occurred in the same area.

The department said the fires were set in trash cans, dumpsters or shipping containers. The first fire was reported at 11:30 p.m. on Saturday in a commercial dumpster at the South Dakota State University College of Nursing, according to the release.

Tim Rangitsch, who owns Acme Bicycles, told the Rapid City Journal someone lit his garbage can on fire and moved it next to the garage, which caught on fire. The blaze destroyed his family's garage, a vehicle, bicycles, skis, snowshoes and other outdoor gear. He estimates damage to be up to \$100,000.

"It's just scary ... I don't feel targeted or anything, but how reckless is this individual or individuals," Rangitsch said. "They're going to eventually kill somebody."

Rangitsch said there have been fires in the area for weeks, not just the string of overnight blazes.

Police officers will be conducting extra patrols in the area and are encouraging residents to report suspicious behavior, the release said.

South Dakota reports 19 new deaths due to the coronavirus

SIoux FALLS, S.D. (AP) — South Dakota health officials on Sunday reported 19 new deaths due to complications from COVID-19, lifting the total number of fatalities since the start of the pandemic to 1,110.

The COVID Tracking Project reports that the state's death count is the 38th highest in the country

overall and the ninth highest per capita at about 124 deaths per 100,000 people. The state has reported 164 deaths in December.

The deaths listed Sunday included six people in Pennington County, in southwestern South Dakota. There were two each in Aurora, Brookings, Davison and Hamlin counties.

Health officials confirmed 687 positive tests in the last day, raising the total number to 85,991.

There were about 1,484 new cases per 100,000 people in South Dakota over the past two weeks, which ranks first in the country for new cases per capita, according to Johns Hopkins University researchers. One in every 142 people in the state tested positive in the past week.

Hospitalizations due to COVID-19 dropped by 15 on Sunday, to 497.

For most people, the new coronavirus causes mild or moderate symptoms, such as fever and cough that clear up in two to three weeks. For some, especially older adults and people with existing health problems, it can cause more severe illness, including pneumonia and death.

Biden picks Calif. AG Becerra to lead HHS, pandemic response

By RICARDO ALONSO-ZALDIVAR, MICHAEL BALSAMO and JONATHAN LEMIRE Associated Press
WASHINGTON (AP) — President-elect Joe Biden has picked California Attorney General Xavier Becerra to be his health secretary, putting a defender of the Affordable Care Act in a leading role to oversee his administration's coronavirus response.

Separately, Biden picked a Harvard infectious disease expert, Dr. Rochelle Walensky, to head the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. And he announced a new role for Dr. Anthony Fauci, the government's top infectious disease expert.

If confirmed by the Senate, Becerra, will be the first Latino to head the Department of Health and Human Services, a \$1 trillion-plus agency with 80,000 employees and a portfolio that includes drugs and vaccines, leading-edge medical research and health insurance programs covering more than 130 million Americans.

Biden's selection of Becerra and Walensky was announced early Monday in a press release from the transition office. People familiar with the decision had confirmed the picks to The Associated Press on Sunday night. Biden also announced other top members of his health care team, though some posts remain unfilled.

Becerra, as the state of California's top lawyer, has led the coalition of Democratic states defending "Obamacare" from the Trump administration's latest effort to overturn it, a legal case awaiting a Supreme Court decision next year.

A former senior House Democrat, Becerra was involved in steering the Obama health law through Congress in 2009 and 2010. At the time he would tell reporters that one of his primary motivations was having tens of thousands of uninsured people in his Southern California district.

Becerra has a lawyer's precise approach to analyzing problems and a calm demeanor.

But overseeing the coronavirus response will be the most complicated task he has ever contemplated. By next year, the U.S. will be engaged in a mass vaccination campaign, the groundwork for which has been laid under the Trump administration. Although the vaccines appear very promising, and no effort has been spared to plan for their distribution, it's impossible to tell yet how well things will go when it's time to get shots in the arms of millions of Americans.

Becerra won't be going it alone. Biden is expected to stress a coordinated response to the virus when he publicly introduces his team this week.

Businessman Jeff Zients was named as Biden's White House coronavirus coordinator. An economic adviser to former President Barack Obama, Zients also led the rescue of the HealthCare.gov website after its disastrous launch in 2013. Former Surgeon General Vivek Murthy, a co-chair of Biden's coronavirus task force, is returning to his post as the nation's doctor, with broader responsibilities.

Biden announced Fauci will be the president's chief medical adviser, while continuing as director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases.

Adding to the group are national security expert Natalie Quillian as co-director of the coronavirus response

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and Yale public health specialist Dr. Marcella Nunez-Smith, who will head a new working group to reduce health disparities in COVID-19, a disease that has taken a deeper toll among minorities.

The core components of HHS are the boots on the ground of the government's coronavirus response. The Food and Drug Administration oversees vaccines and treatments, while much of the underlying scientific and medical research comes from NIH. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention takes the lead in detecting and containing the spread of diseases. The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, or CMS, provides insurance coverage for more than 1 in 3 Americans, including vulnerable seniors, as well as many children and low-income people.

Biden still has not picked the heads of FDA and CMS.

Under President Donald Trump, CDC was relegated to a lesser role after agency scientists issued a stark early warning that contradicted Trump's assurances the virus was under control, rattling financial markets. The FDA was the target of repeated attacks from a president who suspected its scientists were politically motivated and who also wanted them to rubber-stamp unproven treatments.

As CDC director, Walensky would replace Dr. Robert Redfield, who accurately told the public coronavirus vaccines would not be available for most people until next year, only to be disparaged by Trump as "confused." Walensky is a leading infectious disease specialist at Massachusetts General Hospital, and has devoted her career to combatting HIV/AIDS.

Becerra's experience running the bureaucratic apparatus of the California attorney general's office, as well as his success working with Republicans, helped seal the pick for Biden, said a person familiar with the process but not authorized to comment publicly. Becerra had worked with Louisiana's Republican attorney general to increase the availability of the COVID-19 drug treatment Remdesivir in their states. He's also worked closely with other Republican attorneys general on legal challenges against opioid manufacturers.

Early in California's coronavirus response, Becerra defended broad shutdowns Gov. Gavin Newsom had put in place to curtail the pandemic, including limits on religious gatherings. Three churches in Southern California had sued Newsom, Becerra and other state officials because in-person church services had been halted.

Biden's offer was extended to Becerra on Friday. The president-elect has been under pressure from the Congressional Hispanic Caucus to appoint Latinos to the Cabinet.

Previously Becerra had served for more than a decade in Congress, representing parts of Los Angeles County. He had also served in the California state assembly after attending law school at Stanford.

His mother was born in Jalisco, Mexico, and emigrated to the U.S. after marrying his father, a native of Sacramento, California, who had grown up in Mexico.

Becerra often cites his parents as his inspiration, saying they instilled in him a strong work ethic and a desire for advancement. His father worked road construction jobs, while his mother was a clerical employee. Becerra is married to Dr. Carolina Reyes, a physician who specializes in maternal and fetal health.

In an AP profile published last year, a lifelong friend of Becerra's said he learned to stay calm and self-controlled in high school as a varsity golfer and an exceptional poker player. Becerra studied the advice of famous golfers while practicing with a set of used clubs costing less than \$100.

Lemire reported from Wilmington, Delaware. Associated Press reporters Aamer Madhani, Zeke Miller and Kathleen Ronayne in Sacramento, California, contributed to this report.

Romania's opposition Social Democrats win national election

BUCHAREST, Romania (AP) — Romania's opposition Social Democrats have taken a surprise lead over the governing National Liberals after a parliamentary election but appear less likely to emerge on top in what promises to be prolonged post-election wrangling to form a new coalition government.

With 95% of ballots counted Monday, the populist, corruption-prone and fiscally reckless Social Democrat Party (PSD) had around 30% of the vote, with the reformist center-right National Liberal Party trailing them by about 5%. The progressive USR-Plus alliance, which has pledged not to be part of any Social

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Democrat-led government, won about 15% of the vote.

Only two other parties crossed the 5% threshold to enter Parliament: the far-right AUR alliance, whose vocal opposition to coronavirus restrictions resonated with close to 9% percent of voters, and the UDMR party that represents the country's Hungarian minority, which won around 6%.

The National Liberal leader, Prime Minister Ludovic Orban, said Monday that coalition talks with the Social Democrats were out of the question but did not provide a clear explanation for how his party hoped to reach a new governing majority in the 465-seat bicameral parliament.

"I want to be very clear, we will never negotiate with the PSD, we will not let the PSD harm Romania," Orban said.

The AUR alliance was established just a year ago under the leadership that militates against same-sex marriages and was supportive of Orthodox Church clerics who defied pandemic restrictions in Romania to hold religious ceremonies. But it did surprisingly well among Romania's expats, having taken the lead in Italy and coming in second in Spain and France.

Some 4 million Romanians who live abroad, mostly in Western Europe, have traditionally voted for reform-oriented parties that seek to ally the county with the European Union mainstream, but the pandemic has apparently upended traditional allegiances.

The National Liberals have controlled Romania's minority government since October 2019 when the Social Democrats lost a confidence vote in the parliament after a chaotic tenure that had seen it run through three prime ministers and dozens of ministers in the space of just three years. The Social Democratic-led government had drawn heavy criticism from the EU for its interference with the judiciary and a cascade of corruption scandals involving prominent members.

But it defied pre-election polls to become the nominal winner of Sunday's vote with unfeasible promises to preserve Romania's welfare state model and after the minority National Liberals government faced strong criticism for its handling of the pandemic.

Romania was plagued by widespread poverty even before the pandemic, with over 25% of the population of 19 million living on less than \$5.50 a day. The pandemic has exacerbated structural problems, including the near-collapse of the public health care system.

As a result of the pandemic and virus-related restrictions, Romania's fiscal deficit is expected to widen this year to around 9% of gross domestic product, compared with 4.3% in 2019. The coronavirus continues to spread in Romania, with almost two-thirds of over a half-million infections and nearly a half of the country's over 12,300 virus-related deaths registered in the past two months alone.

Only 33% of potential Romanian voters went to the polls Sunday, compared with nearly 39.5 percent in 2016. Observers blamed the historically low turnout on voters' fears of infection, but also on general disillusionment with Romania's political class.

Hundreds ill, 1 dead due to unidentified disease in India

NEW DELHI (AP) — At least one person has died and 200 others have been hospitalized due to an unidentified illness in the southern Indian state of Andhra Pradesh, reports said Monday.

The illness was detected Saturday evening in Eluru, an ancient city famous for its hand-woven products. Since then, patients have experienced symptoms ranging from nausea and anxiety to loss of consciousness, doctors said.

A 45-year-old man who was hospitalized with symptoms similar to epilepsy and nausea died Sunday evening, the Press Trust of India news agency reported.

Officials are trying to determine the cause of the illness. So far, water samples from impacted areas haven't shown any signs of contamination and patients have tested negative for COVID-19.

State chief minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy visited a government hospital and met patients who were ill. Opposition leader N. Chandrababu Naidu demanded on Twitter an "impartial, full-fledged inquiry into the incident."

Andhra Pradesh state is among those worst hit by COVID-19, with over 800,000 detected cases. The

health system in the state, like the rest of India, has been frayed by the virus.

Trump lawyer Giuliani in hospital after positive virus test

By AAMER MADHANI and JONATHAN LEMIRE Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump says his personal attorney Rudy Giuliani has tested positive for the coronavirus, making him the latest in Trump's inner circle to contract the disease that is now surging across the U.S.

Giuliani was exhibiting some symptoms and was admitted Sunday to Georgetown University Medical Center in Washington, according to a person familiar with the matter who was not authorized to speak publicly.

The 76-year-old former New York mayor has traveled extensively to battleground states in an effort to help Trump subvert his election loss to Joe Biden. On numerous occasions he has met with officials for hours at a time without wearing a mask.

Trump, who announced Giuliani's positive test in a Sunday afternoon tweet, wished him a speedy recovery. "Get better soon Rudy, we will carry on!!!" Trump wrote.

Giuliani did not immediately respond to a request for comment, but on Sunday evening he retweeted Trump's announcement of his diagnosis. He also tweeted thanks to a conservative writer who had said he was praying for Giuliani.

Giuliani on Thursday attended a hearing at the Georgia Capitol, where he went without a mask for several hours. Several state senators, all Republicans, also did not wear masks at the hearing.

On Wednesday night, Giuliani was in Lansing, Michigan, to testify in a highly unusual 4 1/2-hour legislative hearing in which he pushed Republican lawmakers to ignore the certification of Biden's Michigan victory and appoint electors for Trump. He did not wear a mask, nor did lawyer Jenna Ellis, who was sitting next to him. He asked one of his witnesses, a Detroit election worker, if she would be comfortable removing her mask, but legislators said they could hear her.

Giuliani traveled on Monday to Phoenix, where he met with Republican legislators for an hourslong hearing in which he was maskless. The Arizona Republican Party tweeted a photo of Giuliani and several state GOP lawmakers standing shoulder-to-shoulder and maskless. The Arizona legislature announced Sunday, after Giuliani's diagnosis became public, that it would close for a week out of an abundance of caution "for recent cases and concerns relating to COVID-19."

The Trump campaign said in a statement that Giuliani tested negative twice before his visits to Arizona, Michigan and Georgia. Unidentified Trump team members who had close contact with Giuliani are in self-isolation.

"The Mayor did not experience any symptoms or test positive for COVID-19 until more than 48 hours after his return," according to the statement. "No legislators in any state or members of the press are on the contact tracing list, under current CDC Guidelines."

Giuliani also appeared maskless at a Nov. 25 hearing in Pennsylvania. And he did not quarantine after being near an infected person at a Nov. 19 news conference at the Republican National Committee's headquarters. His son Andrew Giuliani, who is a White House aide, announced a day after the event that he had tested positive for the virus.

Research shows that people who contract the virus may become infectious to others several days before they start to feel ill.

Georgia state Sen. Jen Jordan, a Democrat who attended Thursday's hearing, expressed outrage after learning of Giuliani's diagnosis.

"Little did I know that most credible death threat that I encountered last week was Trump's own lawyer," Jordan tweeted. "Giuliani — maskless, in packed hearing room for 7 hours. To say I am livid would be too kind."

Before the hearing, Giuliani and Michigan Republican Party Chairman Laura Cox — both maskless — did a virtual briefing for GOP activists.

Giuliani made an appearance earlier Sunday on Fox News Channel's "Sunday Morning Futures" to speak

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about his legal challenges in several states on behalf of Trump.

The diagnosis comes more than a month after Trump lost reelection and more than two months after Trump himself was stricken with the virus in early October. Since then, a flurry of administration officials and others in Trump's orbit have also been sickened, including White House chief of staff Mark Meadows and Ben Carson, the secretary of housing and urban development. The president's wife, Melania Trump, and teenage son, Barron Trump, have also been stricken.

The extraordinary spread in Trump's orbit underscores the cavalier approach the Republican president has taken to a virus that has now killed more than 282,000 people in the U.S. alone.

Those infected also include the White House press secretary and advisers Hope Hicks and Stephen Miller, as well as Trump's campaign manager and the chair of the Republican National Committee.

Trump spent the waning days of his campaign trying to persuade the American public that the virus was receding, and he repeatedly claimed it would miraculously "disappear" after Nov. 3. Instead, the country is experiencing a record-breaking spike in infections.

The president gave the mounting coronavirus death toll scant attention at a Saturday evening rally in Valdosta, Georgia, where he campaigned on behalf of Republican Sens. Kelly Loeffler and David Perdue ahead of next month's runoff election there. Most people who attended the outdoor rally did not wear masks.

White House coronavirus task force coordinator Dr. Deborah Birx on Sunday offered tacit criticism of Trump's attitude on the virus during an interview on NBC's "Meet the Press."

Asked about Trump and other administration members flouting public health experts' warnings to avoid large gatherings and calls to wear masks, Birx replied that some leaders are "parroting" myths and called the pandemic "the worst event that this country will face."

"And I think our job is to constantly say those are myths, they are wrong and you can see the evidence-base," Birx added.

Lemire reported from Wilmington, Delaware. Associated Press writers Ben Nadler in Atlanta and David Eggert in Lansing, Michigan, contributed reporting.

No visible progress yet on key day for final Brexit deal

By RAF CASERT and JILL LAWLESS Associated Press

BRUSSELS (AP) — One of the most intense days in the long-running Brexit trade negotiations started off with little good news about any progress Monday, with the United Kingdom and the European Union seemingly still stuck on the same issues that have dogged the standoff for months.

EU chief negotiator Michel Barnier held a pre-dawn briefing with ambassadors of the 27 member states to see if a deal is still possible with London ahead of the Jan. 1 deadline, but had no news of a breakthrough.

