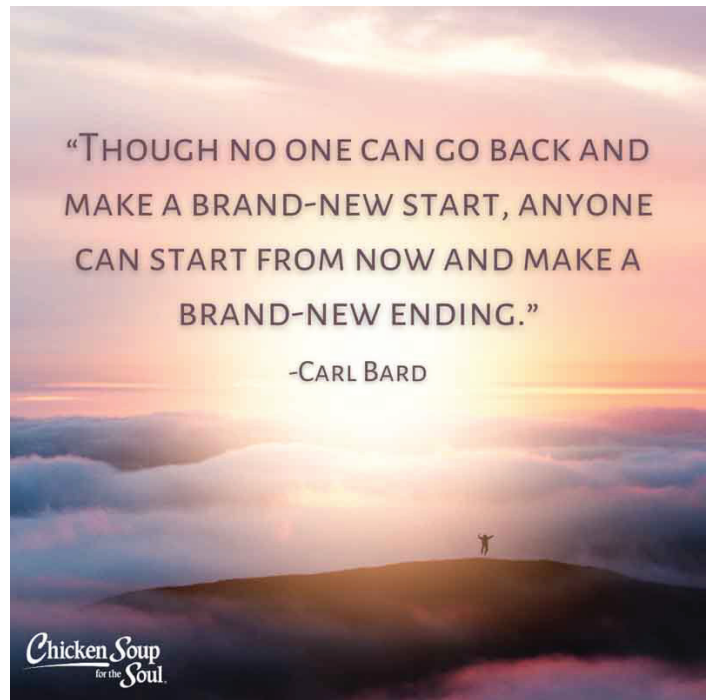


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Tuesday, December 8, 2020

7:00pm: Middle School Christmas Concert

Thursday, December 10, 2020

JH Basketball: Girls 7th/8th Game at Langford High School

7th Grade @ 5:30

8th Grade @ 6:30

5:30pm: Wrestling: Boys Varsity Quad at Madison High School

7:00pm: High School Christmas Concert



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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Coming up on GDILIVE.COM



**Middle School
Christmas Concert**
Tuesday, Dec. 8, 2020
7 p.m., GHS Gym
BROADCAST LIVE ON
GDILIVE.COM
AND LOCALLY ON GDIRADIO AT 89.3 FM

The service of
Lucille Von Wald
Thursday, Dec. 10, 10:30 a.m.
St. Elizabeth Ann Seton
Catholic Church



GDILIVE.COM
GDIRADIO Locally 89.3FM



**High School
Christmas Concert**
Thursday, Dec. 10, 2020
7 p.m., GHS Gym
BROADCAST LIVE ON
GDILIVE.COM
AND LOCALLY ON GDIRADIO AT 89.3 FM



GIRLS



Groton Area at Britton-Hecla
Friday, Dec. 11, 7:30 p.m.
GDILIVE.COM



BOYS



Britton-Hecla at Groton Area
Saturday, Dec. 12, 3 p.m.
GDILIVE.COM
GDIRADIO Locally 89.3FM



**Elementary Christmas
Concert**
Tuesday, Dec. 22, 2020
1 p.m., GHS Gym
BROADCAST LIVE ON
GDILIVE.COM
AND LOCALLY ON GDIRADIO AT 89.3 FM

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That's Life by Tony Bender

COVID: the good, the bad and the ugly

There are signs that mask mandates and renewed personal responsibility have slowed the number of COVID-19 cases in North Dakota.

What mandates do is offer businesses an even playing field rather than pitting them against each other as customers decide whether they'll shop at a store that has a mask policy, the unfortunate politicization of a strict public health issue by the highest office in the land with no little to no pushback from the president's party. It paralyzed action on the state level as politicians quaked with fear over a reaction from a vindictive president.

Well, the election is over and guess what, COVID is still with us. It's not a hoax. It's serious business and just about everyone has lost someone they know and love. Many lives and jobs have been lost just because of politics. The ONLY way to restore the economy is to knock this pandemic down. We can't possibly be the smartest species on the planet.

Am I salty about all this? You bet. It cost lives and livelihoods and continues to do so. It stoked division when we should have been coming together. The president had the power to do so much good and he squandered it. Instead of handling the problem, he pretended it wasn't one, and when that didn't work, he blamed others.

Okay, now that I've got that off my chest, let's deal with the reality that exists. The good news is science works and several companies have produced very promising vaccines that will roll out soon to protect the most vulnerable Americans and front-line health care workers, the true heroes in all of this.

In months, the trajectory of this pandemic will shift. Next year at this time, things will be much more normal. But we can expect a Thanksgiving bump that will overwhelm some hospitals. We've got to do better for Christmas. The impact of isolation and loneliness are well-documented, but we can't achieve normalcy without some sacrifice now. Or just extra effort. If you insist on a family gathering, insist then too, on having everyone tested before and after.

There are plenty of free testing events in your area. Contact your District Health Unit. Insurance often covers such tests. My kids get tested before they visit me. It's not that hard, and hugs are great when they're safe.

The largest number of cases in our region are in the 17-44-year-old category—the most active and the most able to survive an infection, although anyone watching the death toll knows, there are 30-year-olds dying, too. There's an overconfidence among the youngest among us because they're not seeing the big picture. Or perhaps they just don't care. They see a low mortality rate as the be-all, end-all, but the reality is, the long-term effects to organs is shortening lifespans and limiting quality of life among survivors.

But perhaps even more devastating to the national mortality rate is that these avoidable COVID cases are overwhelming the health care system meaning that other preventable deaths from heart disease, strokes and cancer are not being prevented. There are only so many hours doctors can work, and critical health care that could save lives is being put on the back burner. It's triage, and in some places, people that could have been saved won't be.

Remember all the scare tactics about "death panels" when the Affordable Care Act was being debated? Well, here we are through our own national irresponsibility.

The next few months may well be the darkest days in this pandemic. It will take time for vaccinations to take hold, for things to turn around. In the meantime, please remember that just because you can't see the danger, it's real. You could be a victim or a spreader. Be smart. Be a good neighbor and a good friend.

We've always risen to the challenge in America, and certainly nowhere more than we have on the sometimes inhospitable Northern Plains. We endure, we tough it out. And when we're smart, we survive.

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They needed overtime to do it, but the Minnesota Vikings defeated the Jacksonville Jaguars 27-24 on Sunday. The Vikings are still in the playoff hunt with a 6-6 record, but they have some tough games coming up and will need to play much better than they have been if they want to make it to the postseason.

The Good

The best thing you can say about the game is at least they won. Kirk Cousins had an up-and-down game but threw for 305 yards and three touchdowns. Dalvin Cook ran for 120 yards while also catching six passes for 59 yards. Justin Jefferson caught nine passes for 121 yards and a touchdown and is now over 1,000 yards this season. He is the second rookie in Vikings' history to surpass that mark (Randy Moss), and he trails only Odell Beckham Jr. in receiving yards in a player's first 12 games in NFL history. Adam Thielen also had a solid performance after sitting out last week due to Covid-19, as he caught eight passes for 75 yards and a touchdown.

On defense, Harrison Smith filled up the stat sheet, finishing with six tackles, two pass deflections, a half-sack, and one timely interception in overtime. Eric Kendricks was a surprise scratch in this game, so rookie Troy Dye was called upon – and while he didn't have any splash plays, it was still a good day all things considered. Cameron Dantzler is another rookie who stepped up on Sunday. He had an interception and a forced fumble (which he recovered), and per Next Gen Stats, he was targeted eight times but only gave up two catches for 24 yards.

The Bad

The Vikings might have gotten a win, but it never should have been as close as it was. The Jaguars have one of the worst secondaries in the NFL, but the Vikings refused to exploit the obvious mismatch until the second half of the game. Cousins was sloppy with the ball again, turning it over twice, including a pick-six on the first play of the second half. The offensive line was bad in both pass protection and run blocking – Cousins was under pressure nearly every time he dropped back to pass, and Cook had 120 yards but it took him 32 carries to get there (3.75 yards per carry).

The Unknown

Is this Vikings team better than their record would indicate, or have they simply been lucky? Is this team the one who beat Green Bay then whooped Detroit the following week? Or is this the team who lost to the Dallas Cowboys before barely escaping with wins over Carolina and Jacksonville? The regular season is now 75 percent done, yet we still don't know what to make of this Vikings team.

Looking ahead

The Vikings will face off against former divisional foes when they travel to Tampa Bay to take on the Buccaneers. The biggest storyline this past offseason was Tom Brady leaving New England and going to Tampa Bay, and while the Bucs started the season 6-2, they have gone 1-3 over their last four games and are fighting for a playoff spot. Not only will the Vikings have to contend with an angry Tom Brady, but they'll also have to try and manufacture points against one of the better defenses in the league. This game will tell us who the Minnesota Vikings are – contenders or pretenders. Skol!



By Jordan Wright

Find Purpose and Meaning in Retirement

Success in life and all its phases can be measured in many ways. Some reminisce of their glory days in high school. Maybe they were captain of the football team or homecoming queen or won the state chess championship. Others excelled in college, graduated summa cum laude, were invited to all the parties, or landed the dream job. Some worked their way up the corporate ladder or took on a big loan and built a successful business over years of hard work or taught multiple generations of students. Hopefully, most have worked and saved enough through the years to finally retire.

After accomplishing the prior phases of one's life, what does a successful retirement look like? Sure, we plan and save for retirement all the time, but when it finally comes, are we ready for the next phase of our lives?

There are many ways to thrive and enjoy retirement. Some savor time on hobbies, travel, play cards, sew, enjoy gardening, get involved in a church, or volunteer. Some make things or fix things or find a part time job and have some enjoyment while also earning a wage. Some surround themselves with family, helping to connect the generations.

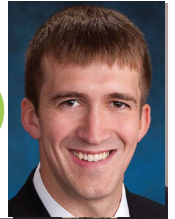
Unfortunately, some do not enjoy retirement. Health issues, financial troubles, and relationship problems are just some of the ways that can make it difficult. Some people, despite the best ways of planning and saving for retirement, may have lost identity and have no idea what to do next. As in any situation, to be successful, one must find meaning and purpose.

It must be extremely hard to dedicate one's life to a calling and purpose, only to one day be told to move on. It must also be particularly challenging to have a plan for retirement, only to have those dreams set aside due to changes in health or financial hardships.

Covid-19 has certainly put a wrench in many people's plans for retirement, as well as most everyone else's plans. Certainly, with many things postponed, changed, or cancelled this last year, we have all had a chance to reconsider what we spend our time on and what things may be worth a risk.

As we enter a new year and changes ahead, whether that be retirement, a new job, a new relationship, or a new normal, I would encourage you to find purpose and meaning in what you do. When you get up for the day, set a goal or find some way to make it meaningful. That is how we will all excel in this new chapter of our lives.

Andrew Ellsworth, M.D. is part of The Prairie Doc® team of physicians and currently practices family medicine in Brookings, South Dakota. For free and easy access to the entire Prairie Doc® library, visit www.prairedoc.org and follow Prairie Doc® on Facebook featuring On Call with the Prairie Doc® a medical Q&A show streaming on Facebook and broadcast on SDPB most Thursdays at 7 p.m. central.



By Andrew Ellsworth, MD ~ Prairie Doc® Perspectives

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Water Tower being erected today

The big crane came to town on Monday and the new water tower will be erected today in Groton. (Photo by Paul Kosel)

Work with native tribes, not against them

By Alaina Beautiful Bald Eagle

Sioux Falls, South Dakota (December 7th, 2020)—South Dakota is once again in the national spotlight for the wrong reason. From Nov. 29-30, MSNBC host Ali Velshi broadcasted his television show "Velshi Across America" from the border of the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation. On Saturday, Mr. Velshi interviewed various Lakota leaders who provided insight on the dire state of Covid-19 within the nine Native American reservations. Appearing on the show were State Senator Red Dawn Foster, Representative Peri Pourier, and Remi Bald Eagle, who shared the struggles tribal nations are facing while protecting their people during this public health crisis.

Native Americans are disproportionately impacted by coronavirus and they also lack adequate healthcare, utilities and telecommunication services. Statewide, indigenous people have been the hardest hit of any ethnic or racial group: while they make up 9 percent of the population, they represent 14 percent of all cases and 15 percent of all deaths. Many reservations have reported Covid-19 deaths within their elderly population, a devastating blow to their culture and society.

Since the beginning of the pandemic, Governor Kristi Noem has refused to implement a statewide mask mandate, despite South Dakota having the worst Covid-19 spikes in the nation. Tribal nations have taken action to protect residents and each tribe has implemented unique Covid-19 emergency response plans. The Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe has been operating in a state of emergency since March and has stockpiled meat, deployed its own robust contact-tracing team, and operates public health checkpoints to safeguard people on reservation lands.

The checkpoints have been a major point of contention from the governor and received national media attention. In May, after threatening legal action against the Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe, Governor Noem back-peddled and asked the Trump administration to intervene to allow checkpoints on tribal roads but not state and federal ones within reservations. In response, 17 state legislators sent a bipartisan letter to the governor stating that her administration does not have the authority to enforce SD state law within the boundaries of a sovereign nation. They were critical of the governor's actions; calling them confrontational, demanding, and causing a constitutional crisis.

Furthermore, they criticized Governor Noem for failing to work with members of the legislature whose districts include tribal people, lands and government. The letter stated, "We could have helped facilitate conversations and given your office unique insight as to the history, culture, protocols, and vernacular of how to work together with Tribal governments. You elected, however, not to contact us and sent an ultimatum to both tribes."

The legislators also wrote that the State does not have authority to enforce State law within the boundaries of reservations, a point that the Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe has continuously maintained. They cited the 1851 and 1868 Ft. Laramie Treaties as well as the 1990 8th Circuit Court of Appeals ruling which held that without tribal consent, the State has no jurisdiction over highways running through Indian lands.

Throughout all the hurdles tribal nations have had to face during the pandemic, antagonism and denialism from Governor Noem has been prevalent. Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe Chairman Harold Frazier famously told the governor, "I absolutely agree that we need to work together during this time of crisis, however by continuing to interfere in our efforts to do what science and facts dictate seriously undermine our ability to protect everyone on the reservation... We will not apologize for being an island of safety in a sea of uncertainty and death."

Ali Velshi's visit to South Dakota shined light on the plight of tribal nations and the battles they must overcome from the governor's administration. Remi Bald Eagle described the dire situation, "It's like we're trapped in a house on fire, and we're doing our best to put it out. We see the fire trucks coming in the form of a vaccine, and we're wondering if it will get here in time before the fire burns us to death."

Last week, Democrats Rep. Pourier and Sen. Foster wrote a compelling letter to the governor imploring her to implement a statewide mask mandate. "As indigenous women, we are writing from the earnest position of granddaughters, sisters, mothers, and the life-givers of our culture and people. It has been

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ingrained into us that our decisions must take into consideration the care and safety of our communities and our people above our individual selves. It is found in a common idiom across Lakota and Dakota peoples, here written in Lakota: "Hecel Lena Oyate Ki Nipi Kte- So that our people may live," wrote the congresswomen.

They continued, "To let any South Dakotan die is a travesty. We should all be united in the goal of any true leader with the people in mind first – in this case our health. There really isn't a need to battle over statistics and politics right now. This isn't a political game of playing roulette with our communities or our families. It is an issue of public health that surpasses political parties and hits the core of our humanity."

Governor Noem's response was to travel to Texas to attend the National Finals Rodeo, even as the death toll from the pandemic has grown to more than one thousand.

Tribal nations have been exercising their inherent sovereignty and doing everything they can to protect all residents living within the boundaries of their reservations. And all the while, they face combativeness from a governor who continues to refuse to take action and whose indifference has led South Dakota down the path of death and grief.

We enter a holiday season that should be filled with life and giving, but instead it is overshadowed with heartache. The South Dakota Democratic Party asks that the SD Congressional Delegation and Governor Kristi Noem unite, listen to science, and work with our native tribes, not against them. And, that caring individuals walk beside our native brothers and sisters, advocating for and with them at the upcoming state legislative session.

Let us take action now so that South Dakota families can celebrate the next holiday season together with their loved ones. As Lakota leaders know, bold action is needed now to protect all people. Hecel Lena Oyate Ki Nipi Kte, so that our people may live.

Giving this season to keep the arts strong

By Jim Speirs, Executive Director, Arts South Dakota

This year, the holidays will be different for all of us. Maybe that's a reason to give more unique gifts—gifts that support and enhance the work of South Dakota artists. There are so many choices, with something very special for each name on your list.

It's easy to give the gift of South Dakota creativity. Choose a book by one of our state's authors or photographers, jewelry created by a local artisan, a framed print or painting by a South Dakota artist or tickets to a special performance, perhaps a musical event planned for the coming year.

Gifts reflecting our state's creative culture are not hard to find. Nearly every bookstore in South Dakota has an "in-state" or "regional" section, filled with our state's writers sharing their stories, telling tales of the past or breaking new ground with exciting fiction or poetry. Museum gift shops are perfect spots to find South Dakota artists' two- and three-dimensional work in an incredible range of prices, sizes, colors and subject matter. Galleries, both public and private, show and sell furniture, sculptures, prints, drawings and notecards created here in South Dakota by your neighbors. And don't forget albums and holiday performances by South Dakota musicians. Honor a loved one by giving a donation to a local nonprofit arts organization in their name. You will be strengthening the arts community with your gift.

You can show personal support to favorite artists struggling in these difficult times with a direct financial contribution to keep them producing art. Giving a gift to artists or purchasing local art helps make South Dakota a place where artists are encouraged and can make a living. You enhance our cultural heritage, advance the appreciation of the arts and spark new ideas for the recipient. It's a holiday gift that benefits us all—and strengthens the creative environment for our children.

For more about arts possibilities and events in South Dakota, visit www.artssouthdakota.org.



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Great day for sweeping

It was a great day for sweeping the gutters in Groton as temperatures got near 60 degrees on Monday. Dwight Zerr gives a thumbs up for the nice weather. (Photo by Paul Kosel)



**Happy 60th Birthday to our family's rock!
We love you very much!
From your family
Birthday greetings can be sent to
Bonnie VanderVorst
12330 411 Ave , Claremont, SD 57432**

HAPPY
Birthday

#288 in a series

Covid-19 Update: by Marie Miller

Well. Mondays are generally slow days, then normal reporting starts up again on Tuesday; but these days, we're not messing around here. We are at 15 million cases in a devastatingly short time—just four short days after we hit 14 million. I'll give you the history below, but wanted to provide some context for this because, to be fair, the day we went over 14 million, we'd started out the day before very close to the mark, then that day we recorded our biggest new-case day to date, so we were 200,000 over 14 million when we went to bed that night. I guess you could say it actually took 4-1/2 days. Still.

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

So, we're at 15,022,400, 1.4% more than yesterday. Today's haul was 201,500, our fifth-worst day. It's been nine weeks since we had a day under 40,000; I remember when 40,000 was a pretty horrifying day. Over the past week, we're averaging almost 203,000 new case reports per day, and the Thanksgiving peak is expected to hit late this week or early next. We're in a ton of trouble here.

Highest reported cases by population over the entire course of the pandemic are in North Dakota (one in 10 residents is a reported case), South Dakota, Iowa, Wisconsin, Utah, Montana, and Minnesota. Hospitalizations set another new record today at 101,501; in contrast, the worst day in the spring surge was not quite 60,000 hospitalized. We've set records in this category on 25 of the last 27 days.

There were 1541 deaths reported today, an increase of 0.5% on the total, which is now at 283,798. Our weekly average is at a record level with 2249. That was pretty much the last record from the spring wave left standing, the 2232 we set on April 17. We're in new territory on all fronts now.

Something occurs to me today on Pearl Harbor Day. Almost 80 years ago, we lost 2403 Americans in the attack on Pearl Harbor. Almost in the next breath, we declared war, put the entire nation on emergency footing, and began to train military personnel. People volunteered to serve, women went to work in factories. We went on rationing: You couldn't buy a new car. A half-pound of sugar per week. Three gallons of gas per week. Household fuel was limited; you were encouraged to turn the heat down and wear a sweater. The government imposed price controls on most commodities and confiscated tires that weren't actually on your car.

Can you even imagine the whining and the angry, armed protests we'd have today? Now I know a lot of considerations factor into whether a nation goes to war, but the impetus for all of this was the deaths of 2403 Americans in a single horrific day.

But more than 2700 people died of Covid-19 last Thursday, and we're still whining about our freedom and our liberty and government overreach when we're asked to wear a face mask at the store—where, I will point out, you can buy as many of whatever as you can afford, no questions asked. I listened today to an interview with a nurse-practitioner in Utah who described patients coming into her clinic who, when asked to put on a mask, instead stormed out declaring they'll never come in again. They skipped a needed

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medical visit rather than put on a mask. And some of them were there for Covid-19 tests. Oh, well. As I listened, I wondered what turned 1941 America into 2020 America. Something's gone terribly wrong here.

So we're just a few days short of the next big milestone in getting a vaccine out to Americans. Teams of FDA staff are, even now, combing through the data submitted by Pfizer (and Moderna) on the trials and their manufacturing processes. While the trials have garnered a great deal of media attention, we should not ignore the manufacturing information; vaccine production is tricky and critical to the success of this effort. Tomorrow, the FDA will release its evaluation of the safety and effectiveness data from Pfizer/BioNTech on its vaccine candidate. From this, we should know which way the wind is blowing on this one—and yes, we have every expectation it will be a fair wind, indeed. There is also the hope that there will be a great many details released about the candidate and the trial results so that experts across the country can assess the findings for themselves.

Then the Vaccines and Related Biological Products Advisory Committee—an all-star group of independent experts in virology, immunology, and infectious diseases who work neither for the FDA nor the pharmaceutical company—meets Thursday to discuss. This is an all-day open meeting with time permitted for the public to speak and a vote on a recommendation at the end. It will be livestreamed by the FDA, YouTube, and Facebook, if you're interested in watching. If the recommendation is to proceed with the emergency use authorization (EUA), it will apply to administration to people ages 16 and up.

Now understand that an unexpected problem could emerge or the advisory committee could raise concerns, but there have been no indications of any reason either of these things would happen—and I'm thinking, if there were concerns, hints would have trickled out to tamp down the anticipation which is building around the country. No one wants to be in the position of raining on our parade without any sort of warning. It should be noted, however, that there have been concerns expressed by some committee members with the requirement to include only two months' follow-up safety data on half the trial participants; it has been suggested this is not stringent enough. I haven't any idea how serious this problem might be in terms of holding things up nor whether we should hold up over it. There's a real balancing act between needing to be quite sure about safety and the serious need to get a vaccine out the door. Since I'm not equipped (nor are you, frankly) to decide how that balance should tip, I'm just going to see how this plays out.

After that, the commissioner will respond by either following the recommendation (likely, but not automatic) or not. Most folks think this will happen within days. It is important to remember an EUA would not be full licensure of the vaccine; that will require a great deal more data. This would be a temporary approval, the sort of thing which is done only during a public health emergency—which I think we can all agree we're in at the moment.

Once the EUA is made, the plan is to ship vaccine within 24 hours. This does not mean, however, that you can go get vaccinated the next day. Supplies are going to be severely limited to begin with and even for several months. Vaccine manufacture is an exacting process, and even with a relatively quick-to-produce vaccine such as this mRNA formulation (way faster than growing virus in tissue culture and then purifying it out of the culture, etc.), there are still real limiting factors here. And I'm not yet clear there will be enough vials, stoppers, syringes, and needles to undertake a vaccination program as massive as this one promises to be in the US, much less across the world. Additionally, I am reading now that Pfizer is unsure whether it will be able to supply substantial quantities of its vaccine to the US in addition to the 100 million doses already contracted before the second half of 2021; I'm quite sure they're not having trouble finding buyers for however much they can produce, and apparently we failed to lock in additional supplies.

Among other things the committee will carefully consider are the long-term safety program set up to catch any serious adverse events following vaccination after the candidate is on the market. There could well be complications that turn up only after hundreds of thousands or millions of people receive the vaccine; these may or may not be significant. The company needs to demonstrate a viable means for tracking this. There will also undoubtedly be discussion of the duration of protection. I get a lot of ques-

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tions about this too, and I certainly don't know anything these experts don't. I'll tell you what these folks are saying: too soon to know. The way you know whether the protection lasts a year is to wait a year and see what you have. One of the downsides of such a rapid vaccine development program is that you don't have answers like this—or even good hints about them—this soon. Can't be helped.

The only alternative is to go slower, and clearly no one wants that.

Here's one more thorny issue the committee will have to sort out: what to do with people in the placebo group once the candidate is authorized for use. There is a strong argument to be made that those participants should be prioritized to receive vaccine, having taken the risks of participation in the trial, and it's hard to counter that argument. Additionally, the reason a lot of folks even signed up for a clinical trial was the hope of receiving vaccine as soon as possible. On the other hand, you "unblind" the trial if you go back and vaccinate the placebo recipients—because if you're going to give them vaccine now, you're going to have to tell them they received placebo, right? But doing that would make it difficult to continue to collect long-term data on safety and duration of protection, which is an important goal. And to add another twist, there is a chance trial participants will seek to leave the trial to get vaccine if it is not offered to placebo recipients, and that would really gum up the works. Not only do we have the specter of placebo recipients leaving the trial to get the vaccine, we also would have vaccine recipients seeking out vaccination—because they don't know they are vaccine recipients. Who wants to waste doses on them? And if participants are not in a priority group, it could be a long time before they can receive the vaccine otherwise. This is a question I don't even want to tackle—tough one, for sure.

The whole process starts all over again next week for the Moderna vaccine. On Tuesday, the FDA posts its evaluation. On Thursday, there will be another advisory committee meeting. Same topics, same order of events, same considerations expected to emerge. Same public nature of the meeting with livestreaming. Rinse, lather, repeat.

Jorge Munoz grew up poor. His mother raised two children on a housekeeper's wage and barely made ends meet; everyone in the family slept in one room. There weren't always three meals a day. And yet, he also learned young that you share what you have with others whose need was greater. His sister, Luz, recalled to him, "I remember one day when we were having lunch, somebody knock on the door. Mommy get up and see who it was. She came back and said, 'There's a guy asking for something to eat.' And you, Jorgie, you just get up and give them your meal. You were seven."

Jorge grew up to be a bus driver, and things got better economically. But one day, he noticed day laborers waiting to be picked up for a day's work. Of course, on any given day, not everyone gets a job or has money for food. Jorge explains, "It was raining and they have no job that day to buy food. So I tell them I have some food at home." And that's how he decided to cook for others.

He estimates he and his family—mom and sister—have prepared 500,000 meals since they started in 2004, but that's been on hold since the pandemic started. His health and law enforcement concerns with a lack of social distancing when people gathered for food distributions have forced him to stop; so he found some organizations in his city to fill in the gap. Now more than ever, day laborers are left food insecure as work dries up and sources for food are under the stress caused by high demand.

Jorge is already looking forward to resuming his mission. He says, "You do not need to be rich to feel what I feel, just willing to do it. At the end of the day, when you hand them a meal and you see that smile in their faces, that smile pays for everything." Which is really quite lovely, I think.

Now, when the need is greater and some folks are less able to meet it, we all need to step up. We need to look around us, pay special attention, make it a point to notice the need—and then do something about it. If we each do a little, we can all help a lot. Let's try that.

Stay well. I'll be back tomorrow.

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Area COVID-19 Cases

	Dec. 3	Dec. 4	Dec. 5	Dec. 6	Dec. 7	Dec. 8	
Minnesota	327,477	333,626	338,973	345,281	350,862	356,152	
Nebraska	132,530	134,710	136,325	138,568	139,834	141,127	
Montana	64,340	65,122	66,436	67,069	67,875	68,591	
Colorado	241,172	247,209	252,222	257,347	260,581	264,618	
Wyoming	29,966	30,518	31,047	31,250	31,561	32,196	
North Dakota	80,135	81,105	81,949	82,504	82,981	83,342	
South Dakota	82,203	83,348	84,398	85,304	85,991	86,500	
United States	13,925,350	14,147,754	14,373,720	14,584,706	14,761,576	14,955,025	
US Deaths	273,847	276,401	279,008	281,206	282,323	283,746	
Minnesota	+5165	+6,149	+5,347	+ 6308	+5,581	+5,290	
Nebraska	+2,336	+2,180	+1,615	+ 2243	+1,266	+1,293	
Montana	+1135	+780	+1,314	+ 633	+806	+716	
Colorado	+3862	+6,037	+5,013	+ 5125	+3,234	+4,037	
Wyoming	+577	+552	+529	+ 203	+311	+635	
North Dakota	+480	+970	+844	+ 555	+477	+361	
South Dakota	+1291	+1,145	+1,050	+ 906	+687	+509	
United States	+199,044	+222,404	+225,966	+ 210986	+176,870	+193,449	
US Deaths	+3,156	+2,554	+2,607	+ 2198	+1,117	+1,423	
	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 7th COVID-19 UPDATE

Groton Daily Independent
from State Health Lab Reports

South Dakota:

Positive: +509 (86500 total) Positivity Rate: 16.3%

Total Tests: 3125 (647,572 total)

Hospitalized: +37 (4872 total). 503 currently hospitalized +6)

Deaths: +0 (1110 total)

Recovered: +127 (68,576 total)

Active Cases: +382 (16,814)

Percent Recovered: 79.3%

Beadle (32) +8 positive, +1 recovered (430 active cases)

Brookings (20) +20 positive, +7 recovered (451 active cases)

Brown (30): +31 positive, +7 recovered (701 active cases)

Clark (1): +5 positive, +1 recovered (69 active cases)

Clay (11): +12 positive, +2 recovered (252 active cases)

Codington (57): +23 positive, +7 recovered (530 active cases)

Davison (42): +8 positive, +4 recovered (489 active cases)

Day (11): +0 positive, +0 recovered (124 active cases)

Edmunds (3): +1 positive, +0 recovered (56 active cases)

Faulk (10): +1 positive, +0 recovered (26 active cases)

Grant (15): +3 positive, +0 recovered (195 active cases)

Hanson (3): +2 positive, +0 recovered (80 active cases)

Hughes (21): +2 positive, +2 recovered (320 active cases)

Lawrence (23): +17 positive, +4 recovered (438 active cases)

Lincoln (55): +32 positive, +6 recovered (1034 active cases)

Marshall (3): +3 positive, +0 recovered (61 active cases)

McCook (19): +0 positive, +2 recovered (113 active cases)

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

Minnehaha (204): +131 positive, +20 recovered (3890 active cases)

Pennington (90): +58 positive, +13 recovered (1928 active cases)

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

Roberts (22): +6 positive, +2 recovered (180 active cases)

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

Walworth (13): +3 positive, 1 recovered (150 active cases)

NORTH DAKOTA

COVID-19 Daily Report, Dec. 7:

- 9.8% rolling 14-day positivity
- 365 new positives
- 4,470 susceptible test encounters
- 304 currently hospitalized (-1)
- 4,758 active cases (-211)
- 1,022 total deaths (+9)

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2 days ago

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

Yesterday

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
1,051,274 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

Today

Global Cases
67,671,098
14,955,025 US
9,703,770 India
6,623,911 Brazil
2,492,713 Russia
2,349,059 France
1,742,557 Italy
1,742,525 United Kingdom
1,702,328 Spain
1,466,309 Argentina
1,377,100 Colombia
1,202,644 Germany
1,182,249 Mexico
1,076,180 Poland

Global Deaths
1,546,422

283,746 deaths US
177,317 deaths Brazil
140,958 deaths India
110,074 deaths Mexico
61,531 deaths United Kingdom
60,606 deaths Italy
55,613 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	379	297	742	7	Substantial	30.77%
Beadle	2384	1929	4787	32	Substantial	18.98%
Bennett	329	274	1043	5	Substantial	16.22%
Bon Homme	1404	1260	1779	20	Substantial	28.04%
Brookings	2614	2138	9024	20	Substantial	19.73%
Brown	3893	3162	10464	30	Substantial	19.87%
Brule	594	507	1615	5	Substantial	20.45%
Buffalo	391	349	825	10	Substantial	25.00%
Butte	770	630	2674	14	Substantial	17.73%
Campbell	107	94	196	1	Minimal	12.50%
Charles Mix	969	696	3387	6	Substantial	24.12%
Clark	278	208	791	1	Substantial	12.12%
Clay	1441	1178	4231	11	Substantial	17.47%
Codington	2911	2324	7713	57	Substantial	31.98%
Corson	422	358	851	5	Substantial	38.46%
Custer	591	459	2231	7	Substantial	23.68%
Davison	2513	1982	5376	42	Substantial	23.42%
Day	417	286	1438	11	Substantial	24.55%
Deuel	349	257	918	3	Substantial	38.03%
Dewey	1096	617	3272	6	Substantial	23.81%
Douglas	318	247	768	5	Substantial	32.14%
Edmunds	277	220	864	3	Substantial	14.29%
Fall River	379	309	2154	10	Substantial	13.04%
Faulk	289	253	565	10	Moderate	13.64%
Grant	721	511	1799	15	Substantial	33.33%
Gregory	453	367	1018	23	Substantial	9.73%
Haakon	173	130	458	3	Substantial	4.94%
Hamlin	527	383	1404	19	Substantial	25.50%
Hand	295	242	670	1	Substantial	11.76%
Hanson	285	202	541	3	Substantial	39.13%
Harding	83	63	138	0	Moderate	63.64%
Hughes	1753	1412	5102	21	Substantial	8.29%
Hutchinson	619	446	1890	13	Substantial	29.13%

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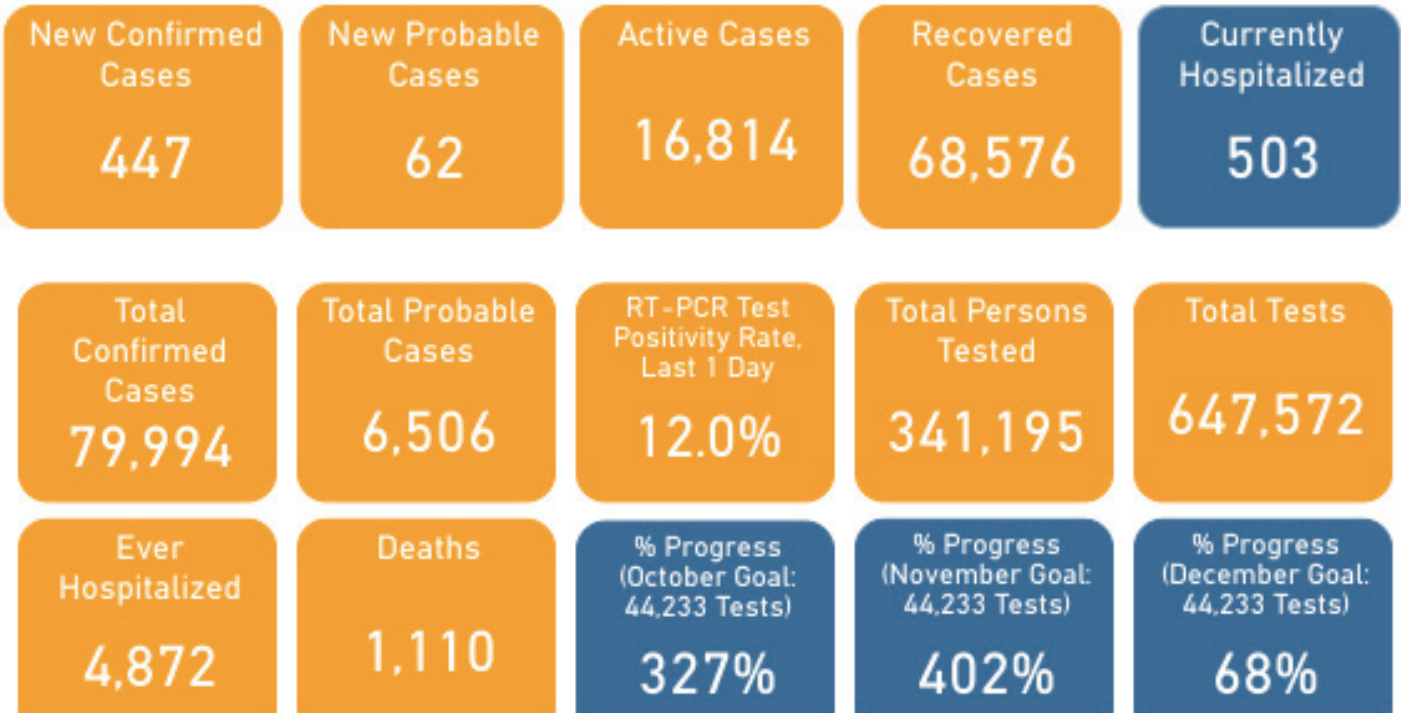
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Hyde	125	101	343	0	Moderate	8.33%
Jackson	219	174	834	8	Substantial	24.56%
Jerauld	245	201	462	13	Moderate	12.50%
Jones	63	54	161	0	Moderate	11.11%
Kingsbury	463	369	1305	12	Substantial	13.54%
Lake	908	727	2577	12	Substantial	29.01%
Lawrence	2219	1758	7176	23	Substantial	21.71%
Lincoln	5792	4703	16027	55	Substantial	25.35%
Lyman	478	396	1614	8	Substantial	18.39%
Marshall	210	146	928	3	Substantial	32.94%
McCook	614	482	1311	19	Substantial	26.58%
McPherson	157	111	475	1	Substantial	4.13%
Meade	1908	1488	6268	16	Substantial	19.60%
Mellette	194	156	622	1	Substantial	21.05%
Miner	205	164	466	5	Substantial	36.36%
Minnehaha	21902	17808	62594	204	Substantial	23.46%
Moody	459	347	1513	12	Substantial	30.30%
Oglala Lakota	1730	1378	6018	27	Substantial	20.18%
Pennington	9407	7389	31459	90	Substantial	22.91%
Perkins	228	143	586	2	Substantial	36.21%
Potter	284	219	673	2	Substantial	12.90%
Roberts	792	590	3623	22	Substantial	27.24%
Sanborn	288	204	568	3	Substantial	15.15%
Spink	611	452	1788	19	Substantial	17.18%
Stanley	241	200	700	1	Substantial	9.52%
Sully	98	80	214	3	Moderate	17.65%
Todd	1023	856	3644	15	Substantial	26.10%
Tripp	562	423	1261	9	Substantial	23.29%
Turner	848	676	2187	46	Substantial	25.66%
Union	1338	1069	4958	25	Substantial	21.75%
Walworth	542	379	1552	13	Substantial	24.90%
Yankton	2083	1408	7710	15	Substantial	27.84%
Ziebach	240	135	574	7	Substantial	36.84%
Unassigned	0	0	1776	0		

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South Dakota



AGE GROUP OF SOUTH DAKOTA COVID-19 CASES

Age Range	# of Cases	# of Deaths
0-9 years	3063	0
10-19 years	9443	0
20-29 years	16182	3
30-39 years	14407	12
40-49 years	12353	20
50-59 years	12313	61
60-69 years	9725	146
70-79 years	5051	234
80+ years	3963	634

SEX OF SOUTH DAKOTA COVID-19 CASES

Sex	# of Cases	# of Deaths
Female	45200	544
Male	41300	566

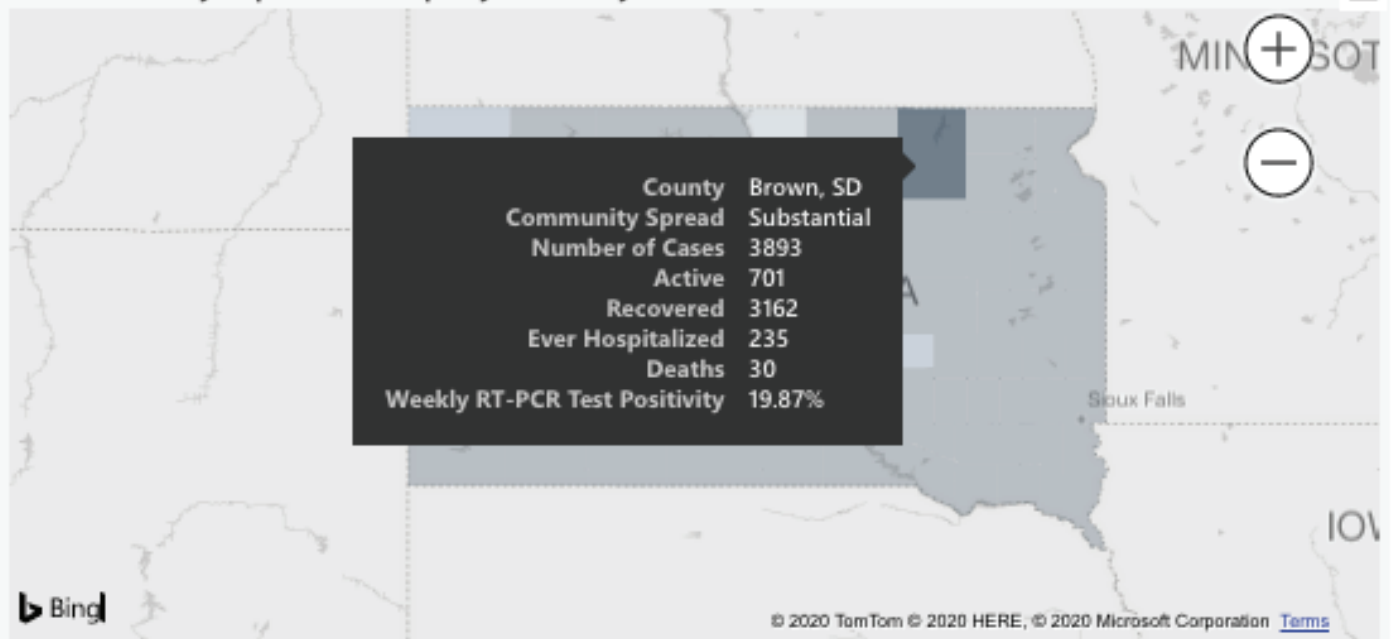
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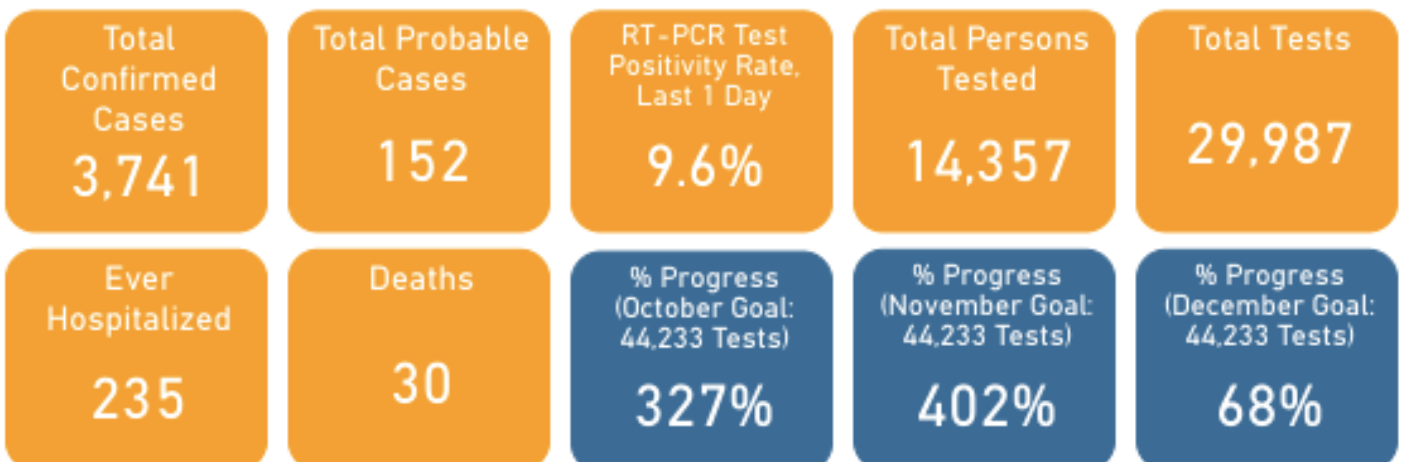
Brown County



Community Spread Map by County of Residence



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



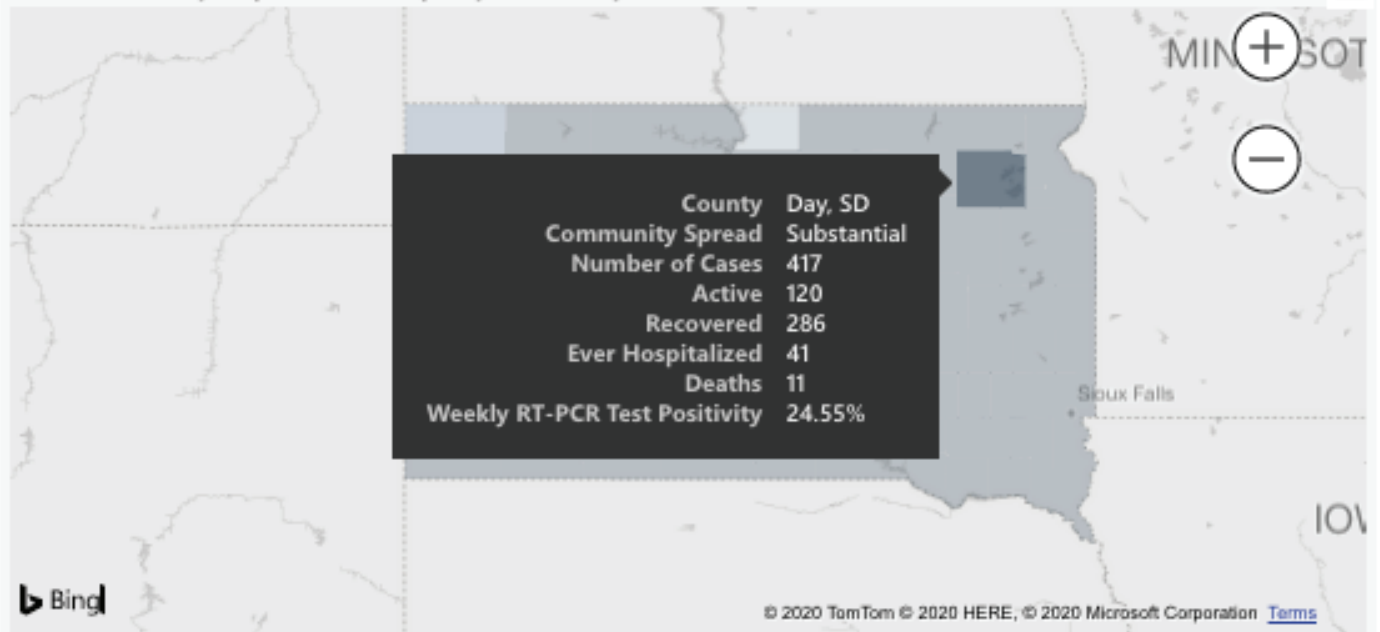
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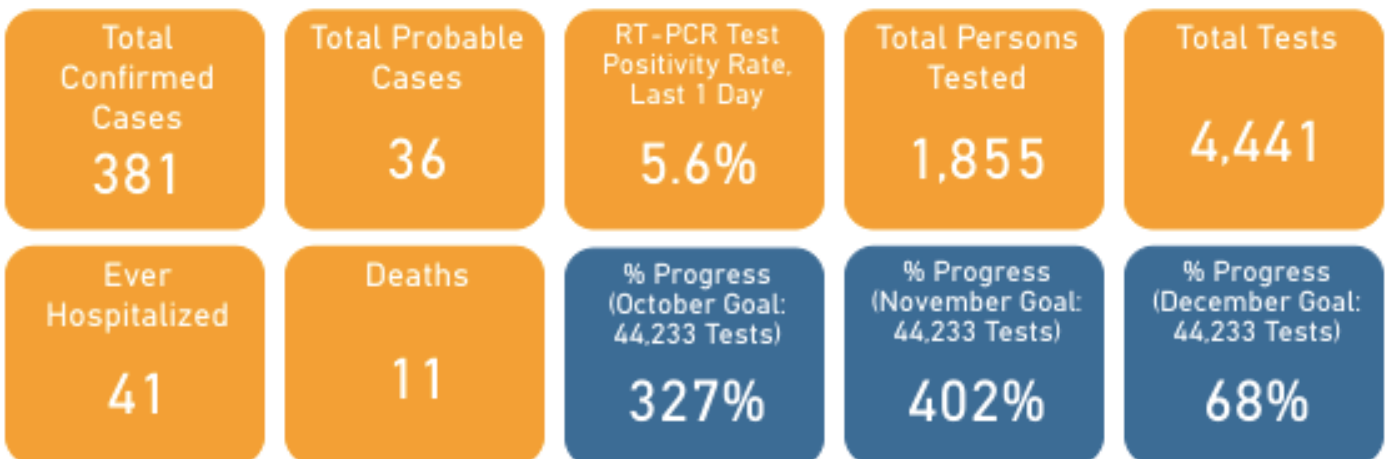
Day County



Community Spread Map by County of Residence



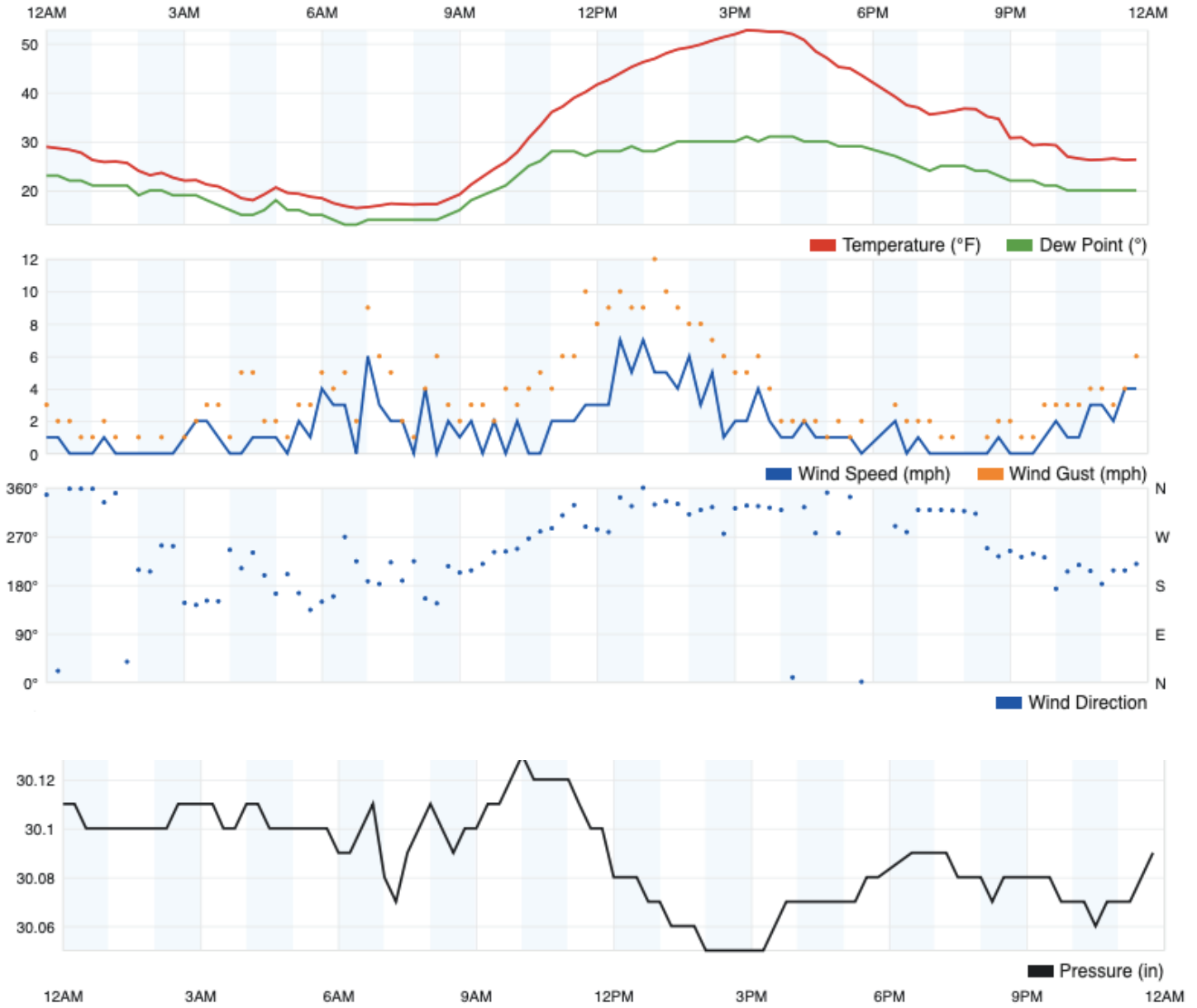
Hover over a county to see its details, or click county to update the orange boxes.



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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Today



Mostly Sunny

High: 57 °F

Tonight



Mostly Clear

Low: 29 °F

Wednesday



Sunny

High: 52 °F

Wednesday
Night



Partly Cloudy

Low: 26 °F

Thursday



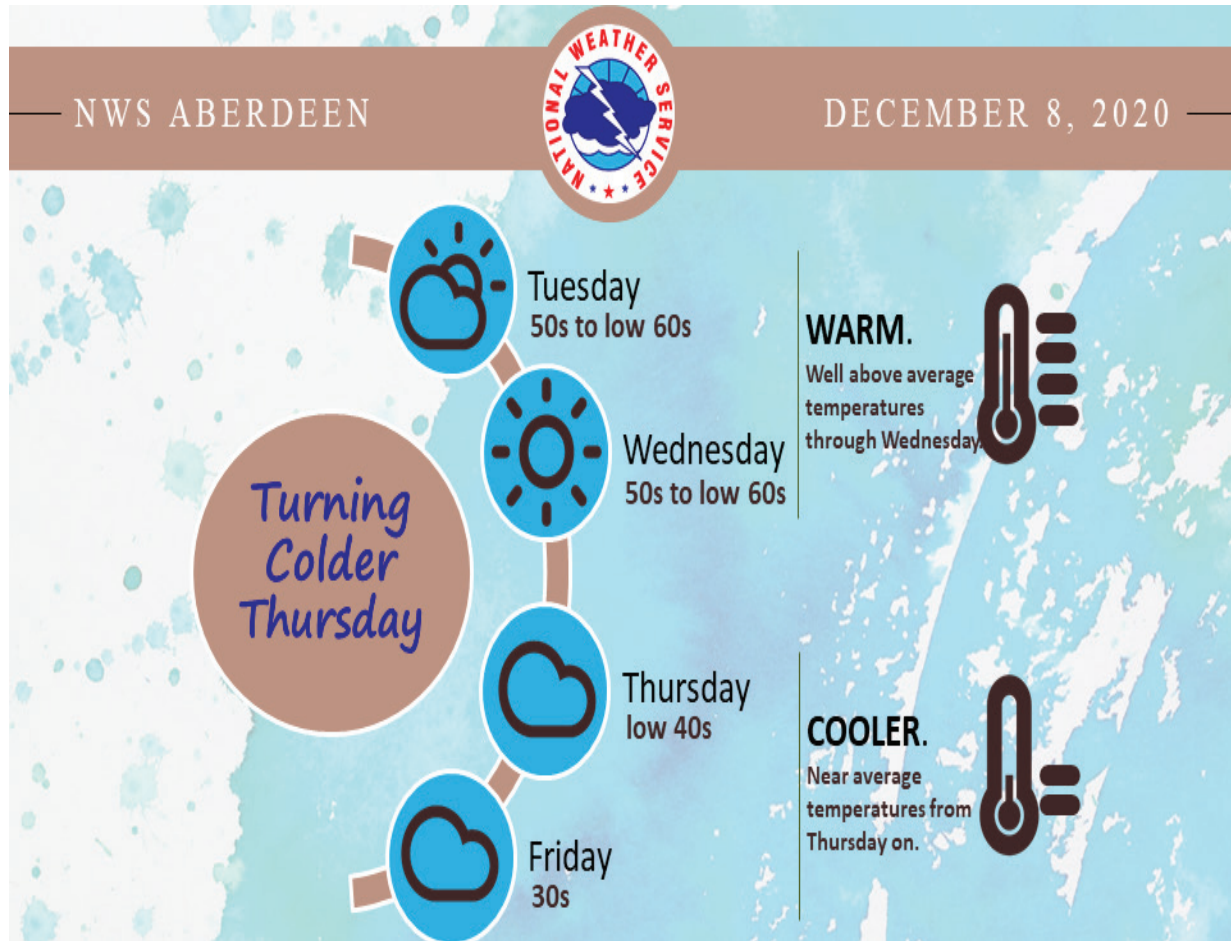
Mostly Cloudy

High: 41 °F

NWS ABERDEEN



DECEMBER 8, 2020



Enjoy the well above average temperatures as they last. Much cooler, seasonal, air will return Thursday and continue through at least mid December. The mainly dry weather looks to continue, as significant snow for the end of the week is expected to fall to our southeast.

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Today in Weather History

December 8, 1995: A powerful Arctic front moved across west central Minnesota and central, north central, and northeast South Dakota throughout the day with winds of 30 to 60 mph. With temperatures falling and one to four inches of snowfall in the morning and afternoon, the high winds produced blizzard conditions with blowing snow and extreme wind chills of 40 to 70 below zero. Many schools, college classes, and activities were canceled for the day. Travel was also significantly affected.

December 8, 1935: From the Monthly Weather Review for December 1935, "The outstanding flood of December 1935 was the record-breaking overflow of Buffalo and White Oak Bayous at Houston, Texas on the 8 and 9th. This destructive flood was caused by excessive rainfall over Harris County, Texas during a 42 hour period on the 6th, 7th, 8th, with amounts ranging from 5.50 inches at Houston" to 16.49 inches at the Humble Oil Company in the northwestern part of Harris County.

1740 - In early December two weeks of mild and rainy weather culminated in the worst flood in fifty years in the Lower Connecticut River Valley. The Merrimack River swelled to its highest level, and in Maine the raging waters swept away mills, carried off bridges, and ruined highways. (David Ludlum)

1935 - Severe flooding hit parts of the Houston, TX, area. Eight persons were killed as one hundred city blocks were inundated. Satsuma reported 16.49 inches of rain. The Buffalo and White Oak Bayous crested on the 9th. (6th-8th) (The Weather Channel)

1987 - Heavy rain fell across eastern Puerto Rico, with 19.41 inches reported at Las Piedras. Flooding caused five million dollars damage. Another in a series of storms hit the northwestern U.S., with wind gusts above 100 mph reported at Cape Blanco OR. While snow and gusty winds accompanied a cold front crossing the Rockies, strong westerly winds, gusting to 93 mph at Boulder CO, helped temperatures in western Kansas reach the 60s for the sixth day in a row. Freezing drizzle in northeastern slowed traffic to 5 mph on some roads in Morrow County. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - An outbreak of cold arctic air brought up to 18 inches of snow to the Colorado Rockies, with 14 inches at Boulder CO, and seven inches at Denver. Heavy snow blanketed New Mexico the following day, with 15 inches reported near Ruidoso. (Storm Data) (The National Weather Summary)

1989 - A storm moving out of the Central Rocky Mountain Region spread snow across Kansas and Oklahoma into Arkansas and Tennessee. Snowfall totals ranged up to 7.5 inches at Winfield KS. Freezing rain on trees and power lines cut off electricity to 24,000 homes in northeastern Arkansas, and 40,000 homes in the Nashville TN area were without electricity for several hours. (Storm Data) (The National Weather Summary)

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CAN YOU SEE HIM NOW?

It was the very first Christmas that Jo Ann's church had a Nativity scene on the front lawn. Working anxiously, she kept arranging, then rearranging, the figures to make certain they could all be seen.

Finally, she sent her friend, Alice, to the edge of the lawn and asked, "How do they look?"

"Fine, they are all O.K.," came the answer.

Suddenly Jo Ann began to rearrange them once again. "What are you doing? I said they were fine," said Alice grumpily.

"Yes, I heard what you said," responded Jo Ann. "But I just want to make sure that Jesus is visible so all of the people can see Him!"

Often Santa gets more attention than our Savior does during these Holy Days. Children anxiously stand in line waiting their turn to ask for gifts and have their picture taken with him. Rarely, however, do children pose at the manger to have a picture taken with the Baby Jesus. Could it be that He is not visible to most people at Christmas? Do we make any effort at all to make Him visible? Is He lost in the pile of gifts? Is He hidden behind the tree?

Matthew wrote about a group of shepherds who said, "Let's go to Bethlehem...and see this wonderful thing that has happened which the Lord has told us about."

This "wonderful thing," Jesus, is what the world needs to see. Let's be certain He is always visible – especially in our lives!

Prayer: Lord, may we not allow Your Son to be hidden or to be placed behind the "false idols" that so many worship at Christmas. May we make Him visible! In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: Luke 2:15 So it was, when the angels had gone away from them into heaven, that the shepherds said to one another, "Let us now go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has come to pass, which the Lord has made known to us."

News from the Associated Press

South Dakota State earns first ranking in 11 years

By DOUG FEINBERG AP Basketball Writer

South Dakota State coach Aaron Johnston was surprised that his team hadn't been in the poll for the last 11 years.

He had a lot of really good teams over that time period, but somehow they just couldn't crack the Top 25. That drought is over as the Jackrabbits entered The Associated Press Top 25 on Monday, coming in at No. 22.

"It's a great recognition piece and I'm excited for the team," Johnston said. "Not knowing it had been that long is a good reminder that we don't over value it either. It's great recognition and I appreciate the heck out of it and we'll fight like crazy to stay there."

The last time the team was in the Top 25 was the 2008-09 season and then stayed in the poll for 10 weeks after first appearing on Dec. 22, 2008. South Dakota State reached as high as 16th in the final poll that season.

Johnston knows how difficult it can be to get top programs to play his team and his squad benefited from some late schedule changes to have the opportunity to get ranked. The Jackrabbits beat Top 25 teams Iowa State and Gonzaga so far this season which helped South Dakota State enter the poll.

"I always felt we had some good teams, this year we beat some ranked teams early. Every November and December we play a tough schedule, but for a team in the mid-major world to be ranked you have to be perfect in those months it seems," said Johnston, who is 495-166 since taking over the program as an interim coach in 1999-00. "We've had a good team in the past, but had some bumps in the road there."

The schedule doesn't get any easier for the Jackrabbits with their next game at Kansas State on Thursday. After that is a trio of the top teams in the Missouri Valley Conference.

"We're as good as our last game and that was a good win against Gonzaga," he said. "We have no easy games coming up."

The Jackrabbits have been led by Myah Selland. The redshirt junior only played in nine games last year before suffering a season-ending injury. This year she's averaging 18 points and seven rebounds.

"Myah is one of those elite players that could play at any level in college," Johnston said. "She's really talented and is one of those players who can elevate your entire program. We have some really good players around her, people who can make shots. Early on this has the making of a team that has a lot of potential for what we like to do at SDSU."

Follow Doug Feinberg on Twitter at <http://twitter.com/dougfeinberg>

More AP women's basketball: <https://apnews.com/Womenscollegebasketball> and https://twitter.com/AP_Top25

Monday's Scores

By The Associated Press

GIRLS PREP BASKETBALL=

Gayville-Volin 45, Mitchell Christian 35

Waubay/Summit 66, Webster 35

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

Noem's travel builds profile as virus surges in South Dakota

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By STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press

SIoux FALLS, S.D. (AP) — South Dakota Gov. Kristi Noem spent the weekend traveling out of state to appearances in Texas and Georgia, as she continued to build a national profile among Republicans even as her state deals with one of the nation's worst outbreak of the coronavirus.

The governor has risen to prominence for opposing lockdowns or mask mandates to slow the spread of coronavirus infections. South Dakota leads the nation over the last two weeks in COVID-19 deaths per capita and new cases per capita, according to Johns Hopkins researchers.

The state has seen a downward tick in the daily average of new cases, but one in every 68 people in South Dakota tested positive in the past two weeks, while the state has reported nearly 33 deaths per 100,000 people. The state reported 509 new cases and no deaths on Monday.

Paul TenHaken, the mayor of Sioux Falls, said he "didn't take too much comfort" in the downward trend of new cases because the positivity rate of testing has stayed high. He said hospitals in the state's largest city are still operating at a "very tense" level of COVID-19 patients.

Throughout the spring and summer, the state had maintained comparatively low numbers of virus cases and deaths. Noem welcomed large events like a July fireworks display at Mount Rushmore featuring President Donald Trump and the Sturgis motorcycle rally in August that drew over 400,000 people.

The motorcycle rally is blamed by many pandemic experts for seeding virus outbreaks across the Upper Midwest. Noem has maintained her hands-off approach even as the virus has spiraled out of control in South Dakota. She touted her leadership during the pandemic while campaigning across the country for Trump's reelection campaign, but rarely fielded direct questions from the media about the virus in her home state.