Irish Foreign Minister Simon Coveney said Barnier's message was "very downbeat."

"I would say he is very gloomy, and obviously very cautious about the ability to make progress today," Coveney told Irish broadcaster RTE.

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson and EU Commission chief Ursula von der Leyen are due to speak by phone Monday evening for the second time in barely 48 hours, to decide whether to pull the plug on talks — a decision that could cost hundreds of thousands of jobs on both sides and disrupt cross-Channel trade for years to come.

One official from an EU nation said "the difficulties persist" over the legal oversight of any trade deal and standards of fair play that the U.K. needs to meet to be able to export in the EU. On fisheries too, a lot of work remains, said the official, who spoke on condition of anonymity because the talks were ongoing.

U.K. Foreign Office Minister James Cleverly acknowledged the situation had changed little despite the need for speed.

"Yes, time is tight. Yes, it might go right to the wire and, indeed, it may well be that we don't get the deal. But I think a deal is possible and we'll keep working towards it," he said.

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While the U.K. left the EU politically on Jan. 31, it remains within the bloc's tariff-free single market and customs union through Dec. 31. Reaching a trade deal by then would ensure there are no tariffs and trade quotas on goods exported or imported by the two sides, although there would still be new costs and red tape.

At his early morning meeting with EU ambassadors, Barnier faced some anxious member states that feared too much might have been yielded already to London. If talks continue after Monday, they will be closing in on an two-day EU summit starting Thursday, where German Chancellor Angela Merkel and French President Emmanuel Macron will be major players.

Germany wants a deal partly because its massive car industry has always found a welcome export market in Britain. France — seen by Britain as the "bad cop" in trade negotiations — has taken the lead in demanding that U.K. companies must closely align themselves with EU rules and environmental and social standards if they still want to export to the lucrative market of 450 million people.

The politically charged issue of fisheries also continues to play an outsized role. The EU has demanded widespread access to U.K. fishing grounds that historically have been open to foreign trawlers. Britain insists it must control its own waters, doling out quotas annually.

While both Britain and the EU say they want a trade deal, trust and goodwill are strained after months of testy negotiations.

In a further complication, Johnson's government plans Monday to revive legislation that breaches the legally binding Brexit withdrawal agreement it struck with the EU last year.

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

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

Britain says the bill, which gives the government power to override parts of the withdrawal agreement relating to trade with Northern Ireland, is needed as an "insurance policy" to protect the flow of goods within the U.K. in the event of a no-deal Brexit. The EU sees it as an act of bad faith that could imperil Northern Ireland's peace settlement.

On Wednesday the U.K. plans to introduce a Taxation Bill that contains more measures along the same lines and would further irritate the EU.

EU member states have to unanimously support any post-Brexit trade deal and the agreement still needs to be voted on by the European parliament, procedures that would push any deal right up to the Dec. 31 deadline.

Both sides would suffer economically from a failure to secure a trade deal, but most economists think the British economy would take a greater hit, at least in the short term, because the U.K. does almost half its trade with the bloc.

Lawless reported from London. Sam Petrequin contributed from Brussels

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Trump cementing death penalty legacy up to Biden inaugural

By MICHAEL TARM and MICHAEL BALSAMO Associated Press

CHICAGO (AP) — As Donald Trump's presidency winds down, his administration is ratcheting up the pace of federal executions despite a surge of coronavirus cases in prisons, announcing plans for five starting Thursday and concluding just days before the Jan. 20 inauguration of President-elect Joe Biden.

If the five go off as planned, it will make 13 executions since July when the Republican administration resumed putting inmates to death after a 17-year hiatus and will cement Trump's legacy as the most prolific execution president in over 130 years. He'll leave office having executed about a quarter of all federal death-

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row prisoners, despite waning support for capital punishment among both Democrats and Republicans.

In a recent interview with The Associated Press, Attorney General William Barr defended the extension of executions into the post-election period, saying he'll likely schedule more before he departs the Justice Department. A Biden administration, he said, should keep it up.

"I think the way to stop the death penalty is to repeal the death penalty," Barr said. "But if you ask juries to impose and juries impose it, then it should be carried out."

The plan breaks a tradition of lame-duck presidents deferring to incoming presidents on policy about which they differ so starkly, said Robert Durham, director of the non-partisan Death Penalty Information Center. Biden, a Democrat, is a death penalty foe, and his spokesman told the AP that he'd work to end the death penalty when he is in office.

"It's hard to understand why anybody at this stage of a presidency feels compelled to kill this many people ... especially when the American public voted for someone else to replace you and that person has said he opposes the death penalty," Durham said. "This is a complete historical aberration."

Not since the waning days of Grover Cleveland's presidency in the late 1800s has the U.S. government executed federal inmates during a presidential transition, Durham said. Cleveland's was also the last presidency during which the number of civilians executed federally was in the double digits in a year, with 14 executed in 1896.

Anti-death penalty groups want Biden to lobby harder for a halt to the flurry of pre-inaugural executions, though Biden can't do much to stop them, especially considering Trump won't even concede he lost the election and is spreading baseless claims of voting fraud.

One, the Ohio-based Death Penalty Action, has garnered some 3,000 signatures on a petition calling on Biden to make "a clear and strong statement" demanding the executions stop.

The issue is an uncomfortable one for Biden given his past support for capital punishment and his central role crafting a 1994 crime bill that added 60 federal crimes for which someone could be put to death.

Activists say the bill, which Biden has since agreed was flawed, puts added pressure on him to act.

"He is acknowledging the sins" of the past, said Abraham Bonowitz, Death Penalty Action's director. "Now he's got to fix it."

Several inmates already executed on death row were convicted under provisions of that bill, including ones that made kidnappings and carjackings resulting in death federal capital offenses.

The race of those set to die buttresses criticism that the bill disproportionately impacted Black people. Four of the five set to die over the next few weeks are Black. The fifth, Lisa Montgomery, is white. Convicted of killing a pregnant woman and cutting out the baby alive, she is the only female of the 61 inmates who were on death row when executions resumed, and she would be the first woman to be executed federally in nearly six decades.

The executions so far this year have been by lethal injection at a U.S. penitentiary in Terre Haute, Indiana, where all federal executions take place. The drug used to carry out the sentences is sparse. The Justice Department recently updated protocols to allow for executions by firing squad and poison gas, though it's unclear if those methods might be used in coming weeks.

Barr suddenly announced in July 2019 that executions would resume, though there had been no public clamor for it. Several lawsuits kept the initial batch from being carried out, and by the time the Bureau of Prisons got clearance the COVID-19 pandemic was in full swing. The virus has killed more than 282,000 people in the United States, according to figures compiled by Johns Hopkins University.

Critics have said the restart of executions in an election year was politically motivated, helping Trump burnish his claim that he is a law-and-order president. The choice to first execute a series of white males convicted of killing children also appeared calculated to make executions more palatable amid protests nationwide over racial bias in the justice system. The first federal execution on July 14 was of Daniel Lewis Lee, convicted of killing an Arkansas family in a 1990s plot to build a whites-only nation in the Pacific Northwest.

Barr has insisted the reinstatement of federal executions was driven by adherence to laws. He noted

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that under Democratic presidents, including Barack Obama, U.S. authorities sought death sentences, they just didn't carry them out.

"I don't feel it is a political issue," Barr told the AP.

Trump has been a consistent supporter of the death penalty. In a 1990 Playboy interview, he described himself as a strong supporter of capital punishment, saying, "Either it will be brought back swiftly or our society will rot away."

Thirty years later, not even the worsening pandemic has slowed his administration's determination to push ahead with executions, rejecting repeated calls to freeze the policy until the pandemic eases.

Many states with death penalty laws have halted executions over concerns that the rampant spread of the coronavirus in prisons would put lawyers, witnesses and executioners at too great a risk. Largely as a consequence of the health precautions, states have executed just seven prisoners in the first half of the year and none since July. Last year, states carried out a combined 22 executions.

The expectation is that Biden will end the Trump administration's policy of carrying out executions as quickly as the law allows, though his longer-term approach is unclear.

Durham said that while Obama placed a moratorium on federal executions, he left the door open for future presidents to resume them. Obama, for whom Biden served as vice president, never employed the option of commuting all federal death sentences to life terms.

As president, Biden could seek to persuade Congress to abolish the federal death penalty or simply invoke his commutation powers to single-handedly convert all death sentences to life-in-prison terms.

"Biden has said he intends to end the federal death penalty," Durham said. "We'll have to wait and see if that happens."

Balsamo reported from Washington.

Follow Michael Tarm on Twitter at <http://twitter.com/mtarm>. Follow Balsamo at <https://twitter.com/MikeBalsamo1>.

Will the US ever have a national COVID-19 testing strategy?

By MIKE STOBBE and MATTHEW PERRONE Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — As the coronavirus epidemic worsens, U.S. health experts hope Joe Biden's administration will put in place something Donald Trump's has not — a comprehensive national testing strategy.

Such a strategy, they say, could systematically check more people for infections and spot surges before they take off. The health experts say it would be an improvement from the current practice, which has professional athletes and students at elite universities getting routine tests while many other Americans stand in line for hours — if they get tested at all.

"We have had no strategy for this virus. Our strategy has been no strategy," said Dr. Michael Mina, a Harvard University researcher focused on use of testing to track disease.

Some experts say the lack of such a system is one reason for the current national explosion in cases, hospitalizations and deaths.

"If we'd had a more robust approach and testing was scaled up as one of the tools, I think much of this third surge would have been avoidable," said Dr. Grant Colfax, director of the San Francisco Department of Public Health.

There are differing opinions on what such a strategy should look like, but many experts say rapid and at-home tests should be used so Americans can check themselves and stay away from others if they test positive.

The president-elect has endorsed that strategy, called for making testing free for all Americans, and said government experts at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and other agencies should be empowered to coordinate the entire effort.

"The reality is we're not testing enough today," Dr. Marcella Nunez-Smith, co-chair of Biden's coronavirus

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advisory board, told The Associated Press this week.

His transition team so far has not gone into further detail.

Testing was one of the first — and most enduring — stumbles in the federal government's response to the coronavirus epidemic that hit the nation early this year.

In February, the CDC distributed test kits to public health laboratories that initially were faulty. U.S. officials worked with companies to expand testing, but shortages of chemicals, materials and protective equipment meant fewer tests were available than what experts said was necessary.

Worse, some experts say, states and cities competed against each other to buy limited testing services and materials, and with little guidance or training on how to best use the tests.

In April, President Donald Trump declared governors were responsible for testing. Amid complaints about shortages and delays, the federal government began sourcing and shipping key testing supplies to states, beginning with swabs.

In the latest phase, Trump officials are sending more than 100 million rapid, point-of-care tests to states. The government said the first shipments went out in early October.

Such tests are considered key to slowing spread, but states have distributed them differently. For example, Alaska is sending tests to oil drilling sites, Colorado to local public health agencies for testing homeless populations, and Mississippi to veterans' homes.

There's also no federal standard for reporting test data. Some states report the number of tests administered, while others tally the number of people tested. Some have counted types of tests that others don't, which can skew results because some tests are better at diagnosing active infections than others.

Administration officials say they are proud of the current state of testing. Last month, Vice President Mike Pence celebrated that 170 million tests have been completed, and that an expanding array of tests are available.

But the focus should be less on numbers and more on action, said Dr. Ali Khan, dean of the University of Nebraska College of Public Health.

"It shouldn't be anybody who needs a test can get a test," Khan said. "It should be anybody who has a positive test immediately gets isolated" and the people they were in contact with checked and placed in quarantine.

He was echoed by Nunez-Smith, the Biden coronavirus adviser.

"Testing is only useful when we can act on the test," said Nunez-Smith, a Yale health equity researcher.

Trump himself has voiced a lack of enthusiasm for comprehensive testing. In a June tweet, the president called testing a double-edged sword that is good to have but "makes us look bad." And Dr. Scott Atlas — a top pandemic adviser to Trump before he resigned Monday — argued against testing people who aren't experiencing symptoms.

But some regard such thinking as an attempt to spin a leadership failure into something else.

"The executive branch has seen test results — case counts — as a report card on its performance," said Carl Bergstrom, a University of Washington evolutionary biologist who studies emerging infectious diseases.

The nation may be weeks away from coronavirus vaccines becoming available, but that won't erase the need for testing, said the Rockefeller Foundation's Eileen O'Connor.

"We're not going to get everybody vaccinated right away. And we still don't know how long that immunity will last," she said. So testing will still be needed to monitor where the infection is active and to see if infections are occurring in vaccinated people.

What should be done moving forward?

In July, the Rockefeller Foundation called for making cheap tests widely available to better identify people who are infected and don't know it. That would involve developing and making cheap antigen tests, which provide quick results but are less reliable than genetic tests. Foundation officials hoped the government would push companies to manufacture tests the same way it has pushed vaccine makers to mass produce experimental vaccines.

Some Harvard researchers believe that testing half the population each week would be possible by mail-

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ing those tests to millions of U.S. households.

Participation would be voluntary, and positive results would have to be confirmed with genetic tests — the home tests are not considered as sensitive as more established lab-based testing. Even so, it could dramatically expand the amount of infection monitoring going on across the nation, its proponents say.

During an appearance on NBC's "Meet the Press," Dr. Anthony Fauci of the National Institutes of Health said Americans should have easy tests they can do in their own homes.

"We don't have that," he said. "We should have that."

Versions of such an approach have been tried in some places, including Slovakia and Minnesota. But some experts note there is little precedent for screening tens of millions of people with cheap, rapid tests—which would generate a significant portion of false results. It's also unclear whether people who test themselves at home will follow instructions to quarantine.

Nearly all experts agree that more data and coordination is needed.

"Having every state do its own thing without guidance from the federal level — from CDC in particular — I think has really hampered us," said Scott Becker, the chief executive of the Association of Public Health Laboratories. "It is a federal response as much as it is a state response, but it's a shared responsibility. We need to work together."

Perrone reported from Washington, D.C. AP medical writer Carla K. Johnson in Washington state contributed.

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.

Chinese probe orbiting moon with Earth-bound samples

BEIJING (AP) — A Chinese probe was orbiting the moon on Monday in preparation for the returning of samples of the lunar surface to Earth for the first time in almost 45 years.

The ascent module of the Chang'e 5 spacecraft transferred a container with 2 kilograms (4.4 pounds) of samples after docking with the robot spacecraft on Sunday and was then cut free.

The orbiter and reentry vehicle will circle the moon for another week awaiting a narrow time window to make the roughly three-day, 383,000-kilometer (238,000-mile) journey back to Earth. It will first "bounce" off the Earth's atmosphere to slow its speed before the reentry vehicle separates and floats down on parachutes to land on the vast steppes of Inner Mongolia, where China's Shenzhou crewed spaceships have also made their landings.

If the mission succeeds, it will make China the third country after the United States and former Soviet Union to bring moon rocks to Earth. They will be the first fresh samples of the lunar surface obtained by scientists since the Soviet Union's Luna 24 probe in 1976.

The Chang'e 5 ascent stage blasted off from the moon's surface on Friday, leaving behind the lander module flying the Chinese flag, according to the China National Space Agency, which also released a photo taken by the orbiter showing it approaching for its rendezvous with the ascender, a sliver of the Earth seen in the background.

That marked the first time China had succeeded in lifting off a spacecraft from a celestial body, while no country had previously achieved the tricky feat of executing a robotic docking in lunar orbit. Controllers on Earth had to deal with distance and time lag while precisely maneuvering a clamp into position with almost no room for error.

The 23-day mission has been front page news in state media for days, paired with reports that China has officially lifted all of its citizens out of the most grinding form of poverty. Along with being a propaganda coup for the ruling Communist Party, the dual stories illustrate the vast economic and technological advances China has made since it became just the third country in history to launch a person into space in 2003.

Chinese foreign ministry spokesperson Hua Chunying praised the "courage to explore, overcome dif-

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faculties and pay hard efforts" of those who made the mission possible.

"The entirety of the Chinese people are proud of the efforts and wisdom of the Chinese lunar exploration researchers," Hua told reporters Monday at a daily briefing.

By way of cautious incremental steps, China is now in the midst of a series of ambitious missions that include a probe en route to Mars and the development of a reusable space plane about which little information has been provided.

The Chang'e lunar program, named after the ancient Chinese moon goddess, has also been operating the Chang'e 4 probe on the moon's less explored far side for the past two years, while the Chang'e 3 rover launched seven years ago continues to send back data.

Future plans call for returning a human to the moon five decades after American astronauts, along with a possible permanent moon base, although no timeline has been offered. China is also building a permanent space station to begin operating as early as 2022.