At her most recent news conference Nov. 18, Noem said that mask mandates don't help slow infections and defended those who choose not to wear masks in public. Noem is next expected to deliver a budget update to the Legislature on Tuesday that will show a big surplus. The governor has repeatedly emphasized the economic benefits of her hands-off approach.

On Friday, Noem appeared at the Wrangler National Finals Rodeo in Arlington, Texas, taking part in the opening ceremonies by carrying the American flag on horseback. On Sunday, she attended a Georgia Senate debate between Republican Sen. Kelly Loeffler and Democrat Rev. Raphael Warnock. Noem acted as a surrogate for Loeffler, fielding media questions after the debate.

"Conservative women need to support other conservative women," Noem posted on Twitter.

The governor has also seen a windfall of contributions after campaigning for Trump. Her gubernatorial campaign even benefited from Trump's attempt to overturn the election results as she organized a fundraiser that asked for online donations to help support the president but appeared to send money to her campaign.

Noem's office has said that state funds are not used to pay for her travels, but a security detail from the Highway Patrol often accompanies the governor. The governor's office has declined a records request from The Associated Press for salary and travel costs for the security officers, saying the office does not release information "relating to security."

Noem is considered a potential presidential candidate, though she said in July she is not interested in pursuing the 2024 nomination.

This story has been corrected to show that Noem has previously said she is not interested in running for president in 2024. An earlier story stated that she has not said whether she is interested in running.

Sturgis gun shop burglarized for 2nd time in 2 months

STURGIS, S.D. (AP) — After operating without incident for five years, a Sturgis gun store has been burglarized for the second time in two months.

Sturgis Guns was broken into at 4:21 a.m. on Sunday, according to a police news release. Authorities arrived to find a broken side window and learned that nine rifles, a BB gun and a scope were stolen,

the release said.

The shop was also targeted on Nov. 2, when 14 firearms were stolen. The suspects in that burglary remain unknown and none of the weapons have been found, despite the enticement of a \$10,000 reward, the Rapid City Journal reported.

Tammy Bohn, who owns Sturgis Guns with her husband Justin, said she ordered metal bars after the first burglary, but they didn't arrive until Monday. She's also installing shatter-proof glass windows and more surveillance cameras.

"The last five weeks, everything has been turned upside down," she said, adding that she was "totally upset and shocked" by getting hit again.

Stealing from a gun shop "is not like you're breaking into Pizza Hut, it's a whole different animal," Bohn said.

Early, high demand driving Christmas tree sales

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — Christmas tree sellers say the coronavirus pandemic and the relatively mild weather are driving early, heavy traffic by shoppers this year.

Some lots, including Baumgartner Family Christmas Trees in Sioux Falls, are running out of trees.

"Because of the nice weather and COVID I think everybody is buying early this year," owner Kevin Baumgartner tells KSFY-TV.

Wreaths are also selling at a rapid pace.

"Also, any outdoor garland and stuff, we were wiped out in the first week, which is unusual. But it was harder than normal to get it this year," Baumgartner said. "A lot of the growers and cutters and people who make the wreaths were having a lot of trouble with labor this year. If they didn't have COVID, some of their people did."

A tree shortage is also contributing to a quicker season. Riverview Christmas Tree Farm in Canton is already closed for the season because of fewer trees and high demand.

"In the drought of 2012, all the baby trees died, and then this past drought in 2020 we just didn't get much growth out of our trees and we actually lost some big trees as well," said owner Todd Gannon.

"I think COVID had a lot to do with it, people really in the Christmas spirit and wanting some positive Christmas joy in their lives earlier than normal this year," said Gannon.

UK-EU talks near collapse ahead of Johnson trip to Brussels

By JILL LAWLESS and LORNE COOK Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — Britain and the European Union warned Tuesday that talks on a post-Brexit free-trade deal are teetering on the brink of collapse, with just over three weeks until an economic rupture that will cause upheaval for businesses on both sides of the English Channel.

Officials downplayed the chances of a breakthrough when Prime Minister Boris Johnson heads to Brussels for face-to-face talks with European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen in the next few days.

With negotiators deadlocked on key issues after months of tense talks, Johnson said "the situation at the moment is very tricky."

"But hope springs eternal. I will do my best to sort it out if we can," he said.

German European Affairs Minister Michael Roth said "political will in London" was needed to secure a deal.

"Let me be very clear, our future relationship is based on trust and confidence. It's precisely this confidence that is at stake in our negotiations right now," said Roth, whose country currently holds the EU's rotating presidency.

"We want to reach a deal, but not at any price," Roth told reporters before chairing videoconference talks among his EU counterparts.

Johnson and von der Leyen, head of the EU's executive arm, spoke by phone Monday for the second time in 48 hours but failed to break the trade talks impasse. They said afterwards that "significant differences" remained on three key issues — fishing rights, fair-competition rules and the governance of future

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disputes — and “the conditions for finalizing an agreement are not there.”

The two leaders said they planned to discuss the remaining differences face to face “in Brussels in the coming days.”

EU chief negotiator Michel Barnier met his U.K. colleague David Frost in Brussels on Tuesday to take stock and “prepare the next steps,” Barnier said as he left the meeting.

Barnier told The Associated Press that now “more than ever, the Brexit is a school of patience, even a university of patience.”

No date was given for the political leaders’ meeting. The leaders of the EU’s 27 nations are holding a two-day summit in Brussels starting Thursday and are not keen for it to be overshadowed by Brexit.

The U.K. left the EU politically on Jan. 31 after 47 years of membership, but 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 quotas on goods exported or imported by the two sides, although there would still be new costs and red tape.

Failure to secure a trade deal would mean tariffs and other barriers that would hurt both sides, although most economists think the British economy would take a greater hit because the U.K. does almost half of its trade with the bloc.

While both sides want a deal, talks have stalled because they have fundamentally different views of what it entails. The EU accuses Britain of seeking to retain access to the bloc’s vast market without agreeing to abide by its rules. It fears Britain will slash social and environmental standards and pump state money into U.K. industries, becoming a low-regulation economic rival on the bloc’s doorstep — hence the demand for strict “level playing field” guarantees.

The U.K. government sees Brexit as about sovereignty and “taking back control” of the country’s laws, borders and waters. It claims the EU is making demands it has not placed on other countries with whom it has free trade deals, such as Canada, and is trying to bind Britain to the bloc’s rules indefinitely.

“Our friends have just got to understand the U.K. has left the EU in order to be able to exercise democratic control over the way we do things,” Johnson said during a visit Tuesday to a hospital where some of the world’s first COVID-19 vaccinations were being administered.

Trust and goodwill have been further strained by British legislation that breaches the legally binding Brexit withdrawal agreement Johnson struck with the EU last year.

Britain says the Internal Market 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.

The House of Lords, Parliament’s unelected upper chamber, removed the law-breaking clauses from the legislation last month, but the elected House of Commons restored them on Monday night.

As the parliamentary tussle continues, the British government has offered the bloc an olive branch on the issue, saying it will remove the lawbreaking clauses if a joint U.K.-EU committee on Northern Ireland finds solutions in the coming days.

Cook reported from Brussels. Sylvain Plazy and Sam Petrequin in Brussels contributed to this story.

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Morocco to kick off mass vaccination plan with Chinese drug

By TARIK EL BARAKAH Associated Press

RABAT, Morocco (AP) — Morocco is gearing up for an ambitious COVID-19 vaccination program, aiming to vaccinate 80% of its adults in an operation starting this month that’s relying initially on a Chinese vaccine that has not yet completed advanced trials to prove it is safe and effective.

The first injections could come within days, a Health Ministry official told The Associated Press. Facing

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a public skeptical about the vaccines' safety and effectiveness, medical experts and health officials have appeared on television in recent weeks to promote the COVID-19 vaccines and encourage Moroccans to get immunized.

While Britain began its vaccination program Tuesday with the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine and the U.S. and European Union are racing to approve a series of Western-made vaccines, other governments are looking to use vaccines from China and Russia.

The World Health Organization has said new vaccines should first be tested in tens of thousands of people to prove they work and don't cause worrisome side effects before being rolled out broadly. But the U.N. health agency also says it's up to individual countries to decide whether there is an urgent domestic need to use a vaccine shot, even without such data.

Morocco is battling a resurgence in virus infections, with the number of recorded deaths from the virus surpassing 6,000. The North African kingdom is pinning its hopes on two vaccine candidates, one developed by China's Sinopharm and the other by Britain's Oxford University and AstraZeneca.

The Sinopharm vaccine has been approved for emergency use in a few countries and the company is still conducting late-stage clinical trials in 10 countries. The AstraZeneca vaccine is still in advanced trials in countries including Britain and the U.S. and hasn't been approved yet.

Morocco's government seeks to vaccinate 80% of its adults, or 25 million people, as soon as the vaccines are approved by domestic regulators. Priority will go to medical staff and other front-line workers, as well as the elderly.

It will start with the Sinopharm vaccine, which was tested on 600 Moroccans as part of clinical trials this autumn. Morocco has ordered 10 million doses of the vaccine.

The initial deliveries will come from China, but Morocco also plans to produce the vaccine locally, Abdelhakim Yahyan, a senior official at the Ministry of Health, told the state-owned news agency MAP.

Health Minister Khalid Ait Taleb said Morocco is seeking vaccines from several sources because COVID vaccines are such a scarce commodity and a single manufacturer's production capacity is too limited to meet the needs of the whole world.

In the Moroccan trial of the Sinopharm vaccine, carried out in Casablanca and the capital Rabat from August through November, healthy volunteers received two separate doses of the vaccine. In the advanced trial, volunteers either received the vaccine or a placebo. According to the health minister, early results have proven the vaccine to be "safe and effective" with no severe side effects reported.

However, some Moroccans have taken to social media to question the safety of the vaccine, with some noting that China was the original epicenter of the pandemic or questioning how effective it will be.

Sinopharm's shot relies on a tested technology, using a killed virus to deliver the vaccine, similar to how polio immunizations are made. Leading Western competitors, like the vaccine made by Oxford and AstraZeneca, use newer, less-proven technology to target the coronavirus' spike protein.

In China, the state-owned Sinopharm subsidiary CNBG has given the vaccine to 350,000 people outside its clinical trials, a top CNBG executive has said.

Critics in Morocco have also expressed concerns that citizens might be forced to take the vaccine, but the health minister insisted that COVID-19 vaccinations will not be mandatory but will be free.

Prime Minister Saad-Eddine El Othmani has sought to reassure the vaccine-hesitant about the robustness of the country's regulatory process for vaccine approval, saying that no corners have been cut in making sure the drug is safe to administer.

Morocco's mass immunization operation will include 2,888 vaccination stations and the deployment of mobile units to vaccinate people at factories, offices, campuses and prisons. The health ministry said it would mobilize over 12,000 health professionals as well as the military to ensure rapid distribution.

The vaccine will be available in a first phase to those at highest risk of contracting the virus: health professionals, security personnel, essential workers at vital sectors and people suffering from chronic diseases.

No exact date has been set for the rollout, but the health minister said "we are doing our best to get it started in mid-December."

Separately, Morocco is expected to be among 92 low- and middle-income countries supported by Covax, an international effort to ensure that vaccine supplies reach developing countries, if the group meets its funding targets, according to the World Health Organization.

AP Medical Writer Maria Cheng contributed from London.

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'Route out' of pandemic: UK gives 1st COVID-19 vaccine doses

By DANICA KIRKA Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — A retired British shop clerk received the first shot in the country's COVID-19 vaccination program Tuesday, signaling the start of a global immunization effort intended to offer a route out of a pandemic that has killed 1.5 million.

Margaret Keenan, who turns 91 next week, got the shot at 6:31 a.m. on what public health officials have dubbed "V-Day." She was first in line at University Hospital Coventry, one of several hospitals around the country that are handling the initial phase of the United Kingdom's program. As luck would have it, the second injection went to a man named William Shakespeare, an 81-year-old who hails from Warwickshire, the county where the bard was born.

"I feel so privileged to be the first person vaccinated against COVID-19," said Keenan, who wore a surgical mask and a blue Merry Christmas T-shirt decorated with a cartoon penguin wearing a Santa hat. "It's the best early birthday present I could wish for because it means I can finally look forward to spending time with my family and friends in the New Year after being on my own for most of the year."

The U.K. is the first Western country to start a mass vaccination program after British regulators last week authorized the use of a COVID-19 shot developed by U.S. drugmaker Pfizer and Germany's BioNTech. U.S. and European Union regulators may approve the vaccine in coming days, fueling a global immunization effort.

Britain's program is likely to provide lessons for other countries as they prepare for the unprecedented task of vaccinating billions of people. U.K. health officials have been working for months to adapt a system geared toward vaccinating groups of people like school children and pregnant women into one that can rapidly reach much of the nation's population.

Amid the fanfare that greeted Britain's first shot, authorities warned that the vaccination campaign would take many months, meaning painful restrictions that have disrupted daily life and punished the economy are likely to continue until spring.

"We still have a long road ahead of us, but this marks the route out," British Health Secretary Matt Hancock told the BBC.

Other vaccines are also being reviewed by regulators around the world, including a collaboration between Oxford University and drugmaker AstraZeneca and one developed by U.S. biotechnology company Moderna.

Britain has received 800,000 doses of the Pfizer vaccine, enough to vaccinate 400,000 people. The first shots will go to people over 80 who are either hospitalized or already have outpatient appointments scheduled, along with nursing home workers and vaccination staff. Others will have to wait their turn.

Health officials have asked the public to be patient because only those who are most at risk from the virus will be vaccinated in the early stages. Medical staff will contact people to arrange appointments, and most will have to wait until next year before there is enough vaccine to expand the program.

Buckingham Palace refused to comment on reports that Queen Elizabeth II, 94, and her 99-year-old husband, Prince Philip, would be vaccinated — and make that fact known — as a public example of the shot's safety.

Britain is the first country to deliver a broadly tested and independently reviewed vaccine to the general public. On Saturday, Russia began vaccinating thousands of doctors, teachers and others at dozens of

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centers in Moscow with its Sputnik V vaccine. But that is being viewed differently because Russia authorized use of the shot last summer after it was tested in only a few dozen people.

The vaccine can't arrive soon enough for the U.K., where more than 61,000 people have died in the pandemic — more than any other country in Europe, according to data tallied by Johns Hopkins University. The U.K. has recorded more than 1.7 million confirmed cases of the virus.

The vaccine, however, remains experimental. While it seems to prevent people from getting sick, it is still unclear how long that protection lasts.

The 800,000 doses Britain has received so far are only a fraction of what is needed. The government is targeting more than 25 million people, or about 40% of the population, in the first phase of its vaccination program, which gives first priority to those who are highest risk from the disease.

Stephen Powis, medical director for the National Health Service in England, said the first shot was an emotional moment.

"This really feels like the beginning of the end," he said. "It's been really dreadful year, 2020 — all those things that we are so used to, meeting friends and family, going to the cinema, have been disrupted. We can get those back. Not tomorrow. Not next week. Not next month. But in the months to come."

The vaccination program will be expanded as the supply increases, with the vaccine offered roughly on the basis of age groups, starting with the oldest people. Britain plans to offer COVID-19 vaccines to everyone over the age of 50, as well as younger adults with health conditions that put them at greater risk from the virus.

In England, the vaccine will be delivered at 50 hospital hubs in the first wave of the program, with more hospitals expected to offer it as the rollout ramps up. Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales are making their own plans under the U.K.'s system of devolved administration.

Logistical issues are slowing the distribution of the Pfizer vaccine because it has to be stored at minus-70 degrees Celsius (minus-94 degrees Fahrenheit). Authorities also are focusing on large-scale distribution points because each package of vaccine contains 975 doses and they don't want any to be wasted.

The U.K. has agreed to buy more than 350 million doses of vaccine from seven different producers. Governments around the world are making agreements with multiple developers to ensure they lock in delivery of the products that are ultimately approved for widespread use.

All of those logistical challenges culminated in nurse May Parsons inserting a syringe into Keenan's left shoulder and depressing the plunger to deliver the vaccine. Parsons, originally from the Philippines, has worked for the NHS for the past 24 years.

"I'm just glad to be able to play a part on this historic day," she said. "The last few months have been tough for all of us working in the NHS, but now it feels like there is a light at the end of the tunnel."

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

Report finds lapses ahead of New Zealand mosque attack

By NICK PERRY Associated Press

WELLINGTON, New Zealand (AP) — There were no clear signs that an attack last year on two New Zealand mosques was imminent, but police should have done a better job vetting the lone gunman when he applied for a gun license, and intelligence agencies should have focused more on threats such as white supremacy, according to a new report.

Among 44 recommendations, the report released Tuesday says the government should establish a new national intelligence agency.

The report details how the attacker, white supremacist Brenton Tarrant, was able to live a solitary, almost ghostlike existence by relying on an inheritance that was fast dwindling when he killed 51 Muslim worshippers in Christchurch.

The Royal Commission of Inquiry report runs nearly 800 pages. It says that New Zealand's intelligence

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agencies were far too focused on the threat posed by Islamic extremism at the expense of other threats including white supremacism.

It found that despite the shortcomings of various agencies, Tarrant hadn't told anybody about his plans or left any clues — until he emailed out his manifesto just eight minutes before he began shooting, which came too late for agencies to respond.

New Zealand currently has one intelligence agency that focuses on domestic threats and one that focuses on international threats. Often those agencies are focused on immediate events such as keeping visiting dignitaries safe. The report recommends establishing a new, well-financed agency that's more strategic in nature and can focus on developing a counter-terrorism strategy.

New Zealand's liberal prime minister, Jacinda Ardern, said the government has agreed to implement all of the recommendations and apologized for agency shortcomings. Immediately after the attacks, Ardern helped push through new laws banning the deadliest types of semiautomatic weapons.

But conservative opposition leader Judith Collins said the report's recommendations need to be scrutinized and the nation must tread carefully to safeguard rights and liberties.

Abdigani Ali, a spokesperson for the Muslim Association of Canterbury, told reporters in Christchurch that his community should have been kept safe.

"The report shows that institutional prejudice and unconscious bias exists in the government agencies and needs to change," he said.

The 30-year-old gunman, who is Australian, was sentenced in August to life in prison without the possibility of parole after pleading guilty to 92 counts of terrorism, murder and attempted murder.

The report details his extensive world travels but also shows he had almost no meaningful interactions with people in New Zealand because he was introverted and didn't work.

As a child, Tarrant had unsupervised access to the internet and became interested in video games from the age of 6 or 7, the report says. He began expressing racist ideas from a young age and told his mother he started using the 4chan internet forum from age 14.

He put on a lot of weight as a teenager before starting to exercise compulsively at gyms and going on a diet, losing about 50 kilograms (110 pounds). His father, Rodney, was diagnosed with lung cancer caused by exposure to asbestos and in 2010 killed himself at home, leaving an inheritance of 457,000 Australian dollars (\$339,000) to Tarrant.

The gunman worked for about three years as a personal trainer at a gym in the Australian town of Grafton, but stopped working after an injury and then used his inheritance to live and travel. He visited dozens of countries around the world, including India, China, Russia, North Korea and many countries in Africa and Europe.

He moved to New Zealand in 2017 and focused on planning for his attack. The report said he only had superficial interactions with people at a gym and the rifle club where he practiced rapid-fire shooting. Yet when needed, Tarrant could present himself to others in a way that didn't arouse suspicion.

Tarrant told investigators that although he frequented extreme right-wing discussion boards on websites like 4chan and 8chan, he found YouTube a far more significant source of information and inspiration.

Ardern said she planned to speak to the leaders at YouTube "directly" about how the gunman had become inspired by videos on the site.

In 2018, Tarrant was treated at Dunedin Hospital for injuries to his right eye and thigh after telling doctors he accidentally fired a gun while cleaning it at his apartment, the report says. He got government compensation for his injury, which wasn't reported to the police. The hospital registrar said the accident appeared to be careless and "a little unusual" but otherwise didn't set off alarm bells.

Health authorities also wrote that Tarrant was taking unprescribed steroids and injecting testosterone after he was treated for abdominal pain, but they didn't report that to the police either.

As part of the process for getting a gun license, Tarrant was required to provide to police the names of two people who could speak to his good character. He gave them the name of a friend he knew mostly online from gaming together, along with that friend's father. Vetting officers interviewed Tarrant and the referees, and recommended he be given his license.

Police Commissioner Andrew Coster said that in deciding whether Tarrant was “fit and proper” to hold a gun license, “we could have done more to consider whether the two referees knew the individual well enough to serve as referees.”

The report also found that the New Zealand Security Intelligence Service, the domestic spying agency, had chosen to concentrate scarce counter-terrorism resources on the threat of Islamist extremist terrorism inspired by groups like the Islamic State at the expense of other threats.

Despite the shortcomings of various agencies, the report concludes, there was no plausible way Tarrant’s plans could have been detected “except by chance.”

Safe harbor law locks Congress into accepting Biden’s win

By MARK SHERMAN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Happy Safe Harbor Day, America.

Other than Wisconsin, every state appears to have met a deadline in federal law that essentially means Congress has to accept the electoral votes that will be cast next week and sent to the Capitol for counting on Jan. 6. Those votes will elect Joe Biden as the country’s next president.

It’s called a safe harbor provision because it’s a kind of insurance policy by which a state can lock in its electoral votes by finishing up certification of the results and any state court legal challenges by a congressionally imposed deadline, which this year is Tuesday.

“What federal law requires is that if a state has completed its post-election certification by Dec. 8, Congress is required to accept those results,” said Rebecca Green, an election law professor at the William & Mary law school in Williamsburg, Virginia.

The Electoral College is a creation of the Constitution, but Congress sets the date for federal elections and, in the case of the presidency, determines when presidential electors gather in state capitals to vote.

In 2020, that date is Dec. 14. But Congress also set another deadline, six days before electors meet, to insulate state results from being challenged in Congress.

By the end of the day, every state is expected to have made its election results official, awarding 306 electoral votes to Biden and 232 to President Donald Trump.

The attention paid to the normally obscure safe harbor provision is a function of Trump’s unrelenting efforts to challenge the legitimacy of the election. He has refused to concede, made unsupported claims of fraud and called on Republican lawmakers in key states to appoint electors who would vote for him even after those states have certified a Biden win.

But Trump’s arguments have gone nowhere in court in Arizona, Georgia, Michigan, Nevada, Pennsylvania and Wisconsin. Most of his campaign’s lawsuits in state courts challenging those Biden victories have been dismissed, with the exception of Wisconsin, where a hearing is scheduled for later this week.

Like the others, the lawsuit does not appear to have much chance of succeeding, but because it was filed in accordance with state law procedures for challenging election results, “it’s looking to me like Wisconsin is going to miss the safe harbor deadline because of that,” said Edward Foley, a professor of election law at Ohio State University’s Moritz School of Law.

Judge Stephen Simanek, appointed to hear the case, has acknowledged that the case would push the state outside the electoral vote safe harbor.

Missing the deadline won’t deprive Wisconsin of its 10 electoral votes. Biden electors still will meet in Madison on Monday to cast their votes and there’s no reason to expect that Congress won’t accept them. In any case, Biden would still have more than the 270 votes he needs even without Wisconsin’s.

But lawmakers in Washington could theoretically second-guess the slate of electors from any state that misses the Dec. 8 deadline, Foley said.

Already one member of the House of Representatives, Rep. Mo Brooks, R-Ala., has said he will challenge electoral votes for Biden on Jan. 6. Brooks would need to object in writing and be joined by at least one senator. If that were to happen, both chambers would debate the objections and vote on whether

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to sustain them.

But unless both houses agreed to the objections, they would fail.

The unwillingness of Trump and his supporters to concede is "dangerous because in an electoral competition, one side wins, one side loses and it's essential that the losing side accepts the winner's victory. What is really being challenged right now is our capacity to play by those rules," Foley said.

The safe harbor provision played a prominent role in the Bush v. Gore case after the 2000 presidential election. The Supreme Court shut down Florida's state-court-ordered recount because the safe-harbor deadline was approaching. The court's opinion was issued Dec. 12, the deadline in 2000.

Vice President Al Gore conceded the race to George W. Bush, then the Texas governor, the next day.

In his dissent, Justice Stephen Breyer said the deadline that really mattered was the day on which the Electoral College was scheduled to meet. Whether there was time to conduct a recount by then "is a matter for the state courts to determine," Breyer wrote.

When Florida's electoral votes, decisive in George W. Bush's victory, reached Congress, several Black House members protested, but no senators joined in. It was left to Gore, who presided over the count as president of the Senate, to gavel down the objections from his fellow Democrats.

Trump thought courts were key to winning. Judges disagreed.

By COLLEEN LONG and ED WHITE Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump and his allies say their lawsuits aimed at subverting the 2020 election and reversing his loss to Joe Biden would be substantiated, if only judges were allowed to hear the cases.

There is a central flaw in the argument. Judges have heard the cases and have been among the harshest critics of the legal arguments put forth by Trump's legal team, often dismissing them with scathing language of repudiation.

This has been true whether the judge has been appointed by a Democrat or a Republican, including those named by Trump himself.

The judicial rulings that have rejected Trump's unfounded claims of widespread voter fraud have underscored not only the futility of the lame-duck president's brazen attempt to sabotage the people's will but also the role of the courts in checking his unprecedented efforts to stay in power.

On Monday, U.S. District Judge Linda Parker threw out a lawsuit challenging Michigan's election results that had been filed two days after the state certified the results for Biden. Parker, appointed by President Barack Obama, said the case embodied the phrase "This ship has sailed."

"This lawsuit seems to be less about achieving the relief plaintiffs seek ... and more about the impact of their allegations on people's faith in the democratic process and their trust in our government."

The lawsuit filed on behalf of a group of voters claimed Biden benefited from fraud, alleging, as in much of the other litigation, a massive Democrat-run conspiracy to shift the results. It sought to reverse the certification and impound all voting machines for inspection — "relief that is stunning in its scope and breathtaking in its reach," the judge said.

"Plaintiffs ask this court to ignore the orderly statutory scheme established to challenge elections and to ignore the will of millions of voters. This, the court cannot, and will not, do," she said.

"The people have spoken."

Her ruling stands alongside others in Pennsylvania, Georgia, Arizona and Nevada that have a common thread: They all rejected Trump's claims.

Even in the face of these losses in court, Trump has dangerously contended that, in fact, he won the election. And he's moved out of the courts to directly appeal to lawmakers as his losses mount. He brought Michigan lawmakers to the White House in a failed bid to set aside the vote tally, and phoned Georgia Gov. Brian Kemp, asking him to order a special legislative session to overturn the states results. Kemp refused. Trump also called Pennsylvania Republican House Speaker Bryan Cutler, who said state law did not give the legislature the power to overturn the will of voters.

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And Trump tweeted in all caps, "I WON THE ELECTION, BIG."

While that is not the case, what is true is that Trump is rapidly running out of legal runway. Out of roughly 50 lawsuits filed, more than 35 have been dropped or dismissed. The U.S. Supreme Court was expected to weigh in later this week in a case from Pennsylvania.

In Georgia, U.S. District Judge Timothy Batten, appointed by President George W. Bush, dismissed a lawsuit filed by attorney Sidney Powell, who was dropped from the Trump legal team a few weeks ago but has still continued to spread faulty election claims.

The lawsuit claimed widespread fraud meant to illegally manipulate the vote count in favor of Biden. The suit said the scheme was carried out in different ways, including ballot stuffing, votes flipped by the election system from Trump to Biden and problems with absentee ballots. The judge summarily rejected those claims.

Batten said the lawsuit sought "perhaps the most extraordinary relief ever sought in any federal court in connection with an election."

He said the lawsuit sought to ignore the will of voters in Georgia, which certified the state for Biden again Monday after three vote counts.

"They want this court to substitute its judgment for that of two-and-a-half million Georgia voters who voted for Joe Biden and this I am unwilling to do," Batten said.

Trump has appointed more than 150 federal court judges who have been confirmed by the Senate and pushed through three Supreme Court justices.

Much like Trump, his lawyers try to blame the political leanings of the judge after their legal arguments are flayed.

When a federal appeals panel in Philadelphia rejected Trump's election challenge just five days after it reached the court, Trump legal advisor Jenna Ellis called their work a product of "the activist judicial machinery in Pennsylvania."

But Trump appointed the judge who wrote the Nov. 27 opinion.

"Voters, not lawyers, choose the president. Ballots, not briefs, decide elections," Judge Stephanos Bibas wrote as the 3rd U.S. Circuit panel refused to stop the state from certifying its results for Democrat Joe Biden, a demand he called "breathtaking."

All three of the panel members were appointed by Republican presidents.

And they were upholding the decision of a fourth Republican, U.S. District Judge Matthew Brann, a conservative jurist and Federalist Society member. Brann had called the campaign's legal case, which was argued in court by Rudy Giuliani, a "haphazard" jumble that resembled "Frankenstein's monster."

In state courts, too, the lawsuits have failed. In Arizona on Friday, Judge Randall Warner, an independent appointed in 2007 by Democratic former Gov. Janet Napolitano, threw out a bid to undo Biden's victory.

Arizona Republican Party Chairwoman Kelli Ward challenged of ballots in metro Phoenix that were duplicated because voters' earlier ballots were damaged or could not be run through tabulators.

Warner wrote: "There is no evidence that the inaccuracies were intentional or part of a fraudulent scheme. They were mistakes. And given both the small number of duplicate ballots and the low error rate, the evidence does not show any impact on the outcome."

In Nevada on Friday, Judge James Todd Russell in Carson City ruled that attorneys for Republican electors failed to provide clear or convincing evidence of fraud or illegality.

Nevada judges are nonpartisan. But Russell's father was a Republican governor of the state from 1951-59.

White reported from Detroit. Associated Press Writers Kate Brumback in Atlanta; Jacques Billeaud in Phoenix; Ken Ritter in Las Vegas; and Maryclaire Dale in Philadelphia contributed to this report.

AP sources: Biden picks Lloyd Austin as secretary of defense

By ROBERT BURNS, MICHAEL BALSAMO, JONATHAN LEMIRE and ZEKE MILLER Associated Press WASHINGTON (AP) — President-elect Joe Biden will nominate retired four-star Army general Lloyd J.

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Austin to be secretary of defense, according to four people familiar with the decision. If confirmed by the Senate, Austin would be the first Black leader of the Pentagon.

Biden selected Austin over the longtime front-runner candidate, Michele Flournoy, a former senior Pentagon official and Biden supporter who would have been the first woman to serve as defense secretary. Biden also had considered Jeh Johnson, a former Pentagon general counsel and former secretary of homeland defense.

The impending nomination of Austin was confirmed by four people with knowledge of the pick who spoke to The Associated Press on the condition of anonymity because the selection hadn't been formally announced. Biden offered and Austin accepted the post on Sunday, according to a person familiar with the process.

As a career military officer, the 67-year-old Austin is likely to face opposition from some in Congress and in the defense establishment who believe in drawing a clear line between civilian and military leadership of the Pentagon. Although many previous defense secretaries have served briefly in the military, only two — George C. Marshall and James Mattis — have been career officers. Marshall also served as secretary of state.

Like Mattis, Austin would need to obtain a congressional waiver to serve as defense secretary. Congress intended civilian control of the military when it created the position of secretary of defense in 1947 and prohibited a recently retired military officer from holding the position.

One of the people who confirmed the pick said Austin's selection was about choosing the best possible person but acknowledged that pressure had built to name a candidate of color and that Austin's stock had risen in recent days.

Austin is a 1975 graduate of the U.S. Military Academy at West Point and served 41 years in uniform.

Biden has known Austin at least since the general's years leading U.S. and coalition troops in Iraq while Biden was vice president. Austin was commander in Baghdad of the Multinational Corps-Iraq in 2008 when Barack Obama was elected president, and he returned to lead U.S. troops from 2010 through 2011.

Austin also served in 2012 as the first Black vice chief of staff of the Army, the service's No. 2-ranking position. A year later he assumed command of U.S. Central Command, where he fashioned and began implementing a U.S. military strategy for rolling back the Islamic State militants in Iraq and Syria.

Austin retired from the Army in 2016, and he would need a congressional waiver of the legal requirement that a former member of the military be out of uniform at least seven years before serving as secretary of defense. That waiver has been granted only twice — most recently in the case of Mattis, the retired Marine general who served as President Donald Trump's first Pentagon chief.

The Mattis period at the Pentagon is now viewed by some as evidence of why a recently retired military officer should serve as defense secretary only in rare exceptions. Although Mattis remains widely respected for his military prowess and intellect, critics say he tended to surround himself with military officers at the expense of a broader civilian perspective. He resigned in December 2018 in protest of Trump's policies.

Loren DeJonge Schulman, who spent 10 years in senior staff positions at the Pentagon and the National Security Council, said she understands why Biden would seek out candidates with a deep understanding of the military. However, she worries that appointing a general to a political role could prolong some of the damage caused by Trump's politicization of the military.

"But retired generals are not one-for-one substitutes of civilian leaders," she said. "General officers bring different skills and different perspectives, and great generals do not universally make good appointees."

Austin has a reputation for strong leadership, integrity and a sharp intellect. He would not be a prototypical defense secretary, not just because of his 41-year military career but also because he has shied from the public eye. It would be an understatement to say he was a quiet general; although he testified before Congress, he gave few interviews and preferred not to speak publicly about military operations.

When he did speak, Austin did not mince words. In 2015, in describing how the Islamic State army managed a year earlier to sweep across the Syrian border to grab control of large swaths of northern and western Iraq, Austin said the majority of Iraqi Sunnis simply refused to fight for their government.

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"They allowed — and in some cases facilitated — ISIS's push through the country," Austin said.

He earned the admiration of the Obama administration for his work in Iraq and at Central Command, although he disagreed with Obama's decision to pull out of Iraq entirely in December 2011.

Austin was involved in the Iraq War from start to finish. He served as an assistant commander of the 3rd Infantry Division during the invasion of Iraq in March 2003 and oversaw the withdrawal in 2011. When Austin retired in 2016, Obama praised his "character and competence," as well as his judgment and leadership.

One person familiar with the matter said Biden was drawn to Austin's oversight of the Iraq pull-out, especially given the military's upcoming role in supporting the distribution of the coronavirus vaccines.

Like many retired generals, Austin has served on corporate boards. He is a member of the board of directors of Raytheon Technologies.

Word of Austin's selection broke a day before a meeting between Biden and Vice President-elect Kamala Harris and civil rights groups, many of whom had pushed the president-elect to pick more Black Cabinet members.

The Rev. Al Sharpton, the civil rights activist, said Monday: "It's a good choice that I think many in the civil rights community would support. It's the first time we have seen a person of color in that position. That means something, in a global view, especially after such an antagonistic relationship we had with the previous administration."

Sharpton, who is set to be in the meeting with Biden on Tuesday, called the choice "a step in the right direction but not the end of the walk."

Politico first reported Biden's selection of Austin.

Lemire reported from Wilmington, Del. AP Washington Bureau Chief Julie Pace contributed to this report.

Feds passed up chance to lock in more Pfizer vaccine doses

By ZEKE MILLER and JONATHAN LEMIRE Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump aims to take credit Tuesday for the speedy development of forthcoming coronavirus vaccines, even as his administration is coming under scrutiny for failing to lock in a chance to buy millions of additional doses of one of the leading contenders.

That decision could delay the delivery of a second batch of doses until manufacturer Pfizer fulfills other international contracts.

The revelation, confirmed Monday by people familiar with the matter, came on the eve of Trump's plans to host a White House summit aimed at celebrating the expected approval of the first vaccine later this week. His administration is seeking to tamp down public skepticism over the vaccine and secure a key component of the Republican president's legacy.

The focus was to be on the administration's plans to distribute and administer the vaccine, but officials from President-elect Joe Biden's transition team, which will oversee the bulk of the largest vaccination program in the nation's history once he takes office Jan. 20, were not invited.

Pfizer's vaccine is expected to be endorsed by a panel of Food and Drug Administration advisers as soon as this week, with delivery of 100 million doses — enough for 50 million Americans — expected in coming months.

Under its contract with Pfizer, the Trump administration committed to buy an initial 100 million doses, with an option to purchase as many as five times more.

This summer, the White House opted not to lock in an additional 100 million doses for delivery in the second quarter of 2021, according to people who spoke about the matter on the condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to discuss it publicly.

Days ahead of the vaccine's expected approval, the administration is reversing course, but it is not clear that Pfizer, which has since made commitments to other countries, will be able to meet the latest request on the same timeline.

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The Pfizer vaccine is one of two on track for emergency Food and Drug Administration authorization this month, the other coming from drugmaker Moderna.

The Trump administration insisted late Monday that between those two vaccines and others in the pipeline, the U.S. will be able to accommodate any American who wants to be vaccinated by the end of the second quarter of 2021.

The administration's decision not to lock in additional Pfizer purchases last summer was first reported by The New York Times. Health and Human Services Secretary Alex Azar told NBC the administration is "continuing to work across manufacturers to expand the availability of releasable, of FDA-approved vaccine as quickly as possible. ... We do still have that option for an additional 500 million doses."

The "Operation Warp Speed" summit will feature Trump, Vice President Mike Pence and a host of government experts, state leaders and business executives, as the White House looks to explain that the vaccine is safe and lay out the administration's plans to bring it to the American people.

Senior administration officials provided details on the summit on Monday. An official with the Biden transition confirmed no invitation was extended.

Officials from the pharmaceutical companies developing the vaccines also were not expected to attend, despite receiving invitations, according to people familiar with the matter. Some expressed concerns about the event contributing to the politicization of the vaccine development process and potentially further inhibiting public confidence in the drugs.

Trump is set to kick off the event with remarks aiming to "celebrate" vaccine development, according to an official who previewed the event. Trump also will sign an executive order to prioritize Americans for coronavirus vaccines procured by the federal government. A second official said the order would restrict the U.S. government from donating doses to other nations until there is excess supply to meet domestic demand. Both officials spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss plans for the summit.

It was not immediately clear what, if any, impact the order would have on other nations' abilities to access the vaccines. Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau announced Monday he expects his country to receive about 250,000 doses of a vaccine from Pfizer by the end of the year.

The Food and Drug Administration's panel of outside vaccine experts is to meet Thursday to conduct a final review of the Pfizer drug, and it will meet later this month on a vaccine developed by Moderna. The FDA is not required to follow the panel's advice, though it usually does. Agency decisions on the two drugs are expected within days of each meeting. Both have been determined to be 95% effective against the virus that causes COVID-19. Plans call for distributing and then administering about 40 million doses of the two companies' vaccines by the end of the year — with the first doses shipping within hours of FDA clearance.

Biden said Friday that "there's no detailed plan that we've seen" for how to get the vaccines out of containers, into syringes and then into people's arms.

Trump administration officials insist that such plans have been developed, with the bulk of the work falling to states and municipal governments to ensure their most vulnerable populations are vaccinated first. The administration says it has leveraged partnerships with manufacturers, distributors and health care providers, so that outside of settings like veterans' hospitals, "it is highly unlikely that a single federal employee will touch a dose of vaccine before it goes into your arm."

In all, about 50,000 vaccination sites are enrolled in the government's distribution system, the officials said.

Each of the forthcoming vaccines has unique logistical challenges related to distribution and administration. The Pfizer vaccine must be transported at super-cooled temperatures, and comes in batches of 975 doses. Each vial contains five doses, requiring careful planning. The administration has prepared detailed videos for providers on how to safely prepare and administer doses, to be posted after the FDA issues its emergency use authorization.

One such plan is to be announced Tuesday: Pharmacy chains CVS and Walgreens have stood up a "mobile vaccination service" ready to vaccinate people in every nursing home and long-term care facility in the country. The roughly 3 million residents of those facilities are among the most vulnerable for

COVID-19 and have been placed at the front of the line to access the vaccine, along with more than 20 million healthcare workers. So far 80-85% of the facilities have signed on to the service, the officials said.

AP writers Jonathan Lemire in Wilmington, Delaware, and Linda Johnson in Trenton, New Jersey, contributed to this report.

Pressure mounts on Hungary, Poland to unlock EU stimulus

By SAMUEL PETREQUIN Associated Press

BRUSSELS (AP) — Germany's Europe minister said Tuesday that further delaying the European Union's landmark 1.82 trillion-euro (\$2.21 trillion) long-term budget and coronavirus recovery package would be "irresponsible" as diplomats envisage a solution without Poland and Hungary, the two EU states holding up the measure.

Speaking ahead of a video conference of European affairs ministers, Michael Roth said the stimulus is crucial for many European countries whose economies have been devastated by the pandemic. But Poland and Hungary, who agreed on the deal in July, are now vetoing the package because of a mechanism that would allow the EU to cut off funds to countries that violate the bloc's democratic standards.

Germany, which currently holds the rotating presidency of the EU, has been deploying efforts to find a compromise before a summit of European leaders in Brussels starting Thursday, where the topic will top the agenda.

"The social and economic consequences of the crisis become more visible every day," Roth said, "It would be irresponsible to further delay essential support to our citizens. We need to rapidly unlock the financial support which is so critical for many member states."

Both Poland and Hungary, which have conservative, nationalist governments, have said they fear the EU mechanism will be used to punish their values.

If EU leaders fail to adopt the budget for 2021-2027 before the end of the year, the bloc will continue to spend but function on limited resources, with a maximum of one-twelfth of the budget for the previous financial year to be spent each month. Many projects for Poland and Hungary — which are already being formally investigated by the EU for their potential violations of the rule of law — could be held up.

To break the stalemate and ensure that at least part of the money is made available, European officials have been thinking of options that would allow the EU's 25 other nations to launch the recovery plan without Poland and Hungary. A senior EU diplomat who was not authorized to speak publicly said Poland and Hungary need to give a clear indication before the summit that they have changed their minds and are now ready to compromise.

The diplomat said if there is no "clear signal" from those two nations, then EU officials will move on to Plan B, which could include an agreement by the 25 other nations or moves labeled enhanced cooperation.

Under the enhanced cooperation procedure, a group of EU nations can decide to move forward in situations where all 27 countries are not on the same page. If the standoff continues, such a move could at least help unlock the bloc's 750 billion-euro (\$909 billion) economic recovery package.

Lorne Cook in Brussels contributed to this story.

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China, Nepal say Everest a bit higher than past measurements

By BINAJ GURUBACHARYA Associated Press

KATHMANDU, Nepal (AP) — China and Nepal jointly announced a new official height for Mount Everest

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on Tuesday, ending a discrepancy between the two nations.

The new height of the world's highest peak is 8,848.86 meters (29,031.7 feet), which is slightly more than Nepal's previous measurement and about four meters (13 feet) higher than China's.

Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi and his Nepalese counterpart, Pradeep Gyawali, simultaneously pressed buttons during a virtual conference and the new height flashed on the screen.

The height of Everest, which is on the border between China and Nepal, was agreed on after surveyors from Nepal scaled the peak in 2019 and a Chinese team did the same in 2020.

There had been debate over the actual height of the peak and concern that it might have shrunk after a major earthquake in 2015. The quake killed 9,000 people, damaged about 1 million structures in Nepal and triggered an avalanche on Everest that killed 19 people at the base camp.

There was no doubt that Everest would remain the highest peak because the second highest, Mount K2, is only 8,611 meters (28,244 feet) tall.

Everest's height was first determined by a British team around 1856 as 8,842 meters (29,002) feet.

But the most accepted height has been 8,848 meters (29,028 feet), which was determined by the Survey of India in 1954.

In 1999, a National Geographic Society team using GPS technology came up with a height of 8,850 (29,035 feet). A Chinese team in 2005 said it was 8,844.43 meters (29,009 feet) because it did not include the snow cap.

A Nepal government team of climbers and surveyors scaled Everest in May 2019 and installed GPS and satellite equipment to measure the peak and snow depth on the summit.

Chinese President Xi Jinping visited Nepal later that year and the leaders of the two countries decided that they should agree on a height.

A survey team from China then conducted measurements in the spring of 2020 while all other expeditions were canceled due to the coronavirus pandemic.

Nepal's climbing community welcomed the end of confusion over the mountain's height.

"This is a milestone in mountaineering history which will finally end the debate over the height and now the world will have one number," said Santa Bir Lama, president of the Nepal Mountaineering Association.

China's official Xinhua New Agency quoted Xi as saying the two sides are committed to jointly protecting the environment around Everest and cooperating in scientific research.

For China, the announcement appeared to be as much about politics as geography. China has drawn Nepal ever closer into its orbit with investments in its economy and the building of highways, dams, airports and other infrastructure in the impoverished nation.

That appears to serve China's interests in reducing the influence of rival India, with which it shares a disputed border, and Nepal's role as a destination for refugee Tibetans.

The Xinhua report said nothing about the technical aspects but heavily emphasized the joint announcement's geopolitical weight.

China and Nepal will establish an "even closer community of a shared future to enrich the countries and their peoples," Xinhua quoted Xi as saying.

China condemns new US Hong Kong sanctions, Taiwan arms sale

BEIJING (AP) — China on Tuesday lashed out at the U.S. over new sanctions against Chinese officials and the sale of more military equipment to Taiwan.

The U.S. actions are part of what critics see as an effort by the Trump administration to put in place high-pressure tactics toward Beijing that could make it more difficult for President-elect Joe Biden to steady relations.

The Cabinet's office for Hong Kong affairs expressed "strong outrage and condemnation" over the sanctions leveled against 14 members of the standing committee of China's legislature, which passed a sweeping Hong Kong National Security Law earlier this year.

Foreign ministry spokesperson Hua Chunying, meanwhile, demanded the U.S. cancel its latest arms sale

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to Taiwan and said China would make a "proper and necessary response."

Hua also condemned the new sanctions, saying China would "take resolute and forceful countermeasures and resolutely defend its sovereignty, security and development interests."

"The Chinese government and people have expressed strong indignation and strongly condemned the U.S.'s arrogant, unreasonable and insane behavior," Hua said at a daily briefing.

The State Department on Monday said the sanctioned officials would be banned from traveling to the U.S. or accessing the U.S. financial system over the crackdown on civil rights in Hong Kong.

It also announced the approval of a \$280 million sale of advanced military communications equipment to Taiwan.

President Donald Trump's administration has incensed Beijing with 11 separate arms sales and closer military and political ties with the self-governing island democracy that Beijing claims as its own territory, to be annexed by force if necessary.

China has stepped up military flights near the island and pledged to punish U.S. companies involved in the arms deals in response.

Taiwan's government welcomed the announcement, saying it showed Washington was honoring its commitment to help strengthen the island's defenses.

"Taiwan has been at the receiving end of such military threats on a daily basis," President Tsai Ing-wen told reporters Tuesday. "Only through engagement and by working together can we tackle the threats and challenges that beset our region and the world."

The U.S. earlier imposed sanctions against Chinese and Hong Kong officials over the passage of the National Security Law, which is seen as rolling back civil liberties in the territory, as well as over abuses against Muslim minority groups in the northwestern region of Xinjiang.

This year it forced the closure of the Chinese consulate in Houston and last week cut the duration of U.S. visas for members of the ruling Communist Party and their family members from 10 years to one month.

The Trump administration appears to be using Taiwan, Hong Kong and other issues to heighten the level of confrontation in China-U.S. relations, said Su Hao, professor of international relations at China Foreign Affairs University.

"Trump would like to see a formation of a solidified structure of China-U.S. relations that will make it difficult for Biden to make changes," Su said.

Trump may view the increased toughness toward China as a legacy of his time in office, said Diao Daming, associate professor in the School of International Studies at Beijing's Renmin University.

"This is hurting bilateral relations, harming the interests of the countries and their citizens, and failing to meet the expectations of international society," Diao said.

Should I wipe down groceries during the pandemic?

By The Associated Press undefined

Should I wipe down groceries during the pandemic?

Experts say it's not necessary for most people.

The coronavirus spreads mainly through the respiratory droplets people spray when talking, coughing, sneezing or singing. It's why health experts stress the importance of wearing masks and social distancing.

Experts still recommend cleaning surfaces — especially frequently touched spots that infected people might have recently touched. That will also help reduce risk from other germs that haven't gone away in the pandemic.

People caring for those at risk for severe illness if infected might also want to take the precaution of wiping down any packages.

But experts say to keep things in perspective. The virus is fragile and doesn't survive easily outside the body for long, they note. Tests finding it on surfaces might just be detecting traces of the virus, not live virus capable of infecting people. Early studies finding it could linger on surfaces for days were conducted under laboratory conditions; the virus likely couldn't survive that long in real life.

Dr. John Brooks, chief medical officer for the COVID-19 response at the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, said people should do what makes them comfortable. But he said if people unpack groceries without touching their faces and then washing their hands afterward, "I think that may be sufficient."

The AP is answering your questions about the coronavirus in this series. Submit them at: FactCheck@AP.org.

Read previous Viral Questions:

Is shopping in stores safe during the pandemic?

What does emergency use of a COVID-19 vaccine mean?

Who will be the first to get COVID-19 vaccines?

'New start:' Medics juggle surgery backlogs and virus fight

By JOHN LEICESTER Associated Press

PARIS (AP) — Chatting before they go under the knife, the two women picture their lives after surgery. Caroline Erganian hopes to be rid of her pain. Lolita Andela imagines being able to be active with her kids.

After multiple false dawns, they scarcely dare believe that their Paris hospital, no longer monopolized by COVID-19 patients, is once again able to perform their intestinal tucks to treat chronic obesity. When the pandemic was burning through France's health system, the women's surgeries were repeatedly pushed back. But after months of waiting, their turn has now come.

Lying on a gurney, ready to be wheeled into the operating room, Erganian, a retired secretary, tells the surgeon: "I'm doing this surgery to have a better life. So I'm enthusiastic, not a bit scared."

"A new start," replies the surgeon, Lara Ribeiro Parenti, thrilled to be back at work with her scalpel. "This is what we know best and what we enjoy doing. It's a renewal, a new start, for us, too."

For these women, yes. But many thousands of others in France and other European countries hardest-hit by the pandemic are still waiting for medical procedures that could change their lives and improve their health, but which were deemed nonessential when the virus ripped through hospitals.

To prevent the collapse of public health systems, their decks were cleared. People who had been scheduled for joint replacements to free them from pain, for cataract removals to defog their sight, for cancer checks, and myriad other life-improving and even potentially life-saving procedures, were told to stay home as staving off COVID-19 took priority.

At the Bichat Hospital in Paris, one of the French capital's largest with 900 beds, wards fell silent as resources were poured into critical care units in the basement.

But doctors are now better able to treat virus patients and better equipped for the double challenge of fighting COVID-19 while also doing other medicine. With France's most recent virus spike now stabilized, Bichat is using the lull to tackle the backlog of surgeries. An Associated Press team spent two days this month with its staff, seeing how they are recovering from virus surges that left more than 55,600 dead in France.

Bichat was the first hospital outside Asia to report a COVID-19 death, back in February, and was turned upside down when the pandemic struck with full force in March. Makeshift plastic screens were erected to stop contamination spreading, held up with duct tape and bits of wood. Operating rooms and a recovery room the size of a tennis court were among spaces hastily converted for floods of sick people, who were plugged into ventilators, one next to the other.

"It was cataclysmic," recalls Simon Msika, the head of digestive surgery whose unit was among those that emptied. "The basement was teeming with people."

When President Emmanuel Macron declared that France was at war with the virus and put the country into lockdown in March, Erganian and Andela both immediately understood that their surgeries wouldn't happen as planned.

"It was a hammer blow for the family, because we were ready," says Andela, who is the carer for a man with disabilities.

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Admissions for COVID-19 aside, hospitalizations across France plunged, with 2 million fewer hospital stays from March to July compared to the same period of 2019, the French Hospitals Federation says. Cataract surgeries stopped almost entirely for eight weeks, and colonoscopies used to spot cancers plummeted by 87%. There were half as many kidney transplants from March to September, according to the federation. Its statisticians estimate that the number of patients waiting for postponed procedures has swelled by hundreds of thousands.

Neighboring Spain was battling long waiting lists for non-urgent surgeries even before the virus caused more than 45,600 deaths there. Public health data shows that in the first half of 2020, surgeries plunged by more than a third year-on-year. The average waiting time has grown from 115 days to 170. At the end of June, 691,508 people were registered as waiting for non-urgent procedures — 20,000 more than a year earlier.

In Portugal, almost 100,000 surgeries had been postponed by October. And the association of hospital surgeons in Italy says more than 600,000 operations have been canceled there, 50,000 of them for cancer. By June, the association was already warning that more than 13 months would be needed to clear the backlog.

Delays are more than mere inconveniences for patients. Erganian weighed 140 kilograms (308 pounds) before surgery; Andela was 133 kilos (293 pounds). Both were terrified of becoming infected by the virus, acutely aware that obesity puts them at greater risk of dying from COVID-19. Other than for work and groceries, Andela says she barely left the house. Erganian says she lived in “monstrous fear.”

Both gained additional kilos in lockdown. Andela wept when her nutritionist weighed her.

“I have three kids. I dream of doing lots of things with them that I cannot do now: rollerblading, scootering, hoverboarding, going to the swimming pool without having to hide,” the 33-year-old said the afternoon before her gastric bypass surgery.

Erganian, 58, hopes to shed more than a third of her weight as a result of having a large part of her stomach cut out and be free of knee and back pain — and of her cane. She prayed in the final weeks that her phone wouldn’t ring with news of another delay.

“In a European country as developed as France, I find it abnormal that surgeries that should have been done couldn’t be carried out because of COVID,” she says. “We should not be choosing between one sick person and another.”

The pandemic hit with such force initially that hospitals in many countries barely coped, but that is changing. During France’s second lockdown from Oct. 30, surgeons at Bichat performed many more operations than during the first shutdown. All 22 of the hospital’s operating rooms were functioning again this month.

The operating room schedule that Aurelie Gouel manages was largely filled with gaping holes in March but is now a tightly packed puzzle of colored blocks, each representing a surgery. She likens the task of fitting in as many operations as possible to the computer game Tetris.

Gouel calculates that the pandemic has so far forced the postponement of more than 600 surgeries at Bichat. Even with operating rooms again going full tilt, she can’t see how the hospital will catch up.

“There will always be other patients who take priority,” she says. “It is going to be complicated for a long time.”

Associated Press writers Aritz Parra in Madrid, Barry Hatton in Lisbon and Frances d’Emilio in Rome contributed.

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Allen throws for 4 TDs, Bills beat 49ers 34-24 in Arizona

By DAVID BRANDT AP Sports Writer

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GLENDALE, Ariz. (AP) — The passes zipped through the air one by one, almost always finding their intended target right on the hands and in stride.

By the time Josh Allen was done, the quarterback had finished one of the best games of his young NFL career, and the Buffalo Bills once again looked like one of the league's elite teams.

Allen threw for 375 yards and tied a career high with four touchdown passes as the Bills stayed in sole possession of first place in the AFC East with a thoroughly impressive 34-24 victory over the San Francisco 49ers on Monday night.

"That's our quarterback. He's a baller," Bills safety Jordan Poyer said. "I don't know what answer you want me to say. It's no surprise to us what he does every week. I'm happy he's on our team."

Buffalo (9-3) moved a step closer to winning its division for the first time since 1995 thanks to a nearly flawless performance from Allen. The 24-year-old completed 32 of 40 passes with no interceptions.

He threw touchdown passes to Cole Beasley, Dawson Knox, Isaiah McKenzie and Gabriel Davis as the Bills built a 17-7 halftime lead and controlled the majority of the second half.

"We were clicking," Allen said. "It just seemed like our guys were getting open and the ball was coming out of my hand really well."

The Bills are one game ahead of the Miami Dolphins with four games left for both teams.

San Francisco (5-7) lost in its first game at its adopted home in Arizona. The 49ers will be based in Glendale for at least the next three weeks after Santa Clara County issued strict new coronavirus protocols that forced the team to find a temporary new home.

It was Allen's fourth game of the season with at least 300 yards passing and three touchdowns, which set a franchise record. Jim Kelly did it three times in 1991 and Drew Bledsoe three times in 2002.

"As long as it correlates to team success, it means we're doing the right thing, making the right decisions and we're winning football games," Allen said. "That's all that matters to me."

The Bills had a much more pleasant trip to the desert than three weeks ago, when they lost a 32-30 heartbreaker to the Arizona Cardinals. That was the game when DeAndre Hopkins made a stunning catch over three Buffalo defenders with 2 seconds left for the game-winning score.

San Francisco has had several recent injuries at its slot cornerback position and struggled to cover Beasley, who had a career-high 130 yards receiving on nine catches.

"We knew exactly what they were running. We just came up short," 49ers linebacker Dre Greenlaw said. "It was kind of a weird feeling."

State Farm Stadium — which is home to the division-rival Arizona Cardinals — was dressed up to make the 49ers feel slightly more at home. There were San Francisco banners hanging on the walls along the sidelines and the videoboard showed Niners highlights and flashed messages like "Faithful to the Bay."

The teams traded goal-line stands in the first quarter.

The Bills opened the game with a 74-yard drive that was stopped at the Niners 1 after Allen's fourth-down pass fell incomplete. San Francisco responded with a 97-yard drive that ended at the Buffalo 2 when Jeff Wilson Jr. was stuffed for no gain on fourth down.

It was just the second game since 2000 that featured two turnovers on downs to start a game.

But San Francisco got the ball back one play later on a fumble by Allen and the 49ers took advantage. Nick Mullens hit Brandon Aiyuk in the middle of the end zone for a 2-yard touchdown.

It was all Buffalo for the rest of the first half and much of the game. Allen hit Beasley for a 5-yard touchdown and later found tight end Knox for a 4-yard score as the Bills pushed ahead 17-7 by halftime.

Mullens finished 26-of-39 passing for 316 yards, three touchdowns and two interceptions. The 49ers weren't bad on offense, but couldn't keep pace with Allen and the Bills.

"We needed to play our best and I think we were very close to doing it," 49ers coach Kyle Shanahan said. "We just had a few things that didn't keep us out on the field. When you do that versus an offense and quarterback like that and you don't get it back for a while, the game gets away from you."

PRIME-TIME SUCCESS

The Bills got a rare prime-time win. They're now 8-22 in prime-time games since 2000, and 2-8 on Mon-

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day night, with their one victory coming against the Jets in November 2014, when the game was moved back a day and played in Detroit after a major snowstorm snarled much of Buffalo.

It was their first win in an official "Monday Night Football" game since beating Miami 23-18 in 1999.

ALLEN'S HOMECOMING, SORT OF

Allen had a big game against the 49ers, which is the team he rooted for while growing up in Firebaugh, California. The town is about a 3-hour drive from San Francisco, and Allen went to games as a kid with his family. This was the first time he had played against San Francisco.

INJURIES

Bills: Beasley left in the first quarter and was evaluated for a head injury but quickly returned. ... RB Devin Singletary (knee) left in the first quarter but returned. ... Safety Jaquan Johnson was hurt on a punt return in the fourth quarter and limped off the field with help.

49ers: DT D.J. Jones (ankle) left in the first half and didn't return.

UP NEXT

The Bills host the Pittsburgh Steelers on Sunday night.

The 49ers stay in Arizona and they'll host Washington on Sunday.

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

Chuck Yeager, 1st to break sound barrier, dies at 97

By The Associated Press undefined

Retired Air Force Brig. Gen. Charles "Chuck" Yeager, the World War II fighter pilot ace and quintessential test pilot who showed he had the "right stuff" when in 1947 he became the first person to fly faster than sound, has died. He was 97.

Yeager died Monday, his wife, Victoria Yeager, said on his Twitter account. "It is w/ profound sorrow, I must tell you that my life love General Chuck Yeager passed just before 9pm ET. An incredible life well lived, America's greatest Pilot, & a legacy of strength, adventure, & patriotism will be remembered forever."

Yeager's death is "a tremendous loss to our nation," NASA Administrator Jim Bridenstine said in a statement.

"Gen. Yeager's pioneering and innovative spirit advanced America's abilities in the sky and set our nation's dreams soaring into the jet age and the space age. He said, 'You don't concentrate on risks. You concentrate on results. No risk is too great to prevent the necessary job from getting done,'" Bridenstine said.

"In an age of media-made heroes, he is the real deal," Edwards Air Force Base historian Jim Young said in August 2006 at the unveiling of a bronze statue of Yeager.

He was "the most righteous of all those with the right stuff," said Maj. Gen. Curtis Bedke, commander of the Air Force Flight Test Center at Edwards.

Yeager, from a small town in the hills of West Virginia, flew for more than 60 years, including piloting an X-15 to near 1,000 mph (1,609 kph) at Edwards in October 2002 at age 79.

"Living to a ripe old age is not an end in itself. The trick is to enjoy the years remaining," he said in "Yeager: An Autobiography."

"I haven't yet done everything, but by the time I'm finished, I won't have missed much," he wrote. "If I auger in (crash) tomorrow, it won't be with a frown on my face. I've had a ball."

On Oct. 14, 1947, Yeager, then a 24-year-old captain, pushed an orange, bullet-shaped Bell X-1 rocket plane past 660 mph to break the sound barrier, at the time a daunting aviation milestone.

"Sure, I was apprehensive," he said in 1968. "When you're fooling around with something you don't know much about, there has to be apprehension. But you don't let that affect your job."

The modest Yeager said in 1947 he could have gone even faster had the plane carried more fuel. He said the ride "was nice, just like riding fast in a car."

Yeager nicknamed the rocket plane, and all his other aircraft, "Glamorous Glennis" for his wife, who died in 1990.

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Yeager's feat was kept top secret for about a year when the world thought the British had broken the sound barrier first.

"It wasn't a matter of not having airplanes that would fly at speeds like this. It was a matter of keeping them from falling apart," Yeager said.

Sixty-five years later to the minute, on Oct. 14, 2012, Yeager commemorated the feat, flying in the back seat of an F-15 Eagle as it broke the sound barrier at more than 30,000 feet (9,144 meters) above California's Mojave Desert.

His exploits were told in Tom Wolfe's book "The Right Stuff," and the 1983 film it inspired.

Yeager was born Feb. 23, 1923, in Myra, a tiny community on the Mud River deep in an Appalachian hollow about 40 miles southwest of Charleston. The family later moved to Hamlin, the county seat. His father was an oil and gas driller and a farmer.

"What really strikes me looking over all those years is how lucky I was, how lucky, for example, to have been born in 1923 and not 1963 so that I came of age just as aviation itself was entering the modern era," Yeager said in a December 1985 speech at the Smithsonian Air and Space Museum.

"I was just a lucky kid who caught the right ride," he said.

Yeager enlisted in the Army Air Corps after graduating from high school in 1941. He later regretted that his lack of a college education prevented him from becoming an astronaut.

He started off as an aircraft mechanic and, despite becoming severely airsick during his first airplane ride, signed up for a program that allowed enlisted men to become pilots.

Yeager shot down 13 German planes on 64 missions during World War II, including five on a single mission. He was once shot down over German-held France but escaped with the help of French partisans.

After World War II, he became a test pilot beginning at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base in Dayton, Ohio.

Among the flights he made after breaking the sound barrier was one on Dec. 12, 1953, when he flew an X-1A to a record of more than 1,600 mph. He said he had gotten up at dawn that day and went hunting, bagging a goose before his flight. That night, he said, his family ate the goose for dinner.

He returned to combat during the Vietnam War, flying several missions a month in twin-engine B-57 Canberras making bombing and strafing runs over South Vietnam.

Yeager also commanded Air Force fighter squadrons and wings, and the Aerospace Research Pilot School for military astronauts.

"I've flown 341 types of military planes in every country in the world and logged about 18,000 hours," he said in an interview in the January 2009 issue of Men's Journal. "It might sound funny, but I've never owned an airplane in my life. If you're willing to bleed, Uncle Sam will give you all the planes you want."

When Yeager left Hamlin, he was already known as a daredevil. On later visits, he often buzzed the town.

"I live just down the street from his mother," said Gene Brewer, retired publisher of the weekly Lincoln Journal. "One day I climbed up on my roof with my 8 mm camera when he flew overhead. I thought he was going to take me off the roof. You can see the treetops in the bottom of the pictures."

Yeager flew an F-80 under a Charleston bridge at 450 mph on Oct. 10, 1948, according to newspaper accounts. When he was asked to repeat the feat for photographers, Yeager replied: "You should never strafe the same place twice 'cause the gunners will be waiting for you."

Yeager never forgot his roots and West Virginia named bridges, schools and Charleston's airport after him.

"My beginnings back in West Virginia tell who I am to this day," Yeager wrote. "My accomplishments as a test pilot tell more about luck, happenstance and a person's destiny. But the guy who broke the sound barrier was the kid who swam the Mud River with a swiped watermelon or shot the head off a squirrel before going to school."