U.S. opposition has prevented China's secretive, military-backed program from participating in the International Space Station, although the CNSA has been expanding its ties with other programs, including the European Space Agency, which has helped guide Chang'e 5 on its mission.

Chang'e 5 touched down Dec. 1 on the Sea of Storms on the moon's near side close to a formation called the Mons Rumker, an area believed to have been the site of ancient volcanic activity.

The rocks and other debris were obtained both by drilling into the moon's crust and by scooping directly off the surface. They are thought to possibly be billions of years younger than those brought back earlier and may offer insights into the moon's history as well as that of other bodies in our solar system.

The lunar exploration program has set up dedicated labs to analyze the samples for age and composition. China is also expected to share some part of them with other countries, as was done with the hundreds of kilograms (pounds) of rocks, sand, dust and other samples obtained by the U.S. and the former Soviet Union.

The Latest: Denmark shuts bars and gyms to fight the virus

The Associated Press undefined

COPENHAGEN, Denmark — Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen has announced local restrictions that close restaurants, bars, theatres and cinemas till the end of the year and switch students from the 5th grade and older to distance learning for a week before the Christmas holidays.

The restrictions, which also include shutting amusement parks, zoos and gyms in 38 municipalities, affect Copenhagen and its surrounding municipalities, and Denmark's second- and third-largest cities of Aarhus and Odense.

The restrictions begin Wednesday and come as Denmark has seen a steady increase in infections in recent weeks. Denmark has had 90,603 cases and 885 deaths.

"The increase is worrying," Frederiksen said.

Health Minister Magnus Heunicke added that the virus "still has the power to shut down the health care system and pull a trail of serious consequences behind it."

Denmark on Monday also extended limiting public gatherings to 10 and urged that private get-togethers respect that number, and extended requirements to wear masks on public transportation and in shops.

THE VIRUS OUTBREAK:

- Health officials warn Americans not to let their guard down
- UK gears up for coronavirus vaccination program watched around the world
- Citing low virus rates in schools, New York City reopens schools again
- Biden picks Calif. Attorney General Xavier Becerra to lead HHS, pandemic response
- Senator says Trump, McConnell likely to back COVID-19 relief
- Trump lawyer Rudy Giuliani in hospital after positive COVID-19 test

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

HERE'S WHAT ELSE IS HAPPENING:

BEIJING — A foreign ministry spokesperson claims that China is following the further spread of coronavirus in the U.S. with a "heavy heart."

The virus was first detected in the central Chinese city of Wuhan late last year and critics have accused the government of botching its initial response, setting off the pandemic that has killed more than 1.5 million people, including more than 282,000 in the U.S.

China has rejected such accusations, saying its 76-day lockdown of Wuhan and other strict measures gave the rest of the world time to prepare.

"We have taken the most comprehensive, stringent and thorough prevention and control measures, taking the lead in controlling the epidemic and resuming production," Hua Chunying told reporters Monday.

"In the meanwhile, we are also following with a heavy heart the reports on the development of the epidemic situation in the United States these days, and express our condolences and sympathy to the American people in their current difficult situation," Hua said.

Public compliance in China with prevention measures has been near-universal, allowing China to all-but eliminate cases of local transmission.

PARIS — Hoping to strengthen its funding, the World Health Organization is appointing a CEO to a foundation intended to bring in more private donations, which should leave the global health body less vulnerable if a country withdraws or cuts funding as the United States did.

Anil Soni will join the new WHO Foundation in January after eight years with the multinational pharmaceutical Viartis.

This year's global coronavirus pandemic, as well as the Trump administration's withdrawal from the world health body, has exposed WHO's fragile funding base. The organization relies largely upon voluntary contributions from member nations as well as a handful of large foundations. That has left it open to criticism that it's vulnerable to outside influence at the expense of global health priorities.

In an interview with The Associated Press ahead of the WHO Foundation announcement, Soni said his priority is to seek out corporate and individual donations. He said the foundation will ultimately assume control of the COVID-19 Solidarity Response Fund, which has raised \$238 million so far.

MADRID - The Spanish government is pleading with people to voluntarily observe social distancing rules and other measures over the Christmas holiday, with the health minister saying "we can't put a police officer in every house."

Health Minister Salvador Illa said Monday that measures announced last week to prevent the spread of COVID-19 over the seasonal holiday are "very drastic."

A curfew will be in place between 1:30 a.m.-6 a.m. on Christmas Eve, Christmas Day and New Year's Eve, and family gatherings will be limited to 10 people.

"You don't play with COVID. Let's be careful," Illa told a news conference in Madrid.

Spain has reported over 46,000 virus-related deaths in the pandemic.

BERLIN — Chancellor Angela Merkel's chief of staff says he expects coronavirus vaccinations to start in Germany "in the very first days" of the new year. The trained doctor says he's prepared to help vaccinate people himself.

European Union authorities are expected to make a decision by Dec. 29 on approving the first vaccine for use. Germany is getting special vaccination centers ready. The news comes as Britain gears up to start coronavirus vaccinations on Tuesday.

Merkel's chief of staff, Helge Braun, told the Bild newspaper late Sunday that he will tell medical authorities he's prepared to help. He said "that won't work at every hour of the day or night as chief of staff, but at

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the weekend I'm prepared to join in." He said that he and Merkel will get vaccinated "when it's our turn."

Infection figures in Germany have more or less stabilized at a high level since a partial shutdown started on Nov. 2 but haven't decreased. On Monday, the national disease control center reported 12,332 new cases over the past 24 hours, compared with 11,168 a week ago, and 147 new deaths.

Restrictions such as the closure of restaurants, bars, sports and leisure facilities are due to last until at least Jan. 10 and some regions are taking or contemplating tougher measures. Braun said tighter restrictions are needed "at least in the hot spots."

HONG KONG — Hong Kong plans to install vending machines for coronavirus testing kits in 10 subway stations across the city amid a new surge in cases.

A government news release Monday said about 10,000 specimen collection packs will be supplied to the machines daily.

The persistence of the virus in the city of 7.5 million has prompted an increasing array of control, testing and case tracing measures.

The news release said another 95 virus cases had been recorded on Sunday, bring the city's total to 6,898, with 112 deaths. The last two week have seen the addition of 1,242 cases, most of them local, prompting authorities to tighten restrictions, including banning most social gatherings to just two people. The surge in cases has also led to the suspension of plans to open a "travel bubble" with Singapore, underscoring the impact the outbreak has had on the city's economy.

Describing the epidemic situation as "severe," the government's Center for Health Protection called on the public to "avoid going out, having social contact and dining out," and strongly urged people to avoid all nonessential travel outside the city.

SEOUL, South Korea — South Korea has reported 615 new cases of the coronavirus, its 30th day in a row of triple-digit daily jumps, as fears grow the viral spread is getting out of control in the greater capital area.

The country has added more than 5,300 to its caseload just in the past 10 days. Most of the transmissions were detected in the Seoul metropolitan area where health workers are struggling to stem transmissions tied to various places, including restaurants, schools, hospitals and long-term care facilities.

There's concern that hospital capacities could become overwhelmed within weeks if the country fails to slow the viral resurgence, especially in the densely-populated capital area, where half of the country's 51 million people live.

"The capital area is now a COVID-19 war zone," Health Minister Park Neung-hoo said in a virus meeting, pleading for citizen vigilance. He said the country may have to further increase social distancing to prevent the viral resurgence in the capital from "exploding into a major outbreak nationwide and collapsing the health-care system."

While President Moon Jae-in's government had been eager to tout the country's previous gains against the virus, there's criticism that it gambled by moving quickly to ease social distancing restrictions.

Officials have restored some restrictions in the capital in past weeks as infections soared, shutting down nightclubs, karaoke rooms and gyms, reducing in-person school classes and allowing restaurants to provide only deliveries and take-outs after 9 p.m.

ANCHORAGE, Alaska — Austin Quinn-Davison, the acting mayor of Alaska's largest city, is isolating at home after testing positive for COVID-19, her office announced Sunday.

She felt cold-like symptoms beginning on Nov. 29 and isolated at home until taking a test the next day. That test and another test came back negative. However, Quinn-Davidson's third test came back positive Saturday.

The 41-year-old is experiencing mild symptoms, the office said. Her wife, Dr. Stephanie Quinn-Davidson, has tested negative and is not experiencing symptoms, the mayor's office said.

"It's so important to stay home and to get tested if you aren't feeling well," Austin Quinn-Davidson said

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"I'm grateful my symptoms are mild and thankful for the many free testing sites in Anchorage.

Quinn-Davidson became the acting mayor of Anchorage on Oct. 23 following the resignation of Mayor Ethan Berkowitz. She's the city's first female mayor and the tenth mayor since the Municipality of Anchorage was formed in 1975.

LOS ANGELES — Many Californians are preparing for a new stay-at-home order that bars restaurant dining, shuts salons and limits retail in an effort to curb spiraling coronavirus infections and hospitalizations.

The new rules that take effect before midnight in the vast region of Southern California, much of the San Francisco Bay Area and a large swath of the Central Valley also prohibit residents from gathering with people not in their households.

Public health officials contend the measures are critical as space dwindles in intensive care units in Southern California and much of the Central Valley amid a surge in coronavirus infections

Some law enforcement officials in these same areas, however, said they don't plan to enforce the rules and are counting on residents to wear masks and practice physical distancing to protect themselves during the pandemic.

BEIJING — Authorities have completed a third round of coronavirus tests in the northeastern border city of Manzhouli, where three new cases were reported on Monday.

The city government said testing on 200,745 people wrapped up on Saturday following two earlier rounds last month. No new positive cases were found and the three announced Monday were among those previously isolated as suspected cases, authorities said. Testing has been accompanied by travel restrictions and the quarantining of suspected cases and close contacts of those infected.

China reported a total of 15 new cases on Monday, 12 of them brought from outside, bringing the mainland's total to 86,634 with 4,634 deaths. Hospitals are currently treating 281 people for COVID-19 while 231 people are being monitored in isolation after having tested positive for the virus while showing no symptoms.

The virus, meanwhile, continues to surge in Hong Kong, with another 95 cases reported on Sunday, bringing the semi-autonomous Chinese city's total to 6,897 with 112 deaths. Authorities there have tightened restrictions on the city's 7.5 million people, including banning most social gatherings to just two. The surge in cases has also led to the suspension of plans to open a "travel bubble" with Singapore, underscoring the impact the outbreak has had on the city's economy.

LONDON — Shipments of the coronavirus vaccine developed by American drugmaker Pfizer and Germany's BioNTech were delivered Sunday in the U.K. in super-cold containers, two days before it goes public in an immunization program that is being closely watched around the world.

Around 800,000 doses of the vaccine were expected to be in place for the start of the immunization program on Tuesday, a day that Health Secretary Matt Hancock has reportedly dubbed as "V-Day," a nod to triumphs in World War II.

"To know that they are here, and we are amongst the first in the country to actually receive the vaccine and therefore the first in the world, is just amazing," said Louise Coughlan, joint chief pharmacist at Croydon Health Services NHS Trust, just south of London.

Last week, the U.K. became the first country to authorize the Pfizer-BioNtech vaccine for emergency use. In trials, the vaccine was shown to have around 95% efficacy.

Vaccinations will be administered starting Tuesday at around 50 hospital hubs in England. Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland will also begin their vaccination rollouts the same day.

World shares mixed as investors eye vaccines, China-US woes

By ELAINE KURTENBACH AP Business Writer

Shares fell in Europe after a mixed day of trading in Asia following a report that the U.S. is preparing to

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slap sanctions on a dozen more Chinese officials, ratcheting up tensions with Beijing.

That news coincided with data showing China logged a record high \$75 billion trade surplus in November. Strong growth in exports is good news for the world economy but could worsen China-U.S. tensions.

Germany's DAX slipped 0.3% to 13,253.44 and the CAC 40 in Paris lost 0.6% to 5,573.51. In Britain, the FTSE 100 lost 0.2% to 6,535.75. Wall Street looked set for a tepid start, with the future for the S&P 500 down 0.4%. The future for the Dow industrials also lost 0.4%.

Chinese exports surged 21.1% in November over a year earlier, propelled by strong demand from American consumers. Exports to the United States rose 46% despite lingering tariff hikes in a trade war with Washington.

A report by Reuters citing unnamed sources said the U.S. departments of State and Treasury were preparing economic sanctions on a dozen more Chinese official in response to Beijing's crackdown on dissent in Hong Kong. The report could not immediately be confirmed.

The latest sanctions followed a tightening of visa restrictions on Chinese Communist Party members and their families announced late last week as tattered relations between Washington and Beijing fray further.

The decision to limit such people to one-month, single entry visas drew an accusation from China's foreign ministry that the U.S. was escalating "political suppression" against Beijing.

In Asian trading, Hong Kong's Hang Seng dropped 1.2% to 26,506.85 and the Nikkei 225 in Tokyo lost 0.8% to 26,547.44. The Shanghai Composite index sank 0.8% to 3,416.60. South Korea's Kospi gained 0.5% to 2,745.44. In Australia, the S&P/ASX 200 added 0.6% to 6,675.00.

Wall Street closed out last week with more record highs as traders took a discouraging jobs report as a sign that Congress will finally move to deliver more aid for the pandemic-stricken economy.

The S&P 500 rose 0.9% to 3,699.12, notching its third all-time high this week. The Dow Jones Industrial Average jumped 0.8%, to 30,218.26, also a record. The Nasdaq picked up 0.7%, to a record 12,464.23.

Hopes remain deeply rooted on Wall Street that one or more coronavirus vaccines will help rescue the global economy next year. China, Indonesia, Britain and the U.S. all are gearing up to begin mass vaccinations soon.

"A U.S. stimulus agreement will not be an instant panacea to U.S. woes; only beating COVID-19 into retreat will do that, but it's the thought that counts," Jeffrey Halley of Oanda said in a commentary.

However, efforts to contain surging virus cases have stoked worries about more economic pain for companies and consumers as governments around the world bring back varying degrees of restrictions on businesses. Outbreaks also are scaring consumers away from stores, restaurants and other normal economic activity.

Democrats and Republicans have been making on-and-off progress on talks for another round of support for the U.S. economy, including aid for laid-off workers and industries hit hard by the pandemic.

A proposed COVID-19 relief bill is expected to get backing from President Donald Trump and Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell but it won't include \$1,200 in direct payments to most Americans, said Sen. Bill Cassidy, a Republican from Louisiana who is involved in the bipartisan talks.

The hope in markets is that financial support from Washington could help carry the economy through a dark winter.

In other trading:

U.S. benchmark crude oil lost 57 cents to \$45.69 per barrel in electronic trading on the New York Mercantile Exchange. It gained 62 cents to \$46.26 per barrel on Friday. Brent crude, the international standard, gave up 51 cents to \$48.74 per barrel.

The U.S. dollar rose to 104.19 Japanese yen from 104.16 yen on Friday. The euro slipped to \$1.2101 from \$1.2120.

As virus slams rural California, many still pan restrictions

By JOCELYN GECKER and RICH PEDRONCELLI Associated Press

REDDING, Calif. (AP) — Brenda Luntley is openly violating California's order to close her restaurant to

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indoor dining. But she wants her customers and critics to know she isn't typically a rule-breaker. It's a matter of survival.

"This is my first episode of civil disobedience in my entire life. My whole family is in law enforcement. I'm a follow-the-rules kind of person," said Luntley, owner of San Francisco Deli, a popular sandwich shop in Redding, more than 200 miles (320 kilometers) north of the restaurant's namesake city.

It's in northern Shasta County, one of several rural California counties that appeared to dodge the virus in the spring but are now seeing some of the most alarming spikes in COVID-19 infections statewide. In an effort to avoid overwhelming hospitals, Gov. Gavin Newsom announced a strict new shutdown order that has taken effect in many other parts of California and will likely soon affect Shasta County.

But outside California's big cities, especially in conservative areas, the backlash against tough new restrictions is growing, and some sheriffs say they won't enforce health orders.

Luntley is not a virus skeptic. She washes her hands so much they're raw. But she shrugs off the idea of a stay-at-home order that shuts businesses. She watched other restaurants collapse, and she and her husband, both in their 70s, cannot afford that.

"I want people to understand we are not thumbing our nose at the government," Luntley said. "I'm trying to keep my business alive."

California has had some of the most aggressive coronavirus measures in the country. It was the first state to impose a stay-at-home order in March that shut businesses and schools for months, and now most of the state is under a nighttime curfew and a majority of restaurants were ordered to close indoor dining.

In the nation's most populated state, confirmed infections have surged past 1.3 million, with an average of nearly 15,000 new cases a day. Each day brings dire new records in hospitalizations and deaths, which neared a total of 20,000 on Sunday.