Yeager was awarded the Silver Star, the Distinguished Flying Cross, the Bronze Star, the Air Medal and the Purple Heart. President Harry S. Truman awarded him the Collier air trophy in December 1948 for his breaking the sound barrier. He also received the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 1985.

Yeager retired from the Air Force in 1975 and moved to a ranch in Cedar Ridge in Northern California where he continued working as a consultant to the Air Force and Northrop Corp. and became well known to younger generations as a television pitchman for automotive parts and heat pumps.

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He married Glennis Dickhouse of Oroville, California, on Feb. 26, 1945. She died of ovarian cancer in December 1990. They had four children: Donald, Michael, Sharon and Susan.

Yeager married 45-year-old Victoria Scott D'Angelo in 2003.

On the Net:

Yeager: <http://www.chuckyeager.com/>

'B.A.P.S.' star Natalie Desselle Reid dies at 53

By JONATHAN LANDRUM Jr. AP Entertainment Writer

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Natalie Desselle Reid, who starred alongside Halle Berry in the 1997 film "B.A.P.S." and on the sitcom "Eve," has died. She was 53.

Reid's death on Monday was confirmed by Je'Caryous Johnson, the CEO of Je'Caryous Entertainment, which was planning a stage adaptation of "B.A.P.S." A rep for the actor's family said she died after a battle with colon cancer.

In the film "B.A.P.S.," Reid and Berry played the roles of two waitresses at a Georgia food diner who decide to fly to Los Angeles for a music video audition. The tandem ended up living a luxury lifestyle as "Black American Princesses" while caring for an elderly Beverly Hills millionaire.

Johnson said Reid was looking forward to bringing her role as Mickey in the film back to life. He said everyone fell in love with Reid's "undeniably witty, always giving and caring and hilariously show-stopping personality" during rehearsals earlier this year.

"The world has truly lost one of its most angelic souls here on Earth," Johnson said in a statement, noting the dedicated approach Reid took to her acting. "There will never be another woman like her who so effortlessly lit up the screen, as well as any room she walked into."

Berry said on Twitter that she was "in total shock. ... completely heartbroken."

Reid starred as Eve's friend Janie Ekins over a three-season span on the UPN sitcom "Eve." The actor also appeared in Tyler Perry's "Madea's Big Happy Family," F. Gary Gray's "Set It Off" and Def Jam's "How to Be a Player."

Eve paid tribute to Reid on her social media saying "thank you for your light and spirit."

Georgia again certifies election results showing Biden won

By KATE BRUMBACK Associated Press

ATLANTA (AP) — Georgia's top elections official on Monday recertified the state's election results after a recount requested by President Donald Trump confirmed once again that Democrat Joe Biden won the state, and the governor then recertified the state's 16 presidential electors.

"We have now counted legally cast ballots three times, and the results remain unchanged," Secretary of State Brad Raffensperger said during a news conference at the state Capitol before the results were recertified.

Georgia law allows a losing candidate to request a recount if the margin between the candidates is within 0.5%. Trump requested the recount after the results certified by Raffensperger showed that Biden led by a margin of 12,670 votes, or 0.25% of the roughly 5 million ballots cast.

During the recount, which was done using scanners that read and tally the votes, there were discrepancies in vote totals in some counties. Since the results of a recount become the official results, those counties had to recertify their results. Once that was done the secretary of state recertified the statewide results, his office said in a news release.

Kemp then recertified the state's slate of 16 presidential electors — all prominent Democrats — as required by state law, spokesman Cody Hall said. The recertification of results comes before the federal "safe harbor" deadline on Tuesday — electors named by that date in accordance with state law cannot be disregarded by Congress.

The recount was the third tally of votes in the presidential race in the state. After the initial count fol-

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lowing Election Day, Raffensperger selected the presidential race for an audit required by state law. The tight margin meant the audit required the roughly 5 million votes in that contest to be recounted by hand, he said. That count also affirmed Biden's victory.

The total number of votes in the recount results certified Monday and posted on the secretary of state's website was 766 fewer than the number certified when the ballots were first tallied after the election. Biden's lead dropped from 12,670 to 11,779. That appears to be largely due to a discrepancy in Fulton County, the state's most populous county that includes most of Atlanta.

Fulton County's recount results showed 880 fewer votes than the results certified after election night, with an overwhelming majority of those votes coming from Biden's total in the county. Gabriel Sterling, who oversaw the implementation of the state's new voting system, called the discrepancy in the county "a little worrisome" but said it's a big county that's had managerial issues. He also noted the difference isn't enough to change the overall outcome of the election.

Also Monday, a federal judge dismissed a lawsuit filed on behalf of would-be Republican presidential electors by former Trump lawyer Sidney Powell. The suit alleged widespread fraud and sought to decertify the results of the presidential race in Georgia, among other things.

In the lawsuit, "the plaintiffs essentially ask the court for perhaps the most extraordinary relief ever sought in any federal court in connection with an election. They want this court to substitute its judgment for that of 2 and a half million Georgia voters who voted for Joe Biden and this I am unwilling to do," U.S. District Judge Timothy Batten as he dismissed the suit following a hearing.

Separately, an election challenge filed Friday by Trump, his campaign and Georgia Republican Party Chairman David Shafer was rejected by the Fulton County Superior Court because the paperwork was improperly completed and it lacked the appropriate filing fees.

Even as lawsuits filed by Trump and his allies have been rejected around the country, the president has continued to make repeated baseless claims of widespread fraud. In Georgia, he has rained criticism on Raffensperger and Kemp, both fellow Republicans. Raffensperger, meanwhile, has been steadfast in his defense of the integrity of the election in the state and Kemp has said he has no power to intervene in elections.

"I know there are people that are convinced the election was fraught with problems, but the evidence, the actual evidence, the facts tell us a different story," Raffensperger said during the news conference Monday.

Hours before coming to Georgia for a rally Saturday night, Trump called Kemp and asked him to call a special legislative session. The governor declined.

In a tweet Sunday, Trump criticized Kemp and Lt. Gov. Geoff Duncan for inaction and again called for a special session.

After four Republican state lawmakers on Sunday also requested a special session, Kemp and Duncan put out a statement saying that convening a special session to select a different slate of presidential electors would not be allowed under state or federal law.

AP sources: Biden picks Lloyd Austin as secretary of defense

By ROBERT BURNS, MICHAEL BALSAMO, JONATHAN LEMIRE and ZEKE MILLER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President-elect Joe Biden will nominate retired four-star Army general Lloyd J. Austin to be secretary of defense, according to four people familiar with the decision. If confirmed by the Senate, Austin would be the first Black leader of the Pentagon.

Biden selected Austin over the longtime front-runner candidate, Michele Flournoy, a former senior Pentagon official and Biden supporter who would have been the first woman to serve as defense secretary. Biden also had considered Jeh Johnson, a former Pentagon general counsel and former secretary of homeland defense.

The impending nomination of Austin was confirmed by four people with knowledge of the pick who spoke to The Associated Press on condition of anonymity because the selection hadn't been formally announced. Biden offered and Austin accepted the post on Sunday, according to a person familiar with the process.

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As a career military officer, the 67-year-old Austin is likely to face opposition from some in Congress and in the defense establishment who believe in drawing a clear line between civilian and military leadership of the Pentagon. Although many previous defense secretaries have served briefly in the military, only two — George C. Marshall and James Mattis — have been career officers. Marshall also served as secretary of state.

Like Mattis, Austin would need to obtain a congressional waiver to serve as defense secretary. Congress intended civilian control of the military when it created the position of secretary of defense in 1947 and prohibited a recently retired military officer from holding the position.

One of the people who confirmed the pick said Austin's selection was about choosing the best possible person but acknowledged that pressure had built to name a candidate of color and that Austin's stock had risen in recent days.

Austin is a 1975 graduate of the U.S. Military Academy at West Point and served 41 years in uniform.

Biden has known Austin at least since the general's years leading U.S. and coalition troops in Iraq while Biden was vice president. Austin was commander in Baghdad of the Multinational Corps-Iraq in 2008 when Barack Obama was elected president, and he returned to lead U.S. troops from 2010 through 2011.

Austin also served in 2012 as the first Black vice chief of staff of the Army, the service's No. 2-ranking position. A year later he assumed command of U.S. Central Command, where he fashioned and began implementing a U.S. military strategy for rolling back the Islamic State militants in Iraq and Syria.

Austin retired from the Army in 2016, and he would need a congressional waiver of the legal requirement that a former member of the military be out of uniform at least seven years before serving as secretary of defense. That waiver has been granted only twice — most recently in the case of Mattis, the retired Marine general who served as President Donald Trump's first Pentagon chief.

The Mattis period at the Pentagon is now viewed by some as evidence of why a recently retired military officer should serve as defense secretary only in rare exceptions. Although Mattis remains widely respected for his military prowess and intellect, critics say he tended to surround himself with military officers at the expense of a broader civilian perspective. He resigned in December 2018 in protest of Trump's policies.

Loren DeJonge Schulman, who spent 10 years in senior staff positions at the Pentagon and the National Security Council, said she understands why Biden would seek out candidates with a deep understanding of the military. However, she worries that appointing a general to a political role could prolong some of the damage caused by Trump's politicization of the military.

"But retired generals are not one-for-one substitutes of civilian leaders," she said. "General officers bring different skills and different perspectives, and great generals do not universally make good appointees."

Austin has a reputation for strong leadership, integrity and a sharp intellect. He would not be a prototypical defense secretary, not just because of his 41-year military career but also because he has shied from the public eye. It would be an understatement to say he was a quiet general; although he testified before Congress, he gave few interviews and preferred not to speak publicly about military operations.

When he did speak, Austin did not mince words. In 2015, in describing how the Islamic State army managed a year earlier to sweep across the Syrian border to grab control of large swaths of northern and western Iraq, Austin said the majority of Iraqi Sunnis simply refused to fight for their government.

"They allowed — and in some cases facilitated — ISIS's push through the country," Austin said.

He earned the admiration of the Obama administration for his work in Iraq and at Central Command, although he disagreed with Obama's decision to pull out of Iraq entirely in December 2011.

Austin was involved in the Iraq War from start to finish. He served as an assistant commander of the 3rd Infantry Division during the invasion of Iraq in March 2003 and oversaw the withdrawal in 2011. When Austin retired in 2016, Obama praised his "character and competence," as well as his judgment and leadership.

One person familiar with the matter said Biden was drawn to Austin's oversight of the Iraq pull-out, especially given the military's upcoming role in supporting the distribution of the coronavirus vaccines.

Like many retired generals, Austin has served on corporate boards. He is a member of the board of directors of Raytheon Technologies.

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Word of Austin's selection broke a day before a meeting between Biden and Vice President-elect Kamala Harris and civil rights groups, many of whom had pushed the president-elect to pick more Black Cabinet members.

The Rev. Al Sharpton, the civil rights activist, said Monday: "It's a good choice that I think many in the civil rights community would support. It's the first time we have seen a person of color in that position. That means something, in a global view, especially after such an antagonistic relationship we had with the previous administration."

Sharpton, who is set to be in the meeting with Biden on Tuesday, called the choice "a step in the right direction but not the end of the walk."

Politico first reported Biden's selection of Austin.

Lemire reported from Wilmington, Del. AP Washington Bureau Chief Julie Pace contributed to this report.

Feds passed up chance to lock in more Pfizer vaccine doses

By ZEKE MILLER and JONATHAN LEMIRE Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Trump administration opted last summer not to lock in a chance to buy millions of additional doses of one of the leading coronavirus vaccine contenders, a decision that could delay the delivery of a second batch of doses until manufacturer Pfizer fulfills other international contracts.

The revelation, confirmed Monday by people familiar with the matter, came a day before President Donald Trump aimed to take credit for the speedy development of forthcoming coronavirus vaccines at a White House summit Tuesday.

Pfizer's vaccine is expected to be endorsed by a panel of Food and Drug Administration advisers as soon as this week, with delivery of 100 million doses — enough for 50 million Americans — expected in coming months.

Under its contract with Pfizer, the Trump administration committed to buy an initial 100 million doses, with an option to purchase as many as five times more.

This summer, the White House opted not to lock in an additional 100 million doses for delivery in the second quarter of 2021, according to people who spoke about the matter on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to discuss it publicly.

Days ahead of the vaccine's expected approval, the administration is reversing course, but it is not clear that Pfizer, which has since made commitments to other countries, will be able to meet the latest request on the same timeline.

The Pfizer vaccine is one of two on track for emergency FDA authorization this month, the other coming from drugmaker Moderna.

The Trump administration insisted late Monday that between those two vaccines and others in the pipeline, the U.S. will be able to accommodate any American who wants to be vaccinated by the end of the second quarter of 2021.

The administration's decision not to lock in additional Pfizer purchases last summer was first reported by The New York Times. Health and Human Services Secretary Alex Azar told NBC the administration is "continuing to work across manufacturers to expand the availability of releasable, of FDA-approved vaccine as quickly as possible. ... We do still have that option for an additional 500 million doses."

Seeking to tamp down public skepticism over the vaccine and secure a key component of Trump's legacy, Tuesday's summit will highlight the administration's plans to distribute and administer the vaccine. But officials from President-elect Joe Biden's transition team, which will oversee the bulk of the largest vaccination program in the nation's history once he takes office Jan. 20, were not invited.

The "Operation Warp Speed" summit will feature Trump, Vice President Mike Pence and a host of government experts, state leaders and business executives, as the White House looks to explain that the vaccine is safe and lay out the administration's plans to bring it to the American people.

Senior administration officials provided details on the summit on Monday. An official with the Biden

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transition confirmed no invitation was extended.

Officials from the pharmaceutical companies developing the vaccines also were not expected to attend, despite receiving invitations, according to people familiar with the matter. Some expressed concerns about the event contributing to the politicization of the vaccine development process and potentially further inhibiting public confidence in the drugs.

Trump is set to kick off the event with remarks aiming to "celebrate" vaccine development, according to an official who previewed the event. Trump also will sign an executive order to prioritize Americans for coronavirus vaccines procured by the federal government. A second official said the order would restrict the U.S. government from donating doses to other nations until there is excess supply to meet domestic demand. Both officials spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss plans for the summit.

It was not immediately clear what, if any, impact the order would have on other nations' abilities to access the vaccines. Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau announced Monday he expects his country to receive about 250,000 doses of a vaccine from Pfizer by the end of the year.

The Food and Drug Administration's panel of outside vaccine experts is to meet Thursday to conduct a final review of the Pfizer drug, and it will meet later this month on a vaccine developed by Moderna. The FDA is not required to follow the panel's advice, though it usually does. Agency decisions on the two drugs are expected within days of each meeting. Both have been determined to be 95% effective against the virus that causes COVID-19. Plans call for distributing and then administering about 40 million doses of the two companies' vaccines by the end of the year — with the first doses shipping within hours of FDA clearance.

Biden said Friday that "there's no detailed plan that we've seen" for how to get the vaccines out of containers, into syringes and then into people's arms.

Trump administration officials insist that such plans have been developed, with the bulk of the work falling to states and municipal governments to ensure their most vulnerable populations are vaccinated first. The administration says it has leveraged partnerships with manufacturers, distributors and health care providers, so that outside of settings like veterans' hospitals, "it is highly unlikely that a single federal employee will touch a dose of vaccine before it goes into your arm."

In all, about 50,000 vaccination sites are enrolled in the government's distribution system, the officials said.

Each of the forthcoming vaccines has unique logistical challenges related to distribution and administration. The Pfizer vaccine must be transported at super-cooled temperatures, and comes in batches of 975 doses. Each vial contains 5 doses, requiring careful planning. The administration has prepared detailed videos for providers on how to safely prepare and administer doses, to be posted after the FDA issues its emergency use authorization.

One such plan is to be announced Tuesday: Pharmacy chains CVS and Walgreens have stood up a "mobile vaccination service" ready to vaccinate people in every nursing home and long-term care facility in the country. The roughly 3 million residents of those facilities are among the most vulnerable for COVID-19 and have been placed at the front of the line to access the vaccine, along with more than 20 million healthcare workers. So far 80-85% of the facilities have signed on to the service, the officials said.

AP writers Jonathan Lemire in Wilmington, Delaware, and Linda Johnson in Trenton, New Jersey, contributed to this report.

Does Trump have power to pardon himself? It's complicated

By ERIC TUCKER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump has declared that he has the "absolute right" to issue a pardon to himself. Yet the law is much murkier than his confidence suggests.

No president has attempted to pardon himself while in office, so if Trump tries to do so in the next six weeks, he will be venturing into legally untested territory without clear guidance from the Constitution or

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from judges. Legal experts are divided on an inherently ambiguous question that was left vague by the Founding Fathers and has never had to be definitively resolved in court.

"It's impossible to anticipate every factual scenario that could come up under a legal provision. This is why we have the courts," said University of Baltimore law professor Kimberly Wehle.

Talk of a potential pardon comes with Trump facing a swirl of investigations as he prepares to leave office, including New York State inquiries into whether he misled tax authorities, banks or business partners.

In favor of a self-pardon is the broad power the Constitution affords a president when it comes to issuing clemency for federal crimes — both charged and not-yet charged — and the absence of any law or language that explicitly prohibits such an act.

But some scholars say a self-pardon collides with other provisions of the Constitution or even fundamental principles of law. The Constitution's text — affording the president "power to grant reprieves and pardons for offenses against the United States, except in cases of impeachment" — can be read to suggest that the Founding Fathers envisioned some sort of limitations on a president's pardon power. It could also mean the power is to be used on someone else, not yourself.

"You could say, implicit in the definition of a pardon or implicit in the notion of granting a pardon — because the Constitution uses the word 'grant' — is that it's two separate people," said Brian Kalt, a law professor at Michigan State University. "You can't grant something to yourself. You can't pardon yourself."

It could also seem to run afoul of the fundamental principle that no one — in this case, a president issuing himself a pardon — may serve as a judge in his own case.

That was the reasoning cited in a 1974 opinion from the Justice Department's Office of Legal Counsel, dated days before President Richard Nixon's resignation, that said "it would seem" a president could not pardon himself.

But that same opinion does suggest a potential workaround, envisioning as legally acceptable a scenario in which a president declares himself temporarily unfit for office under the Constitution's 25th Amendment and transfers power to the vice president, who could then issue a pardon. The president could then either resign or resume his duties, the opinion said.

The question of whether Trump will do it, though, is as unsettled as the question of whether he can.

A self-pardon, which Trump has openly mused about, would on one hand be fitting as a final norm-shattering act in a presidency defined by them. But it might also be at odds with his oft-stated conviction that he has done nothing wrong for which he needs to be absolved.

Regardless, the question has occupied Trump's attention for years.

In June 2018, 13 months into special counsel Robert Mueller's investigation into ties between the Trump campaign and Russia, the president tweeted, "As has been stated by numerous legal scholars, I have the absolute right to PARDON myself, but why would I do that when I have done nothing wrong?"

Mueller's report laid out facts that federal prosecutors could potentially use as the basis for an obstruction of justice prosecution, though the odds of that are unclear.

If prosecutors were to bring a case against Trump in spite of any pardon he grants himself, the issue could wind up in court and before a judge for the first time.

Mark Tushnet, a retired Harvard Law School professor, said he doubted any court would overturn a presidential self-pardon, though he said such an act would constitute an abuse of power that would have been abhorrent to the framers of the Constitution.

"For them, I believe it would have been unthinkable that the American people would ever elect the kind of person who would pardon himself. Which is why they didn't say anything about the possibility," Tushnet said.

Since presidential pardons don't cover state crimes, it would seem unlikely a self-pardon would extend in any event to the state investigations Trump is facing.

But, Tushnet said, Trump's lawyers could conceivably try to invoke double-jeopardy arguments to claim that a federal pardon should bar any New York state prosecution based on the same conduct.

On the federal level, a self-pardon obviously handcuffs the Justice Department under President-elect Joe

Biden from pursuing any federal case against Trump. But it would also spare Biden from having to face questions about a prosecution that would risk distracting from his political agenda and keeping Trump in the spotlight.

Ethan Leib, a law professor at Fordham University, said it is a well-established norm that presidents are supposed to act in the public interest rather than for personal gain. In this case, he said, it is possible Trump could argue that a self-pardon is in the public interest to the extent it would pre-empt a divisive prosecution that could potentially upend democracy and "trigger civil war."

But, he noted, "The irony is this particular president does not seem particularly public spirited and public-interest minded."

As virus spreads, Kansas hospital runs out of staff

By HEATHER HOLLINGSWORTH The Associated Press

The radiology technician slept in an RV in the parking lot of his rural Kansas hospital for more than a week because his co-workers were out sick with COVID-19 and no one else was available to take X-rays.

A doctor and physician assistant tested positive on the same day in November, briefly leaving the hospital without anyone who could write prescriptions or oversee patient care. The hospital is full, but diverting patients isn't an option because surrounding medical centers are overwhelmed.

The situation at Rush County Memorial Hospital in La Crosse illustrates the depths of the COVID-19 crisis in rural America at a time when the virus is killing more than 2,000 people a day and inundating hospitals.

The virus is sidelining nurses, doctors and medical staff nationwide, but the problem is particularly dire in rural communities like La Crosse because they don't have much of a bullpen - or many places to send patients with regional hospitals full.

The staff shortages have forced people like Eric Lewallen, a Gulf War veteran and alfalfa farmer who moonlights as a radiology technician, to mount a last line of defense. To keep the hospital open, he had no choice but to start living in his RV in the parking lot because he needed to be on site as the only remaining healthy staffer to perform X-rays.

"I'm it," Lewallen said shortly after begging the hospital laundry staff to start washing his scrubs because he had run out of clean ones.

"To keep a critical access hospital open, you have to have X-ray and lab functioning," he said. "If one of those go down, you go on diversion and you lose your ER at that point. We don't want that to happen, especially for the community."

La Crosse, a town of 1,300 people that dubs itself as the "Barbed Wire Capital of the World" and is home to a barbed wire museum, is like many small towns struggling with the virus. Case numbers have soared, there's an outbreak at the nursing home, and its county has opted out of Democratic Gov. Laura Kelly's latest mask mandate.

And there are few larger medical centers to send its sickest patients with the rest of the region also overrun by the virus.

The larger Hays Medical Center, which is just 25 miles (40.23 kilometers) away from La Crosse, was always willing to take patients that needed more advanced care in the past. But it turned away 103 transfers in November alone. In the 14 years prior, it had rejected transfers just twice, said Dr. Heather Harris, the medical director there.

Physician assistant Kai Englert was able to fill in for six days at La Crosse, overseeing several COVID-19 patients, one of whom died after no larger hospital would take the patient. The La Crosse hospital doesn't have a ventilator and the oxygen it provided wasn't sufficient with the patient's "chest full of COVID." But Englert doubts more advanced would have made much difference because the patient was so sick.

He said the message from large hospitals is: "We are not going to waste a bed on someone who is going to die anyway. They can die in a small town and that is the sad reality of the situation."

In November, the hospital had to close its attached clinic and turn to a temporary staffing agency to keep the emergency room open after the doctor and physician assistant tested positive for the virus on

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the same day. The nurse practitioner was also out on medical leave. Currently, a certified nursing assistant is quarantining, and at least two other nurses tested positive previously.

The doctor and physician assistant returned Thursday after finishing their quarantine and were swamped with a backlog of patients.

Michael Cooper, the hospital's CEO, said it was a stroke of luck that he could find anyone to fill in while they were gone given the level of strain on the state's hospitals. According to the Kansas Hospital Association, 42% of them are reporting staffing shortages.

"You go through your contingency plans and in the back of your mind you are thinking, 'I am going to have to go on diversion and find a bed for these patients in a time where there are no beds to be found anywhere in the state,'" he said. "That is the crisis that I was really concerned about. If I can't find a provider that can check on these patients then I am going to have to get rid of these patients. And there is no where to send them."

Cooper said he would like to have more nurses, too, because of the volume of patients the hospital is treating, but staffing agencies are charging \$140 to \$240 an hour. "That is more than I pay my doctor." Instead he is encouraging overtime, which is up about 20 or 25%.

Some of the nurses have taken him up on the offer, working a week straight as the virus surges in the county of 3,300 residents.

"We just kind of piece it together," said Jolene Morgan, a registered nurse who suspects she contracted the illness in September. She quarantined for 14 days, although she was never tested.

Lewallen, the radiology technician, acknowledges it might get worse but said everyone is working hard from the kitchen and laundry staff to the nurses. The veteran is trying to keep the proper perspective after his experience in the military.

"It's not like anyone shooting at us or anything, so I am confident we will get through it alright. It will just be a tough spell for awhile," he said.

US schools go back and forth on in-person learning

By LISA MARIE PANE Associated Press

New York City reopened classrooms to many of its youngest students Monday in what has become a frustrating, stop-and-start process in many school systems around the U.S. because of the alarming surge in the coronavirus.

The nation's largest school district, with 1 million students, had shut down in-person learning just two weeks ago but decided to bring back preschoolers and elementary school children after parents pushed for it and the mayor concluded it was safe to do so with beefed-up testing.

In contrast, school systems in Detroit, Boston, Indianapolis, Philadelphia and suburban Minneapolis in recent weeks abandoned in-person classes or dropped plans to bring students back because of soaring infections.

The retreat in some places and the push forward in others are happening as the virus comes back with a vengeance across much of the U.S., with deaths per day averaging over 2,200 — about the same level seen during the very deadliest stretch of the outbreak, last spring in the New York City area.

New cases are averaging close to 200,000 a day, the highest level on record, and the number of Americans now in the hospital has reached all-time highs at over 100,000.

The virus is blamed for more than 280,000 deaths and over 14.8 million confirmed infections in the U.S, with the crisis widely expected to worsen in the coming weeks because of Americans' disregard of warnings to stay home and avoid others over Thanksgiving.

Health officials say the virus does not appear to be spreading rapidly in classrooms themselves, perhaps because children may be less likely to spread or contract the virus. Instead, many cases among youngsters and educators have been traced to activities outside school.

Still, the infections have alarmed parents and educators, and the illnesses and quarantines among teachers and other employees have left some schools short of adult supervision.

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At the same time, parents and others have complained that children are not getting a good education at home in front of a computer. And the switch to remote learning has caused hardship for many families by forcing parents to watch over their children instead of going to work.

In South Carolina, where COVID-19 cases have spiked to levels higher than those seen when the state was one of the nation's hot spots over the summer, school districts are considering cutting back on how much time students spend in the classroom. More than 2,450 new COVID-19 cases have been reported in South Carolina in each of the past three days.

A teacher group there is asking districts to go back to all-virtual teaching until the spike can be flattened, citing not just health concerns but a shortage of adults to keep students safe.

The plea was given more emotional weight after the death on Nov. 11 of 50-year-old Staci Blakely, a third grade teacher in Lexington.

At least four school districts in South Carolina have returned to all-virtual learning. The largest so far, Orangeburg County, sent its 12,000 students home to learn, starting Monday, until at least the end of Christmas break. Nearly a quarter of the state's districts are teaching in person every day.

In New York, Mayor Bill de Blasio announced just last month that school buildings would close after the city crossed a threshold of 3% in the share of coronavirus tests coming back positive for the virus. The rate is now 5%, according to the city, but de Blasio said new testing protocols made it safe to reopen classrooms, in part because few infections have been linked to transmission inside schools.

About 190,000 students are eligible to return. Middle schools and high schools will remain all-remote at least until after the holiday break.

"This is a good day for New York City, even against a tough backdrop," de Blasio said Monday.

Miriam Petrovitch was among staffers welcoming children back at an elementary school on Manhattan's Lower East Side.

"We miss them dearly," Petrovitch, who works as a parent coordinator, said at a union news conference. "There's no school without children."

After closing schools in March, New York became one of the first large U.S. cities to reopen classrooms in September, but the majority of parents chose online-only learning for their children. Other parents chose a hybrid in which students were in their classrooms only a few days a week.

Since the beginning of the New York City school year, more than 1,740 students and 2,240 staff in the public system have gotten the virus, according to city statistics.

It's been a struggle for American schoolchildren for the entire year — academically, psychologically and physically.

School districts across the country, both big and small, have reported an increase in the number of students failing classes. Students for whom English is not their native language, students with disabilities and poor children are suffering the most.

Biden's health team offers glimpse of his COVID-19 strategy

By RICARDO ALONSO-ZALDIVAR Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President-elect Joe Biden's choices for his health care team point to a stronger federal role in the nation's COVID-19 strategy, restoration of a guiding stress on science and an emphasis on equitable distribution of vaccines and treatments.

With Monday's announcement of California Attorney General Xavier Becerra as his health secretary and a half dozen other key appointments, Biden aims to leave behind the personality dramas that sometimes flourished under President Donald Trump. He hopes to return the federal response to a more methodical approach, seeking results by applying scientific knowledge in what he says will be a transparent and disciplined manner.

"We are still going to have a federal, state and local partnership," commented Dr. Georges Benjamin, executive director of the nonprofit American Public Health Association. "I just think there is going to be better guidance from the federal government and they are going to work more collaboratively with the

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states.”

In a sense, what Biden has is not quite yet a team, but a collection of players drafted for key positions. Some have already been working together as members of Biden’s coronavirus advisory board. Others will have to suit up quickly.

By announcing most of the key positions in one package, Biden is signaling that he expects his appointees to work together, and not as lords of their own bureaucratic fiefdoms.

“These are not turf-conscious people,” said Drew Altman, CEO of the nonpartisan Kaiser Family Foundation, a clearinghouse for health care information and analysis. But “it’s up to the (Biden) administration to make it an effective team.”

A Washington saying, sometimes attributed to the late President Ronald Reagan, holds that “personnel is policy.” Here’s what Biden’s health care picks say about the policies his administration is likely to follow:

STRONGER FEDERAL MANAGEMENT

The selection of Becerra as health secretary and businessman Jeff Zients as White House coronavirus coordinator point to a more assertive federal coronavirus role.

Under Trump, states were sometimes left to figure things out themselves, as when the White House initially called on states to test all nursing home residents without providing an infrastructure, only to have to rectify that omission later.

Zients has made a name for himself rescuing government programs that went off course, such as the “Obamacare” HealthCare.gov website. Becerra has experience managing California’s attorney general’s office, which is bigger than some state governments.

Former Health and Human Services Secretary Kathleen Sebelius knows both men from her service in the Obama administration and says she does not see them working at cross purposes.

A Secretary Becerra “can’t get up every morning and think only COVID,” she said. He’ll “work on COVID and coordinate the assets of the FDA, CDC and NIH, but he’ll have lots of other things to do.” Meanwhile “Zients will be the railroad engineer making sure the trains run on time.”

States are ready for the feds to take on a more assertive role, she said. “Governors — Republicans and Democrats — are eager to finally have a federal partner,” she said. “They have felt not only on their own, but unclear about what was coming out of the White House.”

SCIENCE AT THE FOREFRONT

Biden’s selection of infectious disease expert Dr. Rochelle Walensky to head the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the elevation of Dr. Anthony Fauci to medical adviser, and the return of Dr. Vivek Murthy as surgeon general are being read in the medical community as a restoration of the traditionally important role of science in public health emergencies.

“It means that the response plan will be grounded in health science,” said Dr. Nadine Gracia, executive vice president of the Trust for America’s Health, a nonprofit that works to promote public health.

Under Trump, “those of us who practice in medicine today have been dismayed,” said Dr. Wendy Armstrong, an infectious disease specialist at Emory University medical school. “The individuals with the greatest expertise have not had the voice many of us wish they would have had. ... This to me signals that the government is ready to put expertise in place that can guide its plan.”

Walensky, a widely recognized HIV/AIDS expert, got her coronavirus experience first hand as chief of infectious diseases at Massachusetts General Hospital in Boston during the first wave this spring.

“She was a real leader when it came to COVID,” said Dr. Rajesh Gandhi, an infectious disease physician at Mass General. “She organized infection control policies within the hospital, she organized treatment studies, she was organizing testing and leading testing.”

A FOCUS ON EQUITY

Even more than the nomination of a Latino politician for health secretary, Biden’s selection of Yale University’s Dr. Marcella Nunez-Smith is being read as a sign that his administration will work for equitable distribution of vaccines and treatments among racial and ethnic minorities, who have suffered a disproportionately high toll of COVID-19 deaths.

That challenge faces widespread skepticism among minorities that the health care system has their best interests in mind.

Early indications are that the vaccines are highly effective, said Altman of the Kaiser Foundation. But polling indicates a strong undertow of doubts, especially among African Americans.