But many are still reluctant "to accept that this is a real and dangerous virus," said Chuck Smith, spokesman for the COVID-19 response center in Sutter and Yuba counties. "A lot of transmission is caused by people not taking the precautions that are being recommended."

Sutter County, about 100 miles (160 kilometers) northeast of San Francisco, logged one of the state's highest rates of positive tests last week at 20.2%, and neighboring Yuba County ranked close behind at 17%.

They share one hospital, Adventist Rideout Memorial, which is overwhelmed with COVID-19 patients. It has no intensive care beds available, and staff were treating 50 COVID-19 patients after having none just a month ago, spokeswoman Monica Arrowsmith told the CBS-13 television station last week.

The strict new shutdown order in California took effect starting Sunday in Southern California, much of the San Francisco Bay Area and a vast swath of the Central Valley. The new measures, which include a stay-at-home order and widespread business closures, are triggered in any region that crosses an ICU capacity threshold of 85%. The rest of the state is on the brink of the same restrictions.

"If we don't act now, we will continue to see our death rate climb," Newsom said.

Tough in tone, his orders lack enforcement, which is frustrating for health officials issuing local guidance — often to no avail.

In a pre-Thanksgiving Facebook post, Shasta County Sheriff Eric Magrini asked people to be responsible but said he "will not be enforcing the compliance of any health or emergency orders related to curfews, stay at home orders, Thanksgiving or other social gatherings" or mask mandates. Several sheriffs in other areas have made similar statements.

In Sutter County, "we're not running around arresting people, so it's all about personal responsibility," said Smith of the COVID-19 response center. "But can you tell me a law enforcement agency anywhere in California that is enforcing this?"

Some officials in the San Francisco Area are handing out tickets and fines.

Many in rural California were lulled into a false sense of security early in the pandemic when the virus seemed to hit mostly cities. Counties with low virus rates last spring objected to a one-size-fits-all shutdown.

"We had a lot of people who could not understand why in the world we would be doing that. We had very few cases, and not a lot of spread," said Kerri Schuette, spokeswoman for the the Shasta County

Health and Human Services Agency.

Shasta now has more than 5,000 cases and at least 50 deaths. Illustrating how fast the virus multiplies, the agency noted that it took 206 days to hit the first 1,000 infections, from March 8 to Sept. 30, while the second thousand took 28 days. The third thousand came in 16 days. The fourth thousand took seven days.

Schuetz says people are taking it more seriously now, but officials nationwide are bracing for higher numbers after Thanksgiving gatherings and worrying about Christmas. Most of the transmission in hard-hit counties is due to socializing with family or friends, officials say.

Tensions over virus restrictions are encapsulated at Luntey's deli, where a sign on the door tells customers to wear masks but whether they do is up to them.

"My take on that is, it's your choice," said Luntey, adding that her staffers wear masks and she's reduced seating by half, to a dozen well-spaced tables.

The deli, in a strip mall, has no place to put substantial outdoor seating. Earlier in the year, she tried to survive on takeout, but it wasn't enough to pay the bills or wages for 15 employees.

She's not concerned about getting penalized because authorities have taken a "quiet, backseat" approach to enforcement. And her regulars praise her for staying open.

"We all need to eat," said longtime customer Tracy Foster-Olstad who stopped to talk with Luntey after lunch. She said she doesn't agree with "the way things are being governed" and wants to support struggling local businesses.

"The ripple effect of COVID is horrible," Foster-Olstad said. "To me, this is an essential place."

Gecker reported from San Francisco.

New roads pave way for massive growth of Israeli settlements

By JOSEPH KRAUSS Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — In the coming years, Israelis will be able to commute into Jerusalem and Tel Aviv from settlements deep inside the West Bank via highways, tunnels and overpasses that cut a wide berth around Palestinian towns.

Rights groups say the new roads will set the stage for explosive settlement growth, even if the incoming U.S. administration somehow convinces Israel to curb housing construction. The costly infrastructure projects signal that Israel intends to keep large swaths of the occupied territory in any peace deal and would make it even harder to establish a viable Palestinian state.

"This is not another hundred housing units there or here," said Yehuda Shaul, an Israeli activist who has spent months researching and mapping out the new projects. "This is de facto annexation on steroids."

Construction already is underway on a huge tunnel that Shaul says will one day allow settlers from Maale Adumim, a sprawling settlement east of Jerusalem, to drive into the city and onward to Tel Aviv without passing through a military checkpoint or even hitting a traffic light.

South of Jerusalem, work is underway to expand the main highway leading to the Gush Etzion settlement bloc and settlements farther south, with tunnels and overpasses designed to bypass Palestinian villages and refugee camps.

Palestinians will be allowed to drive on many of the new roads, but the infrastructure will be of limited use to them because they need permits to enter Israel or annexed east Jerusalem.

Israel seized the West Bank and east Jerusalem in the 1967 war and has since built a far-flung network of settlements that house nearly 700,000 Jewish settlers. The Palestinians want both territories for their future state and view the settlements as a violation of international law and an obstacle to peace — a position with wide international support.

Supporters of settlements view the West Bank and Jerusalem as the historical and biblical heart of Israel, seeing the settlements as a way of preventing any partition of the Holy Land.

But most Israelis live and work in the main cities. Except for an ideological minority, most Israelis would be uncomfortable living deep inside the West Bank, where two-lane roads pass through military check-

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points and Palestinian villages, and where clashes and rock-throwing can erupt at any time.

The new roads promise to change all that, transforming settlements into affordable suburban communities with safe, easy access to cities and public transportation. Shaul estimates the new infrastructure could facilitate plans for more than 50,000 settler housing units in the West Bank and another 6,000 in east Jerusalem.

"People don't bring roads, roads bring people," he said.

Shaul, an army conscript during the Israeli military's suppression of the second Palestinian uprising in the early 2000s, is a co-founder of Breaking the Silence, a group of former Israeli soldiers who document human rights abuses in the occupied territories. In recent months, he has turned his attention to Israeli planning.

His findings are based on minutes from several meetings held in recent years by parliamentary subcommittees charged with improving West Bank infrastructure. He also cites a strategic plan presented by Transportation Minister Miri Regev, a hard-line supporter of settlements, to a group of settlement mayors last month.

In a statement after the meeting, Regev called it "an exciting day for the settlements and for the state of Israel, which builds and is building in all areas of the homeland." She said it provided a "holistic vision" for "a future development plan for the region."

The ministry did not respond to requests for comment.

Oded Revivi, the mayor of the Efrat settlement in the West Bank who attended the meeting, said the draft plan was "very thorough," and that the ministry was open to suggestions, "taking into account the needs of both populations, both the Jews and the Arabs."

He said U.S. President Donald Trump's Mideast plan, which would allow Israel to annex about a third of the West Bank, including all its settlements, had proven that the settlements are not an obstacle to peace. That plan was immediately rejected by the Palestinians and is likely to be scrapped by President-elect Joe Biden, who opposes annexation.

Alon Cohen Lifshitz, an expert at Bimkom, an Israeli rights group that focuses on urban planning, said the main aim of the road projects is to create a "matrix of control" that ensures the free movement of Israelis while further fragmenting the areas governed by the Palestinian Authority.

"Most of the settlers are not (ideological). They are looking for options to live the dream in affordable housing," he said. "This is the main obstacle for the expansion of settlements."

The same process unfolded on a much smaller scale more than a decade ago, when Israel opened Route 398, connecting settlements in the southern West Bank to Jerusalem. Informally known as the "Lieberman Road," after former Transportation Minister Avigdor Lieberman, who lives in one of the settlements, it reduced the driving time from 40 minutes to 10 minutes. The area's settler population nearly doubled in the next six years, to about 6,000 people, according to Peace Now, an Israeli anti-settlement watchdog.

Many Palestinians view the roads as another kind of barrier erected to separate communities from one another and farmers from their land. They say much of the construction is on land expropriated from farmers, who have little hope of recourse in Israeli courts.

"This is a military occupation, so when they take a decision, they impose it by force, without any coordination with the other side, with the owners of the land," said Mohammed Sabateen, head of the local council in Husan, a Palestinian village south of Jerusalem sandwiched between a growing settlement and one of the new road projects.

"These roads are primarily designed for Israelis and settlers, not Palestinians," he said. The military can also cut off Palestinian access at any time by closing yellow gates at the main access points.

Israel is also at work on so-called "fabric of life" roads intended to benefit the Palestinians, but Shaul says these are usually aimed at routing them away from settlements. One has been dubbed the "apartheid road" because it runs alongside a road open only to Israelis, and the two are separated by an imposing concrete wall.

Biden has vowed to work with Israel and the Palestinians to restart peace talks, without offering much

detail. It's possible he will adopt a similar approach to the Obama administration, which pressed Israel to freeze or curb settlement growth as part of peace efforts that went nowhere.

But even if Biden succeeds in convincing Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to temporarily curb settlement growth, the road infrastructure would ensure plenty of demand once the pause ended.

"The second the freeze is over, this infrastructure will be there to facilitate even greater growth," said Shaul, who believes that stopping the road projects is key to preserving hope for a two-state solution. "This would be the foundation for the development of settlements for the next 20 years."

Venezuela's Maduro claims sweep of boycotted election

By SCOTT SMITH Associated Press

CARACAS, Venezuela (AP) — Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro's political alliance claimed a sweeping victory Monday in congressional elections boycotted by the most influential opposition politicians and widely criticized internationally as being fraudulent.

The win gives Maduro control of the last major branch of government outside his grasp. It plays 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.

"We have recovered the National Assembly with the majority vote of the Venezuelan people," Maduro said in a televised address. "It's a great victory without a doubt for democracy."

Maduro's United Socialist Party of Venezuela and allied parties captured 67% of seats in the National Assembly in Sunday's election, said Indira Alfonzo, president of Venezuela's National Electoral Council. Just 31% of the 20 million registered voters participated in the election, she said.

The National Assembly has been led by U.S.-backed politician Juan Guaidó, who has pressed to oust Maduro for nearly two years and end Venezuela's deepening crisis. He's backed by Washington and dozens of nations that consider Maduro's presidency illegitimate.

The election's outcome, however, appears to weaken both Maduro, who's accused as overseeing a fixed vote, and Guaidó, whose legal claim to the presidency hinges on his role as National Assembly head, while his own popularity fades after failing to oust Maduro.

The opposition boycott stems from a Supreme Court ruling this year appointing a new election commission, including three members who have been sanctioned by the U.S. and Canada, without participation of the opposition-led Congress, as the law requires.

The court also removed the leadership of three opposition parties — including Guaidó's — appointing new leaders the opposition accuses of conspiring to support Maduro.

A small number of opposition parties not associated with Guaidó have held dialogue with the government and participated in the election. Critics say this allowed Maduro to maintain the semblance of a valid contest.

Maduro campaigned for his party's candidates — including his son and wife — promising to finally silence the right-wing opposition, which he accuses of inciting violent street protests and inviting U.S. sanctions.

The election comes amid uncertainty over the impending change of U.S. administration. Like outgoing President Donald Trump, President-elect Joe Biden has called Maduro a "dictator," though it's unclear what approach he'll take toward Venezuela's crisis.

Despite Venezuela's political turmoil, voting took place with no apparent problems in Caracas, where polling places were operated by civilian militia members and armed soldiers alongside election workers.

As a light flow of voters entered the polls, long lines of drivers throughout Caracas waited to fuel up their cars as the oil rich nation struggles to produce gasoline to meet domestic demands.

Guaidó's opposition movement is holding its own referendum over several days immediately after the election. It will ask Venezuelans whether they want to end Maduro's rule and hold new presidential elections.

"Although I cannot promise a magic solution today, I can tell you with certainty and security: You are not alone. We will not give up," Guaidó said in a video message. "We are going to give everything until we win."

Surveys indicate that neither Maduro nor Guaidó are popular among Venezuelans at a time the nation's economic and political crisis is deepening despite having the world's largest oil reserves.

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Karol Teran, a nurse and single mother on her way to work in Caracas, said she didn't vote because it would have no impact. The election is controlled, she said.

"I don't feel like wasting my time, giving these people the opportunity, so I simply don't vote," she said. "We're tired of all this. I'm tired of all of this. It's not easy."

She was still considering whether to participate in the opposition's referendum.

More than 5 million people have fled the country in recent years, the world's largest migration after that of 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, now worth less than a millionth of a dollar on the free market.

Maduro, the hand-picked successor to the late President Hugo Chávez, won a second term in 2018. But his political adversaries and scores of nations, including the U.S., reject his legitimacy, alleging the vote was rigged and his most popular challengers were banned.

Guaidó, 37, vowed to oust 58-year-old Maduro early last year — basing his claim to the interim presidency on his leadership of the National Assembly, whose term legally ends in early January under the constitution.

The Trump administration and other countries led support of Guaidó and have said they will continue to support him in the absence of what they consider fair elections.

Washington has hit Maduro and his political allies with sanctions, and the U.S. Justice Department has indicted Maduro as a "narcoterrorist," offering a \$15 million reward for his arrest.

U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said that Sunday's election was fraudulent.

"The results announced by the illegitimate Maduro regime will not reflect the will of the Venezuelan people," he said on Twitter. "What's happening today is a fraud and a sham, not an election."

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.

Maduro's government invited sympathetic international observers, former Presidents Evo Morales of Bolivia and Rafael Correa of Ecuador. Others included a group of men who identified themselves as Turkish lawmakers.

At a polling place in Chacao, an opposition stronghold of Caracas, 68-year-old resident Luisa Fermin shouted at the observers, calling the election "theatrics" that she wouldn't validate with her vote.

"There are children who don't go to school because they're hungry," Fermin said. "There are mothers who send their children to school barefoot because they don't have the money to buy shoes."

Follow Scott Smith on Twitter: @ScottSmithAP

Associated Press writers Fabiola Sánchez and Jorge Rueda contributed to this report.

Amid pandemic, grants keep Army veteran's business afloat

By SARAH BLAKE MORGAN Associated Press

FAYETTEVILLE, N.C. (AP) — Nicole Walcott's lip started to quiver as she turned her misty gaze away from a reporter's question. "I don't want to cry on camera," the 33-year-old said when asked why she's fought tooth and nail to keep her small business open amid a pandemic that's crushing countless others.

Three years ago, Walcott, a U.S. Army veteran, opened an alternative health and wellness center in Fayetteville, North Carolina, a short drive from Fort Bragg, one of the largest military installations on the planet.

It was going well, but then COVID-19 hit — a phrase that has defined the stories of so many small businesses in 2020. In fact, it's only because of nonprofits such as San Antonio, Texas-based Operation Homefront — and Walcott's determination to seek out every grant possible — that her business is still around.

Walcott's alternative health and wellness center isn't just her livelihood — it's personal. A Humvee accident while she was serving in South Korea left Walcott with a spinal cord injury and debilitating chronic pain. When traditional pain management plans didn't suit her, she tried flotation therapy and says the pain

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disappeared after her first session.

Walcott couldn't find an alternative wellness center to continue her treatment in Fayetteville, so the mother of two worked with a private investor to open one herself.

She put in 16-hour days to build her business and it was paying off.

"We were having our best year ever in 2019. We were booked all day, every day, we were open seven days a week," she said.

The pandemic changed everything.

In March, the state of North Carolina forced Walcott's doors to close. They stayed shut for three months.

"When the revenue dropped 95%, we didn't know what we were going to do," she told the Associated Press.

But while the Wellness Center sat dormant on downtown Fayetteville's main drag, Walcott did not. She dug in her heels and started researching financial assistance to support her business and her family. Her husband, an Army veteran himself and Fayetteville police officer, began working the night shift to help with the kids during the day as Walcott hovered over her laptop searching for lifelines.

"I literally took those 16 hours and I completely switched to finding every piece of knowledge I could about grants," she said.

At the same time, the nonprofit Operation Homefront began to see their requests for assistance skyrocket. The nonprofit helps military families facing financial hardships with things like rent, utilities and food assistance.

It's sometimes the small expenses that Retired Brig. Gen. John Pray, who serves as Operation Homefront's President and CEO, says can upend a family's life. He said it is a "national tragedy" that the country has been unable to properly support veterans in civilian life.

"They may be one car repair or repair or missed rent or mortgage payment away from a series of financial disasters that derail any hope of a brighter future," he said.

Pray has watched the COVID-19 pandemic hit military families especially hard. Since mid-March, his organization has received nearly 3,000 requests for financial assistance. And they've filled nearly half of them.

One of those requests was Nicole's. Walcott's business serves as her home's primary income and when business dried up, so did most of her family's livelihood.

"Many military families are two-wage earner incomes," Pray said. "And when one wage earner like Nicole, they lose their job, all of a sudden that puts tremendous financial strain on the families."

Operation Homefront has shelled out \$802,000 to families struggling amid the pandemic, all while receiving fewer donations. Pray says donors in the restaurant and travel industry have cut back as their own revenues dropped. But others have stepped up to fill the void.

The organization has already started setting aside cash for the influx of requests they expect to see in the coming months as the virus surges again.

They are bracing for a potentially massive need for mortgage and rent assistance as government moratoriums on evictions and foreclosures begin to run out.

"We want to be the organization that says 'Yes,' not the organization that says 'We're out of money,'" Pray said.

Walcott was able to reopen in late May. Since then, business has been hit or miss. They've slimmed down staff and dropped certain services but that's not what she says saved her business.

"If we hadn't found a lot of the grants that I found, we probably wouldn't be here today," Walcott said.

Out of more than 50 grant applications Walcott has submitted, she's received 10. When an organization says no, she applies again.

She's refusing to take no for an answer. It's a skill she picked in Army: keep pushing through, especially when things get uncomfortable.

"I just knew that my vision for the company was so much bigger and it didn't stop with something like COVID," she said. "It had to go on."

—

Follow Morgan on Twitter at twitter.com/storytellersbm

Senator says Trump, McConnell likely to back COVID-19 relief

By HOPE YEN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — A proposed COVID-19 relief bill is expected to get backing from President Donald Trump and Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell but it won't include \$1,200 in direct payments to most Americans, a Republican senator involved in the bipartisan talks says.

"President Trump has indicated that he would sign a \$908 billion package — there's only one \$908 billion package out there and it's ours," Sen. Bill Cassidy, R-La., said Sunday. "The pain of the American people is driving this, and I'm optimistic that both those leaders will come on board."

With time running out, lawmakers from both parties were closing in on the final language that would provide roughly \$300 in extra federal weekly unemployment benefits, leaving the issue of cash payments for President-elect Joe Biden to wrestle over with a new Congress next year.

The package to be released Monday would be attached to a larger year-end spending bill needed to avert a government shutdown this coming weekend.

The direct payments were popular when they were first distributed after the pandemic hit, and Biden on Friday had expressed hope that a second wave might come after weekend negotiations.

But senators involved in the talks said the checks won't be included as part of the compromise, even as Sen. Bernie Sanders, I-Vt., and others said that could cause them to oppose the measure.

Sen. Dick Durbin of Illinois, the second-ranking Democrat, indicated that excluding the checks while assuring small-business aid and renters' assistance was the only way to reach agreement with Republicans who are putting firm limits on the bill's final price tag.

"The \$1,200 check, it cost we believe nationally \$300 billion, to give you an idea," he said. "The Democrats have always wanted a larger number, but we were told we couldn't get anything through the Republicans, except this \$900 billion level."

The plan being worked on by a group of Republican and Democratic senators is less than half of the Democrats' push of \$2.2 trillion and nearly double the \$500 billion "targeted" package proposed by McConnell, R-Ky.

Cassidy agreed that a new round of direct checks "may be a go" at some point. "This is not a stimulus bill, it's a relief bill," he said. "And it's something for the next three to four months to help those in greatest need."

The proposal is expected to include the \$300 per week in bonus federal unemployment payments, providing relief just as emergency aid payments at regular benefit levels are set to expire at year's end. It would extend a freeze on evictions for people who cannot pay their rent and reauthorize the Paycheck Protection Program to give a second round of subsidies to businesses struggling through the pandemic.

Still, potential sticking points remain.

Sanders and Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, D-N.Y., said last week they wouldn't support the \$908 billion proposal if it did not include checks for families, and were joined by Sen. Josh Hawley, R-Mo. Sanders and Ocasio-Cortez are also against shielding businesses from lawsuits claiming negligence for COVID-19 outbreaks, a provision pushed by Republicans.

While favoring the \$1,200 checks, Biden said the emerging compromise was "immediately needed" and that additional assistance could follow later.

On Sunday, lawmakers involved in the negotiations said the direct payments would have to wait until after Biden is inaugurated on Jan. 20. At that time, Biden will face a new Congress as vaccines are being distributed, with a narrowed Democratic majority in the House and a closely divided Senate potentially split 50-50 if Democrats are able to prevail in two runoff elections in Georgia on Jan. 5.

Sen. Mark Warner, D-Va., said Sanders was not involved in the negotiations and "his characterization is just not accurate" about the potential liability protections for businesses. The direct payments, he said, will be a task for Biden.

Sen. Joe Manchin, D-W.Va., said the bipartisan group was focused on extending the most urgent aid for

the next four months.

"Every indication says more money is needed; we see that," he said. "This gets us through basically the lifelines that people need and the small businesses that can survive and not go under."

Manchin said Biden's team, when in power, "can put together a different proposal that takes us further down the road for more recovery."

Durbin spoke on ABC's "This Week," Cassidy appeared on "Fox News Sunday," Warner was on CNN's "State of the Union" and Manchin was interviewed on NBC's "Meet the Press."

Fauci's plea 'Wear a mask' tops list of 2020 notable quotes

NEW HAVEN, Conn. (AP) — A plea from Dr. Anthony Fauci for people to "wear a mask" to slow the spread of the coronavirus tops a Yale Law School librarian's list of the most notable quotes of 2020.

The list assembled by Fred Shapiro, an associate director at the library, is an annual update to "The Yale Book of Quotations," which was first published in 2006.

Also on the list is "I can't breathe," the plea George Floyd made repeatedly to police officers holding him down on a Minneapolis street corner. Several quotes from the presidential campaign appear including Joe Biden telling a student: "You're a lying dog-faced pony soldier."

Shapiro said he picks quotes that are not necessarily admirable or eloquent, but rather because they are famous or particularly revealing of the spirit of the times.

THE LIST

1. "Wear a mask." — Dr. Anthony Fauci, CNN interview, May 21.
2. "I can't breathe." — George Floyd, plea to police officer, Minneapolis, May 25.
3. "One day — it's like a miracle — it will disappear," President Donald Trump, referring to the coronavirus in remarks at an African American History Month reception at the White House, Feb. 27.
4. "I see the disinfectant that knocks it out in a minute, one minute. And is there a way we can do something like that by injection inside or almost a cleaning?" — Trump, in remarks at a White House Coronavirus Task Force news briefing, April 23.
5. "I will never lie to you. You have my word on that." — White House Press Secretary Kayleigh McEnany, at her first press briefing, May 1.
6. "My most fervent wish is that I will not be replaced until a new president is installed." — Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg, statement dictated to granddaughter Clara Spera, September.
7. "If you have a problem figuring out whether you're for me or Trump, then you ain't Black." — Joe Biden, in an interview with "The Breakfast Club" radio program, May 22.
8. "The science should not stand in the way of this." — McEnany, referring to school reopenings in a news briefing, July 16.
9. "You're a lying dog-faced pony soldier." — Biden, in a remark to student at campaign event, Hampton, N.H., Feb. 9.
10. "We are all Lakers today." — Los Angeles Clippers coach Doc Rivers, in a remark to reporters after the death of Kobe Bryant, Orlando, Fla., Jan. 26.

Trump lawyer Giuliani in hospital after positive COVID test

By AAMER MADHANI and JONATHAN LEMIRE Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump said Sunday his personal attorney Rudy Giuliani has tested positive for the coronavirus, making him the latest in Trump's inner circle to contract the disease that is now surging across the U.S.

Giuliani was exhibiting some symptoms and was admitted Sunday to Georgetown University Medical Center in Washington, according to a person familiar with the matter who was not authorized to speak publicly.

The 76-year-old former New York mayor has traveled extensively to battleground states in an effort to help Trump subvert his election loss. On numerous occasions he has met with officials for hours at a time

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without wearing a mask.

Trump, who announced Giuliani's positive test in a Sunday afternoon tweet, wished him a speedy recovery. "Get better soon Rudy, we will carry on!!!" Trump wrote.

Giuliani did not immediately respond to a request for comment, but on Sunday evening he retweeted Trump's announcement of his diagnosis. He also tweeted thanks to a conservative writer who had said he was praying for Giuliani.

Giuliani attended a hearing at the Georgia Capitol on Thursday where he went without a mask for several hours. Several state senators, all Republicans, also did not wear masks at the hearing.

On Wednesday night, Giuliani was in Lansing, Michigan, to testify in a highly unusual 4 1/2-hour legislative hearing in which he pushed Republican lawmakers to ignore the certification of Joe Biden's Michigan victory and appoint electors for Trump. He did not wear a mask, nor did lawyer Jenna Ellis, who was sitting next to him. At one point, he asked one of his witnesses — a Detroit election worker — if she would be comfortable removing her mask. But legislators said they could hear her.

Giuliani traveled on Monday to Phoenix where he met with Republican legislators for an hourslong hearing in which he was maskless. The Arizona Republican Party tweeted a photo of Giuliani and several state GOP lawmakers standing shoulder-to-shoulder and maskless. The Arizona legislature announced Sunday, after Giuliani's diagnosis became public, that it would close for a week out of an abundance of caution "for recent cases and concerns relating to COVID-19."

The Trump campaign said in a statement that Giuliani tested negative twice before his visits to Arizona, Michigan and Georgia. Unidentified Trump team members who had close contact with Giuliani are in self-isolation.

"The Mayor did not experience any symptoms or test positive for COVID-19 until more than 48 hours after his return," according to the statement. "No legislators in any state or members of the press are on the contact tracing list, under current CDC Guidelines."

Giuliani also appeared maskless at a Nov. 25 hearing in Pennsylvania. And he did not quarantine after being near an infected person at a Nov. 19 news conference at the Republican National Committee's headquarters. His son Andrew Giuliani, who is a White House aide, announced a day after the event that he had tested positive for the virus.

Research shows that people who contract the virus may become infectious to others several days before they start to feel ill.

Georgia state Sen. Jen Jordan, a Democrat who attended Thursday's hearing, expressed outrage after learning of Giuliani's diagnosis.

"Little did I know that most credible death threat that I encountered last week was Trump's own lawyer," Jordan tweeted. "Giuliani — maskless, in packed hearing room for 7 hours. To say I am livid would be too kind."

Before the hearing, Giuliani and Michigan Republican Party Chairman Laura Cox — both maskless — did a virtual briefing for GOP activists.

Giuliani made an appearance earlier Sunday on Fox News "Sunday Morning Futures" to speak about his legal challenges in several states on behalf of Trump.

The diagnosis comes more than a month after Trump lost reelection and more than two months after Trump himself was stricken with the virus in early October. Since then, a flurry of administration officials and others in Trump's orbit have also been sickened, including White House chief of staff Mark Meadows and Ben Carson, the secretary of housing and urban development. The president's wife, Melania Trump, and teenage son, Barron Trump, have also been stricken.

The extraordinary spread in Trump's orbit underscores the cavalier approach the president has taken to a virus that has now killed more than 280,000 people in the U.S. alone.

Those infected also include the White House press secretary and advisers Hope Hicks and Stephen Miller, as well as Trump's campaign manager and the chair of the Republican National Committee.

Trump spent the waning days of his campaign trying to persuade the American public that the virus was

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receding, and repeatedly claimed it would miraculously “disappear” after Nov. 3. Instead, the country is experiencing a record-breaking spike in infections.

The president gave the mounting coronavirus death toll scant attention at a Saturday evening rally in Valdosta, Georgia, where he campaigned on behalf of Republican Sens. Kelly Loeffler and David Perdue ahead of next month’s runoff election there. Most people who attended the outdoor rally did not wear masks.

White House coronavirus task force coordinator Dr. Deborah Birx on Sunday offered tacit criticism of Trump’s attitude on the virus during an interview on NBC’s “Meet the Press.”

Asked about Trump and other administration members flouting public health experts’ warnings to avoid large gatherings and calls to wear masks, Birx replied that some leaders are “parroting” myths and called the pandemic “the worst event that this country will face.”

“And I think our job is to constantly say those are myths, they are wrong and you can see the evidence-base,” Birx added.

—
Lemire reported from Wilmington, Delaware. Associated Press writers Ben Nadler in Atlanta and David Eggert in Lansing, Michigan, contributed reporting.

Biden picks Calif. AG Becerra to lead HHS, pandemic response

By RICARDO ALONSO-ZALDIVAR, MICHAEL BALSAMO and JONATHAN LEMIRE Associated Press
WASHINGTON (AP) — President-elect Joe Biden has picked California Attorney General Xavier Becerra to be his health secretary, putting a defender of the Affordable Care Act in a leading role to oversee his administration’s coronavirus response.

Separately, Biden picked a Harvard infectious disease expert, Dr. Rochelle Walensky, to head the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

If confirmed by the Senate, Becerra, 62, will be the first Latino to head the Department of Health and Human Services, a \$1-trillion-plus agency with 80,000 employees and a portfolio that includes drugs and vaccines, leading-edge medical research and health insurance programs covering more than 130 million Americans.

Biden’s selection of Becerra was confirmed by two people familiar with the decision, who spoke on condition of anonymity ahead of a formal announcement anticipated Tuesday.

Two people also anonymously confirmed the choice of Walensky. The post of CDC director does not require Senate confirmation.

Becerra, as the state of California’s top lawyer, has led the coalition of Democratic states defending “Obamacare” from the Trump administration’s latest effort to overturn it, a legal case awaiting a Supreme Court decision next year.

A former senior House Democrat, Becerra was involved in steering the Obama health law through Congress in 2009 and 2010. At the time he would tell reporters that one of his primary motivations was having tens of thousands of uninsured people in his Southern California district.

Becerra has a lawyer’s precise approach to analyzing problems and a calm demeanor.

But overseeing the coronavirus response will be the most complicated task he has ever contemplated. By next year, the U.S. will be engaged in a mass vaccination campaign, the groundwork for which has been laid under the Trump administration. Although the vaccines appear very promising, and no effort has been spared to plan for their distribution, it’s impossible to tell yet how well things will go when it’s time to get shots in the arms of millions of Americans.

Becerra won’t be going it alone. Biden, who is expected to announce key health care picks as early as Tuesday, is taking a team approach to his administration’s virus response.

Businessman Jeff Zients is expected to be named as Biden’s White House coronavirus coordinator. An economic adviser to former President Barack Obama, Zients also led the rescue of the HealthCare.gov

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website after its disastrous launch in 2013. And former Surgeon General Vivek Murthy, a co-chair of Biden's coronavirus task force, is expected to return in a new role akin to the top medical adviser.

But the core components of HHS are the boots on the ground of the government's coronavirus response. The Food and Drug Administration oversees vaccines and treatments, while much of the underlying scientific and medical research comes from NIH. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention takes the lead in detecting and containing the spread of diseases. The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services provides insurance coverage for more than 1 in 3 Americans, including vulnerable seniors, as well as many children and low-income people.

Under President Donald Trump, CDC was relegated to a lesser role after agency scientists issued a stark early warning that contradicted Trump's assurances the virus was under control, rattling financial markets. The FDA was the target of repeated attacks from a president who suspected its scientists were politically motivated and who also wanted them to rubber-stamp unproven treatments.

As CDC director, Walensky would replace Dr. Robert Redfield, who accurately told the public coronavirus vaccines would not be available for most people until next year, only to be disparaged by Trump as "confused." Walensky is a leading infectious disease specialist at Massachusetts General Hospital, and has devoted her career to combatting HIV/AIDS.

Becerra's experience running the bureaucratic apparatus of the California attorney general's office, as well as his success working with Republicans, helped seal the pick for Biden, said a person familiar with the process but not authorized to comment publicly. Becerra had worked with Louisiana's Republican attorney general to increase the availability of the COVID-19 drug treatment Remdesivir in their states. He's also worked closely with other Republican attorneys general on legal challenges against opioid manufacturers.

Early in California's coronavirus response, Becerra defended broad shutdowns Gov. Gavin Newsom had put in place to curtail the pandemic, including limits on religious gatherings. Three churches in Southern California had sued Newsom, Becerra and other state officials because in-person church services had been halted.

Biden's offer was extended to Becerra on Friday. The president-elect has been under pressure from the Congressional Hispanic Caucus to appoint Latinos to the Cabinet.

Becerra has been jokingly known in Democratic legal circles as the man who sued Trump more than anyone else. Beyond health care, the California attorney general's lawsuits centered on issues from immigration to environmental policies.

Previously Becerra had served for more than a decade in Congress, representing parts of Los Angeles County. He had also served in the California state assembly after attending law school at Stanford.

His mother was born in Jalisco, Mexico, and emigrated to the U.S. after marrying his father, a native of Sacramento, California, who had grown up in Mexico.