"While states will be able to make the final decisions on who gets the vaccine, there has to be guidance around those decisions so that they are fair and equitable across the country," Altman said. "You don't want to have the kind of variations that people will look and say, 'This just wasn't fair.'"

Years of research laid groundwork for speedy COVID-19 shots

By LAURAN NEERGAARD AP Medical Writer

How could scientists race out COVID-19 vaccines so fast without cutting corners? A head start helped -- over a decade of behind-the-scenes research that had new vaccine technology poised for a challenge just as the coronavirus erupted.

"The speed is a reflection of years of work that went before," Dr. Anthony Fauci, the top U.S. infectious disease expert, told The Associated Press. "That's what the public has to understand."

Creating vaccines and having results from rigorous studies less than a year after the world discovered a never-before-seen disease is incredible, cutting years off normal development. But the two U.S. frontrunners are made in a way that promises speedier development may become the norm -- especially if they prove to work long-term as well as early testing suggests.

"Abject giddiness," is how Dr. C. Buddy Creech, a Vanderbilt University vaccine expert, described scientists' reactions when separate studies showed the two candidates were about 95% effective.

"I think we enter into a golden age of vaccinology by having these types of new technologies," Creech said at a briefing of the Infectious Diseases Society of America.

Both shots -- one made by Pfizer and BioNTech, the other by Moderna and the National Institutes of Health -- are so-called messenger RNA, or mRNA, vaccines, a brand-new technology. U.S. regulators are set to decide this month whether to allow emergency use, paving the way for rationed shots that will start with health workers and nursing home residents.

Billions in company and government funding certainly sped up vaccine development -- and the unfortunately huge number of infections meant scientists didn't have to wait long to learn the shots appeared to be working.

But long before COVID-19 was on the radar, the groundwork was laid in large part by two different streams of research, one at the NIH and the other at the University of Pennsylvania -- and because scientists had learned a bit about other coronaviruses from prior SARS and MERS outbreaks.

"When the pandemic started, we were on a strong footing both in terms of the science" and experience handling mRNA, said Dr. Tal Zaks, chief medical officer of Massachusetts-based Moderna.

Traditionally, making vaccines required growing viruses or pieces of viruses -- often in giant vats of cells or, like most flu shots, in chicken eggs -- and then purifying them before next steps in brewing shots.

The mRNA approach is radically different. It starts with a snippet of genetic code that carries instructions for making proteins. Pick the right virus protein to target, and the body turns into a mini vaccine factory.

"Instead of growing up a virus in a 50,000-liter drum and inactivating it, we could deliver RNA and our bodies make the protein, which starts the immune response," said Penn's Dr. Drew Weissman.

Fifteen years ago, Weissman's lab was trying to harness mRNA to make a variety of drugs and vaccines. But researchers found simply injecting the genetic code into animals caused harmful inflammation.

Weissman and a Penn colleague now at BioNTech, Katalin Kariko, figured out a tiny modification to a building block of lab-grown RNA that let it slip undetected past inflammation-triggering sentinels.

"They could essentially make a stealth RNA," said Pfizer chief scientific officer Dr. Philip Dormitzer.

Other researchers added a fat coating, called lipid nanoparticles, that helped stealth RNA easily get inside cells and start production of the target protein.

Meanwhile at the NIH, Dr. Barney Graham's team figured out the right target -- how to use the aptly

named "spike" protein that coats the coronavirus to properly prime the immune system.

The right design is critical. It turns out the surface proteins that let a variety of viruses latch onto human cells are shape-shifters — rearranging their form before and after they've fused into place. Brew a vaccine using the wrong shape and it won't block infection.

"You could put the same molecule in one way and the same molecule in another way and get an entirely different response," Fauci explained.

That was a discovery in 2013, when Graham, deputy director of NIH's Vaccine Research Center, and colleague Jason McLellan were investigating a decades-old failed vaccine against RSV, a childhood respiratory illness.

They homed in on the right structure for an RSV protein and learned genetic tweaks that stabilized the protein in the correct shape for vaccine development. They went on to apply that lesson to other viruses, including researching a vaccine for MERS, a COVID-19 cousin, although it hadn't gotten far when the pandemic began.

"That's what put us in a position to do this rapidly," Graham told the AP in February before the NIH's vaccine was first tested in people. "Once you have that atomic-level detail, you can engineer the protein to be stable."

Likewise, Germany's BioNTech in 2018 had partnered with New York-based Pfizer to develop a more modern mRNA-based flu vaccine, giving both companies some early knowledge about how to handle the technology.

"This was all brewing. This didn't come out of nowhere," said Pfizer's Dormitzer.

Last January, shortly after the new coronavirus was reported in China, BioNTech CEO Ugur Sahin switched gears and used the same method to create a COVID-19 vaccine.

Moderna also was using mRNA to develop vaccines against other germs including the mosquito-borne Zika virus -- research showing promise but that wasn't moving rapidly since the Zika outbreak had fizzled.

Then at the NIH, Graham woke up on Saturday Jan. 11 to see Chinese scientists had shared the genetic map of the new coronavirus. His team got to work on the right-shaped spike protein. Days later, they sent Moderna that recipe -- and the vaccine race was on.

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.

Lawmakers who met with Giuliani scramble after COVID news

By AAMER MADHANI and DAVID EGGERT Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump said Monday his personal attorney Rudy Giuliani was "doing very well" after being hospitalized with the coronavirus as lawmakers in battleground states that Giuliani visited last week scrambled to make sure they did not contract the virus.

The 76-year-old former New York mayor, hospitalized in Washington, had traveled extensively to battleground states to press Trump's quixotic effort to get legislators to overturn his election loss to Joe Biden and subvert the November vote. On numerous occasions, Giuliani met with officials for hours at a time without wearing a mask, including hearings last week with state lawmakers in Arizona, Georgia and Michigan.

Fallout from Giuliani's diagnosis continued Monday as the Michigan House announced it had canceled its voting session scheduled for Tuesday. Giuliani spoke for hours last week before a Republican-led committee in Lansing investigating alleged election irregularities.

Michigan's move came after the Arizona legislature announced Sunday that it would close for a week out of an abundance of caution "for recent cases and concerns relating to COVID-19."

"Multiple representatives have requested time to receive results from recent COVID-19 tests before returning to session, out of an abundance of caution," Michigan House Speaker Lee Chatfield, a Republican who met with Giuliani before the hearing, said in a statement. "The CDC guidelines would not consider

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them close contacts with anyone, even if Mayor Giuliani had been positive, but they want to go above and beyond in the interest of public safety. With the recent spike in COVID cases nationwide, this makes sense.”

The health department in Ingham County, where Lansing is located, said several people who attended the Michigan committee meeting with Giuliani on Wednesday must quarantine at least through Saturday. Health officer Linda Vail said she consulted with the state health department, which agrees that “it is extremely likely that Giuliani was contagious during his testimony.”

In Georgia, state Sen. William Ligon Jr., chairman of the subcommittee Giuliani testified before, urged those who had come in close contact with Giuliani “to take every precaution and follow all requisite guidelines to ensure their health and safety.” 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. The Georgia legislature is not currently in session.

Trump, who announced Giuliani’s positive test in a Sunday afternoon tweet, told reporters he spoke with Giuliani on Monday. Giuliani was exhibiting symptoms when he was admitted to Georgetown University Medical Center on Sunday, according to a person familiar with the matter who was not authorized to comment publicly.

“Rudy’s doing very well,” Trump said Monday. “I just spoke to him. No temperature.”

At Wednesday’s 4-1/2-hour hearing in Lansing, Giuliani 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 last 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 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.”

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.”

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, also contracted the virus.

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.

—
Associated Press writers Jonathan Lemire in Wilmington, Del., Zeke Miller in Washington, and Ben Nadler in Atlanta contributed reporting.

Why are some scientists turning away from brain scans?

By MARION RENAULT Associated Press

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NEW YORK (AP) — Brain scans offer a tantalizing glimpse into the mind's mysteries, promising an almost X-ray-like vision into how we feel pain, interpret faces and wiggle fingers.

Studies of brain images have suggested that Republicans and Democrats have visibly different thinking, that overweight adults have stronger responses to pictures of food and that it's possible to predict a sober person's likelihood of relapse.

But such buzzy findings are coming under growing scrutiny as scientists grapple with the fact that some brain scan research doesn't seem to hold up.

Such studies have been criticized for relying on too few subjects and for incorrectly analyzing or interpreting data. Researchers have also realized a person's brain scan results can differ from day to day — even under identical conditions — casting a doubt on how to document consistent patterns.

With so many questions being raised, some researchers are acknowledging the scans' limitations and working to overcome them or simply turning to other tests.

Earlier this year, Duke University researcher Annchen Knodt's lab published the latest paper challenging the reliability of common brain scan projects, based on about 60 studies of the past decade including her own.

"We found this poor result across the board," Knodt said. "We're basically discrediting much of the work we've done."

WATCHING BRAINS 'LIGHT UP'

The research being re-examined relies on a technique called functional magnetic resonance imaging, or fMRI.

Using large magnets, the scans detect where oxygenated blood rushes to when someone does an activity — such as memorizing a list of words or touching fingertips together — allowing scientists to indirectly measure brain activity.

When the technology debuted in the early 1990s, it opened a seemingly revolutionary window into the human brain.

Other previous imaging techniques tracked brain activity through electrodes placed on the skull or radioactive tracers injected into the bloodstream. In comparison, fMRI seemed like a fast, high-resolution and non-invasive alternative.

A flurry of papers and press coverage followed the technique's invention, pointing to parts of the brain that "light up" when we fall in love, feel pain, gamble or make difficult decisions. But as years passed, troubling evidence began to surface that challenged some of those findings.

"It's a very powerful thing to show a picture of the brain. It lends itself to abuse, in some ways," said Damian Stanley, a brain scientist at Adelphi University. "People eat them up, things get overblown. Somewhere in there, we lost the nuance."

QUESTIONS EMERGE

In 2009, a group of scientists investigated papers that had linked individual differences in brain activity to various personality types. They found many used a type of analysis that reported only the strongest correlations, leading to potentially coincidental conclusions. A "disturbingly large" amount of fMRI research on emotion and personality relied on these "seriously defective research methods," the group wrote.

Later that year, another pair of researchers demonstrated that the raw results of imaging scans — without the proper statistical corrections — could detect brain activity in a dead Atlantic salmon. Four years ago, another group of scientists claimed a different common statistical error had led thousands of fMRI projects astray.

This year, Stanford University researchers described what happened when they gave the same fMRI data to 70 groups of independent neuroscientists. No two teams used the same analysis methods and, overall, the researchers did not always come to the same conclusions about what the data demonstrated about brain activity.

"In the end, we probably jumped on the fMRI bandwagon a little too fast. It's reached the threshold of concern for a lot of us," said Duke neuroscientist Anita Disney.

THE NEXT BIG THING

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With doubts growing, many labs have become more cautious about what imaging techniques to use in efforts to unravel the average brain's 110,000 miles (177,000 kilometers) of nerve fibers.

Yale University researcher Joy Hirsch, for example, wants to understand "the social brain" — what happens when people talk, touch or make eye contact. She's opted out of fMRI, since it can only be used on a single person who must remain perfectly still for imagining inside a large scanner.

Instead, Hirsch uses an alternative technology that bounces laser lights off of a fiber optic cable-laced skullcap into the brain to detect blood flow. The technique, functional near infrared spectroscopy, allows her subjects to move freely during scanning and permits her to study live social interactions between several people.

Disney also shies away from fMRI, which she says is too crude of an instrument for her forays into the molecular relationship between brain chemistry, behavior and states like arousal and attentiveness.

That doesn't mean everyone is walking away from fMRI.

Some surgeons depend on the technique to map a patient's brain before surgeries, and the technology has proven itself useful for broadly mapping the neural mechanisms of diseases such as schizophrenia or Alzheimer's.

Today, optogenetics — an emerging technique that uses light to activate neurons — is poised to be brain science's next siren technology.

Some say it's too early to know whether they'll adopt it as a tool.

"In that early hyper-sexy phase of a new technique, it is actually really difficult to get people to do the basic work of understanding its limitations," Disney said.

Stanley, for one, said he gravitates toward that basic work and has spent years advocating for a more measured use of brain scans, even if it means less fanfare. "People are much more cautious — and that's a good thing," he said.

The evolving understanding of fMRI and its limits shows science at work and should ultimately make people more confident in the results, not less, said Stanford brain scientist Russ Poldrack.

"We want to show people you have to pay attention to this stuff," Poldrack said. "Otherwise people are going to lose faith in our ability to answer questions."

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.

The Dylan catalog, a 60-year rock 'n' roll odyssey, is sold

By DAVID BAUDER Associated Press Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — To many music lovers, Bob Dylan's songbook is priceless. Well, now he's put a price on it.

The Nobel Prize-winning songwriter has sold publishing rights to his catalog of more than 600 songs, one of the greatest treasures in popular music, to the Universal Music Publishing Group, it was announced on Monday.

His collection includes modern standards like "Blowin' in the Wind," "Tangled Up in Blue" and "Like a Rolling Stone" through to this year's 17-minute opus on the Kennedy assassination, "Murder Most Foul." The body of work may only be matched for its breadth and influence by the Beatles, whose songs were re-acquired by Paul McCartney in 2017.

The price was not disclosed, but industry experts have suggested the sale is in the range of \$300 million to a half-billion dollars.

The sale gives Universal the right, in perpetuity, to lease use of Dylan's compositions to advertisers and movie, television or video game producers, or anyone who thinks his words and melodies could enhance their product.

Dylan's team cautioned anyone against thinking this is a sign that the 79-year-old music legend is checking out. Rather, it seems like he's taking advantage of a favorable business climate to find a comfortable home for his life's work.

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In cultural terms, Dylan's catalog is "quite literally priceless," said Anthony DeCurtis, a veteran music writer and contributing editor at Rolling Stone.

"It has been 60 years and it's still going strong," DeCurtis said. "There's no reason to believe there's going to be any diminishment in its significance."

Dylan topped the Rolling Stone list of the 100 Greatest Songwriters of All Time in 2015 and "Like A Rolling Stone" was named by the magazine as the best song ever written. He won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 2016, the only songwriter to receive the award.

Until Dylan and the Beatles, it was considered unusual for popular music songwriters to perform their own work. In an illustration of his lasting influence, 38-year-old Nashville-based singer Emma Swift is releasing a collection of Dylan covers this week, "Blonde on the Tracks." The title is a nod to the classic Dylan albums "Blonde on Blonde" and "Blood on the Tracks."

Dylan's songs have been recorded more than 6,000 times, by artists from dozens of countries, cultures and music genres. Notable releases include the Byrds' chart-topping version of "Mr. Tambourine Man," Jimi Hendrix's reworking of "All Along the Watchtower" and Adele's cover of "Make You Feel My Love."

Events have conspired to make song publishing a more valuable asset. Interest rates are favorable for companies looking to invest, and songs are seen as a reliable source of long-term income in an industry where streaming has taken control and the live concert business has at least temporarily collapsed due to the coronavirus pandemic, said Alan Light, a veteran music writer and host of his own SiriusXM show.

Given the pace of change in the industry, "songs seem to be the place to place your bets," Light said.

New publishing and talent management companies like Primary Wave and Merck Mercuriadis' Hipgnosis Song Fund have sprung up to compete with long-time players in the industry like Universal and Sony. Stevie Nicks recently sold an 80% stake in her music to Primary Wave for a reported \$100 million.

Despite the sale, Dylan does not lose total control over his work, a longtime fear of many musicians. The Universal deal does not include rights to Dylan's own recordings of his material, so if Universal is approached to use Dylan's recording of "Lay Lady Lay," for example, that would have to be cleared by the artist.

Even in cases where Universal has control, the company is unlikely to risk doing something where Dylan would publicly object to how his work is being used. He's never been a purist when it comes to commercial possibilities, having recorded ads for Victoria's Secret and Cadillac.

Dylan's songs, however, will long outlive him.

"It's the kind of thing, if you want it done right, you want to take care of it yourself while you're still at a stage in your life when you can do it right," said Robert Levine, Billboard's industry editorial director.

Dylan has performed regularly even as he's aged, so much so that fans have joked he's been on the "Never-Ending Tour" since the late 1980s. Only the pandemic has grounded him. He continues to record, with this year's disc, "Rough and Rowdy Ways," being well-received critically.

Judging from a tweet by David Crosby on Monday, other veteran musicians may be looking for their own deals. Crosby said he's selling his catalog, too, noting that he can't work because of the pandemic and that streaming has cut off record sales as a source of income.

"I have a family and a mortgage and I have to take care of them so it's my only option," Crosby said. "I'm sure the others feel the same."

Associated Press writers Hillel Italie in New York and Hillary Fox in London contributed to this report.

VIRUS TODAY: Nearly 200,000 cases a day; a pick to lead HHS

By The Associated Press

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

THREE THINGS TO KNOW TODAY

— The race to complete a COVID-19 vaccine has occurred at breathtaking speed, the culmination of years of research.

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— President-elect Joe Biden's choice to lead the Department of Health and Human Services will inherit an agency in the midst of a mass vaccination program all while dealing with soaring deaths and hospitalizations from COVID-19.

— President Donald Trump's personal attorney Rudy Giuliani is in the hospital with the virus, but the president says he's doing well. The former New York mayor has been traveling the country — often without a mask — in trying to subvert the president's loss.

THE NUMBERS: The nation is approaching the point where it is averaging 200,000 new confirmed cases per day. As of Sunday, the seven-day average for cases was more than 196,000.

QUOTABLE: "We kept trying to find a way. But eventually we realized there wasn't one." - preschool operator Mary De La Rosa on the struggles to keep her school open amid the pandemic.

ICYMI: In an illustration of rampant staff shortages in rural America, a Kansas hospital has been running dangerously short of medical workers. A doctor and physician's assistant contracted the virus in November, and an X-ray technician was living out of an RV in the parking lot so he could be on site with co-workers out sick.

ON THE HORIZON: Can a sharply divided Congress come together and pass a virus relief package? Congressional leaders are in the midst of talks and a key sticking point is how much the government should give to Americans in the form of direct payments.

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

UK's Johnson to head to Brussels amid Brexit talks deadlock

By RAF CASERT and JILL LAWLESS Associated Press

BRUSSELS (AP) — More than four years after helping set Britain's course out of the European Union, Prime Minister Boris Johnson is headed to EU headquarters to try to finish the job.

With less than a month until the U.K.'s economic rupture with the European Union and talks on a new trade deal at a standstill on three crucial issues, Johnson and European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen agreed Monday to meet in person "in the coming days" to see whether they can find common ground.

Brussels is dangerous territory for Brexit-backing British leaders. Johnson's predecessor, Theresa May, came time and again to negotiate a Brexit deal, only to see it repeatedly rejected by her own Parliament, ending her top-level career. Johnson will be hoping for a quick in-and-out that leaves his reputation intact and his country on course for a free trade deal with its biggest economic partner.

Johnson and von der Leyen spoke by phone Monday for the second time in 48 hours, as their negotiators were stuck in gridlocked trade talks. They said after the call that "significant differences" remained on three key issues — fishing rights, fair-competition rules and the governance of future disputes — and "the conditions for finalizing an agreement are not there."

The two leaders said in a joint statement they planned to discuss the remaining differences "in a physical meeting in Brussels in the coming days."

Despite the continuing impasse, plans for a top-level meeting will be seen as a sign there is still a chance of a deal, though No. 10 Downing St. said the situation was "tricky" and failure a distinct possibility.

No timing was given for the face-to-face meeting. Leaders of the 27 EU nations are due to hold a two-day summit in Brussels starting Thursday.

EU chief negotiator Michel Barnier had no news of a breakthrough when he briefed ambassadors of the 27 member states early Monday on the chances of a deal with London before the Dec. 31 deadline.

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

Penny Mordaunt, a junior minister for Brexit planning, told lawmakers in the House of Commons that the "level playing field" — competition rules that Britain must agree to to gain access to the EU market — was the most difficult unresolved issue.

Officials on both sides said there were also major differences over the legal oversight of any trade deal

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and European boats' access to U.K. waters.

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.

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 because the U.K. does almost half its trade with the bloc.

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 end-of-year deadline.

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 on Monday revived 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 is asking lawmakers to put them back in.

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.

But the British government offered the bloc an olive branch on the issue, saying it would remove the lawbreaking clauses if a joint U.K.-EU committee on Northern Ireland found solutions in the coming days. It said talks in the committee, which continued Monday, had been constructive.

Jill Lawless reported from London. Samuel Petrequin contributed from Brussels.

Follow all AP stories about Brexit and British politics at <https://apnews.com/Brexit>

Millions of hungry Americans turn to food banks for 1st time

By SHARON COHEN AP National Writer

The deadly pandemic that tore through the nation's heartland struck just as Aaron Crawford was in a moment of crisis. He was looking for work, his wife needed surgery, then the virus began eating away at her work hours and her paycheck.

The Crawfords had no savings, mounting bills and a growing dread: What if they ran out of food? The couple had two boys, 5 and 10, and boxes of macaroni and cheese from the dollar store could go only so far.

A 37-year-old Navy vet, Crawford saw himself as self-reliant. Asking for food made him uncomfortable. "I felt like I was a failure," he says. "It's this whole stigma ... this mindset that you're this guy who can't provide for his family, that you're a deadbeat."

Hunger is a harsh reality in the richest country in the world. Even during times of prosperity, schools hand out millions of hot meals a day to children, and desperate elderly Americans are sometimes forced to choose between medicine and food.

Now, in the pandemic of 2020, with illness, job loss and business closures, millions more Americans are worried about empty refrigerators and barren cupboards. Food banks are doling out meals at a rapid pace

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and an Associated Press data analysis found a sharp rise in the amount of food distributed compared with last year. Meanwhile, some folks are skipping meals so their children can eat and others are depending on cheap food that lacks nutrition.

Those fighting hunger say they've never seen anything like this in America, even during the Great Recession of 2007-2009.

The first place many Americans are finding relief is a neighborhood food pantry, most connected to vast networks of nonprofits. Tons of food move each day from grocery store discards and government handouts to warehouse distribution centers, and then to the neighborhood charity.

The Crawfords turned to the Family Resource Centers and Food Shelf, part of 360 Communities, a non-profit 15 minutes from their apartment in Apple Valley, Minnesota. When needed, they receive monthly boxes of fresh produce, dairy, deli, meat and other basics — enough food to fill two grocery carts. If that runs out, they can get an emergency package to tide them over for the rest of the month.

Crawford's wife, Sheyla, had insisted they seek help; her hours had been cut at the day care center where she worked. At first, Crawford was embarrassed to go the food shelf; he worried he'd bump into someone he knew. He now sees it differently.

"It didn't make me a bad man or a terrible husband or father," he says. "On the contrary, I was actually doing something to make sure that my wife and kids had ... food to eat."

The history books are filled with iconic images of America's struggles against hunger. Among the most memorable are the Depression-era photos of men standing in breadlines, huddled in long coats and fedoras, their eyes large with fear. An overhead sign reads: "Free Soup. Coffee and a Doughnut for the Unemployed."

This year's portrait of hunger has a distinctively bird's eye view: Enormous traffic jams captured from drone-carrying cameras. Cars inching along, each driver waiting hours for a box or bag of food. From Anaheim, California to San Antonio, Texas to Toledo, Ohio and Orlando, Florida and points in-between, thousands of vehicles carrying hungry people queued up for miles across the horizon. In New York, and other large cities, people stand, waiting for blocks on end.

The newly hungry have similar stories: Their industry collapsed, they lost a job, their hours were cut, an opportunity fell through because of illness.

Handwritten "closed" signs appeared on the windows of stores and restaurants soon after the pandemic arrived. Paychecks shrank or disappeared altogether as unemployment skyrocketed to 14.7 percent, a rate not seen in almost a century.

Food banks felt the pressure almost immediately.

Feeding America, the nation's largest anti-hunger organization, scrambled to keep up as states locked down and schools — many providing free breakfasts and lunches — closed. In late March, 20 percent of the organization's 200 food banks were in danger of running out of food.

The problem with supply subsided, but demand has not. Feeding America has never handed out so much food so fast — 4.2 billion meals from March through October. The organization has seen a 60 percent average increase in food bank users during the pandemic: about 4 in 10 are first-timers.

An AP analysis of Feeding America data from 181 food banks in its network found the organization has distributed nearly 57 percent more food in the third quarter of the year, compared with the same period in 2019.

There will be no quick decline as the pandemic rages on, having already claimed more than 280,000 lives and infecting 14.7 million people across the nation.

Feeding America estimates those facing hunger will swell to 1 in 6 people, from 35 million in 2019 to more than 50 million by this year's end. The consequences are even more dire for children — 1 in 4, according to the group.

Some states have been hit especially hard: Nevada, a tourist mecca whose hotel, casino and restaurant industries were battered by the pandemic, is projected to vault from 20th place in 2018 to 5th place this year in food insecurity, according to a report from Feeding America.

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In four states — Mississippi, Arkansas, Alabama and Louisiana — more than 1 in 5 residents are expected to be food insecure by year's end, meaning they won't have money or resources to put food on the table, the report said.

In New Orleans one recent Saturday morning, Donna Duerr was waiting to pick up food in a drive-through donation — something that has become part of her routine since COVID-19 swept in last spring.

Her husband was laid off from his job as a pipefitter and she's unable to work, having undergone two surgeries — one on her spine, the other on her arm — in the last two months. She also has two grown children who've moved home since the pandemic began.

"This is a hard thing to accept that you have to do this," says a weary-sounding Duerr, her throat covered with bandages as the result of a recent operation. Every morning she monitors the local news for announcements of the next food donation; she tries to attend as many as she can, sometimes sharing the food with less-mobile neighbors.

Duerr, 56, faces painful choices. "I either pay bills or get food," she says, though these donations have brought some relief.

Norman Butler is another first-timer. Shortly before Thanksgiving, he and his girlfriend, Cheryl, arrived at 3 a.m. at a drive-through food bank in a suburban New Orleans sports stadium. They joined a pre-dawn procession of mothers with their kids, the elderly and folks like him — unemployed workers.

"You can see the look of uncertainty on their faces," he says. "Everybody's just worried about their next meal."

Before the pandemic, Butler, 53, flourished in the tourism-dominated city, working as an airport shuttle and limousine driver, a valet and hotel doorman. Since March, when the bustling streets turned silent, jobs in the city have been scarce.

"A lot of people are in limbo," he says. "The main thing we need is to get back to work."

Low-wage employees, many in the service industry, have borne the brunt of economic hardship. But the misery has reached deeper into the workforce.

A September report commissioned by the Food Research & Action Center, an anti-hunger organization, found 1 in 4 of those reporting they didn't have enough to eat typically had incomes above \$50,000 a year before the outbreak.

In Anchorage, Alaska, Brian and Airis Messick were coasting along in full-time jobs for companies that support the state's oil industry. They were moving toward buying a house.

When March arrived, everything unraveled.

Brian, 28, the newest hire at an electrical wiring company, was laid off. Within a week, Airis, an office worker at an oil well testing firm, lost her job, too.

Then it became a monthly game of deciding who gets paid first with their unemployment checks — the landlord or one of the many bills. They kept their car filled with gas in case they had to move.

The Messicks and their 9-year-old son, Jayden, tried to survive on \$50 to \$75 a week because, she says, "that's all we could squeeze." They turned to a food bank for only the second time — they'd sought help after Hurricane Irma hit Florida in 2017.

After that devastation, the Messicks, who'd met in Florida, decided to get a fresh start and move to Alaska, where Airis had grown up.

Airis, who just turned 30, found work in August, ironically, at the state unemployment office. "I hear people's stories all day," she says. "I listen to moms cry about not having money to take care of their kids. My heart aches for the people who get denied."

Brian stays home with Jayden, who is autistic, helping him with school and driving him to appointments. Also part of the family are Cleo, a pit bull-lab mix, and Daisy, a bearded dragon.

Airis earns too much for the family to receive state financial aid. Anchorage's high cost-of-living, partly fueled by the expense of shipping goods to the nation's most northern state, makes it harder to economize even with coupons and careful shopping.

She says the family will continue to go to the food bank until the economy improves, which she expects

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won't be soon.

There should be better systems in place, she says, to help families.

"I feel great knowing that we're not alone, that we're, you know, not out here being the only one suffering but," she says, "it makes me mad to know my government failed us."

For communities of color, the pandemic has been a compound disaster with Blacks and Latinos reeling from disproportionately high rates of deaths, infections — and joblessness.

Unemployment surged among Latinos to 18.9 percent this spring, higher than any other racial and ethnic group, according to federal statistics. Though it has since fallen, many are still struggling.

More than 1 in 5 Black and Latino adults with children said as of July 2020 they sometimes or often did not have enough to eat, according to the commissioned report. That was double the rate of white and Asian households. It also found that women, households with children and people of color are at greatest risk of hunger.

Abigail Leocadio, 34, first approached the nonprofit Society of St. Vincent de Paul in Phoenix, Arizona, during hard times about a decade ago. Her family rebounded and she completed training to become a phlebotomist, landing a job drawing blood specimens for a local lab.

Leocadio was just 7 when her family brought her to the U.S. from their native Cuernavaca, Mexico. She currently is protected from deportation and has a work permit through the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program, or DACA.

When her husband, a restaurant cook, was laid off earlier in the pandemic, her income — barely more than the \$11 state minimum wage — wasn't enough to cover their expenses.

Though they own a two-bedroom trailer, they pay \$500 a month to rent the lot. Add to that as much as \$450 in monthly electric bills and internet service so their four kids, 9 to 15, can attend class remotely. Before schools closed, the kids received free breakfasts and lunches on campus.

"It has been hard feeding all the kiddos daily," Leocadio said outside the trailer after a recent delivery from the charity of two boxes including canned tomatoes, dried beans, rice, breakfast cereal and the kids' undisputed favorite: specialty Oreo cookies.

The food, she says, provides less than half of what her family eats in four weeks, but significantly reduces their monthly bill to about \$250. Before the pandemic, the family was saving to buy a house, but that money has been wiped out. Her husband, though, is back at work.

"We always figure out things one way or another," Leocadio says, though she's worried about the surge in coronavirus cases and what lies ahead. "We really don't know what's going to happen."

Briana Dominguez had been depending on food pantries in the Chicago area since last fall to supplement her groceries. With two sons, ages 3 and 14, it was hard to keep up, even though she and her boyfriend both worked full-time.

"I never thought it would be me," she says of her visits to the Hillside Food Pantry in Evanston, Illinois. "But you do what you gotta do to survive."

A series of misfortunes brought them to a turning point.

Dominguez had a miscarriage, and her father lost his job, due to the pandemic. So did her boyfriend, a trucker. In November her company, which sells ceiling tiles for hospitals and other business, eliminated her job with little notice.

Dominguez, 34, who has a small severance, has decided to move to Georgia, where she has family and living costs are lower. Her boyfriend has found work as a customer service representative that he can do from anywhere, though it's only \$13 an hour. She traveled there in early December to scout job possibilities.

"If I don't do it now," she says, "I'll never do it."

While food banks have become critical during the pandemic, they're just one path for combating hunger. For every meal from a food bank, a federal program called the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance

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Program, or food stamps, provides nine.

Anti-hunger groups have lobbied Congress for a 15 percent increase in maximum food stamp benefits, A similar measure went a long way in digging the nation out of the Great Recession. A stimulus bill passed by the House this spring includes such a provision, but it has been bogged down in partisan squabbling.

"Food banks and food pantries are doing great work," says Luis Guardia, president of the Food Research & Action Center. "But they simply cannot do enough to be something of the order of magnitude that we're seeing right now."

Many going to food pantries also are receiving food stamps, though eligibility varies among states.

Aaron Crawford says the addition of \$550 in food stamps the family started receiving last summer has made a significant difference in their lives.

Others have discovered they couldn't make it without food help, even with Social Security or other benefits.

Phyllis Marder, 66, had both Social Security and unemployment when she arrived at the Hillside Food Pantry in Evanston, Illinois, where she's lived in the same bungalow for 20 years.

She'd been supplementing her benefits as an Uber driver, and when the pandemic hit, she helped workers bring home their computers and office gear. After that, she ferried medical and other front-line workers, but that came to an abrupt end with a COVID-19 scare.

At first, Marder, didn't tell anyone about visiting food pantries. Then she had a change of heart. "Keeping a secret makes things get worse," she says, "... and makes me feel worse about myself, and so I decided that it was more important to talk about it."

Marder sometimes shared her food with neighbors and a panhandler on a freeway ramp. But she expects her food bank visits will end soon.