Becerra often cites his parents as his inspiration, saying they instilled in him a strong work ethic and a desire for advancement. His father worked road construction jobs, while his mother was a clerical employee. Becerra is married to Dr. Carolina Reyes, a physician who specializes in maternal and fetal health.

In an AP profile published last year, a lifelong friend of Becerra's said he learned to stay calm and self-controlled in high school as a varsity golfer and an exceptional poker player. Becerra studied the advice of famous golfers while practicing with a set of used clubs costing less than \$100.

Lemire reported from Wilmington, Delaware. Associated Press reporters Aamer Madhani, Zeke Miller and Kathleen Ronayne in Sacramento, California, contributed to this report.

Sheriff: Defiant NYC bar owner struck deputy with his car

By KAREN MATTHEWS Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — The co-owner of a New York City bar that authorities said has been defying coronavirus restrictions was taken into custody early Sunday after running over a deputy with a car, authorities said.

Danny Presti tried to drive away from his bar, Mac's Public House, as deputies were arresting him for

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serving patrons in violation of city and state closure orders, Sheriff Joseph Fucito said.

Deputies attempted to arrest Presti as he left the bar early Sunday, but Presti got into his car, struck a deputy and kept driving for about 100 yards as the deputy was left hanging onto the hood, Fucito said.

Presti, 34, was eventually stopped and apprehended, the sheriff said. Presti was arraigned Sunday afternoon in Staten Island's 122nd Precinct on 10 charges including third-degree assault, reckless driving, menacing and resisting arrest. A phone message was left for Mark Fonte, an attorney for Presti.

The injured deputy was taken to a hospital for treatment of injuries. The deputy's condition wasn't immediately available.

The Staten Island bar was the site of protests last week after the sheriff's office arrested Presti on charges of violating restrictions aimed at halting the spread of the coronavirus and obstructing governmental administration.

The tavern is in an area designated by Gov. Andrew Cuomo as an orange zone because of spiking COVID-19 rates and was not supposed to be serving customers indoors. But the owners had declared the bar an "autonomous zone," a nod to protesters who claimed control over a Seattle neighborhood in June.

A spokesperson for Mayor Bill de Blasio said Presti's actions showed a disregard for human life. "In both of these instances, whether it's flouting public health laws or ramming a car into a uniformed deputy, this individual has endangered the lives of others," said the spokesperson, Bill Neidhardt.

Authorities said the bar was still serving patrons Saturday night even though it was ordered closed entirely after Presti's earlier arrest.

Deputies surveilling the pub saw that the front door to the bar was locked but customers were being directed to a building next door, Fucito said. From there, they were able to enter Mac's Public House through a back door and order food and beverages, he said.

Staten Island is much more conservative than the rest of New York City and is the only one of the city's five boroughs that voted for Republican President Donald Trump in November. The borough is home to many police officers and firefighters and is usually seen as supportive of law enforcement.

A unique recipe for healing: Bill Murray and a biblical text

By ELANA SCHOR and ANDREW WELSH-HUGGINS Associated Press

Against the backdrop of a pandemic's blight and wounds from an acrimonious election, a group of acclaimed actors on Sunday staged an online reading of a religious text with remarkable relevance to the current moment: the Book of Job.

Audience members may have been drawn to the production by the casting of Bill Murray as Job, the righteous man tested by the loss of his health, home and children, but the real star was the format. Staged on Zoom, it was aimed at Republican-leaning Knox County, Ohio, with participation from locals including people of faith, and designed to spark meaningful conversations across spiritual and political divides.

After the performance, several people from the area were asked to share their perspective on the ancient story in a virtual discussion. It was then thrown open to some of the scores of others signed in, no matter their location. One young woman studying social work shared that Job's judgment at the hands of others during his suffering inspired her to reflect on "how I am practicing empathy" during the coronavirus.

The structure of a dramatic reading followed by open-ended dialogue is a fixture of Theater of War Productions, the company behind the event. Artistic director Bryan Doerries is an alumnus of Kenyon College in Knox County and chose the area to focus on bridging rifts opened by the election and sharing the pain of a pandemic that's tied to more than 275,000 U.S. deaths.

By using Job's story "as a vocabulary for a conversation, the hope is that we can actually engender connection, healing," Doerries said. "People can hear each other's truths even if they don't agree with them."

The performance was headlined by Murray and featured other noted actors such as Frankie Faison and David Strathairn. The cast also included Matthew Starr, mayor of the Knox County town of Mount Vernon, who will play Job's accuser. He said the timing is perfect for the moment the country is going through, between the pandemic, the heated election and racial justice protests.

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His hope is that the event and the dialogue afterward lead to less shouting and more listening. And a good story like that of Job can do so more effectively than a new law or a new directive, by changing people's hearts, said Starr, a Republican and supporter of President Donald Trump who founded an independent film company before going into politics.

"God does not say that bad things aren't going to happen, but He does tell us, when they do, we're not alone," Starr said.

Knox County, a largely rural community of about 62,000 residents including a medium-size Amish population, lies about an hour east of the state capital, Columbus. Despite its numerous farms, most people in the county work blue-collar manufacturing jobs at several local factories.

The county, which is 97% white, is a conservative stronghold that voted for Trump by a nearly 3-1 margin in November and also went overwhelmingly for him in 2016.

An exception is Kenyon College, a small liberal arts school perched on a hill a few miles outside Mount Vernon. Voters in the precincts comprising the college and the village of Gambier voted 8-1 for President-elect Joe Biden.

To help prompt more locals to engage in the post-reading conversation, Doerries worked with leaders from multiple faith traditions. Among them is Marc Bragin, Jewish chaplain at Kenyon, who said he hopes the experience can help people who share bigger values look beyond their differences.

Bragin, administrator of a project backed by the nonprofit Interfaith Youth Core that partners Kenyon students with counterparts at nearby Mount Vernon Nazarene University, said he's hopeful they will attend the discussion and take away an important lesson: "Surround yourself with people who aren't like you," he said, "and you can have such a bigger impact on your community, your world."

Pastor LJ Harry, who has also been recruiting people for the virtual conversation, does not believe Knox County is as divided as other places in the country. The police chaplain and pastor at the Apostolic Church of Christ in Mount Vernon said most in the area are united in their support for Trump and for law enforcement, with protests after the death of George Floyd spirited but peaceful.

Harry said the community's biggest point of contention is over mask-wearing, with many resisting Republican Gov. Mike DeWine's statewide mandate. He likened Knox County's need for healing to that of a hospital patient who has left intensive care but remains in a step-down unit, and said he hopes the performance will drive home God's central role in Job's story.

"That's the message I'm hoping our church family, our community, hears," Harry said. "God has this in control, even though it feels like it's out of control."

In the biblical tale, God allows for Job's massive losses as a means to share broader truths about suffering. The story ends with the restoration of what was taken from him, plus more.

Theater of War held its first Job reading in Joplin, Missouri, a year after a tornado killed more than 160 people there in 2011. The company has performed more than 1,700 readings worldwide, harnessing Greek drama and other resonant texts to evoke deeper dialogues about an array of issues.

Doerries acknowledged that his company's readings always have the potential to fall flat if a genuine back-and-forth doesn't develop. Still, he's betting that Sunday's event could create space for people from different backgrounds, in Ohio and beyond, to engage with each other.

"Our hope is not that there's going to be a group hug at the end of the thing, or that we're going to resolve all our political differences, but that we can remind people of our basic humanity ... what it requires to live up to basic values such as treating our neighbor as ourselves," Doerries said.

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

Biden's pick to head OMB brings experience, Twitter enemies

By ASHRAF KHALIL and AAMER MADHANI Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Neera Tanden has delighted in labeling Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell as

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"Moscow Mitch"; in the wake of the acrimonious vote to confirm Supreme Court Justice Brett Kavanaugh, she cuttingly dismissed Maine Republican Sen. Susan Collins as "the worst."

And as Democrats wrestled with the 2016 loss, Tanden tweeted her takeaway in a dig on former first lady Michelle Obama's often-quoted political truism: "One important lesson is that when they go low, going high doesn't ... work."

Tanden, who is president of the Democratic-leaning Center for American Progress and now president-elect Joe Biden's choice for budget director, has spent years as a partisan combatant willing to go low against both Republicans and left-leaning critics of her former boss Hillary Clinton. Now some of those she's bruised along the way see her upcoming confirmation as a chance to hit back, making her perhaps Biden's most controversial staffing and Cabinet decision yet.

Some Republican leaders have declared their opposition to Tanden — drawing a new red line over Twitter etiquette after years of ignoring President Donald Trump's tweets. Some progressives, meanwhile, see Tanden's nomination as a test of whether the left will challenge Biden, who ran as a moderate, over funding for social programs.

"If she sails through without a challenge (from the left), it speaks badly for the progressive wing's willingness to challenge Biden on anything," said David Sirota, a former speechwriter for leftist Vermont Sen. Bernie Sanders who also worked at the think tank under Tanden.

Sanders has not commented publicly on Tanden's nomination, but other liberal senators including Elizabeth Warren of Massachusetts and Sherrod Brown of Ohio have expressed their support.

Tanden would be the first woman of color to lead the powerful Office of Management and Budget. Friends and allies say that the fuss over her online persona is a distraction from her credentials and deep experience with large-scale policy making. That includes her roles in helping Clinton develop her health care plan in 2007 and later as a senior adviser that helped craft "Obamacare."

"She is a policy wonk first and foremost," said Lindsay Hamilton, a former chief of staff to Tanden at the Center for American Progress.

On Friday, Biden tweeted his support, calling her "a brilliant policy mind with experience across government" and saying "above all, she believes what I believe: a budget should reflect our values."

Tanden, 50, has said her values reflect personal experience with the government programs she would play a key role in supporting.

The child of Indian immigrants, her parents divorced when she was five and her mother spent two years on government support, food stamps and Section 8 housing vouchers in the suburbs of Boston before eventually getting a job as a travel agent.

"I'm here today because of social programs, because of budgetary choices, because of a government that saw my mother's dignity and gave her a chance," Tanden said last week, as Biden announced the nomination. The experience gave her a belief in the ability of government to "pull families back from the brink," she added. Biden's team declined to make Tanden available for an interview.

The first wave of Republican criticism of Tanden mentioned none of her professional or personal experience, instead focusing on her aggressive Twitter hand.

Tanden's rhetoric online was "filled with hate & guided by the woke left," Arkansas Republican Sen. Tom Cotton said. Republican Sen. John Cornyn called Tanden "radioactive" and a spokesperson for the Texas senator has said she "stands zero chance" of being confirmed if the GOP holds the Senate. (Democrats need to win both of next month's runoffs in Georgia to take control of the Senate.)

Democrats have been quick to point out the hypocrisy in Republicans' focus on Tanden's harsh posts. Most Senate Republicans have spent years backing President Donald Trump as he hurled personal insults — "horseface," "phony," "slob" — at opponents, stoked racial tensions and pushes falsehoods on Twitter.

Tanden has long been close to Hillary Clinton, serving as an East Wing aide to the then-first lady during President Bill Clinton's administration. She would go on to serve as a top staffer in Clinton's Senate office, policy director during Clinton's unsuccessful 2008 campaign and as an outside adviser to Clinton's 2016 campaign for the White House.

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Tanden, who referred to herself as a “loyal soldier” for Clinton in a private email made public by WikiLeaks, aligned herself with Clinton early and stuck close to her through much of the last two decades.

Jim Kessler, a former policy director in the office of New York Democrat and Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer, said he first got to know Tanden more than 20 years ago when she called him to get a primer on New York politics as Clinton launched her first Senate campaign.

“She was a sponge,” recalled Kessler. “It’s not easy being an outsider and that was not a simple race for Hillary. She was a big part of the reason that Clinton was successful.”

After Clinton was defeated by Obama in the 2008 Democratic primary, Tanden joined the Obama campaign and went on to work as a top aide in Obama’s Department of Health and Human Services as he put together his signature health care reform.

Tanden left the agency in 2010 to become chief operating officer at CAP, a longtime stronghold of Clinton loyalists.

It’s not just Republicans who have a beef with Tanden; her expected nomination shines a light on lingering divisions inside the Democratic Party.

Tanden clashed frequently online, and occasionally in person, with supporters of Sanders, the progressive standard-bearer during his bitter primary battle with Clinton in 2016 and again during his fight against Biden this year. Last year, Sanders wrote an open letter accusing CAP under Tanden’s leadership of playing a “destructive role” in the process. Calling out Tanden by name, Sanders said the think tank had a pattern of calling for Democratic unity but then “maliciously maligning my staff and supporters and belittling progressive ideas.”

Tanden has also previously endorsed cutting entitlements such as Social Security and Medicare — something the Sanders’ wing of the party regards as a red line, but a position that Biden himself has held at different times.

Sirota, who now publishes the political newsletter The Daily Poster, said the smoke over Tanden’s online persona obscures the true debate among Democrats over her policy choices.

“In a rational political world, that would be the central issue regarding her nomination,” he said.

Follow Khalil at <https://twitter.com/Ashrafkhalil> and Madhani at <https://twitter.com/AamerISmad>

Lawmakers say COVID-19 relief bill won’t offer \$1,200 checks

By HOPE YEN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — With time running out, lawmakers on Sunday closed in on a proposed COVID-19 relief bill that would provide roughly \$300 in extra federal weekly unemployment benefits but not another round of \$1,200 in direct payments to most Americans, leaving that issue for President-elect Joe Biden to wrestle over with a new Congress next year.

The \$908 billion aid package to be released Monday would be attached to a larger year-end spending bill needed to avert a government shutdown this coming weekend.

The cash payments were popular when they were first distributed after the pandemic hit, and Biden on Friday had expressed hope that a second wave might come after weekend negotiations.

But senators involved in the talks said the checks won’t be included as part of the compromise, even as Sen. Bernie Sanders, I-Vt., and others said that could cause them to oppose the measure.

Sen. Dick Durbin of Illinois, the second-ranking Democrat, indicated that excluding the checks while assuring small-business aid and renters’ assistance was the only way to reach agreement with Republicans who are putting firm limits on the bill’s final price tag.

“The \$1,200 check, it cost we believe nationally \$300 billion to give you an idea,” he said. “The Democrats have always wanted a larger number, but we were told we couldn’t get anything through the Republicans, except this \$900 billion level.”

The plan being worked on by a group of Republican and Democratic senators is less than half of the Democrats’ push of \$2.2 trillion and nearly double the \$500 billion “targeted” package proposed by Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky.

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Sen. Bill Cassidy, R-La., agreed that a new round of direct checks “may be a go” at some point. “This is not a stimulus bill, it’s a relief bill,” he said. “And it’s something for the next three to four months to help those in greatest need.”

Both he and Durbin said that McConnell has shown interest in the bipartisan effort, and Cassidy said he was hopeful that President Donald Trump would embrace it as well.

The proposal is expected to include about \$300 per week in bonus federal unemployment payments, providing relief just as emergency aid payments at regular benefit levels are set to expire at year’s end. It would extend a freeze on evictions for people who cannot pay their rent and reauthorize the Paycheck Protection Program to give a second round of subsidies to businesses struggling through the pandemic.

Still, potential sticking points remain.

Sanders and Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, D-N.Y., said last week they wouldn’t support the \$908 billion proposal if it did not include checks for families, and were joined by Sen. Josh Hawley, R-Mo. Sanders and Ocasio-Cortez are also against shielding businesses from lawsuits claiming negligence for COVID-19 outbreaks, a provision pushed by Republicans.

While favoring the \$1,200 checks, Biden said the emerging compromise was “immediately needed” and that additional assistance could follow later.

On Sunday, lawmakers involved in the negotiations said the direct payments would have to wait until after Biden is inaugurated on Jan. 20. At that time, Biden will face a new Congress as vaccines are being distributed, with a narrowed Democratic majority in the House and a closely divided Senate potentially split 50-50 if Democrats are able to prevail in two runoff elections in Georgia on Jan. 5.

Sen. Mark Warner, D-Va., said Sanders was not involved in the negotiations and “his characterization is just not accurate” about the potential liability protections for businesses. The direct payments, he said, will be a task for Biden.

Sen. Joe Manchin, D-W.Va., said the bipartisan group was focused on extending the most urgent aid for the next four months.

“Every indication says more money is needed; we see that,” he said. “This gets us through basically the lifelines that people need and the small businesses that can survive and not go under.”

Manchin said Biden’s team, when in power, “can put together a different proposal that takes us further down the road for more recovery.”

Durbin spoke on ABC’s “This Week,” Cassidy appeared on “Fox News Sunday,” Warner was on CNN’s “State of the Union” and Manchin was interviewed on NBC’s “Meet the Press.”