In a few days, she starts a job — courtesy of the pandemic.

She'll be a coronavirus contract tracer, working remotely for a nearby county.

As the year nears its end, Crawford is more confident.

The months have been filled with setbacks and successes. Both Crawfords developed mild cases of COVID-19. Sheyla had hysterectomy surgery and was out work without pay for six weeks.

But they've rebounded, too.

Crawford has two part-time jobs, one at United Parcel Service, the second as a maintenance worker at a home for the elderly. His wife is back at work at the day care center. And their boys are receiving breakfast and lunch at their school that provides day care.

The financial troubles that brought them to the food bank haven't disappeared. They still have overdue bills and a car that needs repairs.

But after many dark months, there have been moments of relief. This fall when the couple contracted COVID-19, their sons' school sent meals and milk to help,

And a friend had an 18-pound turkey delivered for a Thanksgiving feast. It was so big the Crawfords had to figure out how to find room for the leftovers in the refrigerator now stocked with food.

A full fridge, Crawford says, is a welcome sight.

"It just kind of puts you at ease," he says. "There's a sense of peace."

Sharon Cohen, a Chicago-based national writer for The Associated Press, can be reached at scohen@ap.org or on Twitter at <http://twitter.com/SCohenAP>. Contributing to this report were Martha Irvine in Evanston, Illinois; Rebecca Santana and Gerald Herbert in New Orleans; Anita Snow in Phoenix, Arizona; Mark Thiessen in Anchorage, Alaska; and data editor Meghan Hoyer.

UK readies for 'V-Day,' its 1st shots in war on coronavirus

By DANICA KIRKA Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — It's been dubbed "V-Day" in Britain -- recalling the D-Day landings in France that

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marked the start of the final push in World War II to defeat Nazi Germany.

A week after the U.K. became the first Western country to authorize widespread use of a vaccine against COVID-19, it is preparing to administer its first shots on Tuesday in its war on the virus.

Those 800,000 doses will first go to people over 80 who are either hospitalized or already have outpatient appointments scheduled, along with nursing home workers.

In other words, the National Health Service is saying to the waiting public, in effect: Don't call us, we'll call you. Only those who have been contacted by the NHS to arrange an appointment will be getting the jab.

Most people will have to wait until next year before there is enough vaccine on hand to expand the program.

"I don't think people should expect anything over the next few days because the reality is ... that for the vast, vast, vast majority of people this will be done in January, February, March," said Chris Hopson, chief executive of NHS Providers. "And the one thing that we don't want people to get anxious about or concerned about is 'Where's my letter?' in December."

Public health officials around the globe are watching Britain's rollout as they prepare for the unprecedented task of rapidly vaccinating billions of people to end the pandemic that has killed more than 1.5 million worldwide. While the U.K. has a well-developed infrastructure for delivering vaccines, it is geared to vaccinating groups such as school children or pregnant women, not the entire population.

The U.K. is getting a head start on the project after British regulators on Dec. 2 gave emergency authorization to the vaccine produced by U.S. drugmaker Pfizer and Germany's BioNTech. U.S. and European Union authorities are also reviewing the vaccine, alongside rival products developed by U.S. biotechnology company Moderna, and a collaboration between Oxford University and drugmaker AstraZeneca.

On Saturday, Russia began vaccinating thousands of doctors, teachers and others at dozens of centers in Moscow with its Sputnik V vaccine. That program is being viewed differently because Russia authorized use of Sputnik V last summer after it was tested in only a few dozen people.

But the vaccine can't arrive soon enough for the U.K., which has more than 61,000 COVID-19 related deaths — more than any other country has reported in Europe. The U.K. has more than 1.7 million cases.

The first shipments of the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine were delivered to a selected group of U.K. hospitals on Sunday.

The 800,000 doses are only a fraction of what is needed. The government is targeting more than 25 million people, or about 40% of the population, in the first phase of its vaccination program, which gives first priority to those who are at the highest risk from the disease.

After those over 80 and nursing home workers, the program will be expanded as the supply increases, with the vaccine offered roughly on the basis of age groups, starting with the oldest people.

Buckingham Palace refused to comment on reports that Queen Elizabeth II, 94, and her 99-year-old husband, Prince Philip, would be vaccinated and the action publicized in an effort to show that there was nothing to fear from the jab.

"Our goal is totally to protect every member of the population, Her Majesty, of course, as well," Dr. June Raine, chief executive of Britain's Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency, told the BBC on Sunday.

In England, the vaccine will be delivered at 50 hospital hubs in the first wave of the program, with more hospitals expected to offer it as the rollout ramps up. Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales are making their own plans under the U.K.'s system of devolved administration.

Logistical issues are slowing the rapid rollout of the Pfizer vaccine because this effort will be a cold war: The vaccine has to be stored at minus-70 degrees Celsius (minus-94 degrees Fahrenheit).

The immunization program will be a "marathon not a sprint," said professor Stephen Powis, medical director for NHS England.

Authorities also are focusing on large-scale distribution points because each package of vaccine contains 975 doses, and they don't want any to be wasted.

The U.K. has agreed to purchase millions of doses from seven different producers. Governments around the world are making agreements with multiple developers to ensure they lock in delivery of the products

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that are ultimately approved for widespread use.

Dozens of armed forces personnel are assisting in building vaccination centers in the U.K. in preparation for what Health Secretary Matt Hancock has dubbed "V-Day."

His reference harked back to Britain's World War II effort and Winston Churchill's patriotic appeals, such as his "V for Victory" hand gesture.

Hancock even used some Churchill-style rhetoric after last week's vaccine approval, saying, "This is a day to remember, frankly, in a year to forget."

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

Final goodbye: Recalling influential people who died in 2020

By BERNARD McGHEE Associated Press

In a year defined by a devastating pandemic, the world lost iconic defenders of civil rights, great athletes and entertainers who helped define their genres.

Many of their names hold a prominent place in the collective consciousness — RBG, Kobe, Maradona, Eddie Van Halen, Little Richard, Sean Connery, Alex Trebek, Christo — but pandemic restrictions often limited the public's ability to mourn their loss in a year that saw more than a million people die from the coronavirus.

U.S. Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg — known as the Notorious RBG to her many admirers — was one of the many noteworthy figures who died in 2020.

In a court known for solemn legal proceedings, Ginsburg became a cultural and social media icon whose fierce defense of women's rights earned her a devoted following. She died in September after 27 years on the country's highest court. Making few concessions to age and health problems, she showed a steely resilience and became the leader of liberal justices on the court.

The world also said goodbye to U.S. Rep. John Lewis, a lion of the civil rights movement who died in July.

Other former political figures who died this year include Egyptian leader Hosni Mubarak, New York Mayor David Dinkins, Arizona Gov. Jane Hull, Taiwanese President Lee Teng-hui, U.S. Sen. Tom Coburn, Palestinian negotiator Saeb Erekat, U.N. Secretary-General Javier Pérez de Cuéllar and FBI Director William S. Sessions.

Some of the year's deaths struck down relatively young people, leaving mourners with the heartbreak of a life gone too soon.

Basketball great Kobe Bryant died along with several others in a January helicopter crash at age 41. And in a shock to fans, actor Chadwick Boseman, who inspired audiences with his portrayal of comic book superhero Black Panther, died of cancer in August at age 43.

Others in the world of arts and entertainment who died in 2020 include actors Olivia de Havilland, Kirk Douglas, Irrfan Khan, Max von Sydow, Diana Rigg, Ian Holm, Rishi Kapoor and Franca Valeri; musicians Ellis Marsalis Jr., John Prine, Bonnie Pointer, Kenny Rogers, Juliette Greco and Toots Hibbert; filmmakers Nobuhiko Obayashi, Joel Schumacher and Ivan Passer; authors Mary Higgins Clark and Clive Cussler; TV hosts Regis Philbin and Jim Lehrer; magician Roy Horn; and fashion designer Kenzo Takada.

Here is a roll call of some influential figures who died in 2020 (cause of death cited for younger people, if available):

JANUARY

David Stern, 77. The basketball-loving lawyer who took the NBA around the world during 30 years as its longest-serving commissioner and oversaw its growth into a global powerhouse. Jan. 1.

Nick Gordon, 30. He was found liable in the death of his ex-partner, Bobbi Kristina Brown, the daughter of singers Whitney Houston and Bobby Brown. Jan. 1. Heroin overdose.

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Don Larsen, 90. The journeyman pitcher who reached the heights of baseball glory when he threw a perfect game in 1956 with the New York Yankees for the only no-hitter in World Series history. Jan. 1. Esophageal cancer.

Neil Peart, 67. The renowned drummer and lyricist from the influential Canadian band Rush. Jan. 7.

Elizabeth Wurtzel, 52. Her blunt and painful confessions of her struggles with addiction and depression in the bestselling "Prozac Nation" made her a voice and a target for an anxious generation. Jan. 7. Cancer.

Buck Henry, 89. "The Graduate" co-writer who as screenwriter, character actor, "Saturday Night Live" host and cherished talk-show and party guest became an all-around cultural superstar of the 1960s and 70s. Jan. 8.

Ivan Passer, 86. A leading filmmaker of the Czech New Wave who with Milos Forman fled Soviet-controlled Prague and forged a celebrated career in Hollywood. Jan. 9.

Sultan Qaboos bin Said, 79. He was the Mideast's longest-ruling monarch who seized power in Oman in a 1970 palace coup and pulled his Arabian sultanate into modernity while carefully balancing diplomatic ties between adversaries Iran and the U.S. Jan. 11.

Jimmy Heath, 93. A Grammy-nominated jazz saxophonist and composer who performed with such greats as Miles Davis and John Coltrane before forming the popular family group the Heath Brothers in middle age. Jan. 19.

Thomas Railsback, 87. An Illinois Republican congressman who helped draw up articles of impeachment against President Richard Nixon in 1974. Jan. 20.

Terry Jones, 77. A founding member of the anarchic Monty Python troupe who was hailed by colleagues as "the complete Renaissance comedian" and "a man of endless enthusiasms." Jan. 21.

Jim Lehrer, 85. The longtime host of the nightly PBS "NewsHour" whose serious, sober demeanor made him the choice to moderate 11 presidential debates between 1988 and 2012. Jan. 23.

Kobe Bryant, 41. The 18-time NBA All-Star who won five championships and became one of the greatest basketball players of his generation during a 20-year career spent entirely with the Los Angeles Lakers. Jan. 26. Helicopter crash.

John Andretti, 56. Carved out his own niche in one of the world's most successful racing families and became the first driver to attempt the Memorial Day double. Jan. 30.

Mary Higgins Clark, 92. She was the tireless and long-reigning "Queen of Suspense" whose tales of women beating the odds made her one of the world's most popular writers. Jan. 31.

Anne Cox Chambers, 100. A newspaper heiress, diplomat and philanthropist who was one of America's richest women. Jan. 31.

FEBRUARY

Andy Gill, 64. The guitarist who supplied the scratching, seething sound that fueled the highly influential British punk band Gang of Four. Feb. 1.

Bernard Ebbers, 78. The former chief of WorldCom who was convicted in one of the largest corporate accounting scandals in U.S. history. Feb. 2.

George Steiner, 90. He became one of the world's leading public intellectuals through his uncommon erudition, multilingual perspective and the provocative lessons he drew from his Jewish roots and escape from the Holocaust. Feb. 3.

Daniel arap Moi, 95. A former schoolteacher who became Kenya's longest-serving president and presided over years of repression and economic turmoil fueled by runaway corruption. Feb. 4.

Kirk Douglas, 103. The intense, muscular actor with the dimpled chin who starred in "Spartacus," "Lust for Life" and dozens of other films, helped fatally weaken the blacklist against suspected communists and reigned for decades as a Hollywood maverick and patriarch. Feb. 5.

Beverly Pepper, 97. A fixture of the Roman "Dolce Vita" and renowned American sculptor who made Italy her home and backdrop to many of her monumental steel creations. Feb. 5.

Roger Kahn, 92. The writer who wove memoir and baseball and touched millions of readers through his

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romantic account of the Brooklyn Dodgers in "The Boys of Summer." Feb. 6.

Orson Bean, 91. The witty actor and comedian who enlivened the game show "To Tell the Truth" and played a crotchety merchant on "Dr. Quinn, Medicine Woman." Feb. 7. Hit by a car.

Robert Conrad, 84. The rugged, contentious actor who starred in the hugely popular 1960s television series "Hawaiian Eye" and "The Wild Wild West." Feb. 8.

Mirella Freni, 84. An Italian soprano whose uncommon elegance and intensity combined with a sumptuous voice and intelligence to enthrall audiences for a half-century. Feb. 9.

Joseph Shabalala, 78. The founder of the South African multi-Grammy-Award-winning music group Ladysmith Black Mambazo. Feb. 11.

Charles "Chuckie" O'Brien, 86. A longtime associate of Teamsters boss Jimmy Hoffa who became a leading suspect in the labor leader's disappearance and later was portrayed in the Martin Scorsese film, "The Irishman." Feb. 13.

Zoe Caldwell, 86. A four-time Tony Award winner who brought humanity to larger-than-life characters, whether it be the dotty schoolteacher Miss Jean Brodie, an aging opera star Maria Callas or the betrayed, murderous Medea. Feb. 16.

Charles Portis, 86. The novelist was a favorite among critics and writers for such shaggy dog stories as "Norwood" and "Gringos" and a bounty for Hollywood whose droll, bloody Western "True Grit" was a bestseller twice adapted into Oscar-nominated films. Feb. 17.

Mickey Wright, 85. The golf great with a magnificent swing who won 13 majors among her 82 victories and gave the fledgling LPGA a crucial lift. Feb. 17.

Sy Sperling, 78. The Hair Club for Men founder who was famous for the TV commercials where he proclaimed "I'm not only the Hair Club president but I'm also a client." Feb. 19.

Barbara "B." Smith, 70. She was one of the nation's top Black models who went on to open restaurants, launch a successful home products line and write cookbooks. Feb. 22.

Thich Quang Do, 91. A Buddhist monk who became the public face of religious dissent in Vietnam while the Communist government kept him in prison or under house arrest for more than 20 years. Feb. 22.

Katherine Johnson, 101. A mathematician who calculated rocket trajectories and Earth orbits for NASA's early space missions and was later portrayed in the 2016 hit film "Hidden Figures," about pioneering Black female aerospace workers. Feb. 24.

Clive Cussler, 88. The million-selling adventure writer and real-life thrill-seeker who wove personal details and spectacular fantasies into his page-turning novels about underwater explorer Dirk Pitt. Feb. 24.

Hosni Mubarak, 91. The Egyptian leader who was the autocratic face of stability in the Middle East for nearly 30 years before being forced from power in an Arab Spring uprising. Feb. 25.

MARCH

Jack Welch, 84. He transformed General Electric Co. into a highly profitable multinational conglomerate and parlayed his legendary business acumen into a retirement career as a corporate leadership guru. March 1. Renal failure.

Ernesto Cardenal, 95. The renowned poet and Roman Catholic cleric who became a symbol of revolutionary verse in Nicaragua and across Latin America, and whose suspension from the priesthood by St. John Paul II lasted over three decades. March 1.

James Lipton, 93. The longtime host of "Inside the Actors Studio." March 2. Cancer.

Bobbie Battista, 67. She was among the original anchors for CNN Headline News and hosted CNN's "TalkBack Live." March 3. Cancer.

Javier Pérez de Cuéllar, 100. The two-term United Nations secretary-general who brokered a historic cease-fire between Iran and Iraq in 1988 and who in later life came out of retirement to help reestablish democracy in his Peruvian homeland. March 4.

Amory Houghton Jr., 93. He led his family's glass company in upstate New York and later spent nearly two decades in Congress as a Republican with a reputation for breaking with his party. March 4.

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Max von Sydow, 90. The actor known to art house audiences through his work with Swedish director Ingmar Bergman and later to moviegoers everywhere when he played the priest in the horror classic "The Exorcist." March 8.

Rev. Darius L. Swann, 95. His challenge to the notion of segregated public schools helped spark the use of busing to integrate schools across the country. March 8.

Charles Wuorinen, 81. A winner of the 1970 Pulitzer Prize in Music and composer of the operas "Brokeback Mountain" and "Haroun and the Sea of Stories." March 11. Injuries suffered in a fall.

Lyle Waggoner, 84. He used his good looks to comic effect on "The Carol Burnett Show," partnered with a superhero on "Wonder Woman" and was the first centerfold for Playgirl magazine. March 17.

Kenny Rogers, 81. The Grammy-winning balladeer who spanned jazz, folk, country and pop with such hits as "Lucille," "Lady" and "Islands in the Stream" and embraced his persona as "The Gambler" on records and TV. March 20.

Terrence McNally, 81. He was one of America's great playwrights whose prolific career included winning Tony Awards for the plays "Love! Valour! Compassion!" and "Master Class" and the musicals "Ragtime" and "Kiss of the Spider Woman." March 24. Coronavirus.

Manu Dibango, 86. He fused African rhythms with funk to become one of the most influential musicians in world dance music. March 24. Coronavirus.

Floyd Cardoz, 59. He competed on "Top Chef," won "Top Chef Masters" and operated successful restaurants in both India and New York. March 25. Coronavirus.

Fred "Curly" Neal, 77. The dribbling wizard who entertained millions with the Harlem Globetrotters for parts of three decades. March 26.

Rev. Joseph E. Lowery, 98. A veteran civil rights leader who helped the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. found the Southern Christian Leadership Conference and fought against racial discrimination. March 27.

Tom Coburn, 72. A former U.S. senator from Oklahoma who earned a reputation as a conservative political maverick when he railed against federal earmarks and subsidies for the rich. March 28.

Krzysztof Penderecki, 86. An award-winning conductor and one of the world's most popular contemporary classical music composers whose works have featured in Hollywood films like "The Shining" and "Shutter Island." March 29.

Joe Diffie, 61. A country singer who had a string of hits in the 1990s with chart-topping ballads and honky-tonk singles like "Home" and "Pickup Man." March 29. Coronavirus.

Bill Withers, 81. He wrote and sang a string of soulful songs in the 1970s that have stood the test of time, including "Lean on Me," "Lovely Day" and "Ain't No Sunshine." March 30.

APRIL

Ellis Marsalis Jr., 85. The jazz pianist, teacher and patriarch of a New Orleans musical clan. April 1. Coronavirus.

Adam Schlesinger, 52. An Emmy and Grammy-winning musician and songwriter known for his work with his band Fountains of Wayne and on the TV show "Crazy Ex-Girlfriend." April 1. Coronavirus.

Tom Dempsey, 73. The NFL kicker born without toes on his kicking foot who made a then-record 63-yard field goal. April 4. Coronavirus.

Honor Blackman, 94. The potent British actress who took James Bond's breath away in "Goldfinger" and who starred as the leather-clad, judo-flipping Cathy Gale in "The Avengers." April 5.

Earl Graves Sr., 85. He championed Black businesses as the founder of the first African American-owned magazine focusing on black entrepreneurs. April 6.

John Prine, 73. The singer-songwriter who explored the heartbreaks, indignities and absurdities of everyday life in "Angel from Montgomery," "Sam Stone," "Hello in There" and scores of other songs. April 7. Coronavirus.

Herbert Stempel, 93. A fall guy and whistleblower of early television whose confession to deliberately losing on a 1950s quiz show helped drive a national scandal and join his name in history to winning con-

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testant Charles Van Doren. April 7.

Linda Tripp, 70. Her secretly taped conversations with former White House intern Monica Lewinsky provided evidence of an affair with President Bill Clinton that led to his impeachment. April 8.

Mort Drucker, 91. The Mad magazine cartoonist who for decades lovingly spoofed politicians, celebrities and popular culture. April 9.

Phyllis Lyon, 95. A gay rights pioneer who, with her longtime partner, was among the first same-sex couples to marry in California when it became legal to do so in 2008. April 9.

Nobuhiko Obayashi, 82. He was one of Japan's most prolific filmmakers who devoted his works to depicting war's horrors and singing the eternal power of movies. April 10.

Stirling Moss, 90. A daring, speed-loving Englishman regarded as the greatest Formula One driver never to win the world championship. April 12.

Brian Dennehy, 81. The burly actor who started in films as a macho heavy and later in his career won plaudits for his stage work in plays by William Shakespeare, Anton Chekhov, Eugene O'Neill and Arthur Miller. April 15.

Jane Hull, 84. She was Arizona's first woman elected governor and part of the "Fab Five" celebrated as the nation's first all-female elected state executive branch leadership group. April 17.

Paul O'Neill, 84. A former Treasury secretary who broke with George W. Bush over tax policy and then produced a book critical of the administration. April 18.

Irrfan Khan, 54. A veteran character actor in Bollywood movies and one of India's best-known exports to Hollywood. April 29.

Denis Goldberg, 87. A South African anti-apartheid activist. April 29.

Rishi Kapoor, 67. A top Indian actor who was a scion of Bollywood's most famous Kapoor family. April 30.

MAY

Bobby Lee Verdugo, 69. One of the leaders of the 1968 East Los Angeles high school walkout to protest discrimination and dropout rates among Mexican American students, which triggered a movement across the American Southwest. May 1.

Shady Habash, 22. An Egyptian filmmaker detained without trial for over two years for making a music video that mocked President Abdel Fattah el-Sissi. May 2. Died in prison.

Rosalind Elias, 90. An American mezzo-soprano who created roles in a pair of Samuel Barber world premieres and made her Broadway debut at 81. May 3.

Don Shula, 90. He won the most games of any NFL coach and led the Miami Dolphins to the only perfect season in league history. May 4.

Roy Horn, 75. He was half of Siegfried & Roy, the duo whose extraordinary magic tricks astonished millions until Horn was critically injured in 2003 by one of the act's famed white tigers. May 8. Coronavirus.

Little Richard, 87. He was one of the chief architects of rock 'n' roll whose piercing wail, pounding piano and towering pompadour irrevocably altered popular music while introducing Black R&B to white America. May 9. Bone cancer.

Betty Wright, 66. The Grammy-winning soul singer and songwriter whose influential 1970s hits included "Clean Up Woman" and "Where is the Love." May 10.

Jerry Stiller, 92. For decades, he teamed with wife Anne Meara in a beloved comedy duo and then reached new heights in his senior years as the high-strung Frank Costanza on the classic sitcom "Seinfeld" and the basement-dwelling father-in-law on "The King of Queens." May 11.

Astrid Kirchherr, 81. She was the German photographer who shot some of the earliest and most striking images of the Beatles and helped shape their trend-setting visual style. May 12.

Phyllis George, 70. The former Miss America who became a female sportscasting pioneer on CBS' "The NFL Today" and served as the first lady of Kentucky. May 14.

Fred Willard, 86. The comedic actor whose improv style kept him relevant for more than 50 years in films like "This Is Spinal Tap," "Best In Show" and "Anchorman." May 15.

Ken Osmond, 76. On TV's "Leave It to Beaver," he played two-faced teenage scoundrel Eddie Haskell,

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a role so memorable it left him typecast and led to a second career as a police officer. May 18.

Saleh Abdullah Kamel, 79. The billionaire Saudi businessman who founded the banking and real estate conglomerate Dallah Albaraka Group. May 19.

Jerry Sloan, 78. The Hall of Fame coach who was a fixture for decades in Utah and took the Jazz to the NBA Finals in 1997 and 1998. May 22.

Eddie Sutton, 84. The Hall of Fame basketball coach who led three teams to the Final Four and was the first coach to take four schools to the NCAA Tournament. May 23.

Stanley Ho, 98. A casino tycoon whose business empire dominated the Portuguese gambling enclave of Macao for decades. May 26.

Larry Kramer, 84. The playwright whose angry voice and pen raised theatergoers' consciousness about AIDS and roused thousands to militant protests in the early years of the epidemic. May 27. Pneumonia.

Christo, 84. He was known for massive, ephemeral public arts projects that often involved wrapping large structures in fabric. May 31.

JUNE

Wes Unseld, 74. The workmanlike Hall of Fame center who led Washington to its only NBA championship and was chosen one of the 50 greatest players in league history. June 2.

Shigeru Yokota, 87. A Japanese campaigner for the return of his daughter and more than a dozen others who were abducted to North Korea in the 1970s. June 5.

Bonnie Pointer, 69. She convinced three of her church-singing siblings to form the Pointer Sisters, which would become one of the biggest acts of the 1970s and '80s. June 8. Cardiac arrest.

Pierre Nkurunziza, 56. As president of Burundi, his 15-year-rule was marked by deadly political violence and a historic withdrawal from the International Criminal Court. June 8.

William S. Sessions, 90. A former federal judge appointed by President Ronald Reagan to head the FBI and fired years later by President Bill Clinton. June 12.

Charles Webb, 81. A lifelong nonconformist whose debut novel "The Graduate" was a deadpan satire of his college education and wealthy background adapted into the classic film of the same name. June 16.

Edén Pastora, 83. Better known as "Commander Zero," he was one of the most mercurial and charismatic figures of Central America's revolutionary upheavals. June 16.

Jean Kennedy Smith, 92. She was the last surviving sibling of President John F. Kennedy and who as a U.S. ambassador played a key role in the peace process in Northern Ireland. June 17.

Vera Lynn, 103. The endearingly popular "Forces' Sweetheart" who serenaded British troops during World War II. June 18.

Ian Holm, 88. An acclaimed British actor whose long career included roles in "Chariots of Fire" and "The Lord of the Rings." June 19.

Joel Schumacher, 80. The eclectic and brazen filmmaker who shepherded the Brat Pack to the big screen in "St. Elmo's Fire" and steering the Batman franchise into its most baroque territory in "Batman Forever" and "Batman & Robin." June 22.

Milton Glaser, 91. The groundbreaking graphic designer who adorned Bob Dylan's silhouette with psychedelic hair and summed up the feelings for his home state with "I (HEART) NY." June 26.

Thomas Edwin Blanton Jr., 82. He was the last of three one-time Ku Klux Klansmen convicted in a 1963 Alabama church bombing that killed four Black girls and was the deadliest single attack of the civil rights movement. June 26.

Rudolfo Anaya, 82. A writer who helped launch the 1970s Chicano Literature Movement with his novel "Bless Me, Ultima," a book celebrated by Latinos. June 28.

Carl Reiner, 98. The ingenious and versatile writer, actor and director who broke through as a "second banana" to Sid Caesar and rose to comedy's front ranks as creator of "The Dick Van Dyke Show" and straight man to Mel Brooks' "2000 Year Old Man." June 29.

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Johnny Mandel, 94. The Oscar- and Grammy-winning composer, arranger and musician who worked on albums by Frank Sinatra, Natalie Cole and many others and whose songwriting credits included "The Shadow of Your Smile" and the theme from the film and TV show "M(asterisk)A(asterisk)S(asterisk)H." June 29.

JULY

Hugh Downs, 99. The genial, versatile broadcaster who became one of television's most familiar and welcome faces with more than 15,000 hours on news, game and talk shows. July 1.

Nick Cordero, 41. A Tony Award-nominated actor who specialized in playing tough guys on Broadway in such shows as "Waitress," "A Bronx Tale" and "Bullets Over Broadway." July 5. Coronavirus.

Ennio Morricone, 91. The Oscar-winning Italian composer who created the coyote-howl theme for the iconic spaghetti Western "The Good, the Bad and the Ugly" and soundtracks for such classic Hollywood gangster movies as "The Untouchables" and "Once Upon A Time In America." July 6. Complications of surgery after a fall.

Charlie Daniels, 83. Country music firebrand and fiddler who had a hit with "Devil Went Down to Georgia." July 6. Stroke.

Mary Kay Letourneau, 58. A teacher who married her former sixth-grade student after she was convicted of raping him in a case that drew international headlines. July 6. Cancer.

Naya Rivera, 33. A singer and actor who played a gay cheerleader on the hit TV musical comedy "Glee." July 8. Drowning.

Kelly Preston, 57. She played dramatic and comic foil to actors ranging from Tom Cruise in "Jerry Maguire" to Arnold Schwarzenegger in "Twins" and was married to actor John Travolta. July 12. Cancer.

Joanna Cole, 75. The author whose "Magic School Bus" books transported millions of young people on extraordinary and educational adventures. July 12. Idiopathic pulmonary fibrosis.

John Lewis, 80. An icon of the civil rights movement whose bloody beating by Alabama state troopers in 1965 helped galvanize opposition to racial segregation, and who went on to a long and celebrated career in Congress. July 17.

Rev. C.T. Vivian, 95. An early and key adviser to the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. who organized pivotal civil rights campaigns and spent decades advocating for justice and equality. July 17.

Regis Philbin, 88. The genial host who shared his life with television viewers over morning coffee for decades and helped himself and some fans strike it rich with the game show "Who Wants to Be a Millionaire." July 24.

Peter Green, 73. The dexterous blues guitarist who led the first incarnation of Fleetwood Mac in a career shortened by psychedelic drugs and mental illness. July 25.

John Saxon, 83. A versatile actor with a lengthy and prolific career who starred with Bruce Lee in "Enter the Dragon" and appeared in several "Nightmare on Elm Street" movies. July 25. Pneumonia.

Olivia de Havilland, 104. The doe-eyed actress beloved to millions as the sainted Melanie Wilkes of "Gone With the Wind," but also a two-time Oscar winner and an off-screen fighter who challenged and unchained Hollywood's contract system. July 26.

Connie Culp, 57. She was the recipient of the first partial face transplant in the U.S. July 29.

Lee Teng-hui, 97. A former Taiwanese president who brought direct elections and other democratic changes to the self-governed island despite missile launches and other fierce saber-rattling by China. July 30.

Herman Cain, 74. A former Republican presidential candidate and former CEO of a major pizza chain who went on to become an ardent supporter of President Donald Trump. July 30. Coronavirus.

Alan Parker, 76. A successful and sometimes surprising filmmaker whose diverse output includes "Bugsy Malone," "Midnight Express" and "Evita." July 31.

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AUGUST

Wilford Brimley, 85. He worked his way up from movie stunt rider to an indelible character actor who brought gruff charm, and sometimes menace, to a range of films that included "Cocoon," "The Natural" and "The Firm." Aug. 1.

John Hume, 83. The visionary politician who won a Nobel Peace Prize for fashioning the agreement that ended violence in his native Northern Ireland. Aug. 3.

Shirley Ann Grau, 91. A Pulitzer Prize-winning fiction writer whose stories and novels told of both the dark secrets and the beauty of the Deep South. Aug. 3.

Brent Scowcroft, 95. He played a prominent role in American foreign policy as national security adviser to Presidents Gerald Ford and George H.W. Bush and was a Republican voice against the 2003 invasion of Iraq. Aug. 6.

Rabbi Adin Steinsaltz, 83. A prolific Jewish scholar who spent 45 years compiling a monumental and ground-breaking translation of the Talmud. Aug. 7.

Franca Valeri, 100. An elegant, ironic and versatile actress who pioneered female comic roles in Italy's post-war years and helped the nation laugh at its foibles. Aug. 9.

Robert Trump, 71. President Donald Trump's younger brother, he was a businessman known for an even keel that seemed almost incompatible with the family name. Aug. 15.

Slade Gorton, 92. A cerebral politician from Washington state who served as a U.S. Senate Republican leader before he was ousted by the growing Seattle-area liberal electorate in 2000. Aug. 19.

Gail Sheehy, 83. A journalist, commentator and pop sociologist whose best-selling "Passages" helped millions navigate their lives from early adulthood to middle age and beyond. Aug. 24. Complications from pneumonia.

Lute Olson, 85. The Hall of Fame coach who turned Arizona into a college basketball powerhouse. Aug. 27.

Osamu Masuko, 71. A former Mitsubishi Motors chief executive who engineered the Japanese automaker's alliance with Nissan. Aug. 27. Heart failure.

Chadwick Boseman, 43. He played Black American icons Jackie Robinson and James Brown with searing intensity before inspiring audiences worldwide as the regal Black Panther in Marvel's blockbuster movie franchise. Aug. 28. Cancer.

John Thompson, 78. The imposing Hall of Famer who turned Georgetown into a "Hoya Paranoia" powerhouse and became the first Black coach to lead a team to the NCAA men's basketball championship. Aug. 30.

Lady Yvonne Sursock Cochrane, 98. One of Lebanon's most prominent philanthropists and a pioneer defender of the country's heritage. Aug. 31. Injuries suffered from a massive explosion in Beirut.

Tom Seaver, 75. The Hall of Fame pitcher who steered a stunning transformation from lovable losers to Miracle Mets in 1969. Aug. 31. Complications of Lewy body dementia and the coronavirus.