Despite promise, few in US adopting COVID-19 exposure apps

By BRYAN ANDERSON and MATT O’BRIEN Associated Press

RALEIGH, N.C. (AP) — Six months ago, Apple and Google introduced a new smartphone tool designed to notify people who might have been exposed to the coronavirus, without disclosing any personal information. But for the most part, Americans haven’t been all that interested.

Fewer than half of U.S. states and territories — 18 in total — have made such technology widely available. And according to a data analysis by The Associated Press, the vast majority of Americans in such locations haven’t activated the tool.

Data from 16 states, Guam and the District of Columbia shows that 8.1 million people had utilized the technology as of late November. That’s about one in 14 of the 110 million residents in those regions.

In theory, such apps could bolster one of the most difficult tasks in pandemic control: Tracing the contacts of people infected with the coronavirus in order to test and isolate them if necessary. In practice, however, widespread COVID-19 misinformation, the complexity of the technology, overwhelmed health workers needed to quickly confirm a diagnosis, and a general lack of awareness have all presented obstacles, experts and users say.

“There’s a lot of things working against it,” said Jessica Vitak, an associate professor at the University of Maryland’s College of Information Studies. “Unfortunately, in the U.S., COVID has been politicized far more

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than in any other country. I think that's affecting people's willingness to use tools to track it."

Charlotte, North Carolina, lawyer Evan Metaxatos was thrilled to learn in November about his state's tracking app, called SlowCOVIDNC. He immediately downloaded it and got his parents and pregnant wife to follow suit.

But they're still outliers in the state, which launched the app in September with little fanfare. Of roughly 10.5 million state residents, only 482,003 had installed it through the end of November.

"It won't work great until everyone's using it, but it's better than nothing," Metaxatos said.

Apple and Google co-created the primary technology behind such apps, which use Bluetooth wireless signals to anonymously detect when two phones have spent time in close proximity. If an app user tests positive for the virus, that person's phone can trigger a notification to other people they've spent time near — without revealing names, locations, or any other identifying information.

In states such as Colorado, Connecticut, Maryland and Washington, as well as Washington, D.C., iPhone users don't even have to download an app. In fact, Apple prompts users via pop-ups to activate the notification system by adjusting their phone settings.

In these states, adoption rates are notably higher. But even in the most successful state, Connecticut, only about a fifth of all residents have opted into this tracking. On Friday, Washington said that more than 1 million state residents — roughly 13% of its population — had activated the technology in its first four days.

Virginia's COVIDWISE app launched on Aug. 5 and was the first to go live. Since then, fewer than one in ten residents have downloaded it, though the state estimates almost 20% of Virginians between the ages of 18 and 65 with a smartphone have done so. Delaware's app downloads account for about 7% of the state's population.

All other U.S. states analyzed have much lower adoption rates.

New York launched its app on Oct. 1. It recently surpassed 1 million downloads, which amounts to about 5% of the population. New Jersey and Pennsylvania have seen less use, with a 4% download rate.

Adoption is even lower in Wyoming, North Dakota, Michigan, Nevada and Alabama, with users representing only 1% to 3% of their state populations. The apps, which are free, can be found in Apple's app store and the Google Play store for Android devices; they're also typically available on state health-department websites.

Irish app developer NearForm says more than one-quarter of Ireland's population uses its COVID-19 app. It's been harder to get such traction in the four U.S. states where it's built similar apps: New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania and Delaware.

In Ireland, "all sides of the political divide came together with a consistent message on this is what we need to do," said Larry Breen, NearForm's chief commercial officer. "That debate continues to rage on your side of the pond."

Elsewhere in Europe, the uptake has been mixed. Germany and Britain have penetration rates similar to Ireland's; in Finland the figure is 45%, according to data compiled by MIT Technology Review. In France, however, less than 4% of the population is using the official COVID app, which shuns the Apple-Google approach for a more intrusive data collection system that raised privacy concerns and technical issues.

Security experts praise the Apple-Google system for protecting users' anonymity, but it's been a tough sell for many people. American users say partisanship, privacy concerns and stigma surrounding COVID-19 have kept participation low. A lack of state and federal efforts to boost awareness hasn't helped.

Neither have technological and bureaucratic issues.

Lee McFarland, a loan officer from Grand Forks, North Dakota, was eager to download his state's Care19 Alert app but said he couldn't push a "Notify Others" button after getting the virus in late October.

"If you test positive, a public health official will call and verify your code," said a message on McFarland's app. "This ensures that only verified positive COVID-19 people can send notifications."

McFarland said he forgot to tell the health worker he had the app installed on his phone. He was unsuccessful in following up with the worker to get the needed code, and has since deleted the app.

Even when that process works, however, many North Dakotans don't actually push the button to notify

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others.

Tim Brookins, CEO of app developer ProudCrowd, said 91 of North Dakota's 14,000 active users had their "Notify Others" button enabled after the state confirmed them as positive. Of the 91 users, only 29 pushed the button, which prompted 50 notifications.

Still, many users say they'll keep the app in hopes others will see its potential benefits.

"You can say that about just about anything that not enough people are doing this or that, but everybody that does something is helping," said David Waechter, a general contractor from Lenoir, North Carolina. "I think that the United States could use a good strong dose of E pluribus unum and stop thinking about self and start thinking about our countrymen."

O'Brien reported from Providence, Rhode Island. AP reporter Kelvin Chan contributed from London.

Follow Anderson on Twitter at <https://twitter.com/BryanRAnderson> and O'Brien at <https://twitter.com/mattoyeah>.

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

Health officials warn Americans not to let their guard down

By STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press

With a COVID-19 vaccine perhaps just days away in the U.S., most of California headed into another lockdown Sunday because of the surging outbreak and top health officials warned Americans that this is no time to let their guard down.

"The vaccine's critical," Dr. Deborah Birx, the White House coronavirus response coordinator, said on NBC's "Meet the Press." "But it's not going to save us from this current surge. Only we can save us from this current surge."

A Food and Drug Administration advisory panel is scheduled to take up a request Thursday to authorize emergency use of Pfizer's vaccine. Vaccinations could begin just days later, though initial supplies will be rationed, and shots are not expected to become widely available until the spring.

With the U.S. facing what could be a catastrophic winter, top government officials warned Americans anew to wear masks, practice social distancing and follow other basic measures — precautions that President Donald Trump and other members of the administration have often disdained.

"I hear community members parroting back those situations — parroting back that masks don't work, parroting back that we should work towards herd immunity, parroting back that gatherings don't result in super-spreading events," Birx said. "And I think our job is to constantly say those are myths, they are wrong and you can see the evidence base."

The virus is blamed for over 280,000 deaths and more than 14.6 million confirmed infections in the U.S. New cases per day have rocketed to an all-time high of more than 190,000 on average.

Deaths per day have surged to an average of more than 2,160, a level last seen during the dark days in April, when the outbreak was centered around New York. The number of Americans in the hospital with the coronavirus topped 100,000 for the first time over the past few days.

Dr. Scott Gottlieb, a former FDA commissioner, warned on CBS' "Face the Nation" that the U.S. death toll could be approaching 400,000 by the end of January.

"As bad as things are right now," he said, "they're going to get a lot worse."

In California, the first place to enact a statewide lockdown last spring, new stay-at-home orders were set to take effect Sunday night in Southern California, much of the San Francisco Bay area and other areas.

The new rules in the state of 40 million people prohibit residents from gathering with those outside their household. Retailers including supermarkets and shopping centers can operate with just 20% capacity,

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while restaurant dining, hair salons, movie theaters, museums and playgrounds must shut down.

Hospitals in California are seeing space in intensive care units dwindle amid a surge in infections. California health authorities imposed the order after ICU capacity fell below a 15% threshold in some regions.

Some law enforcement officials, though, said they don't plan to enforce the rules, and some business owners are warning that they could go under after a year of on-and-off closings and other restrictions.

California Gov. Gavin Newsom said he hopes the new lockdown order is the last one he has to issue, declaring the vaccine offers "light at the end of the tunnel."

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention is recommending that health care workers and nursing home patients get priority when the first shots become available.

Both Pfizer's vaccine and a Moderna vaccine that will also be reviewed by the FDA later this month require two doses a few weeks apart. Current estimates project that a combined total of no more than 40 million doses will be available by the end of the year. The plan is to use those to fully vaccinate 20 million people.

Dr. Moncef Slaoui, head of Operation Warp Speed, the government's vaccine development program, suggested on CBS that using those 40 million doses more broadly to reach 40 million people right away would be too risky, because of the possibility of manufacturing delays that could hold up the necessary second doses.

"It would be inappropriate to partially immunize large numbers of people and not complete their immunization," he said.

But Gottlieb said he would push out as many doses as possible, taking "a little bit of a risk" that the supply would catch up in time for people to get a second dose.

Associated Press writers Adam Beam and Kathleen Ronayne in Sacramento, California, Amy Taxin in Huntington Beach, California and Hope Yen in Washington contributed to this story.

Schools confront 'off the rails' numbers of failing grades

By CAROLYN THOMPSON Associated Press

The first report cards of the school year are arriving with many more Fs than usual in a dismal sign of the struggles students are experiencing with distance learning.

School districts from coast to coast have reported the number of students failing classes has risen by as many as two or three times — with English language learners and disabled and disadvantaged students suffering the most.

"It was completely off the rails from what is normal for us, and that was obviously very alarming," said Erik Jespersen, principal of Oregon's McNary High School, where 38% of grades in late October were failing, compared with 8% in normal times.

Educators see a number of factors at play: Students learning from home skip assignments — or school altogether. Internet access is limited or inconsistent, making it difficult to complete and upload assignments. And teachers who don't see their students in person have fewer ways to pick up on who is falling behind, especially with many keeping their cameras off during Zoom sessions.

The increase in failing grades has been seen in districts of all sizes around the country.

At Jespersen's school in the Salem-Keizer Public School district, hundreds of students initially had not just Fs, but grade scores of 0.0%, indicating they simply were not participating in school at all. In New Mexico, more than 40 percent of middle and high school students were failing at least one class as of late October. In Houston, 42% of students received at least one F in the first grading period of the year. Nearly 40% of grades for high school students in St. Paul, Minnesota, were Fs, double the amount in a typical year.

In response schools have been ramping up outreach efforts, prioritizing the return of struggling students for in-person learning and in some cases changing grading policies and giving students more time to complete assignments.

Jespersen said his school began to see grades improve after bringing groups of 300 students into the building in small cohorts to receive support from teachers, although that recently stopped because of

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the region's rising coronavirus cases. Advisory teams increased contact with students, and teachers were asked to temporarily stop assigning graded homework. Parents of Hispanic students were invited for a session to learn how to access their children's grades online.

In Charleston, South Carolina, administrators and teachers are raising the possibility of adjusting grading the way they did in spring, where instructors were told to give 50s instead of 0s to make it less punitive for disengaged students, eighth-grade English teacher Jody Stallings said. "I'm an English teacher, not a math teacher, but I've learned zeros are very, very devastating to an average," he said.

Most of the failing grades he gives out come from missing assignments, not assignments that were turned in with a lot of wrong answers.

"You talk to them later and they say, 'You know I just didn't do it. I didn't know the answer so I just didn't do it,'" said Stallings, who teaches most of his students in person and the rest online simultaneously at Moultrie Middle School. "When you have a kid in person, he's going to take the test ... Even if he doesn't know anything, he has a chance."

Jillian Baxter's son, a high school sophomore in Fairfax County, Virginia, normally gets good grades but was failing all his classes at one point, including physical education. Her daughter, a senior, was getting all A's. Both students are learning remotely fulltime.

She attributes the difference to how her kids learn. Her daughter is thrilled to work independently in her room. Her son is a "tactile learner," she said.

"You don't have that drive to do it if you're not there," she said.

The failing grades during the pandemic have also revealed how equity gaps in the education system are growing.

An analysis by the Fairfax County school system found that English language learners and students with disabilities were among those with the largest increases in failing grades. In contrast, students who performed well previously were performing slightly better than expected.

In Hatch, New Mexico, high school registrar Blanca Ramirez said her job has evolved during the pandemic to serve as translator, ombudsman and life coach to students and parents who speak only Spanish. In conversations, she asks students how they can have such low grades.

"The first response is 'it's so hard — Miss — no lo entiendo'" -- I don't get it, Ramirez said.

"Come to find out a lot of the time for kids are not even doing their first attempt because I think they're afraid. And so just making that phone call opens up that encouragement and they start making a little bit more effort," says Ramirez.

In some cases, the biggest barrier for an English-language learning student is simply that they've been unable to log in to the Zoom calls and the online education platform that are key to attending classes. A few times this semester, Ramirez has had the students meet her in the school parking lot, everyone masked up, while she shows them and their parents how to log in.

Hatch High School reported 79% of students were failing at least one class during their first grading period of the year. That's been cut to 46% within a few months, said spokeswoman Audra Bluehouse, both because school has been made easier and students are more engaged.

Bluehouse says the number was high in part because the school added an eighth class to every student's schedule this fall.

Now, teachers have been instructed to give less homework, prioritizing the most important assignments. They've been encouraged to find alternatives to traditional lectures. Grading has been changed from a 100-point system to a 50-point so that missed assignments with zeroes hurt students less.

Associated Press writer Cedar Attanasio contributed to this report from Santa Fe, New Mexico. Thompson reported from Buffalo, N.Y.

EXPLAINER: How does AP choose which lawsuits to cover?

By The Associated Press undefined

The Associated Press has tallied roughly 50 cases brought by the campaign of President Donald Trump

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and his allies, challenging the result of elections. More than 30 have been rejected or dropped. About a dozen are awaiting action. Trump has gotten one court win. It came in a Pennsylvania case about deadlines for proof of identification for certain absentee ballots and mail-in ballots. It didn't affect the outcome in that state.

While The Associated Press has covered the details of many of these lawsuits, it has not written a story on every one. How do journalists decide which ones to cover, while ensuring fairness and a lack of bias? The answer is straightforward: Stick with the facts.

John Daniszewski, AP's vice president for standards, has more:

HOW IS AP COVERING THE LITIGATION?

Even before voting began, AP assigned a team of legal reporters to cover litigation in battleground states and to follow those cases through to the end. We constantly evaluate and assess each piece of litigation, and we monitor every hearing and subsequent press conference.

On a given day, we might have a reporter at a trial in Arizona, one covering legal developments in Nevada and another in Michigan. Our AP reporter was one of two national journalists at the hearing in a federal court in Pennsylvania where Trump's personal attorney Rudy Giuliani argued before a judge.

WHY IS AP ZEROING IN ON SOME LAWSUITS AND NOT OTHERS?

Some lawsuits could have greater impact because they were filed in a battleground state as votes were being counted, or because they could halt vote certification in certain states. Also, we've paid close attention to litigation that could end up before the U.S. Supreme Court.

It's easier to file civil litigation because the bar is lower than for criminal cases, where there's a higher burden of proof. So not all the lawsuits are likely to have impact or are likely to be newsworthy — and this is true in general, not just when it's about elections.

The AP has reported on most of the litigation. AP reporters and editors have read every lawsuit and their affidavits to assess which ones are the most newsworthy because of their potential impact on the overall election.

HOW DO WE KEEP TRACK OF ALL OF IT?

We are tracking all of the litigation that we can find, and we look out for decisions, new filings and case dismissals. You can see that in our interactive, which is updated every time there is a development.

HOW DO WE MAINTAIN FAIRNESS IN THE COVERAGE?

As with all stories, AP reporters and editors approach the topic with an open mind, then collect facts and assess them. In legal cases, that means looking carefully at the allegations made by the plaintiffs, the responses of the defendants, any motions and evidence presented, other facts that might come into play, and the responses of the judges or other jurists involved.

If a case is brought by a presidential candidate's own lawyers with substantive evidence attached that raises important legal questions around election integrity and fairness that could affect the outcome of the race, that kind of lawsuit would merit a full-blown story.

If a judge looks at the motions and the evidence, and then awards a legal or procedural win to an election challenge, that certainly deserves a story.

Other lawsuits may be brought by third parties, with scant evidence, or raise legal questions that have been dismissed or adjudicated already or elsewhere. We would track those cases but not necessarily do a story.

Remember, hundreds of lawsuits are filed in the United States each day, and journalists use their judgment about which ones merit news coverage. Often the filing of a lawsuit is not enough in itself to merit a story. The news comes when arguments and evidence are presented and there is a ruling of some kind.

Follow our election legal developments interactive here: <https://interactives.ap.org/embeds/LW8CB/9/>

US Navy official says 'uneasy deterrence' reached with Iran

By JON GAMBRELL Associated Press

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DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — The top U.S. Navy official in the Mideast said Sunday that America has reached an “uneasy deterrence” with Iran after months of regional attacks and seizures at sea, even as tensions remain high between Washington and Tehran over the Islamic Republic’s nuclear program.