SEPTEMBER

Kaing Guek Eav, 77. Known as Duc, he was the Khmer Rouge's chief jailer, who admitted overseeing the torture and killings of as many as 16,000 Cambodians while running the regime's most notorious prison. Sept. 2.

Diana Rigg, 82. A commanding British actress whose career stretched from iconic 1960s spy series "The Avengers" to fantasy juggernaut "Game of Thrones." Sept. 10.

Toots Hibbert, 77. One of reggae's founders and most beloved stars who gave the music its name and later helped make it an international movement through such classics as "Pressure Drop," "Monkey Man" and "Funky Kingston." Sept. 11.

Terence Conran, 88. The British designer, retailer and restaurateur who built a furniture empire around the world, founded The Design Museum in London and modernized the everyday lives of British people.

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Sept. 12.

Florence Howe, 91. An activist, educator and major contributor to American literature and culture who as co-founder of the Feminist Press helped revive such acclaimed and influential works as Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "The Yellow Wall-Paper" and Rebecca Harding Davis' "Life in the Iron Mills." Sept. 12.

Winston Groom, 77. The writer whose novel "Forrest Gump" was made into a six-Oscar winning 1994 movie that became a soaring pop culture phenomenon. Sept. 17.

Ruth Bader Ginsburg, 87. The U.S. Supreme Court justice developed a cultlike following over her more than 27 years on the bench, especially among young women who appreciated her lifelong, fierce defense of women's rights. Sept. 18.

Rev. Robert Graetz, 92. The only white minister to support the Montgomery bus boycott and who became the target of scorn and bombings for doing so. Sept. 20.

Michael Lonsdale, 89. An enigmatic giant of the silver screen and theater in France who worked with some of the world's top directors in an acting career that spanned 60 years. Sept. 21.

Ang Rita, 72. A veteran Nepalese Sherpa guide who was the first person to climb Mount Everest 10 times. Sept. 21.

Gale Sayers, 77. The dazzling and elusive running back who entered the Pro Football Hall of Fame despite the briefest of careers and whose fame extended far beyond the field for decades thanks to a friendship with a dying Chicago Bears teammate. Sept. 23.

Juliette Greco, 93. A French singer, actress, cultural icon and muse to existentialist philosophers of the country's post-War period. Sept. 23.

Sheikh Sabah Al Ahmad Al Sabah, 91. The ruler of Kuwait who drew on his decades as the oil-rich nation's top diplomat to push for closer ties to Iraq after the 1990 Gulf War and solutions to other regional crises. Sept. 29.

Helen Reddy, 78. She shot to stardom in the 1970s with her rousing feminist anthem "I Am Woman" and recorded a string of other hits. Sept. 29.

Timothy Ray Brown, 54. He made history as "the Berlin patient," the first person known to be cured of HIV infection. Sept. 29.

Mac Davis, 78. A country music star who launched his career crafting the Elvis hits "A Little Less Conversation" and "In the Ghetto," and whose own hits include "Baby Don't Get Hooked On Me." Sept. 29.

Sister Ardeth Platte, 84. A Dominican nun and anti-nuclear activist who spent time in jail for her peaceful protests. Sept. 30.

OCTOBER

Bob Gibson, 84. A baseball Hall of Famer and the dominating St. Louis Cardinals pitcher who won a record seven consecutive World Series starts and set a modern standard for excellence when he finished the 1968 season with a 1.12 ERA. Oct. 2.

Kenzo Takada, 81. The iconic French-Japanese fashion designer famed for his jungle-infused designs and free-spirited aesthetic that channeled global travel. Oct. 4. Coronavirus.

Eddie Van Halen, 65. The guitar virtuoso whose blinding speed, control and innovation propelled his band Van Halen into one of hard rock's biggest groups and became elevated to the status of rock god. Oct. 6. Cancer.

Johnny Nash, 80. A singer-songwriter, actor and producer who rose from pop crooner to early reggae star to the creator and performer of the million-selling anthem "I Can See Clearly Now." Oct. 6.

Mohammad Reza Shajarian, 80. His distinctive voice quavered to traditional Persian music on state radio for years before supporting protesters following Iran's contested 2009 election. Oct. 8.

Whitey Ford, 91. The street-smart New Yorker who had the best winning percentage of any pitcher in the 20th century and helped the Yankees become baseball's perennial champions in the 1950s and '60s. Oct. 8.

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Joe Morgan, 77. The Hall of Fame second baseman became the sparkplug of dominant Cincinnati teams in the mid-1970s and was a two-time National League Most Valuable Player. Oct. 11.

Bernard S. Cohen, 86. He won a landmark case that led to the U.S. Supreme Court's rejection of laws forbidding interracial marriage and later went on to a successful political career as a state legislator. Oct. 12. Complications from Parkinson's disease.

Mahmoud Yassin, 79. An Egyptian actor and pillar of the country's film industry during the second half of the 20th century. Oct. 14.

Christopher Pendergast, 71. A suburban New York teacher who turned a Lou Gehrig's disease diagnosis into a decadeslong campaign to raise awareness and fund research. Oct. 14.

Rhonda Fleming, 97. The fiery redhead who appeared with Burt Lancaster, Kirk Douglas, Charlton Heston, Ronald Reagan and other film stars of the 1940s and 1950s. Oct. 14.

Sid Hartman, 100. The Minnesota sports columnist and radio personality was an old-school home team booster who once ran the NBA's Minneapolis Lakers and achieved nearly as much celebrity as some of the athletes he covered. Oct. 18.

Spencer Davis, 81. A British guitarist and bandleader whose eponymous rock group had 1960s hits including "Gimme Some Lovin'" and "I'm a Man." Oct. 19.

James Randi, 92. A magician who later challenged spoon benders, mind readers and faith healers with such voracity that he became regarded as the country's foremost skeptic. Oct. 20.

Lee Kun-Hee, 78. The Samsung Electronics chairman who transformed the small television maker into a global giant of consumer electronics but whose leadership was also marred by corruption convictions. Oct. 25.

Diane di Prima, 86. A poet, activist and teacher who was one of the last surviving members of the Beats and one of the few women writers in the Beat movement. Oct. 25.

Billy Joe Shaver, 81. An outlaw country singer-songwriter who wrote songs like "Honky Tonk Heroes," "I Been to Georgia on a Fast Train" and "Old Five and Dimers Like Me." Oct. 28.

Sean Connery, 90. The charismatic Scottish actor who rose to international superstardom as the suave secret agent James Bond and then abandoned the role to carve out an Oscar-winning career in other rugged roles. Oct. 31.

NOVEMBER

Robert Fisk, 74. A veteran British journalist, he was one of the best-known Middle East correspondents who spent his career reporting from the troubled region and won accolades for challenging mainstream narratives. Nov. 1.

Tom Metzger, 82. The notorious former Ku Klux Klan leader who rose to prominence in the 1980s while promoting white separatism and stoking racial violence. Nov. 4. Parkinson's disease.

Norm Crosby, 93. The deadpan mangler of the English language who thrived in the 1960s, '70s and '80s as a television, nightclub and casino comedian. Nov. 7.

Alex Trebek, 80. He presided over the beloved quiz show "Jeopardy!" for more than 30 years with dapper charm and a touch of schoolmaster strictness. Nov. 8.

Saeb Erekat, 65. A veteran peace negotiator and prominent international spokesman for the Palestinians for more than three decades. Nov. 10. Coronavirus.

Prince Khalifa bin Salman Al Khalifa, 84. As Bahrain's prince, he was one of the world's longest-serving prime ministers and led his island nation's government for decades. Nov. 11.

Paul Hornung, 84. The dazzling "Golden Boy" of the Green Bay Packers whose singular ability to generate points as a runner, receiver, quarterback and kicker helped turn the team into an NFL dynasty. Nov. 13.

Soumitra Chatterjee, 85. The legendary Indian actor with more than 200 movies to his name and famed for his work with Oscar-winning director Satyajit Ray. Nov. 15. Coronavirus.

Walid al-Moallem, 79. Syria's longtime foreign minister, he was a career diplomat who became one of

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the country's most prominent faces to the outside world during the uprising against President Bashar Assad. Nov. 16.

Jan Morris, 94. The celebrated journalist, historian, world traveler and fiction writer who in middle age became a pioneer of the transgender movement. Nov. 20.

David Dinkins, 93. He broke barriers as New York City's first African American mayor but was doomed to a single term by a soaring murder rate, stubborn unemployment and his mishandling of a riot in Brooklyn. Nov. 23.

Bruce Carver Boynton, 83. A civil rights pioneer from Alabama who inspired the landmark "Freedom Rides" of 1961. Nov. 23.

Diego Maradona, 60. The Argentine soccer great who scored the "Hand of God" goal in 1986 and led his country to that year's World Cup title before later struggling with cocaine use and obesity. Nov. 25.

Dave Prowse, 85. The British weightlifter-turned-actor who was the body, though not the voice, of archvillain Darth Vader in the original "Star Wars" trilogy. Nov. 28.

Eddie Benton-Banai, 89. He helped found the American Indian Movement partly in response to alleged police brutality against Indigenous people. Nov. 30.

DECEMBER

Thomas M. Reavley, 99. He was the oldest active federal judge who served for 41 years on the 5th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals. Dec. 1.

Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, 94. He was the president of France from 1974 to 1981 and became a champion of European integration. Dec. 2.

Rafer Johnson, 86. He won the decathlon at the 1960 Rome Olympics and helped subdue Robert F. Kennedy's assassin in 1968. Dec. 2.

Alison Lurie, 94. The Pulitzer Prize-winning novelist whose satirical and cerebral tales of love and academia included the marital saga "The War Between the Tates" and the comedy of Americans abroad "Foreign Affairs." Dec. 3.

David L. Lander, 73. An actor who played the character of Squiggy on the popular ABC comedy "Laverne & Shirley." Dec. 4.

Tabaré Vázquez, 80. He was Uruguay's first socialist president, rising from poverty to win two terms as leader. Dec. 6. Cancer.

Paul Sarbanes, 87. He represented Maryland for 30 years in the Senate as a leader of financial regulatory reform and drafted the first article of impeachment against Republican President Richard Nixon during the Watergate scandal as a congressman. Dec. 6.

Trump ratchets up pace of executions before 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-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

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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 Dunham, 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,” Dunham 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, Dunham 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.

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.

The concern about moving forward with executions in the middle of a pandemic — as the Bureau of Prisons struggles with an exploding number of virus cases at prisons across the country — heightened further on Monday when the Justice Department disclosed that some members of the execution team had tested positive for the virus.

The disclosure was made in a court filing by lawyers for two inmates at the prison complex, saying the Justice Department informed them that some of the members of the team — among the nearly 100 people are typically brought in to assist in various tasks during each execution — had tested positive for coronavirus after the last execution.

The spiritual adviser for the man who had been executed also filed court papers saying he too had tested positive after attending the execution.

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

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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 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.

Dunham 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," Dunham 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>.

This story has been corrected to show the name of the Death Penalty Information Center's executive director is Robert Dunham, not Durham.

Get lost 2020: Some things to leave behind, with caveats

By LEANNE ITALIE Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Zoom, Zoom and Zoom. Masks, masks and masks. Sourdough starter and short-order cooking. In these "troubled times," in our sweat pants and the isolation we endure "out of an abundance of caution," there isn't much not to be over as 2020 comes to a longed for halt.

With the election behind us, along with its deluge of texts and cries of fake news, the year was a mess of common horrors and inconveniences driven by political divisions, racial injustice and the deadly and persistent pandemic, with chronic language to match.

But not all things 2020 need to be left behind. More white people have realized racism is real and present. Quppies (as in quarantine puppies) and Quittens (the feline equivalent) have enriched millions of lives. Family dinner is back on the table and coronavirus pods have turned friends into family.

Here's a few more things we're over as we lurch into 2021, and a few things we may just remember fondly:

DISTANCE LEARNING

There's no denying that some kids have done OK and others have suffered greatly from school at home, as have their parents. And when the pandemic sputters to an end, all kids will return to their classrooms.

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While we wait, let's talk teacher heroes trying to make the most of their worst case scenarios. They've organized drive-by parades and made TikTok dance videos for gym class. They've delivered meals to students and written encouraging chalk messages on doorsteps. They've transformed kitchens into chemistry labs and tutored kids through porch doors.

Thank you.

STREAMING EXPLOSION

Do those of us who can't or won't march back into movie theaters miss the big screen experience? Sure. But streaming exploded at just the right time, including first-run films available at home. That means a dizzying array of choices, but also that parents don't have to suffer in the dark through "Trolls World Tour." It means more couples are cuddling up on the couch and more families are making their own popcorn to sit down together for movie night.

Comcast, the nation's largest cable operator and owner of NBCUniversal, reportedly passed a telling milestone: It now has more streaming subscribers than cable-TV subscribers.

What we're over? Let's work on decent, affordable Wi-Fi for all.

OH THE BREAD

We made bread. We made bread! WE MADE BREAD. Yes, we did. And now we're thinking it might be time to stop. As the pandemic brought on baking — and hoarding — madness in March, flour was in short supply for a time, along with yeast.

Some companies reported the biggest spikes in sales were for bread flour. With nothing but time at home for plenty of proving and chilling of dough, many in quarantine tried their hand at bread. And who's the queen? Sourdough, along with her mother.

Talk of sourdough starters spread like a loaf on fire. Boasts of decades-old mothers proliferated. Then the COVID 19 (pounds, not virus) led some to reconsider all that baking.

But, the thing is, we did it!

THE GREAT OUTDOORS

We've hiked. We've walked. We've dined outdoors. As winter descends in cold-weather environs, are we over it or merely bundling up to continue seeking space free of walls? Add-on value of leaving one's home in a pandemic: Being able to wave at the neighbors without stopping to say hello, because coronavirus, and because we're all introverts now.

The great outdoors has led some to rediscover what's right in front of them: their local parks, their backyards, their decks, their porches. And they've spent some of their newfound time sprucing them up. Work from home office views are now trees and gardens and birds for many.

Outside isn't entirely out of reach for those facing down winter, and for all who are supremely over working from home.

DUMP THE DOOMSCROLLING

We bought new distractions and made long to-do lists. We had big pandemic plans, darn it. Perhaps we've done a thing or two, but the endless time suck of consuming negative news has us prone and fretting much of the time.

Let's free ourselves, people! Halt the endless doomscrolling, especially at night when sleep would be the smarter choice.

Need something to do instead? Take up a collection with neighbors of all that stuff we've hoarded and donate it to a soup kitchen or food pantry. And guess what, they'll take our pile of Fresh Direct bags, too.

Added incentive: Some of our doomsday cache may be approaching expiration dates. Does anything last forever?

THAT SPIKY SPHERE

We're certainly over COVID-19, but are we also over the coronavirus model? You know the one. It's the round image with the germ's notorious crown-like spikes. Sometimes it's red, sometimes blue or purple, but always, always ominous.

The prickly orb is on every news and medical site. It's all over TV and on flyers for COVID car cleaning. It's a nasty little emoji guest that needs to go home.

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Graphic designers everywhere, please come up with something else! It DID serve nicely as a vivid reminder of the murderous little devil. Now, over it.

ELECTION FATIGUE

Oh boy, what an election it was. Choosing a president fueled the chaos in our lockdown minds, but something else occurred in 2020. It was the 100th anniversary of women winning the right to vote.

Congress passed the 19th Amendment on June 4, 1919. It was ratified on Aug. 18, 1920. We marked the centennial with a special postage stamp, museum exhibitions and the like.

But the fight didn't end in 1920. Practically speaking, Black women, indigenous women and other women of color continued to face stumbling blocks. Over that, then and now.

GET OVER BEING OVER IT

Are these unprecedented times?

Well, when it comes to the pandemic, a little something called Black Death killed 25 to 30 million people from 1347 to 1352. According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, about 500 million people, or one-third of the world's population, were infected in the flu pandemic of 1918-19. The number of deaths was estimated to be at least 50 million worldwide.

How about getting over being Over It? Tired of wearing masks, following other protocols, being house-bound, having to sacrifice? Consider that some of our grandfathers stormed the beaches of Normandy and slogged through the jungles of Vietnam. Consider that business owners have lost their livelihoods and families are struggling to afford food.

When it comes to the U.S. election, the times, they were unprecedented. But the caterwauling. We're over it. People are truly suffering. For those of us who have jobs and food and a roof, just breathe.

As one Holocaust survivor put it: Things of importance fade into oblivion when NEVER AGAIN is reduced to a meaningless mantra.

EXPLAINER: What has Japanese space mission accomplished?

By MARI YAMAGUCHI Associated Press

TOKYO (AP) — A small capsule containing asteroid soil samples that was dropped from 136,700 miles (220,000 kilometers) in space by Japan's Hayabusa2 spacecraft landed as planned in the Australian Outback on Sunday. After a preliminary inspection, it will be flown to Japan for research. The extremely high precision required to carry out the mission thrilled many in Japan, who said they took pride in its success. The project's manager, Yuichi Tsuda of the Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency, called the capsule a "treasure box." The AP explains the significance of the project and what comes next.

WHAT IS THE HAYABUSA2 MISSION?

Launched on Dec. 3, 2014, the unmanned Hayabusa2 spacecraft touched down twice on the asteroid Ryugu, more than 300 million kilometers (190 million miles) away from Earth. The asteroid's extremely rocky surface forced the mission's team to revise landing plans, but the spacecraft successfully collected data and soil samples during the 1½ years it spent near Ryugu after arriving there in June 2018.

In its first touchdown in February 2019, the spacecraft collected surface dust samples, similar to NASA's recent touch-and-go grab by Osiris REx on the asteroid Bennu. Hayabusa2 later blasted a crater into the asteroid's surface and then collected underground samples from the asteroid, a first for space history. In late 2019, Hayabusa2 left Ryugu. That yearlong journey ended Sunday.

Japan hopes to use the expertise and technology used in the Hayabusa2 in the future, perhaps in its 2024 MMX sample-return mission to a Martian moon.

WHY AN ASTEROID?

Asteroids orbit the sun but are much smaller than planets. They are among the oldest objects in the solar system and therefore may contain clues into how Earth evolved. Scientists say that requires studying samples from such celestial objects.

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

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Japan's research into asteroids also may contribute to resource development and to finding ways to protect Earth from collisions with big meteorites, said Hitoshi Kuninaka, JAXA's vice president.

WHAT'S INSIDE THE CAPSULE?

The pan-shaped capsule, about 40 centimeters (15 inches) in diameter, contains soil samples taken from two different sites on the asteroid. Some gases might also be embedded in the samples. The preliminary inspection at a lab in Australia was to extract and analyze the gas. The capsule is due to return to Japan on Tuesday. It will be taken to JAXA's research center in Sagami-hara, near Tokyo.

WHAT CAN ASTEROID SAMPLES TELL US?

Scientists say the samples, especially ones taken from under the asteroid's surface, contain data from 4.6 billion years ago unaffected by space radiation and other environmental factors. They are particularly interested in studying organic materials in the samples to learn about how they are distributed in the solar system and if or how they are related to life on Earth. JAXA President Hiroshi Yamakawa said he believes analysis of the samples may help explain the origins of the solar system and how water helped to bring life to Earth. Fragments brought back from Ryugu can also tell its collision and thermal history.

After about a year, some of the samples will be shared with NASA and other international scientists. About 40% of them will be stored for future research. JAXA mission manager Makoto Yoshikawa said just 0.1 gram of the sample can be enough to conduct the planned research, though he said more would be better.

WHY IS HAYABUSA SUCH A BIG DEAL FOR JAPAN?

Hayabusa2 is a successor of the original Hayabusa mission that Japan launched in 2003. After a series of technical setbacks, it sent back samples from another asteroid, Itokawa, in 2010. The spacecraft was burned up in a failed re-entry but the capsule made it to Earth.

Many Japanese were impressed by the first Hayabusa spaceship's return, which was considered a miracle given all the troubles it encountered. JAXA's subsequent Venus and Mars missions also were flawed. Tsuda said the Hayabusa2 team used all the hard lessons learned from the earlier missions to accomplish a 100 times better than "perfect" outcome. Some members of the public who watched the event shed tears as the capsule successfully entered the atmosphere, briefly flaring into a fireball.

WHAT'S NEXT?

About an hour after separating from the capsule at 220,000 kilometers (136,700 miles) from Earth, Hayabusa2 was sent on another mission to the smaller asteroid, 1998KY26. That is an 11-year journey one-way. The mission is to study possible ways to prevent big meteorites from colliding with Earth.

This story has been corrected to say that data is expected to be from 4.6 billion years ago, not 46 billion years.

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

Biden picks Xavier Becerra to lead HHS, coronavirus 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 advisory 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

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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.

Becerra, a former senior House Democrat, said that in Congress he helped pass the Affordable Care Act and as California's attorney general he has defended it. "As Secretary of Health and Human Services, I will build on our progress and ensure every American has access to quality, affordable health care — through this pandemic and beyond," he tweeted on Monday.

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 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.

As a U.S. representative, he 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 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.

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"I'm honored to be called to lead the brilliant team at the CDC," she tweeted on Monday. "We are ready to combat this virus with science and facts."

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 Amer Madhani, Zeke Miller and Kathleen Ronayne in Sacramento, California, contributed to this report.

Hundreds ill, 1 dead due to unidentified illness 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 the chief minister's office said people not linked to the municipal water supply have also fallen ill. The patients are of different ages and have tested negative for COVID-19 and other viral diseases such as dengue, chikungunya or herpes.

An expert team deputed by the federal government reached the city to investigate the sudden illness Monday.

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.

Coronavirus takes toll on Black, Latino child care providers

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By CHRISTINE FERNANDO Associated Press

INDIANAPOLIS (AP) — When Mary De La Rosa closed her toddler and preschool program in March because of the coronavirus pandemic, she fully expected to serve the 14 children again some day. In the end, though, Creative Explorers closed for good.

It left the families to search for other care options — and the three teachers to file for unemployment benefits.

“We kept trying to find a way,” said De La Rosa, who is of Mexican and Egyptian descent. “But eventually we realized there wasn’t one.”

The story of De La Rosa’s program in the Westchester neighborhood of Los Angeles is being repeated across the country as the pandemic’s effects ripple through child care, disproportionately affecting Black and Latino-owned centers in an industry that has long relied on providers of color.

Policy experts say the U.S. spends a small fraction of federal funds on child care compared to other industrialized nations, an underfunding exacerbated by COVID-19. Soon nearly half of the child care centers in the U.S. may be lost, according to the Center for American Progress.

“Prior to the pandemic, the child care system was fractured,” said Lynette Fraga, CEO of Child Care Aware of America. “Now, it’s shattered.”

Even before the coronavirus, many parents already faced an impossible choice — caring for their children or earning a living. But COVID-19’s impact on the system has worsened that, Fraga says, and its effects risk creating “child care deserts,” leaving parents unable to return to work, reducing incomes and taking away early education opportunities crucial for a child’s development.

The U.S. child care industry has long relied on Black and Latina women, with women of color making up 40% of its workforce, according to the Center for the Study of Child Care Employment. These women have been disproportionately affected by COVID-19. A July survey from the National Association for the Education of Young Children stated half of minority-owned child care businesses expect to close permanently without additional assistance.

“The pandemic has unveiled how little access to support many of these women have,” Fraga said. “It’s exacerbated and spotlighted the inequities we’ve always known existed here.”

Economic disparities in the child care industry fell along racial lines long before COVID-19, said Lea Austin, executive director of the Center for the Study of Child Care Employment.

Black early educators earn an average of \$0.78 less per hour than white early educators, according to the center. While 15% of white women in child care live below the poverty line, poverty rates for Black and Latina child care workers are 23% and 22% respectively, according to a 2017 analysis by the National Women’s Law Center.

“They’re earning lower wages for doing the exact same work,” Austin said.

Rooted in slavery, professional child care has historically been seen as the domain of women of color, says Shana Bartley, director of community partnerships for the National Women’s Law Center. As a result, she says, child care is undervalued because of cultural biases suggesting the work of women of color is worth less.

“The roots of our child care system goes all the way back to slavery when women who were enslaved and forced to care for others’ children did so with no pay,” she said. “Later, those domestic jobs were among the only available for Black women and other women of color. Because we have these antiquated systems and cultural biases rooted in sexism and racism, we’re not willing to adequately value these women and their work.”

This undervaluing was perpetuated by policies like the 1938 Fair Labor Standard Act, which guaranteed minimum wages and standardized hours but excluded domestic workers. Even today, Bartley says child care providers of color are less supported with reduced access to federal funding and less support from banks when navigating licenses, loans and grants.

Angelique Marshall, director of Ms. P’s Daycare, feels lucky her center is still open to care for children with special needs in the Washington, D.C., area, especially as other Black and Latino-owned centers close around her.

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Marshall, who is Black, serves half the number of children she used to. Her emergency funds bought cleaning and personal protective equipment, and operating costs have more than doubled.

"We're not even making money," she said. "It's just about survival."

Marshall said she's surviving largely on loans and grants. But the process is exhausting, requiring her to file paperwork, log spending, save receipts and write reports. She said providers of color don't have the resources and information they need to navigate grant applications and government offices.

"No one is telling us how to do this," she said. "We're figuring it out on our own. We have to fend for ourselves, and nobody seems to care."

Maria Potts, director of Kids World in Falls Church, Virginia, is also relying on grants and PPP loans. With only seven of the original 14 children she served still in her program, Potts laid off three assistants and works 70-hour weeks.

She goes through three times as much paper towels, sanitizers and bleach. Much of her grant money goes to PPE and cleaning supplies.

"If it wasn't for the Paycheck Protection Plan, I don't think we would have survived," said Potts, who is Latina.

Many of her colleagues in the Hispanic Association for Child Care in Northern Virginia have had to close. Potts has helped many of those remaining apply for grants. She says language barriers prevent many Spanish-speaking child care business owners from accessing grants and support.

The U.S. House of Representatives passed two bills — the Child Care is Essential Act and the Child Care for Economic Recovery Act — in July, aiming to stabilize the child care industry during the pandemic and create a \$50 billion fund for the child care sector.

Christine Johnson-Staub, a senior policy analyst with the Center for Law and Social Policy, considers moving this legislation forward only the first step.

Johnson-Staub, who has worked in child care policy for three decades, said workers need hazard pay and funds for cleaning supplies and PPE. She said federal dollars should be tracked to ensure they are allocated equitably, and policies should support fair compensation and job quality for child care providers of color.

Austin recommends shifting the burden of child care costs away from individual families and providers. Because parents pay most child care costs, centers in lower-income communities of color are at a disadvantage.

"We don't tell students that they can't go to third grade unless they can pay for it," she said. "And we don't tell third-grade teachers that they'll get paid based on what their students can afford. So why is that OK for child care workers?"

Policy changes didn't come soon enough to save De La Rosa's center. After she sent parents a letter announcing the closing, Katie Nance was so devastated that she cried. Nance's 5-year-old daughter, Lily, had been in the program for almost two years. Nance says the lessons De La Rosa taught Lily, as well as the perspective she offered as a Latina teacher, were crucial to her growth.

Today, De La Rosa's house feels empty and quiet. She misses the children's laughter. Her husband's job has helped keep their family afloat, but losing the business has forced them to rethink their budget. It has also had other effects — some more intangible, but just as real.

"It was like mourning someone," De La Rosa said. "This school was such a huge part of who I am, and then all of a sudden it was gone."

Fernando is a member of AP's Race and Ethnicity team. Follow her on Twitter at <https://twitter.com/christinetfern>.

Today in History

By The Associated Press undefined
Today in History

Groton Daily Independent

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Today is Tuesday, Dec. 8, the 343rd day of 2020. There are 23 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On Dec. 8, 1941, the United States entered World War II as Congress declared war against Imperial Japan, a day after the attack on Pearl Harbor.

On this date:

In 1863, President Abraham Lincoln issued his Proclamation of Amnesty and Reconstruction for the South.

In 1886, the American Federation of Labor was founded in Columbus, Ohio.

In 1949, the Chinese Nationalist government moved from the Chinese mainland to Formosa as the Communists pressed their attacks.

In 1972, a United Airlines Boeing 737 crashed while attempting to land at Chicago-Midway Airport, killing 43 of the 61 people on board, as well as two people on the ground; among the dead were Dorothy Hunt, wife of Watergate conspirator E. Howard Hunt, U.S. Rep. George W. Collins, D-Ill., and CBS News correspondent Michele Clark.

In 1980, rock star and former Beatle John Lennon was shot to death outside his New York City apartment building by an apparently deranged fan.

In 1987, President Ronald Reagan and Soviet leader Mikhail S. Gorbachev signed a treaty at the White House calling for destruction of intermediate-range nuclear missiles.

In 1991, AIDS patient Kimberly Bergalis, who had contracted the disease from her dentist, died in Fort Pierce, Fla., at age 23.

In 1998, struggling to stave off impeachment, President Bill Clinton's defenders forcefully pleaded his case before the House Judiciary Committee. The Supreme Court ruled that police cannot search people and their cars after merely ticketing them for routine traffic violations.

In 2008, in a startling about-face, Khalid Sheikh Mohammed told the Guantanamo war crimes tribunal he would confess to masterminding the Sept. 11 attacks; four other men also abandoned their defenses.

In 2012, Pakistan's president visited a British hospital where a 15-year-old schoolgirl, Malala Yousafzai (mah-LAH'-lah YOO'-suhf-zeye), was being treated after being shot in the head by a Taliban gunman in October.

In 2013, hundreds of thousands of protesters poured into the streets of the Ukrainian capital of Kyiv (KEE'-ihv), toppling the statue of former Soviet leader Vladimir Lenin and blocking key government buildings in an escalating stand-off with the president on the future of the country.

In 2014, the U.S. and NATO ceremonially ended their combat mission in Afghanistan, 13 years after the Sept. 11 terror attacks sparked their invasion of the country to topple the Taliban-led government.

Ten years ago: President Barack Obama rejected claims that he had betrayed Democrats by cutting a deal with Republicans on Bush-era tax cuts and implored his party to back the compromise, arguing it could jump-start the economy. Hackers rushed to the defense of WikiLeaks, launching attacks on MasterCard, Visa, Swedish prosecutors, a Swiss bank and others who had acted against the site and its founder, Julian Assange. A fire that started during an inmate brawl swept through an overcrowded prison in Chile, killing at least 81 people.

Five years ago: China declared its first ever red smog alert as poisonous air quality forced the government to close schools, order motorists off the road and shut down factories in and around Beijing.

One year ago: Puppeteer Carroll Spinney, who voiced and operated Muppets Big Bird and Oscar the Grouch on "Sesame Street" for nearly 50 years, died at his Connecticut home at the age of 85. Rapper Juice WRLD, age 21, who rose to the top of the charts with "Lucid Dreams," died after what was called a "medical emergency" at Chicago's Midway International Airport; a coroner determined that the death resulted from an accidental overdose of the opioid oxycodone and codeine. Actor René Auberjonois, best known for the TV shows "Benson" and "Star Trek: Deep Space Nine," died of lung cancer at his Los Angeles home; he was 79.

Today's Birthdays: Flutist James Galway is 81. Singer Jerry Butler is 81. Pop musician Bobby Elliott (The Hollies) is 79. Actor Mary Woronov is 77. Actor John Rubinstein is 74. Actor Kim Basinger (BAY'-sing-ur) is 67. Rock musician Warren Cuccurullo is 64. Rock musician Phil Collen (Def Leppard) is 63. Country singer

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Marty Raybon is 61. Political commentator Ann Coulter is 59. Rock musician Marty Friedman is 58. Actor Wendell Pierce is 57. Actor Teri Hatcher is 56. Actor David Harewood is 55. Singer Sinead (shih-NAYD') O'Connor (AKA Shuhada' Davitt) is 54. Actor Matthew Labordeaux is 54. Baseball Hall of Famer Mike Mussina is 52. Rock musician Ryan Newell (Sister Hazel) is 48. Actor Dominic Monaghan is 44. Actor Ian Somerhalder is 42. Rock singer Ingrid Michaelson is 41. R&B singer Chrisette Michele is 38. Actor Hannah Ware is 38. Country singer Sam Hunt is 36. MLB All-Star infielder Josh Donaldson is 35. Rock singer-actor Kate Voegelé (VOH'-geh) is 34. Christian rock musician Jen Ledger (Skillet) is 31. NHL defenseman Drew Doughty is 31. Actor Wallis Currie-Wood is 29. Actor AnnaSophia Robb is 27.