Vice Adm. Sam Paparo, who oversees the Navy’s 5th Fleet based in Bahrain, struck an academic tone in comments to the annual Manama Dialogue hosted by the International Institute for Strategic Studies. He described having a “healthy respect” for both Iran’s regular navy and the naval forces of its paramilitary Revolutionary Guard.

“We have achieved an uneasy deterrence. That uneasy deterrence is exacerbated by world events and by events along the way,” the vice admiral said. “But I have found Iranian activity at sea to be cautious and circumspect and respectful, to not risk unnecessary miscalculation or escalation at sea.”

While Iran has not directly seized or targeted a tanker in recent months as it did last year, a mine struck an oil tanker off Saudi Arabia and a cargo ship near Yemen came under assault in recent days. Suspicion immediately fell on Yemen’s Iranian-backed Houthi rebels for being behind both attacks. The Houthis have not commented on either.

Paparo, a former Navy fighter pilot who most recently served as director of operations at the U.S. military’s Central Command, offered a different stance than his immediate predecessor, Vice Adm. James Malloy. In one of his last comments to journalists in August, Malloy referred to Iran as “reckless and provocative” and always trying in dramatic naval drills to “lower the denominator until they’re sure that they can look like they’ve won something.”

Malloy’s tenure saw oil tankers seized by Iran and a series of limpet mine explosions targeting tankers that the Navy blamed on Iran. Tehran denied being involved, though Revolutionary Guard members were filmed taking an unexploded mine away from one tanker.

By contrast, the several months that Paparo’s been in charge have not seen any major crises.

The U.S. Navy routinely has tense encounters with the Revolutionary Guard, whose speed boats race alongside American warships in the Persian Gulf and sometimes conduct live-fire drills with machine guns and missile launches in their presence.

The Guard typically patrols the shallower waters of the Persian Gulf and its narrow mouth, the Strait of Hormuz. Iran’s regular navy largely operates in the Gulf of Oman and the Arabian Sea. While previous commanders have made a point to differentiate between the professionalism of the two, Paparo dismissed it as an “old idea” that included a lingering belief that the service was still loyal to Iran’s former shah, who was toppled in the 1979 Islamic Revolution.

“Forty-one years into the revolution, I think we can dispense with that notion,” the vice admiral said. “I sincerely doubt there’s a difference among them.”

Asked about Paparo’s comments, Alireza Miryousefi, a spokesman for Iran’s mission to the United Nations, said all of Iran’s naval forces “have always conducted themselves in the utmost professional manner while patrolling in our territorial waters and the greater Persian Gulf.”

“Any suggestion to the otherwise is categorically false,” Miryousefi told The Associated Press. “The question that should be raised is, what is the U.S. Navy doing 7,000 miles from its territorial waters?”

The 5th Fleet long has patrolled the Mideast as part of a mission to ensure energy supplies can pass through crucial regional chokepoints, like the Strait of Hormuz, through which a fifth of all oil passes. Iranian officials in the past have threatened to close the strait.

Paparo said he did not believe the 5th Fleet’s mission would be affected by the Navy potentially reconstituting a 1st Fleet responsible for the Indian Ocean.

Still, Paparo’s remarks carried a clear warning, quoting former U.S. Defense Secretary Jim Mattis at one point.

“Be polite, be professional and have a plan to kill everyone in the room,” he said. “That’s how we conduct ourselves at sea.”

Netflix rejects calls to add disclaimer to *The Crown*

LONDON (AP) — Netflix has “no plans” to add a disclaimer to “The Crown” stating that its lavish drama about Britain’s royal family is a work of fiction.

In a statement Saturday, Netflix said it has always presented the drama, as just that — a drama.

“We have always presented *The Crown* as a drama — and we have every confidence our members understand it’s a work of fiction that’s broadly based on historical events,” it said.

“As a result we have no plans — and see no need — to add a disclaimer.”

Netflix was urged last week by British Culture Secretary Oliver Dowden to add the disclaimer, in the wake of the broadcast of the drama’s fourth series.

Questions of historical fidelity weren’t a major issue during earlier seasons of the show, which debuted in 2016 and traces the long reign of Queen Elizabeth II, which began in 1952.

But the current fourth season is set in the 1980s, a divisive decade in Britain. Characters include Conservative Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, whose 11-year tenure transformed and divided Britain, and the late Princess Diana, whose death in a car crash in 1997 transfixed the nation and the world.

Some Conservatives have criticized the program’s depiction of Thatcher, played by Gillian Anderson. Britain’s first female prime minister, who died in 2013, is portrayed as clashing with Olivia Colman’s Elizabeth to an extent that some say is exaggerated.

“*The Crown*” creator Peter Morgan, whose work also includes recent-history dramas “*The Queen*” and “*Frost/Nixon*,” has defended his work, saying it is thoroughly researched and true in spirit.

Charles Spencer, Diana’s brother, was one who called on Netflix to add a disclaimer.

“I think it would help *The Crown* an enormous amount if, at the beginning of each episode, it stated that, ‘This isn’t true but it is based around some real events,’” he told broadcaster ITV. “I worry people do think that this is gospel and that’s unfair.”

Trump tactics to overturn election could have staying power

By CHRISTINA A. CASSIDY Associated Press

ATLANTA (AP) — Even after he exits the White House, President Donald Trump’s efforts to challenge the legitimacy of the election and seeking to overturn the will of voters could have staying power.

Trump’s tactics are already inspiring other candidates and have been embraced by a wide array of Republicans. Supporters include congressional candidates, state lawmakers, party chairs, conservative legal groups and appointees to previously little-known state vote-certification boards. The breadth of support for Trump’s effort could be a troubling sign for future elections.

“What this president is doing is poisoning democracy,” former Michigan Gov. Jennifer Granholm said. “And, yes, he is setting a precedent, suggesting that it is OK to violate these norms that have made our country great.”

Granholm, a Democrat, joined with former New Jersey Gov. Christine Todd Whitman, a Republican, to raise concerns about Trump’s refusal to concede and efforts to undermine the integrity of elections.

“This is not who we are as Americans, and we don’t want the public coming away from this thinking this is the norm,” said Whitman, who served in President George W. Bush’s administration.

Trump and his allies have pushed conspiracies involving voting machines manipulated by dead foreign leaders and tens of thousands of fraudulent mail ballots that somehow escaped layers of security and scrutiny by election workers across the country. They have filed lawsuits without evidence, tried to pressure state lawmakers into seating their own presidential electors and sought to influence low-level party members who sit on the state and local boards that certify election results.

This is despite the fact that the federal government’s own cybersecurity arm declared the presidential election “the most secure in American history,” and Attorney General William Barr said the Department of Justice uncovered no evidence that would change the outcome.

Even so, Trump has found friendly lawmakers and party officials willing to bolster his claims and adopt

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his tactics. On Friday, a group of 64 GOP lawmakers in Pennsylvania signed a statement urging Congress not to accept the state's slate of electors for Democrat Joe Biden. They cited a litany of complaints over how the election was conducted.

"A number of people have shown themselves willing to go along or at least being perceived of going along instead of just condemning the entire operation," said Wendy Weiser with the Brennan Center for Justice at New York University Law School. "It was not written off as it should have been."

In recent days, lawmakers in battleground states have provided friendly forums for Trump allies to air their suspicions. A group of GOP state lawmakers in Arizona held an unofficial meeting where Trump's lawyers repeated claims of irregularities with the state's vote count but provided no evidence of widespread fraud. The chairwoman of the Arizona GOP asked a court to overturn Biden's win in the state.

The effort then shifted to Michigan, where Trump lawyer Rudy Giuliani appeared at a four-hour legislative hearing to argue that fraud had occurred.

"Throughout this hearing, my colleagues continued to speak in circles about 'getting to the bottom of this.' But we're already at the bottom, and there's nothing down here," said Michigan state Rep. Darrin Camilleri, a Democrat. "Down here at the bottom of all this, it's just a dark, empty place."

On Thursday, a legislative committee in Georgia received testimony from a Trump campaign attorney about purported irregularities despite a hand count and machine audit that revealed no major problems with the vote.

Election law experts say time will tell whether Trump's approach and the support it has generated in the GOP represent a shift in how candidates handle defeat.

"Next time could be worse," constitutional law expert Edward B. Foley warned in an op-ed last week while offering praise for the few Republicans willing to stand up to Trump.

Those included Georgia Secretary of State Brad Raffensperger, who certified his state's election amid calls for his resignation from fellow Republicans and threats, and Aaron Van Langevelde, one of two Republicans on the Michigan board that certified that state's results.

While the other Republican on the Michigan board abstained, Van Langevelde said he was required under state law to certify Biden's win. The result, Foley noted, could have easily been different if other Republicans more open to Trump's arguments had occupied those same positions.

"What makes this year's narrow escape so unnerving is how far the plot to overthrow the election got with so little factual ammunition," Foley said.

Others believe Trump's behavior is more of a fluke and unlikely to result in any lasting damage to the electoral process.

"Everybody knows that it's just because they lost," said Pennsylvania Lt. Gov. John Fetterman, a Democrat. "There isn't anyone from the president on down that genuinely believed that there was any real fraud. That's what makes it so disingenuous."

A few candidates have followed Trump's lead, refusing to concede and seeking extraordinary measures to address their concerns.

A Pennsylvania congressional candidate who lost his race has yet to concede and signed on to a lawsuit challenging the validity of all mail ballots cast this year. A Republican candidate for U.S. Senate in Michigan called on the state to take the unprecedented step of delaying certification so an audit could be done — despite an extensive county canvassing process that did not find significant irregularities. He ultimately conceded.

Using the 2020 election as a springboard to create more trust in the process would help, said David Carroll, head of the democracy program at the Carter Center, founded by former President Jimmy Carter and his wife, Rosalynn.

That could involve requiring state and local election officials to be nonpartisan and appointed rather than elected by party, clarifying vague election laws, implementing federal standards for parts of the process and ensuring more training for election workers and volunteers.

"There was a lot of discussion before the election that the process might not be credible. Those are the

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things we see around the world where democracy is weak," Carroll said. "It will be important for us to sit down as a nation and as a society and say we don't want this to happen again. If we don't, it's likely that it could."

Trump's strategy, even if it fails, will probably still be an effective rallying tool for supporters, and it has generated at least \$170 million in donations since Election Day. As Trump hints at running for president again, he will need his supporters to stay energized and on his side.

"I don't think it's going to go away," said Democratic California Secretary of State Alex Padilla, "because I don't think he is going away."

Associated Press writers David Eggert in Lansing, Michigan; Marc Levy in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania; and Terry Tang in Phoenix contributed to this report.

Pope: Christmas a sign of hope amid difficulties of pandemic

VATICAN CITY (AP) — Pope Francis says the Christmas season provides reason for hope amid the difficulties of the coronavirus pandemic.

During his Sunday blessing, Francis noted that the Vatican's Christmas tree had gone up last week in St. Peter's Square, and that work is underway to build the life-size Nativity scene next to it.

Pointing to the tree from his studio window over the square, Francis said such symbols of Christmas "are signs of hope, especially in this difficult period."

He urged the faithful to recall the true meaning of Christmas — the birth of Jesus — and lend a hand to the neediest. He said: "There's no pandemic, there's no crisis that can extinguish this light."

The Vatican hasn't released the pope's Christmas schedule, but he usually celebrates a Christmas Eve Mass and then offers a blessing on Christmas Day. The Vatican's liturgical services are being held without the general public present because of COVID-19.

Today in History

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Monday, Dec. 7, the 342nd day of 2020. There are 24 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On Dec. 7, 1941, the Empire of Japan launched an air raid on the U.S. Navy base at Pearl Harbor in Hawaii as well as targets in Malaya, Hong Kong, Guam, the Philippines and Wake Island; the United States declared war against Japan the next day.

On this date:

In 1787, Delaware became the first state to ratify the U.S. Constitution.

In 1909, in his State of the Union address, President William Howard Taft defended the decision to base U.S. naval operations in the Pacific at Pearl Harbor in Hawaii, instead of in the Philippines.

In 1917, during World War I, the United States declared war on Austria-Hungary.

In 1972, America's last moon mission to date was launched as Apollo 17 blasted off from Cape Canaveral. Imelda Marcos, wife of Philippine President Ferdinand E. Marcos, was stabbed and seriously wounded by an assailant who was shot dead by her bodyguards.

In 1982, convicted murderer Charlie Brooks Jr. became the first U.S. prisoner to be executed by injection, at a prison in Huntsville, Texas.

In 1987, 43 people were killed after a gunman aboard a Pacific Southwest Airlines jetliner in California apparently opened fire on a fellow passenger, the pilots and himself, causing the plane to crash. Soviet leader Mikhail S. Gorbachev set foot on American soil for the first time, arriving for a Washington summit with President Ronald Reagan.

In 1988, a major earthquake in the Soviet Union devastated northern Armenia; official estimates put the death toll at 25-thousand.

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In 1993, gunman Colin Ferguson opened fire on a Long Island Rail Road commuter train, killing six people and wounding 19. (Ferguson was later sentenced to a minimum of 200 years in prison.)

In 2001, Taliban forces abandoned their last bastion in Afghanistan, fleeing the southern city of Kandahar.

In 2004, Hamid Karzai (HAH'-mihd KAH'R'-zeeye) was sworn in as Afghanistan's first popularly elected president.

In 2017, Democratic Sen. Al Franken said he would resign after a series of sexual harassment allegations; he took a parting shot at President Donald Trump, describing him as "a man who has bragged on tape about his history of sexual assault." Republican Rep. Trent Franks of Arizona said he would resign, after revealing that he discussed surrogacy with two female staffers.

In 2018, the man who drove his car into counterprotesters at a 2017 white nationalist rally in Virginia was convicted of first-degree murder; a state jury rejected defense arguments that James Alex Fields Jr. acted in self-defense. President Donald Trump announced that he would nominate William Barr to succeed Jeff Sessions as attorney general. (Barr would be confirmed and sworn-in in February.)

Ten years ago: Elizabeth Edwards, the estranged wife of former U.S. Sen. John Edwards, died at her home in Chapel Hill, North Carolina, at 61 after fighting breast cancer. WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange surrendered to authorities in London, where he was jailed for nine days before being freed on bail as he fought extradition to Sweden for questioning in a rape investigation.

Five years ago: Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump called for a "total and complete shut-down of Muslims entering the United States," an idea swiftly condemned by his rival GOP candidates for president and other Republicans. The federal government opened an investigation into the Chicago Police Department, the same day authorities announced they would not charge an officer in the shooting death of 25-year-old Ronald Johnson, a Black man who authorities said was armed with a gun as he ran away from officers.

One year ago: In a rare diplomatic breakthrough between Tehran and Washington, Chinese-American graduate student Xiyue Wang, who'd been held for three years in Iran on widely-criticized espionage charges, was freed as part of a prisoner exchange that saw the U.S. release a detained Iranian scientist. At the shipyard in Newport News, Virginia, Caroline Kennedy christened a new aircraft carrier named after her late father, President John F. Kennedy. A dozen frail survivors of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor returned to honor those who died in the 1941 bombing that launched the U.S. into World War II.

Today's Birthdays: Linguist and political philosopher Noam Chomsky is 92. Bluegrass singer Bobby Osborne is 89. Actor Ellen Burstyn is 88. Broadcast journalist Carole Simpson is 80. Baseball Hall of Famer Johnny Bench is 73. Actor-director-producer James Keach is 73. Country singer Gary Morris is 72. Singer-songwriter Tom Waits is 71. Sen. Susan M. Collins, R-Maine, is 68. Basketball Hall of Famer Larry Bird is 64. Actor Priscilla Barnes is 63. Former "Tonight Show" announcer Edd (cq) Hall is 62. Rock musician Tim Butler (The Psychedelic Furs) is 62. Actor Patrick Fabian is 56. Actor Jeffrey Wright is 55. Actor C. Thomas Howell is 54. Actor Kimberly Hebert Gregory (TV: "Kevin (Probably) Saves the World") is 48. Producer-director Jason Winer is 48. Former NFL player Terrell Owens is 47. Rapper-producer Kon Artis is 46. Pop singer Nicole Appleton (All Saints) is 45. Latin singer Frankie J is 44. Country singer Sunny Sweeney is 44. Actor Chris Chalk is 43. Actor Shiri Appleby is 42. Pop-rock singer/celebrity judge Sara Bareilles (bah-REHL'-es) is 41. Actor Jennifer Carpenter is 41. Actor Jack Huston is 38. Singer Aaron Carter is 33.